

SHEIKH HASINA

CITATION FOR AN HONORARY DEGREE

Mr Chancellor, it is my privilege to present to you for a degree of the University, the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina.

Born in 1947 in the Gopalganj district of what is now Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina is the daughter of the founding father of her nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In 1973 she graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Arts from the University of Dhaka.

Sheikh Hasina was active in the nationalist freedom movement which culminated in the Bangladesh War of Independence of 1971. Following the assassination of her father, the first Prime Minister and later President of Bangladesh, and most of her family in 1975, she was forced into exile in India. In 1981 she returned to Bangladesh as President of the Awami League Party.

First elected to Parliament in 1986, Sheikh Hasina became Leader of the Opposition, standing against authoritarianism and military rule. From 1986 until 1991, she campaigned for restoration of fundamental human rights, establishment of civilian parliamentary democracy and for fair elections.

In 1990 Sheikh Hasina led the historic mass movement, forcing the military regime to step down from power. From 1991 she steered all political parties to evolve the presidential system into a parliamentary one.

Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister of Bangladesh in the parliamentary elections of 1996. In the three years since her election to government, her achievements have received international acclaim. She has been a strong activist for the pursuit of peace. In international forums her interventions on peace and disarmament, racial conflict, human rights and the status of women have contributed significantly to improve global relations. Her historic step in signing the 30 Year Ganges Water Sharing Treaty with India ended Bangladesh's longest standing bilateral dispute. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord ended a long period of insurgency and national insecurity.

Sheikh Hasina's political reforms have strengthened democracy and the rule of law by securing parliamentary sovereignty through the appointment of a highly respected neutral President and the introduction of the politics of consensus on national issues. In addition, she has institutionalised elections held under a non-party and neutral caretaker government established under the Constitution to ensure that representatives and government are elected freely and fairly.

Her achievements in the economic development of Bangladesh have been substantial and against heavy odds. Her economic policies sought freedom from poverty and to provide assistance to the agricultural majority through far-reaching reforms of the economic system. She is committed to the abolition of hunger, poverty and illiteracy through the education of the people of Bangladesh. Accordingly, she has given priority to providing primary education for all Bangladesh children.

Sheikh Hasina's leadership in promoting a national identity for Bangladesh society through the arts and literature is outstanding. Further, within Bangladesh she has championed human rights, the resolution of racial conflict, the protection of minority rights, the enhancement of the status of women and universal human development.

Often Sheikh Hasina has had to exercise her great political skills in an adverse environment but she does so without sacrificing her principles. She has been courageous in Opposition and an effective reformer in Government. She is a visionary who has achieved balance in implementing far-reaching reforms whilst retaining and nurturing traditional values in a large and conservative society of nearly 130 million people.

Mr Chancellor, it is with great pleasure that I present to you Sheikh Hasina, that you may confer on her the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on the ground of her distinguished creative contributions in the service of society.

Professor R D Terrell
Vice-Chancellor
The Australian National University
20 October 1999