

## Speech Delivered by High Commissioner on 13 August 2017 at the India Day Celebration organized by the India Club at Johannesburg

As an Indian Foreign Service Officer, the only thing I was guaranteed at the beginning of my career was change. But in reality, it was rather a guarantee for adventure.

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to stand in this room today, as I embark upon a fresh journey with a new beginning in South Africa. However, rather it would be slightly more appropriate to phrase this as a homecoming. Almost 10 years ago, I was posted as India's Consul-General to Cape Town. And ever since, my appreciation for this country's passion, vibrancy and spirit of warmth has deepened. I have come to realise that this country not only possesses a uniquely **genuine** spirit of welcoming, but also serves as an epitome of reconciliation and rapprochement.

I must also add that in approximately 30 years in the Foreign Service, I have yet to stand beneath something as entrancingly low and vast as the African sky. Thus, once again, I would like to reiterate my gratitude to deliver this afternoon's speech here, on India day – a day which celebrates the colors of our country.

India has come a long way in 71 years of independence. In terms of its economic growth, it is one of the fastest growing economies in the world; in terms of its environmental efforts, it leads in conservation efforts including the Blue Revolution for blue oceans and skies; in technology, with cost effective and influentially bold space programs, it has launched some of the most powerful rockets and satellites, as well as in its actions of tenacity and strength on education for all.

[And every day, it strives to edge towards a country devoid of poverty and hunger through the empowerment of its people.

As a consequence, India's efforts synchronize perfectly with those of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals – monumental goals which aim to unify and dignify all.

However, besides its own internal growth, India's relationship with South Africa is one of acceleration and expansion. Since 1994 at the end of apartheid, trade has emboldened, cultural and economic bonds have deepened and people to people ties have solidified. This relationship between India and South Africa is truly special. It stands for peace in a time of turmoil, serves as a platform for collaboration in a time of chaos and above all, is an alliance of trust and conviction.

Thus, on the eve of 71 years of independence in India, I am here to honour my country as much as I am here to honour the historic and expanding friendship between our two countries and our people.

*Thank you.*