



United Nations Development Programme

Communications Office

# PRESS RELEASE

## **FAZLE HASAN ABED TO RECEIVE TOP PRIZE AT UNDP HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AWARDS**

*Founder of Bangladesh's BRAC Organisation and Leading Proponent of Micro  
Credit to be Honoured on Eve of the International Year of Micro Credit*

NEW YORK – 15 December, 2004 -- "Micro-finance can make the difference between hope and despair for billions of people living in dehumanising poverty," says Fazle Hasan Abed, founder of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, and winner of the **2004 Mahbub ul Haq Award for Outstanding Contribution to Human Development**. "Over the last two decades understanding and experience of serving poor people with sustainable micro-finance has been gained in many countries. These services need to be scaled up and integrated with each country's financial system."

Mr. Abed will be in New York on Wednesday, 15 December to receive the award from the United Nations Development Programme. He is being recognised for his extraordinary achievements in helping the rural poor in Bangladesh to combat hunger, disease and literacy on a massive scale.

Mr. Abed, a leading proponent of micro credit as a way to lift the poor out of destitution and dependence, will also give the keynote address at the ceremony. His award comes just two weeks before the start of the UN's "International Year of Micro Credit" – a multinational campaign to build support for making financial services more accessible to poor and low-income people. It is designed to raise public awareness about micro-credit and microfinance, and promote innovative partnerships among governments, donors, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, academia and microfinance clients.

Mr. Abed was selected for the UNDP award by an esteemed panel of judges for his achievements in helping some of the most destitute people in one of the world's poorest countries. BRAC's work in health care has made a significant contribution to Bangladesh's achievement of the fastest decline in infant mortality rates in Asia. Its educational efforts have helped Bangladesh increase primary schooling from 55% to 85% within two decades.

Mr. Abed, a former Shell Oil executive, founded BRAC in 1972 to assist refugees returning from India after Bangladesh's Liberation War. The relief work was soon finished, but poverty and vulnerability remained. He then expanded the organisation to provide services to people affected by extreme poverty, discrimination and exploitation. BRAC, now the world's largest non-governmental organisation, is recognised internationally for these pioneering efforts:

**Micro credit:** BRAC works with destitute women, disbursing over \$2 billion, with a 98% repayment rate. One effort that has attracted considerable attention is to provide food assistance and savings and credit services to nearly a million participants. Two-thirds of these women have “graduated” from absolute poverty to become microfinance clients, without returning to government handouts.

**Health Care:** BRAC provides care to some 30 million people, almost a quarter of Bangladesh's population, at 90 health clinics and 2,200 prenatal clinics, as well as through the 52,000 volunteers mobilised to provide home health care assistance.

**Education:** BRAC has established over 42,000 primary schools, working increasingly in collaboration with the government of Bangladesh, with a special emphasis on girls' education and involving families in their children's school life.

The other UNDP Human Development Awards this year are: **Latvia 2002/2003:** “Human Security;” **Zambia 2003:** “Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger;” **Colombia Report 2003:** “The Conflict, A Way Out;” **Argentina Report 2002:** “Contributions to Human Development;” and **The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe 2002:** “Avoiding the Dependency Trap.”

Final selections were made by eminent scholars including Dr. Mahnaz Afkhami, President, Women's Learning Partnership and former Minister of State for Women's Affairs in Iran; Princess Basma Bint Talal of Jordan; Dr. Kwesi Botchwey, Executive Chairman, African Development Policy Ownership Initiative, and former Minister of Finance in Ghana; and Dr. Moisés Naím, Editor, Foreign Policy, and former Minister of Trade and Industry in Venezuela.

“The goal of human development is to put people back at the centre of the development process,” said **UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown**, who will host the proceedings on December 15, along with **Mistress of Ceremonies Juju Chang**, the Emmy Award-winning correspondent for ABC News and “20/20” reporter. “It is about expanding choices for people, to enable them to enjoy long and healthy lives, knowledge, fair access to the resources and the ability to participate in the life of the community.”

The UNDP is the global development network of the United Nations. UNDP advocates for change and connects countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with people on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. 90% of UNDP's resources are spent on 66 countries where over 90% of the world's poor live. Additional information is available at <http://hdr.undp.org/aboutus/nhdr/awards/>

**For interview requests with Mr. Abed, other awardees or UNDP officials, please contact David Kirby at 212-906-3693 or [david.kirby@undp.org](mailto:david.kirby@undp.org).**