

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF THE ARSP
CONFERENCE**

New Delhi: January 10, 2018

1. I am glad to be here for the inauguration of the **International Conference of PIO Parliamentarians**, being organised by **Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad - Bharat** in association with the **PIO Chamber of Commerce and Industry** and the Ministry of External Affairs, government of India. This event is a milestone. It brings together parliamentarians and public representatives of Indian origin from countries across the globe. It is a new and welcome addition to the commemoration of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. The Divas itself marks the return of Mahatma Gandhi to India from South Africa on January 9, 1915.

2. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is not merely the remembrance of a historical anniversary. It is the celebration of a very contemporary, very accomplished and very high-achieving community – the Indian diaspora. It is a tribute to the estimated 30 million strong Pravasi Bharatiya community that can be found in over 100 countries – from Trinidad to Fiji, from Argentina to Australia, and from the United States to the United Arab Emirates. Of these people, about 13 million are People of Indian Origin or PIOs as we know them, and some 17 million are Non-Resident Indians or NRIs.

3. The Indian diaspora has climbed to appreciable heights in almost all the countries where it has found a home. It has contributed to the well-being of that country and of that society – enriching the economy and adding to intellectual wealth and local culture. Members of the Indian diaspora work hard on farms in countries as far apart as Italy, Bolivia and Tanzania. They are instrumental to the tech start-up ecosystem of Silicon Valley. They form the

backbone of the economy of Dubai and other major business cities in the Gulf region. The global financial centres of New York, London and Singapore would simply not be the same without the Indian diaspora. And as I discovered during my first state visit after being elected as the President of India, Pravasi Bharatiya teachers have helped educate several generations in Ethiopia.

4. Of course, I have given only a few examples. If I were to continue to cite instances of achievements of the Indian diaspora in different countries, I would require a few hours and not a few minutes. As a country, we are very proud of what our Pravasi Bharatiya brothers and sisters have done. They have embellished the identity of India and of the Indian people all over the world. They have also remained true to Indian culture and retained a strong and commendable bond with their roots, even when living thousands of miles away. I would go to the extent of saying that if Indian cuisine and Indian films have a global market today, it is because the diaspora has taken them to distant lands.

Ladies and Gentlemen

5. We Indians are proud of our democracy, fabric of pluralism and diversity. This is our greatest strength. And the Indian diaspora has carried such liberal and civic-minded values with it. Instinctively, this has made members of the Indian diaspora contribute to public life in countries that they are citizens of. I am told that there are around 300 PIO parliamentarians. Among them are those who have risen to become heads of state, heads of government and senior ministers.
6. At this conference itself some 140 elected public representatives – from MPs to mayors – from 23 countries are participating. This is a very substantial number. In November 1998, **Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad – Bharat** had hosted the first such get-together of PIO parliamentarians. That meeting was inaugurated by India's then Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. It saw the participation of 34 PIO parliamentarians from eight countries. In

two decades, the event has grown four-fold. This is a matter of happiness and satisfaction for all of us.

7. Regular contact and outreach with the Indian diaspora, in various countries, is a cornerstone of the Ministry of External Affairs of the government of India. Our consulates and embassies have a special place in their hearts for Pravasi Bharatiyas and are making efforts to provide prompt services and support to members of the Indian diaspora. Regular interaction with PIO parliamentarians and public representatives is a part of this process.
8. For the government of India, engagement with PIO parliamentarians – or indeed with the wider Indian diaspora community – is not a transactional relationship or a **zero-sum game**. Rather, we look upon the community and look upon you – the PIO parliamentarians and elected and public representatives – as a **living bridge**. You have a role in enhancing understanding between your countries and the country of your parents and ancestors. And in helping build economic, people-to-people and strategic connections that will be of benefit to both countries and to all of us.
9. Today, India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The next few decades are likely to see our economy gallop ahead. We are also at the cusp of New India – an India that will achieve certain milestones for our people by 2022, when we celebrate the 75th year of our Independence. At such a juncture, India offers huge investment, trade and developmental opportunities. And the development of India will be of benefit to not just the 1.3 billion people of India – but will be a voice of hope and prosperity and of peace and stability for our shared world. And for all the countries you represent.
10. I have often said that the entire global community – the entirety of human civilisation, if I could put it so – has a stake in the development of India. As PIO parliamentarians, as those in public life in your systems who have the best understanding of India, it is

important for you to link your individual country's priorities to India's development. And to see how these can intersect. I am sure the remaining sessions of this conference will take that process forward.

11. With these words, I wish you and I wish the conference all success. And should you have the time, I invite you to visit Rashtrapati Bhavan. It belongs to all Indians, to all those in the Indian diaspora and to all PIOs.

Thank you
Jai Hind!