

STATEMENT BY MR. ANAND SHARMA, MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, AT THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT NEEDS: STATE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF VARIOUS COMMITMENTS, CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD AT 63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2008

Excellency President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal,
Excellency Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

India and Africa have a unique and special bond based on shared experiences and civilisational links. Over centuries, vibrant cultural and economic exchanges have marked the relations between India and Africa which were interrupted by colonization. Decolonization and emergence of free countries in Asia and Africa restored this engagement, bringing India and Africa together to address the challenges of social and economic development and poverty eradication.

We have a long-standing, close and multi-layered relationship with Africa based on our abiding commitment to work with the continent to fulfill its aspirations. Our partnership encompasses priority sectors integral to the developmental goals of Africa in the 21st century. A vibrant India and a resurgent Africa are witnessing an intensification of relations and growing convergence of interests in their common quest for sustainable economic growth and development.

India has always been committed to elevate its special engagement with Africa into an enduring partnership by developing an institutional mechanism for India-Africa dialogue. The first-ever India Africa Partnership Forum Summit held in New Delhi in April 2008 was convened in partnership with the African Union. It is the African Union which worked with us in choosing the participants and in defining the roadmap of Africa-India cooperation in accordance with Africa's priorities. The Delhi Declaration and the Africa-India Framework for Cooperation adopted at the Summit highlight our shared political vision and world view and provide a solid foundation for a systematic and stepped-up engagement in the years to come.

The vision of the Delhi Declaration is based on equality and mutual respect. The Framework of Cooperation, adopted at the Summit, outlines the priority areas of our future engagement. These are in line with the priorities of the continent and include capacity-building, agriculture, infrastructure development, health and food security and technology cooperation. Our Prime Minister also announced the enhancement of the available concessional Lines of Credit for Africa to US\$ 5 billion. India sincerely aspires for a long-term partnership with Africa and is therefore investing in building economic infrastructure including railways, IT, telecom and power.

India has made a unilateral announcement of duty free and quota free market access to goods from 34 Least Developed Countries in Africa. This will spur economic activity in manufacturing, particularly for African SMEs, by allowing them enhanced market access to one of the fastest-growing economies in the world.

At the India Africa Partnership Forum Summit, India and Africa also decided to work together on pressing global issues of shared interests and concerns. These include climate change, WTO issues, reform and democratization of international institutions, the fight against terrorism, combating diseases, eradication of hunger and poverty and promotion of pluralism and democracy.

For many decades, capacity building in human resource development in Africa has been an area of priority. In 1964, India launched the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme. It was at a time when we ourselves were faced with acute scarcity of resources and colossal economic challenges. The ITEC programme has benefited thousands of students from Africa who came to study in professional institutions under Indian scholarship schemes. This programme is in the true spirit of South-South cooperation. Over 15000 African students are currently studying in Indian universities and colleges. India will over the next five to six years, undertake, on a grant basis, projects in critical areas focusing on education, science, IT, agriculture and renewable energy. India has offered a substantially higher number of training slots and has also doubled long-term scholarships. We have allocated half a billion dollars for this purpose.

The pan-African e-network project is a shining example of India-Africa partnership. India has gifted a dedicated satellite for e-connectivity in sub Saharan Africa to help bridge the digital divide. This project is fully financed by the Government of India and was launched from Addis Ababa with a satellite hub in Dakar. It is linking major universities in different regions of Africa with major Indian universities and centers of excellence in India and major hospitals in Africa with super-specialty hospitals in India. Thirty countries have already joined this Project to provide quality tele-education and tele-medicine.

Distinguished co-chairs,

We feel that the time has come when our age old political ties will mature into a vibrant economic partnership. India's FOCUS AFRICA policy, launched in 2002, which targeted seven countries, has yielded visible results. Our bilateral trade with Africa has grown manifold and reached a level of USD 31 billion in 2006-07 up from USD 3 billion in 2000-01 and is expected to reach a level of USD 35 billion in the current year. The Indian private sector's initiative and investments in Africa in core sectors, in particular in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, IT and health, complement India's commitment. Through this, it is enabling and empowering young local men and women in Africa.

I would like to conclude, Distinguished co-chairs, by reiterating India's commitment to continue to work closely with the countries in Africa to meet the diverse challenges that they face, to achieve the developmental targets and fulfill the aspirations of the people of Africa.

Thank You

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