

# Bangladesh Development Initiative

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## **BDI Statement in Support for the Student-Led Pro-Democracy Movement**

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The undersigned members of the Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI), a nonpartisan think tank dedicated to research and scholarship on Bangladesh, extend our heartfelt congratulations to the people of Bangladesh, especially the heroic students and young generation, for their effort to reclaim the rights of citizens of a free country, committed to democracy as enshrined in the nation's constitution. This remarkable movement [*Boisommo Birodhi Chattra Andolon*] and its success will long live in history, inspiring future generations in Bangladesh, but would also serve as a beacon of hope for nations across the world, where dictators have usurped constitutional rights as was done in Bangladesh.

As we celebrate this triumph, we mourn the death of hundreds of protesters who lost their lives or were injured during this epic struggle. In particular, we salute the memory of the young students - Abu Syed, Mir Mugdho, among others - who bravely led the initial protests. These youth are the heroes who have made the ultimate sacrifice; the nation owes them a debt of gratitude that must never be forgotten.

We are also deeply saddened and distressed by the scenes of looting, burning, and attacks on public property and religious minorities, and condemn these in the strongest possible terms. During this transitional period, we urge all citizens and community leaders to help maintain law and order and take special care to protect our religious minorities and other vulnerable communities who are an essential part of the nation's fabric. We urge all to commit to protecting our minorities. This is a cardinal principle on which Bangladesh was founded, and is enshrined in the nation's constitution. We must be vigilant against conspiracies and those who would try to hijack the revolution or discredit its reputation.

The larger Bangladeshi society has a commitment and responsibility to maintain communal harmony, which must not be undermined by the lawlessness and violence designed to mar this historic victory over autocracy. We are encouraged to see students and religious leaders have taken leadership on this, and are protecting minorities and their places of worship against vandalism and violence. The armed forces and law enforcement authorities have a duty to protect the life and liberty of all citizens of Bangladesh, with special attention to the vulnerable tribal communities and religious minorities. Page 2

Bangladesh has made tremendous economic progress. While significant challenges remain, such as overcoming persistent poverty and inequities in income and wealth, eliminating corruption, improving human rights, strengthening democracy, and safeguarding the country's environment, we remain optimistic about a bright future. The courage, wisdom and patriotism demonstrated by our youth, who led this revolution for democracy and justice, and the support they received from the nation in toppling an entrenched regime makes us hopeful and optimistic about a bright future.

A nation of 173 million people, the 8th largest in the world, Bangladesh is poised for greatness. Let us work together to demonstrate to the world that we are united as a people, despite our differences in religion and ideologies, and that we aspire to be responsible citizens of the global community, and that we are fully committed to inclusive development, poverty alleviation, and communal harmony.

To conclude, as we rejoice the end of more than a decade of dictatorship, we join others in committing ourselves to building a nation free of corruption, oppression, and communalism—a nation where people of all faiths would live in peace and harmony.

Signed by:

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