

Asian University for Women is pleased to confer a Doctor of Arts, *honoris causa*, to Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya. She is one of the most effective and far-reaching proponents of Rabindranath Tagore today at home and abroad. Tagore's vision of a world "Where the mind is without fear.., where knowledge is free, where the world has not been broken up into fragments..." is all the more important at a time when these core human values are under attack almost everywhere. Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya through her unstinting efforts in cultivating the music and knowledge and philosophy of Tagore is inspiring this nation and others to abandon the insidious hate against the other and embrace the dignity of our common humanity as propounded by Tagore.

Educated under the tutelage of some of the great musical geniuses at Visva Bharati University at *Shantiniketan*, the University that Tagore had founded, Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya is an extraordinarily gifted vocalist. She has performed the world over. One commentator has noted that "The sweetness in the tonal quality of her voice combined with the effortless control of the tune and the perfect pronunciation of each word makes her music a distinct and divine experience".

Rezwana Choudhury Bannya is also the founding chair of the Department of Dance at the University of Dhaka where she has also been on the faculty in the music department. She is the founder of a music school of her own in Dhaka called *Shurer Dhara* – where, like at AUW, opportunities for education and training are accorded to all irrespective of their financial background. Not surprisingly, she has been feted with the *Shadhinata Padak*, the highest civilian award in Bangladesh.

For all this and many other significant achievements as a musician and as an extraordinary citizen, the Asian University for Women honors her today. May I now request Chancellor Cherie Blair and Vice Chancellor Nirmala Rao to present to the certificate of the degree of Doctor of Arts, *honoris causa*, to Professor Rezwana Choudhury Bannya?