

**Message from Mary Frances Dunham
to the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh
on the Occasion of the Ceremony to Honor Foreign Friends of the Bangladesh
Liberation War**

(October 1, 2013)

I am both proud and grateful to have been invited by the Government of Bangladesh for this occasion honoring the foreigners who supported the Bangladeshi struggle for independence in 1971. On behalf of the many Americans who supported the cause of Bangladesh during the war, I give many thanks for today's ceremony. My late husband, Daniel Dunham, who was among the American supporters, would have been especially pleased. I am glad that our oldest grandson, Nicholas, and our daughter, Katherine, can represent my late husband and myself at this event.

All the Americans whom I have met who have ever lived in Bangladesh fell in love, as my husband and I did, with the people of the country. From the first day that my husband and I arrived in Dhaka, in the fall of 1960, I wanted to learn Bangla, especially its poetry and music, as soon as possible. Consequently, I prepared a book about *jarigan* based on my work with the poet Jasimuddin. During our first seven years that we lived in Dhaka, my husband designed many well-known buildings such as Kamlapur Railway Station and University buildings. He was one of the founding five foreign architects to help start the Architecture Faculty at BUET and developed lifetime friendships with many of his students from that time. During those early years, my husband and I made long-lasting friends, especially teachers and students of the 1960s. Although we had moved back to New York City before 1970, my husband happened to be in Dhaka working on cyclone relief on the eve of Sheik Mujibur Rahman's famous speech on March 25. He was evacuated soon after. It is no wonder, when the massacre of March 1971 began, that we, along with hundreds of other Americans who had lived in "East Pakistan," rallied to support the cause in Washington DC.

Spontaneously and unsupported by any organization or sponsor, private citizens from all over the US converged on Washington, some putting their jobs in jeopardy, to visit their senators and representatives to educate them as to what was going on in East Pakistan and to persuade them to stop the US support of West Pakistan. Many such sympathizers had been former USA government employees with the consulate, or with USIS, and the USAID in Dhaka. Among them were cholera doctors from the SEATO Cholera Lab team who had worked in Dhaka, and Peace Corps volunteers. There were the men and women who had served as engineers and other consultants, teachers and religious leaders.

These private citizens set up a make-shift office in a rented room near the Capitol from where they disseminated information to the American nation about what was happening in the nascent Bangladesh. The office gathered information smuggled out of

Bengal through private means and publicized it with posters and press releases all over the USA. One wife, a doctor herself, fasted for three days on the steps of the Capitol.

This campaign in the United States lasted through the summer of 1971, but was too late to stop the carnage. During that summer, my husband went to Calcutta to help with the refugee camps where he designed latrines and other solutions to the difficult conditions in the camps. Senator Kennedy paid a visit to those camps during that time, and was perhaps one of the only US government representatives to have shown concern for what was happening to the people of the future Bangladesh. Throughout this time, my husband saved daily news articles and memorabilia which the Bangladesh Liberation War Museum now houses in its archives.

It is timely with the current awards ceremony that two books about the USA involvement in the Liberation War are coming out this month. I hope that these books will help to shed a needed light on a shadowy time in American history. I am proud to be among the many foreigners who recognized at that time the detrimental policies of the US government and tried to make a change.

I hope I have expressed my gratitude that I feel for this Bangladeshi recognition of foreign support. On behalf of my whole family, today's recognition is indeed gratifying.

Sincerely,

Mary Frances Dunham
September 28, 2013