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Assistant Secretary of State Robert O. Blake's Statement at the Press Conference

June 14, 2009
American Club, Dhaka

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure for me to be here today. This is my first visit to Bangladesh as Assistant Secretary for South Central Asia. I want to see first-hand how we can work with the new government here and the people to expand the good cooperation we already enjoy. During my visit, I met with people in government, political parties and civil society. I will be meeting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a bit later this evening. I appreciate the warm hospitality that everyone has shown me. Although my visit has been short, I have learned a great deal about Bangladesh, and am impressed with the important changes and opportunities here.

The United States and Bangladesh have been friends and allies for decades. We have worked together to build democratic institutions. The U.S. welcomed the free, fair, and transparent elections Bangladesh held last December. This proves that Bangladeshis want democracy. The United States is proud to have supported this effort. We will continue to support Bangladesh as it extends its democratic roots. We also are here to help you develop your economy, feed and educate your citizens and respond to natural disasters. And we are here to help you protect your people from those who wish to destabilize your democracy through terrorism and extremism.

President Obama is committed to improving the U.S. relationship with the Muslim world. In Cairo, he called for a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. I think that his message resonated very well, here and around the world. In the countries of South and Central Asia, which my Bureau handles, there are more than half a billion Muslim citizens. Audiences in this region positively

received President Obama's Cairo speech. Most appreciated the President's desire for engagement and dialogue.

I know that many Bangladeshis paid close attention to the President's address. We are pleased that so many media organizations, including many that you represent, broadcast or printed the President's speech. We are closely following the reaction here. We look forward to working with you as the President continues building bridges to the Muslim world.

In closing, let me say I enjoyed meeting with many Bangladeshis this trip and having the opportunity to review the important opportunities we have for cooperation. I look forward to continued discussions, continued dialog and continued friendship. I see great potential for U.S. – Bangladesh relations, and will make the realization of that potential a personal priority.

With that, I am happy to take your questions.

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**As Prepared for delivery.*

GR/2009