

Goodwill message at the Global African Diaspora Symposium, Abuja, 2023

27 April 2023

Honourable Dr. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, H.E. Ambassador
Zubairu Dada, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,
Allow me to stand on the existing protocol.

I am happy to present this goodwill message at the Global African Diaspora Symposium, Abuja 2023. Both our countries are natural partners and have historical relations. We have many things in common, including the large diaspora that both of us have around the world. Countrymen outside the country are actually force-multipliers when tapped right. We in India have had some experience in this direction. The Prime Minister of India has described the relations with diaspora as "Hamara toh khoon ka rishta hai, passport ka nahi", which means that "our relationship is that of blood and not of passport". And that one phrase, I think, captures the entire complexity of a relationship that we have today with 34 million People of Indian origin and non-Resident Indians abroad.

India has the largest diaspora in the world and many would say, the most talented. But what is perhaps unique about us is the intensity of the bonding between the community abroad and the motherland. And that is a two-way street which is promoted particularly by activities like the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas. This relationship was very much in evidence amidst the challenges of the Covid pandemic. On its part, the Government of India undertook the Vande Bharat Mission to bring back the stranded Indians and the Vaccine Maitri initiative, which were focused significantly on our diaspora-centered partners. We recognize the tremendous response that we got from the PIO-NRI community during the most difficult moments of our own Covid experience.

The younger generations are also very much in the forefront of connecting India to the world. They do so not only through their activities at home but by studying, working and traveling abroad. Our endeavor is therefore to maximize support for them and to ensure that they realize the benefits and achievements that are due to them. We strive to create a better global workplace, a more secure traveling experience and a non-discriminatory treatment abroad. To facilitate their movement and stay, India signed Migration and Mobility Partnerships with Germany, Denmark, Portugal, France and UK, just to give you some examples. We have also signed a Working Holiday Programme with Austria and an understanding with Australia for providing a more liberal working conditions to the Indian diaspora. We also have finalized more predictable and liberal visa and work provisions in some other nations. We also provide services and support through the Indian Community Welfare Fund. The facilities extended to the diaspora even includes the swift replacement of a lost passport and the more efficient rendering of Consular services. The redressal of grievances in a transparent manner through online mechanisms like MADAD is by now well established.

The identity of a diaspora is very much derived from how closely it is connected to its roots. Here too, our efforts have been to encourage easier exposure to Indian culture and traditions abroad. Many of our Embassies across the world offer yoga, dance and music classes. In fact, the High Commission of India in Abuja has also started free yoga classes at our premises and I invite my Nigerian friends to avail of the facility. We ask them also to support and facilitate community functions and collective activities. The youth living abroad today, therefore, have many more opportunities than before to stay connected. Having said that, we believe that this is never enough by itself. There is always room for improvement in schemes like the Know India Programme that we intend to expand, the Bharat Ko Janiye Quiz and the Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children. It is also our expectation that the New Education Policy will create more pathways for a deeper involvement of the diaspora.

Our cooperation in diaspora matters between India and Nigeria has grown stronger. We had a delegation from Nigeria visit India in January 2023 to attend the Diaspora event organized at Indore, Madhya Pradesh. They also interacted with their Indian counterparts. It is satisfying to note both the countries engage their respective diaspora in similar fashion and with almost similar number of outreach activities, which provides us with the opportunity for us to exchange experiences and learn from each other.

I wish the event Global African Diaspora Symposium, 2023, a success and also want to reiterate that India would continue to cooperate with NIDCOM and the Nigerian Agencies in fostering closer bilateral relations.

Thank you.
