Combining Community with Faith

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The emphasis on dialogue convinced me that mutual respect, trust and empathy are at the foundation of improved relations between communities. However, the problems of poverty, climate change, corruption and disease are too great for us to stop at dialogue. We must use the fruits of dialogue over recent decades to confront these development challenges together.

Recently you had the opportunity to meet a few of Bangladesh's most impressive youth leaders, what, if anything do you think you learned from them?

AA: I found the Bangladeshi youth leaders with whom I met to be a very impressive and inspiring group. I was struck by their commitment to serve, in spite of the relatively early stages of a culture of volunteerism in the country. I was pleasantly surprised to hear details of the many ways young people contribute to and lead organisations that serve the nation's most poor and vulnerable. And I will never forget the sense of responsibility felt by the educated elite to those less fortunate in their midst.

The CFBCI must deal with hundreds of organisations, but in your opinion, how many of them are powered or created by the youth? Do they (the youth) play a large enough role in community initiatives, or do you feel they could be encouraged to do more?

AA: The CFBCI engages a very large number of organisations. A small minority of these organizations are created or powered by youth. In my opinion, youth have an energy, an optimism and an enthusiasm that make them invaluable contributors to the impact of local organisations. In some societies, youth can face obstacles to positions of authority and influence within organisations. I hope that it becomes easier for young people to get more involved in more places because I believe this would be good for development. Where the barriers prove to be significant, some Bangladeshi youth have taken their destiny in their own hands by starting and running their own organizations. With demographics shifting towards younger populations throughout much of the developing world. It would not surprise me if a youth sector emerged to be a stronger segment of the NGO community.

You have lived in various countries across the Middle East and as such have a personal understanding of the region; do you feel the CFBCI has a role to play in that volatile region of the world?

AA: The CFBCI works with all of the regional and technical bureaus at USAID, including the Middle East Bureau. USAID does incredible development work throughout the West Bank and Gaza, as well as countries including Yemen, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Iraq. My own experiences in the Middle East have convinced me that socioeconomic conditions, education and good governance are all critical to advancement of the region.

Distinguished guests at a function on occasion of national essay competition organised by Prothom Alo Bondhu Shova at Dhaka Imperial College

