

Introduction and Objectives by Dr. Kamaluddin Siddiqui

Thank you, Mr. Farooq Sobhan. Honorable Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Morshed Khan, distinguished foreign dignitaries and guests, ladies and gentlemen, Assalamu Alaikum and good morning. I welcome you to today's workshop on improving the climate of doing business in Bangladesh. First of all, my heartiest congratulations to the team for their successful organization of this roundtable. I cannot underline how important the investment climate is for our country. It will govern how many jobs are created, and it will be a way of measuring our progress on difficult issues such as corruption and efficiency. These are big issues for our government and these are things we want to improve; these are also linked with the successful need to improve the quality, depth and technical expertise of government personnel. There is currently a problem of capacity in the government. Nowhere is this more important than in securing pro-poor growth for our country, and with it the goal of poverty reduction. Improving government capacity to undertake this work is something we should all be concerned about and be committed to solving. It is most likely that a government design task force for the upcoming private sector development project will be formed; I am sure it will meet regularly and review progress on the design of this initiative. This roundtable kickstarts this project design process from the government side. As part of the process, development partners and the government will work together in finding solutions to some of the problems we face. The design process will also help in building up a technically resourced cadre to take forward the program. This is an interesting way for us to tackle the problem with development partners. We also like the way the development partners have come together for this program, and we also appreciate the leadership of DFID in this regard. I have discussed a broad idea of private sector development with concerned development partners and see it as an opportunity for us to address challenges we face in the post-MFA period. In sum, we need a unified, broad-based long term-effort to design and implement critical reforms that will unleash the growth potential of the Bangladesh economy. The main objective of the roundtable is to share basic principles, best practices and experiences in improving the business environment through regulatory reform at the national level, and upgrading industrial and free zone strategy at national and local levels. Topics of discussion at this roundtable are some of the most needed areas we need to work on for the next few years. Countries are competing neither by labor cost nor fiscal incentives alone, not any more, but by the entire investment climate. The investment climate assessment exercise last year was the beginning of such efforts in Bangladesh. This workshop and upcoming private sector development project will follow up that study and work on actual agenda and institutional issues. We have been relatively successful with our EPZs but we need to do much more with inward foreign direct investment. Our value addition and participation of local suppliers to the global manufacturing network remains low while our competitors are moving up the ladder very fast. This may be the time to start thinking out of box to reposition our economy in the post-MFA period. I believe that very high level experts from around the world who made special efforts to join us today are great catalysts to begin this process. I would like to call to your attention that improving the investment climate is an urgent task that needs the combined effort of the government, political leaders, the private sector and donor countries. I thank all of you for coming here today in response to my invitation. I hope

we have a great discussion today and tomorrow and I look forward to using the inputs of the discussion for the benefit of Bangladesh. Thank you.