

# **Introductory Remarks**

**by**

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Director General  
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**at**

**First ICWA Africa-India Academic Conference**

**on**

**“Africa and India: A Partnership for Development and Growth”**

**at**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**May 11, 2011**

H.E. Mr. Birhane Gebre-Christos, Hon'ble Minister of State for Foreign Affairs,  
Government of Ethiopia,

H.E. Mr. Demeke Mekonnen, Hon'ble Minister for Education, Government of Ethiopia,

H.E. Mme Novara Saadia Djaffer, Hon'ble Minister for Gender and Family Welfare,

H.E Mr. Erastus. J.O. Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson, African Union

H.E. Mr. Shebat Negga, Executive Director, Ethiopian International Institute for Peace  
and Development

H.E. Mr B.S. Bishnoi, Ambassador of India to Ethiopia and the African Union,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests, senior officials, academics , members of the media,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour and privilege to be here in this beautiful city of Addis Ababa on the occasion of the first Africa-India Academic Conference, "Africa and India :A Partnership for Development and Growth" organised by the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi in collaboration with the African Union Commission Secretariat and the Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development (EIIPD).

This first conference of this kind which is taking place two weeks before the African Union-India Summit in Addis Ababa is of particular significance. We are grateful that senior leaders and policy makers from several African countries are attending this conference at which issues of great importance to both Africa and India are planned to be discussed. We are equally thankful that eminent academics and experts both from Africa and India positively responded to our invitation and are taking part in our deliberations.

Africa and India today stand on the threshold of a new awakening and consciousness about each other. In recent years there has been a sharp rise in our mutual desire to understand each other better and interact closely. The India-Africa Summit held in New Delhi in April, 2008 marked an important milestone in that direction which saw the reinvigoration of our historical relationship to meet the common challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It also provided a blue print for enhancing India's engagement with Africa across a wide spectrum of areas including economic cooperation, science and technology, social development, economic infrastructure, energy and environment.

India and Africa have shared civilisational ties. Peoples from these two regions have travelled to each other for thousands of years. There had been exchanges of trade and commerce, culture, religion, music, architecture and so on. A number of African communities including from Ethiopia have lived in India. Similarly over two million Indians had adopted African countries as their homes for over 100 years. It is heartening to find in Ethiopia that Indian teachers had made a valuable and lasting contribution in the field of education for several decades. During the dark colonial period both Africa and India underwent a similar experience when they had to struggle against foreign rule, racial discrimination and oppression. Mahatma Gandhi's message of Satyagraha and non-violence which he developed on the African soil enabled him to wage freedom struggle against the British. A generation of African leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere, Nkrumah and others drew inspiration from him. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, our first Prime Minister described Africa 'as our next door neighbour even though it was separated by the Indian Ocean'; he always stated that he will stand by the Africans.

Relationship between India and Africa has been significantly without any ideological predilections or geo-political or security fears. Throughout the last sixty years ever since both India and African countries became independent, there has been a strong thread of partnership and cooperation that has woven us together. There may have been occasional ups and downs in our relations; yet the impulse that has consistently driven us is to seek understanding and friendship and to always develop better communication. Cultural similarities between the two have undoubtedly helped us in establishing a sound base for the relationship.

In the contemporary times which are influenced by rapid globalisation and trends towards economic integration how does India and Africa relate to each other is the principal question today. Whereas the Cold-war ended two decades ago, there are still concerns of arm race, continuing shadow of unresolved major disputes, non-traditional security threats, regional or global financial crisis or a deadlock in the multilateral trading regime. While in recent years Africa has shown a remarkable resurgence and is registering rapid economic growth, India's rise as an increasingly major economic entity and its growing influence in key world forums such as G-20, WTO, Climate Change negotiations etc offer enormous opportunities for mutual cooperation. India's bilateral trade with African countries is fast expanding and diversifying (it stands at appr. 40 bn U.S dollars). Yet for the two large regions one can say it has just touched the surface. The huge potential needs to be explored. India's investment in African has rapidly grown. A credit of U.S \$ 5.4 billion was offered at IAFS-1. Under India's ITEC programme in operation in Africa since 1964, this year 2045 training positions have been proposed. In all these areas and new ones such as agriculture and agro-processing, healthcare, education, infrastructure and so on much more needs to be done and quickly. The major change today is that our mutual ability to help each other is much greater than was in the past. Importantly today both Africa

and India observe that in today's multi-polar world, the emergence of a number of economies is beginning to influence a new agenda , a new paradigm which may impact on the global discourse on security and non-traditional security, finance, development, energy, environment and above all human security. Africa and India therefore feel the continuing need to have regular and intensive conversation at the government to government level as also at academic and people-to-people level. This will be in a sense the continuation of our dialogue which was started way back in the 50s and 60s on Afro-Asian solidarity and Non-alignment.

It is in this spirit that India wishes to be closely engaged with African countries as well as the African Union which is the principal forum for Africa's unity. India, a country of nearly 1.2 billion and Africa comprising appr.900 million people are brothers and sisters in the gigantic enterprise of peace and development and therefore India seeks partnership with Africa through consultative process. India's experience in its secular pluralism, democratic governance, and the objective of equitable and inclusive growth, environmental , energy and food security can find resonance in Africa which has similar values and aspirations. It is with this idea that this academic conference is planned to address such major areas and ideas as (i) economic development, (ii) capacity building, (iii) human resources developments, (iv) diaspora resources, and (v) non-traditional security which are major challenges and opportunities for both India and Africa. They also reflect our common concerns for a new society which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should meet the demands of change brought about by technology, openness and transparency, freedom and equal opportunity. We are looking forward to listening to our distinguished African scholars and experts in this regard and learn from their knowledge and experience.

We do hope that this conference comes up with clear and specific recommendations in the subjects under our discussion at the conference which we could place before our leaders for their consideration when they meet in Addis Ababa later this month.

The Indian Council of World Affairs, one of India's oldest institutions in foreign affairs once again expresses its grateful thanks to the African Union Commission Secretariat and Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development for giving us this opportunity to organise this important conference in Ethiopia.

Thank you

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