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BANGLADESH

**“Advancing Women’s Role in Energy Access”
Key note speech by Denise Rollins
Second Application Workshop on Efficient Energy
Management, Women and Energy
Monday, November 17th at 9:00 to 11:00am**

Honorable Prof. Tamim, Special Assistant to the Chief Advisor for Energy,

Special Guest Dr. Fouzul Kabir Khan, Power Secretary;

Special Guest Ms. Shireen Kamal Sayeed, Assistant Country Director, UNDP

Ambassador Muhammad Zamir, Chairman of the Bangladesh Renewable Energy Association (BREA),

Mr. Padmanaban, Director, SARI/Energy program,

Representatives of the co-sponsoring institutions,

Participants from South Asian countries,

Distinguished audience,

Ladies and gentlemen, a very good morning to you all.

I would like to start by paying tribute to the memory of the late Mr. Quamrul Islam Siddique who left us all so suddenly. His premature departure left a big vacuum. He will always be remembered as a patriotic nation builder and a true professional. He was the person largely responsible for bringing us all together here. May his soul rest in peace.

We are very honored and pleased to have the Honorable Special Assistant Dr. Tamim as well as the two special guests

here at the inauguration of the “Second Application Workshop on Efficient Energy Management and Renewable Energy.” On behalf of USAID/Bangladesh I would like to welcome you all, especially the participants and resource people who have traveled long distances. I would also like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the SARI/Energy program management for hosting this program here in Dhaka.

You may be aware that the USAID SARI/Energy program launched the first ‘Women in Energy’ workshop in Kerala, India in April 2008 with the objective of equipping women from South Asia with the knowledge and skills to efficiently manage energy at the household level. It was a way of introducing women in the region to the benefits of renewable energy and to empower women as agents of change with regard to energy conservation and energy efficiency.

That first workshop was a great success and received tremendous attention in the region. The participating women developed recommendations that later came to be known as the “The Kerala Declaration.” Through the declaration they established the South Asia Women in Energy Network, whose mandate is to replicate lessons learned and best practices in energy efficiency in neighboring South Asian countries. The network seeks to encourage South Asian countries to establish

information resources on renewable energy and to bring together energy working groups representing member countries. One of the recommendations in the declaration was to hold this follow-on workshop in Dhaka, hosted by the Bangladesh Renewable Energy Association, or BREA as it is commonly called.

Following the recommendations of the Kerala Workshop the BREA Executive Committee decided to hold the second application workshop in November 2008 at Dhaka. The late Mr. Quamrul Islam Siddique, then Chairman of BREA, was there to answer the call. He worked diligently with BREA's executive committee to bring this workshop to life.

The agenda you have before you is a challenging one indeed. We are pleased to see so many distinguished representatives from throughout South Asia come together to work on these issues. I commend you on your participation. When women come together great things can happen. I strongly believe that you will share amongst yourselves creative thoughts and innovative ideas on how women can become leaders in energy efficiency and conservation.

South Asia is home to more than one-fifth of the world's population. The region has experienced robust economic

growth accompanied by an unprecedented demand for energy. Securing energy that is sufficient in quantity, stable in supply and affordable, helps countries to grow. Shared economic interests in energy, trade and investment across borders is essential for diversification of an affordable and reliable energy supply. This is why USAID created the South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy or “SARI/Energy” in 2000. We wanted to help improve cross-border cooperation on sustainable energy in South Asia.

We all know that women are the foundation of society. Yet for many women in South Asia, as in other regions, life is extraordinarily difficult due to the lack of access to energy for their daily chores. While the responsibility for securing household energy supplies and services remains largely with women, access to modern energy sources, such as clean fuels and electricity affects both women and men differently.

Gender inequalities influence the distribution of household tasks, often limiting women’s ability to work outside the home. Inequalities also affect women’s control over household finances and decision-making. Poverty is disproportionately female. It cannot be alleviated without addressing women’s energy needs.

Access to energy has contributed to positive developments in women's socio-economic status. A socio-economic study on rural electrification in Bangladesh revealed that women in households with access to energy are better empowered to control resources for bringing about improvements in their quality of life. Women, in urban and in rural areas, where energy is available, are found to be more involved in economic activities compared to areas without electricity. I am sure this also holds true for other countries in South Asia. Access to reliable electricity improves women's mobility, participation in income-generating-activities, decision-making and freedom in using income and savings.

Maintaining reliable, affordable and environmentally acceptable energy supplies is a cornerstone of economic development. For this reason, USAID has undertaken initiatives that stimulate investment in the energy sector, particularly to meet the social and development needs of rural Bangladesh, and especially women. We do this by assisting the energy sector on many fronts. We promote policies, laws and regulations to restructure the sector to induce greater private investment. We encourage responsible energy consumption through programs that promote efficient energy use. And we also actively support renewable and alternative energy development.

As many of you know, USAID's commitment to improving the energy supply in Bangladesh has been long and constant. Since the 1970s when we introduced a rural electrification program, we have made significant strides. Now, 70 rural electric cooperatives serve more than 45,000 villages and provide electricity to more than 43 million people.

Our current energy program is aimed at promoting economic activity by building the capacity of these rural electric cooperatives to source their own generation needs and to provide business advisory services to their customers. The intent is to encourage rural economic growth that will benefit women.

USAID's partnership with Grameen Shakti has helped create a pool of women solar energy technicians paving the way for increased use of solar home systems in rural areas of Bangladesh not served by grid electricity. In collaboration with Grameen Shakti, USAID has helped open a new horizon for rural women, through training and technology dissemination, in the development and expansion of renewable energy in Bangladesh. With Grameen Shakti we have trained rural women to assemble, install maintain and repair solar home systems. The project has already established 20 Grameen Technology Centers that trained over 1,000 women. It has

provided great livelihood opportunity for many rural women who otherwise have few income generating opportunities.

These technicians also construct, repair and maintain Improved Cooking Stoves that are 50% more efficient than the traditional stoves and promote biogas technology. USAID and Grameen Shakti will install another 15 technology centers over the next two years in the area affected by Cyclone Sidr.

Grameen Shakti will make several presentations during the course of the workshop and may also arrange a site visit. The workshop will provide opportunity to know more about the program and help other countries of South Asia to replicate this.

I would like to thank BREA, UNDP and Grameen Shakti for their role in putting this event together. I would also like to express my appreciation in advance to the resource people, from here and abroad, who will share their experience with the participants over the next three days.

Special thanks to Mr. Padmanaban, the SARI/Energy Program Director and his team for all the arrangements.

Before I conclude, let me once again express very special thanks and appreciation to the Chief Guest, the two Special Guests, the Chairman of BREAA, and the participants for being with us here today.

I wish the program great success. Thank you.