

Vice President's Secretariat

Vice President appeals to world community to ensure early conclusion of UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism

Terrorism is impeding global progress: Vice President;

India would like to become a valuable partner in the economic development of Comoros;

Legislators from different countries can benefit significantly from sharing views and perspectives with each other.

Addresses the Parliament of Comoros in Moroni

Posted On: 11 OCT 2019 7:58PM by PIB Delhi

The Vice President, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu said that terrorism was increasingly threatening and impeding global progress and urged the world community to come together to ensure that the UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism is concluded at the earliest.

Addressing the parliament of Comoros at Moroni, the capital of the island nation, Shri Naidu said that terrorist groups threaten peace and stability and render state institutions vulnerable. "Piracy and maritime threats as well as cross border transnational crimes, including cyber crimes, have only added new dimensions to the problem", he added. He said that India was willing to partner with Comoros to neutralize these threats, particularly those in the maritime domain.

Shri Naidu said that the Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi had articulated a coherent Indian vision for a collaborative security architecture in the Indian Ocean which can ensure security and economic growth for all littoral countries of the region.

Observing that India was committed to work with Comoros in accordance with the principles of South-South Cooperation, he said that the economic ties between the two countries could become stronger and there was vast potential for trade between the two nations. "India would like to become a valuable partner in the economic development of Comoros", he added.

Referring to the partnership between India and Comoros under the International Solar Alliance, he said it can help light thousands of homes in a sustainable manner and provide access to energy in the remotest corners. Observing that both the countries were having large youth population, the Vice President said that huge demographic dividend could be reaped "if we can train them, skill them and gainfully employ them".

Referring to pan-Africa e-network initiative to implement e-Vidya Bharati and e-Arogya Bharati in Comoros, he said “Under it, we are offering free tele-education to 15000 students and free tele-medicine courses to 1000 doctors and paramedics in various African countries. India is happy to share its digital revolution with Africa to enhance the well-being of its people and in particular, empower its youth”.

Touching upon the common challenges faced by various countries, Shri Naidu said that legislators from different countries can benefit significantly from sharing views and perspectives with each other. “We have to address persistent challenges of poverty, illiteracy, income inequality, gender discrimination, environmental degradation and lack of basic amenities in some parts of the world, including some areas in both our countries”, he added.

The Vice President said that people-centric governance alone would ensure a high quality of life to all citizens and said that parliamentarians have a constitutional responsibility to play a significant role in supporting and monitoring implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. (SDGs)

Earlier the Vice President had a tête-à-tête with Mr. Abdou Ousseni, the President of the Assembly of the Union of Comoros.

The Vice President was accompanied by a high level delegation comprising Shri Sanjeev Kumar Balyan, Minister of State for Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Shri Ramvihar Netam, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and senior officials.

The following is the full text of the speech:

I am deeply honoured to address this august House. As the first Indian Vice President to have this rare privilege, you have not only honoured me but also honoured the world’s largest democracy. My visit to COMOROS is truly historic since it is first ever bilateral visit by an Indian Vice President to your great country.

I bring to my brothers and sisters of COMOROS the good wishes of the Parliament of India as well as of the people of India. I would like to thank H.E. President Azali Assoumani for the extraordinary warmth and hospitality extended to me personally and to my entire delegation.

Dear sisters and brothers,

Our countries share a common ocean, a common struggle against colonialism and a common endeavour to improve the quality of life of our peoples.

The Indian Ocean has long been the centre of maritime trade and commerce and exchange of ideas. Many great civilization have flourished in the rim countries of this ocean.

Many Indians since centuries have sailed to your perfumed islands in their dhows. Some of them decided to settle down in Comoros and today, even though small in number, form the bedrock of our cultural and trade ties.

Our countries have successfully fought colonialism and achieved independence. It is indeed an emotional moment for me to come to Comoros today as India and the world remembers Mahatma Gandhi, the iconic Indian leader who galvanized the people of the country and garnered world wide support for the cause of Indian independence.

Mahatma Gandhi, whose 150th Birth Anniversary is being celebrated across the globe this year,

has left behind a lasting legacy of peace and non-violence for the entire humanity.

He is also a bridge that connects our continents.

It was Mahatma Gandhi who said on the eve of India's independence "India's freedom will remain incomplete so long as Africa remains in bondage".

Sisters and brothers,

In many ways, our own struggle against colonialism helped in reinforcing our shared principles and values and helped to redefine our existence as free nations. For example, our principled stand against apartheid in South Africa came out of our quest for equality, dignity and justice for all people, particularly in the African continent.

While India's independence paved the way for the independence of a large number of African countries, even before we became a free nation, India has always been a strong and vocal votary of Afro-Asian solidarity. It is this solidarity and our joint search for a voice in the post colonial world which brought the leaders of India and Africa together.

When the United Nations met in 1945 to draw up its charter, Mahatma Gandhi spoke of "the terrible deceptions and fraud" of war and added that there could be no peace for the world without "universal freedom and equality of coloured races". The relationship between India and Africa has been growing stronger with each passing year.

It is, therefore, not a mere coincidence that our President, Prime Minister and myself have visited 32 African countries in the last five and half years. My Government has made a conscious effort to reach out to our African sisters and brothers, reinforcing a long standing and broad based support which we have always enjoyed in Africa.

In the last 5 years or so, we have received nearly 100 Heads of States and Heads of Governments from Africa in India, including more than 40 Heads of States and Heads of Governments during the India-Africa Forum Summit III in 2015. We also had the privilege of having President Azali Assoumani and several other leaders from this continent in the International Solar Alliance Founding Conference in March 2018 in New Delhi. We deeply value the friendship that we have built with our African counterparts.

This close relationship is also evident in Comoros where the current leadership, warmly recognizes the role of the Indian community in Comoros and provides them with a sense of safety and security and with a welcoming environment where they could flourish. We deeply appreciate President Azali Assoumani for being not just a mentor and guide for the Indian community but also their true friend and well-wisher.

Sisters and brothers,

Our support to Africa as well as our Lines of Credit and Buyers Credit Scheme have been driven by your requirements and your priorities. Currently nearly 181 projects in 41 African countries of USD 11 billion are being implemented with our Lines of Credit. These projects cover a wide range from large power projects, iconic buildings, IT parks, water treatment plants, rural drinking water, etc.

In this context, I am happy to note that India has provided for a Line of Credit to Comoros of USD 41.6 million for setting up of 18 MW power plant in Moroni. I would like to assure this august House that we would like to work with you more closely in the years to come.

India and Africa draw inspiration from each other as we shape a new future for our own countries as well as for our world.

Dear sisters and brothers,

You are blessed to have nature's bounty in full measure. I am happy that you are not only protecting and preserving this treasure but are willing to harness it for sustainable development. I wish to congratulate President Azali Assoumani and this august House on your decision to sign the International Solar Alliance Framework Agreement and help us take bold steps collectively towards a sustainable and cleaner world. We look forward to working with your country to take up solar projects for the benefit of your people.

Our economic ties are strong and I am sure they can be stronger.

Our trade with Comoros now stands at US\$ 47.11 million for 2018-19. The potential for trade between India and Comoros is vast. India would like to become a valuable partner in the economic development of Comoros.

The good news is that exports from Africa to India have increased. Our trade is becoming more broad-based. There is a huge untapped potential for our countries to grow together.

Sisters and brothers,

However, even as political stability and peaceful transition takes place in Comoros, terrorism has, time and again, threatened to derail this process. Terrorist groups threaten peace and stability and render state institutions vulnerable. Piracy and maritime threats as well as cross border transnational crimes, including cyber crimes, have only added new dimensions to the problem.

As a country which continues to be a victim of cross border terrorism, India is willing and ready to partner with Comoros, and supplement Comoros efforts, to neutralize these threats, particularly in the maritime domain.

As Indian Ocean countries, our maritime security is interlinked. Prime Minister Modi has articulated a coherent Indian vision for a collaborative security architecture in the Indian Ocean, which can ensure security and economic growth for all in the littoral countries of this region.

I am happy to convey that India will be extending a Line of Credit of US \$ 20 million to Comoros on strengthening our defense and maritime cooperation.

In our contemporary world, terrorism in different forms and manifestations, is increasingly threatening and impeding global progress. The world community must come together to combat this global menace and ensure that the UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism is concluded as early as possible.

Sisters and brothers,

Human development must grow in tandem with economic development in order to ensure inclusive and sustainable development.

I am happy that India and Comoros are collaborating closely to enhance Comoros human resource potential through a number of capacity building programmes, including through our flagship ITEC programme, and scholarships from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and

IAFS as well as new tailor made programmes for Africa.

Given the growth of tourism all over the world, India has made it easier for Comorians to travel to India by expanding our Electronic Tourist Visa scheme to them. Our cultural ties have received a great boost through regular cultural exchanges. I am very happy to note the enthusiastic celebration of the International Yoga Day in Comoros and the readiness to appreciate Indian culture and celebrate Indian festivals. I would like to share with this august House that Festival of India will be celebrated this year and next year in Comoros which will greatly enhance cultural exchanges between our two countries.

Sisters and brothers,

India and Comoros are now marching ahead on the path of development and economic growth. We are strengthening our democratic roots and are implementing various policies and programmes to ensure that the fruits of freedom reach all our citizens.

We share a common ocean and a common future. As the Comorian saying goes "*celui qui fait l'effort supplémentaire bénéficiera*" – "one who makes the extra effort will benefit". Let both our countries make that extra effort and accelerate development.

When Comoros marches ahead, India will always be there to march by your side, shoulder to shoulder.

Excellencies, to be a legislator of a country is a special responsibility. All of you represent the collective voice of the people of Comoros. You are the guardian of their welfare and the guiding lights for their growth and development. Through your work in this House, you are not only assisting day-to-day business of legislation and governance, but also in deliberating on the long-term policy orientations of your country.

New waves of nationalism and protectionist trends are making us question the effectiveness of multilateral institutions. To legislate in such changing times demands even greater awareness and acumen from Parliamentarians. Parliamentarians have an opportunity, and constitutional responsibility, to play a significant role in supporting and monitoring implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We have set for ourselves an ambitious, transformatory agenda. We have resolved to leave no one behind and have a special focus on the marginalized group. We have to address persistent challenges of poverty, illiteracy, income inequality, gender discrimination, environmental degradation and lack of basic amenities in some parts of the world including some areas in both our countries. Real freedom would require us to move rapidly towards inclusive development. People centric good governance alone can ensure a high quality of life to all our citizens.

Given these common challenges, legislators from different countries can benefit significantly from sharing views and perspectives with each other. Over the past seven decades of our independence, India has developed a robust institutional architecture of Parliamentary democracy, and we would be happy to share this experience and expertise with this august House.

India's General Parliamentary Elections in April- May 2019 with an electorate of 900 million was the world's largest democratic exercise. We are sharing our experiences of election management with several countries in Africa. Several parliamentary delegations as well as officials visit our Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies (PRIDE- erstwhile BPST).

Government of India has adopted the vision of '*Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas*', which means 'collective efforts, inclusive growth, with everyone's trust'. On this basis, we are moving forward to build a strong prosperous and inclusive India. This overarching framework is not just limited to our domestic agenda, but purposefully guides our external engagement as well.

We remain committed to work with you to meet the aspirations of your people in accordance with the principles of South-South Cooperation.

We are honored that we have been able to share our expertise and resources, in whatever manner possible, to support food energy and health security in Comoros. Our partnership under the International Solar Alliance can help us lights thousands of home in sustainable manner and provide access to energy to people in the remotest corner.

Our countries have a large youth population. If we can train them, skill them and gainfully employ them, we can reap huge demographic dividend. Following the success of our Pan African e-Network initiative, we now look forward to the implementation of the e-vidyabharti and e-arogyabharti. Under it, we are offering free tele-education to 15000 students and free tele-medicine courses to 1000 doctors and paramedics in various African countries. India is happy to share its digital revolution with Africa to enhance the well-being of its people and in particular, empower its youth.

Let me conclude with two quotations, one from your national anthem, and another from an ancient Indian text that illuminate our collective future journey.

First is your resolve to rise as an independent nation and love your country, your religion and the world, "*Narikenī ha niya, Riveindze uwatamiya, Mahaba ya dine na duniya*".

Second is the holistic Indian vision articulated by the Indian vedic sages almost 4000 years ago, "*Samaani va akuti, Samaana hrudayanivah, Samaanam astu vo mano yatha vah susahaasati*".

("Just as different elements in the universe co-exist harmoniously, let us all work together united by a common purpose, with a cordial, calm and composed approach.")

RR/BK/MS/RK

(Release ID: 1587882) Visitor Counter : 294

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