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Make human development an enterprise of all humanity

Fazle Hasan Abed says at memorial lecture

DU Correspondent

Make human development an enterprise of all humanity, said Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and chairperson of Brac, at a lecture in the city yesterday.

“We must take up every acceptable implement- whether social, legal, scientific, economic or political- to make human development the enterprise of all humanity,” he added.

Abed was delivering the Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Lecture 2008 on the 'Development as a Right: The Role of Legal Empowerment in the Making of a Just Society' at the National Museum auditorium. It was organised by Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Foundation at the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

“When a single member of our neighbourhood lives in poverty and squalor, we are all impoverished,” he said.

It is for the governments, organisations and individuals who should practise as a daily act of social justice to make the society a just one, he observed.

The Brac founder said in an unequal society where the poor are already disadvantaged, it is important to provide legal safety nets before allowing market forces to operate freely.

The present global financial crisis is an example of the unfair economic and social policies at work, he added.

Abed said issues like sustainable development, responsible energy, carbon trading or water foot-printing, in the case of Bangladesh, have direct bearing on imminent challenges on several fronts, particularly in food security and climate changes.

"It is a sad reality that globally as well as nationally, we have had to wait for such grim realities to shake us out of our self-absorbed comfort zones and make us connect the crucial dots between our rights, needs and responsibilities to our respective societies," he added.

The Brac chairman also mentioned the challenges that lie ahead for Bangladesh.

These include continued political instability and shrinking of secular, democratic spaces, constant upward struggle to ensure gender justice at home and in the workplace and coping with recurring natural disasters, he added.

Quoting an extensive study by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) in late 2007, Abed said it is predicted that the population of Bangladesh would be nearly 200 million with 40 percent under the age of 15 by 2030.

An additional six to eight percent land of Bangladesh would be permanently under water, and flood-prone areas would increase from 25 to 40 percent by 2050, he added.

The Brac chairman further mentioned that environmental refugees from rural areas would be concentrated and over 80 million people would live in urban slums and Dhaka would be one of the world's largest cities with 30 million people.

He concluded the lecture quoting Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, as saying, "The right to development is the measure of the respect of all other human rights. That should be our aim: a situation in which all individuals are enabled to maximise their potential and to contribute to the evolution of society as a whole."

Prof AH Ahmed Kamal, chairman of the history department at Dhaka University, delivered a speech on the lecture.

The programme was also addressed by noted academics and journalists.