

## **Citizens Declaration 2017 (Final Draft)**

**Fifth version addressing comments and amendments  
received on earlier drafts  
To be endorsed at the Plenary Session of the Conference**



We, the citizens of Bangladesh, inspired by the spirit of our great War of Liberation, and in response to the call by the Citizens Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh have assembled here today at the event titled “Citizens Conference 2017: Implementation of SDGs in Bangladesh”. Given our commitments towards the pledge to “Leave No One Behind” of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, we are joined today by hundreds of non-governmental organisations and private sector bodies associated with the platform as well as more than a thousand people from different regions, professional background, age and occupations.

Capitalising on our achievements in MDGs, we are moving forward towards implementing the SDGs. Over the past few decades, the government of Bangladesh has taken a number of initiatives towards the overall development of the country. Nonetheless, absence of appropriate laws, inadequate implementation of existing laws, corruption, and above all, various social stigma and negative mindsets, have inhibited access to equal opportunities by all the citizens of the country. Indeed, majority of the citizens are not being able to benefit from their rightful share of national achievements.

Consequently, inequalities – in their diverse manifestation – have not come down; rather vulnerabilities facing the marginalised and the deprived are on the rise. This goes against the spirit of the SDGs which have made a firm commitment to “Leave No One Behind”. We remain resolute in our commitment to implement this ambitious aspiration in the context of Bangladesh.

Due to the existing economic, social and environmental disparities, the ambition of attaining inclusive growth in Bangladesh is facing enormous challenges. A close examination reveals that vulnerabilities of the people get aggravated due to lack of education and skills, inadequate health services, religious and ethnic differences, adverse geographical locations, economic deprivation, life cycle status, physical and mental disabilities, gender and transgender disparities, civil identity and lack of rule of law. Many of the affected people are also faced with multiple vulnerabilities, accentuating the effects of the others. Majority of children are deprived from adequate nutrition and quality education, while many of them often fall prey to violence. The youth in the country are also subjected to various vulnerabilities – unemployment is an acute problem for them, and as a result they are becoming alienated from family and society. Adverse geographical and environmental conditions are further deepening the state of vulnerabilities. Immediate actions are needed in the country to end vulnerabilities and deprivation of all types and in all forms.

The civil society of Bangladesh has traditionally played an important and historic role over the past decades towards socio-economic development of the country. This positive role of the civil society is continuing at present, but has to be significantly strengthened

in the future. At various sessions of today's Conference, a large number of specific recommendations have been put forward for eradication of economic, social, environmental and governance related inequalities. Being fully committed to implementing the aforesaid recommendations ourselves, we are also keen to forge partnerships with the government's efforts in relevant areas.

From this Conference today we pledge to build a just and right-based Bangladesh where No One Will Be Left Behind. We will reflect this commitment in our activities, create awareness among people and help improve their capabilities to work for the SDGs. Our platform will continue to work to coordinate the initiatives of our partners.

**We firmly believe that**

1. In order to ensure active participation of the marginalised, the deprived and the vulnerable groups in Bangladesh's development, the following steps have to be undertaken:
  - a. Formulation of appropriate policy framework and specific work plans in favour of the "left behinds" to realise the SDG aspirations.
  - b. Full implementation of various government plans and laws that promote the interest of the marginalised groups.
  - c. Inclusion of the civil society in formulation of the relevant policy framework
  - d. Allocation of transparent and prioritised resources in the national budget to implement the envisaged work plans.
2. The action plans formulated for the marginalised communities have to be implemented through effective public-private partnerships. For this, the following will be needed:
  - a. Formulation of a government-non-state actor partnership policy.
  - b. Ensuring effective institutional framework.
  - c. Monitoring and evaluating the implementation progress on a regular basis, and ensuring active involvement of the civil society in the process.
3. Concrete measures will need to be undertaken for collection of disaggregated data and information concerning the vulnerable groups in the context of various indicators of the SDGs.
4. Legal protection of the marginalised and vulnerable people and rule of law must be ensured.
5. The draft "Anti-Discrimination Law" needs to be approved by the National Parliament, at the earliest, taking note of the feedbacks received in this regard.

6. Immediate and full implementation of the “Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord” and the “Vested Property Return Act” has to be ensured. All discriminatory laws need to be amended.
7. Take effective legal and institutional measures towards establishing equal rights of all citizens, including women, with regard to property rights and access to income.
8. A specific plan, with time bound targets, has to be formulated to address youth employment, and its immediate implementation should be ensured.
9. The policy to give priority to marginalised, deprived and vulnerable groups in distribution of khas land has to be faithfully implemented.
10. Effective implementation of special laws and policies designed to support the vulnerable groups in the society has to be ensured. These include, *Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Act, 2013; Persons with Disabilities Rights And Protection Act 2013 ; Disaster Management Act, 2012; National Women Development Policy, 2011; National Children Policy, 2011; National Education Policy, 2010; National Health Policy, 2011; National Child Labour Elimination Policy, 2010; Coastal Zone Policy, 2005; National Plan for Disaster Management 2010-2015.*
11. Opportunities must be created to nurture and promote freedom of thought and expression through, among others, ensuring the freedom of media and access to information for all.
12. All political parties, participating in the upcoming national elections, will commit in their manifestos their respective programmes to address vulnerabilities of the marginalised, deprived and vulnerable sections of the population.

Bangladesh is changing and will evolve further. Together we will build a Bangladesh where No One Will Be Left Behind and no citizen will be deprived of the rightful benefits of national development and achievements. Successful implementation of this commitment will be our best homage to our great War of Liberation.