Indian Council of World Affairs
Sapru House, Barakhamba Road
New Delhi

Remarks

by

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at the Interactive Session on

The Dynamics of Bilateral Engagements Between India and Syria

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to express my gratitude to the Indian government and to the Indian Council for Cultural Relations for this kind invitation, and my pleasure to meet with this distinguished group of academics and experts in the field of higher education in India.

This visit reflects among other things the deeply rooted historical relations between our two countries on all fronts, including academic, cultural, and civilizational levels which I am sure that both our countries are so keen to constantly enhance and develop.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Syria has been subject to an unprecedented and most brutal war waged throughout the past eight years by tens of thousands of terrorists recruited from well over eighty countries. War on Syria targeted not only the economic infrastructure of the country, but also worked on tearing Syrian national fabric apart, and destroying its history, culture and age-old civilization. Terrorists sacked many archeological sites in Syria which is internationally acclaimed as the largest museum in the world. They looted and smuggled thousands of priceless archeological treasures from those sites. We are currently working hard on tracing and retrieving these looted treasures.

War on Syria was among other things, the war of ignorance against knowledge and backwardness against progress. This is why the higher education sector was subject to many attempts by these terrorist groups to undermine its Avant-guard role in building the future of Syria. However, despite this vicious war, all universities and academic institutions in Syria withstood those eight lean years, based on a solid faith that the pursuit of knowledge is in the long run, the decisive strategic weapon to quell the enemies of knowledge. This goes parallel to the Indian wisdom which says that "nothing is better than knowledge, because it cannot be destroyed by a despot or stolen by a thief; for what is unique about knowledge is that the more it spreads the richer and more comprehensive it becomes".

Ladies and Gentlemen

Below is a brief survey of our vision about developing the higher education system in Syria. It involves:

- Concentrating on both industry and community service. The main concern of our universities and academic research centres is to work on partnerships with local industrial companies in order to contribute to developing their production systems. In return, the latter of which, should finance these research projects
- Concentrating on high quality research projects (both scholarly and applied), and encouraging partnerships, joint research and supervision with internationally renowned universities and research centres

- Working on fully supporting innovators and innovative works, and training faculty members in the field of leadership where they focus on becoming constant learners
- Recruiting distinctive faculty members and introducing a mechanism that provides them with job security through offering them tenure track positions
- Creating the apt environment for constructive competition between public universities (7 universities) and private universities (21 universities) which will reflect positively on educational and research output.
- Designing up-to-date programmes and learning systems, together with enhancing the role of 'on line learning', and also reforming the current structure of our universities which leads to promoting competition and enhancing credibility amongst our academic institutions
- Encouraging students to shift from being passive recipients of information to active participants in the process of development
- Shifting focus from teaching to learning where students become givers of knowledge. This can be achieved through encouraging students to broaden their background knowledge.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Both our countries share a long history of cooperation on many levels, especially in the field of higher education. India hosted

scores of undergraduate and postgraduate students over the years. Upon completing their studies, those graduates returned home and positively contributed to the welfare of their country.

We in Syria, look highly on your achievements in all fields, and the progress your country has accomplished on its way to embrace a future worthy of the dream of Mahatma Gandhi. We look forward to promoting our bilateral relations in all fields of common interest including the higher education sector.

Finally, I reiterate my gratitude for this kind invitation and avail myself of this opportunity to wish you and your friendly country a prosperous future.