

SPEECH FOR HER EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRIMATI PRATIBHA DEVISINGH PATIL AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE SEVENTH REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE ADB-OECD ANTI-CORRUPTION INITIATIVE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION ON 'BUILDING MULTIDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORKS TO COMBAT CORRUPTION' ON 28TH SEPTEMBER 2011 AT NEW DELHI

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to inaugurate the Seventh Regional Conference of the ADB-OECD Anti-Corruption Initiative being hosted by India. I convey my warmest greetings to experts and policy makers from various countries who have come together for these deliberations. I understand that the request of the Government of 'Timor Leste' to join the Initiative has been considered and recommended for acceptance by the Steering Committee as the 29th Member.

The ADB-OECD Initiative on Anti Corruption, which now has more than a decade of experience, is committed to move forward purposefully, in the fight against corruption. The Action Plan, together with its Implementation Plan developed by the Initiative, consist of steps relating to the public sector, the private sector and civil society, and also contain a number of principles and standards on policy reform, which Governments of the region implement on a voluntary basis. The initiative, indeed, seeks to implement the entire gamut of obligations contained in the legally binding United Nations Convention Against Corruption, extending from the preventive aspects of corruption, to the requirements to ensure effective international co-operation for combating it.

To begin with, I take this opportunity to speak of India's economic growth as well as its governance structure. India has made great economic strides since 1991 when the process of economic reforms were ushered in. This has enabled the country's GDP to grow, reaching a level of 9.6 percent in the year prior to the global economic crisis of 2008. The Indian economy faced this global financial meltdown with alacrity and persisted with a high growth trajectory. India's weight in the global economic landscape increased considerably. Once again the global economic environment is raising concerns. However, I am confident that with its strong fundamentals and resilience, the Indian economy will grow, and we will continue to pursue an inclusive growth strategy, that includes an ambitious programme for the expansion of our social and infrastructure sectors. We recognize that corruption is a hurdle towards these endeavors and that it must be removed.

India has a Constitution whose principles and institutions have served the nation well. We are a secular democratic country with separation of powers of the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. Equally important are the fourth and fifth pillars, which have been playing their role of instruments of course correction. Equality of opportunity is contained in the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution and, we have a long history of responsible affirmative action to meet peoples' needs within a democratic framework. In India, the roots of democracy are deep and

abiding. We are not only the largest functional democracy in the world but have an unwavering faith in it. We have held 15 nationwide general elections since our independence. Following the verdict of the people, each time there has been a peaceful transition of government. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have strengthened the Panchayati Raj System in villages and municipal bodies in towns and cities, as the third tier of the democratic system. This has resulted in a deepening of democracy and further empowered citizens at the grassroots level by decentralizing decision making in many areas. We are committed to greater transparency and accountability in governance, as also to a policy of “zero tolerance” towards corruption.

India has an elaborate legal and institutional framework for prevention and combating corruption in public services. We have a well structured system of recruitment, clear and transparent policies of promotion, and elaborate conduct rules for public officials for ensuring the maintenance of integrity. Rules of conduct for public officials provide for submission of reports regarding investments, assets and properties and gifts received. There are also provisions for prevention of conflict of interest through restrictions on private employment of public officials after retirement. Violation of conduct rules attracts disciplinary action against officials. The Central Vigilance Commission, the Central Bureau of Investigation, State anti corruption agencies, the Directorate of Enforcement, and the Lokayuktas, tackle

preventive and punitive aspects of corruption. Laws like the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988, the Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002, the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, are in force and form the core of the legal provisions to tackle corruption. The judicial process through the structure of civil courts, the High Courts and the apex level Supreme Court, provide an alternate channel of redressal for matters related to corruption. The issue for framing an Ombudsman Law is presently being considered by Parliament, as also the Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill, 2010.

The Extradition Act and bilateral arrangements for mutual legal assistance are the tools on which we seek to build international co-operation. India has ratified the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in May 2011. It has been a significant step and would facilitate the furtherance of efforts to secure effective international co-operation in tackling trans-border corruption. Domestic laws are substantially compliant with the mandatory provisions of the UN Convention, excepting a couple of Articles. For this, the necessary Legislative Bill has been introduced in Parliament, which relates to the prevention of bribery of foreign public officials and officials of public international organizations. A process to consider changes in the Indian penal laws, has also been set in motion for criminalizing private sector bribery.

Any approach to combating corruption would need to be multifaceted, as the problem itself has a number of dimensions. Governments would have to constantly look at and review existing laws, systems and procedures for ensuring their effectiveness. It would require strengthening institutions, removing loopholes, stringently implementing laws and making every institution more transparent in its functioning. All the stakeholders have to work together in all these initiatives.

I believe that any fight against corruption also requires the need to look at individual behaviour as well as societal norms. Legislation alone would not be enough. It requires education, creation of awareness and moral regeneration to fight corruption. Gandhiji once said that the right national life has to begin with the individual. Corruption basically arises out of greed and a desire for quick enrichment without efforts. It can be described as a moral failure. There are some who speak of how the temptation of consumerism has caused a drift away from a principled life. Therefore, it is very important for society to look at inculcating values that respect and give a premium to honesty and integrity. India has always been a land where through the ages, there has been an emphasis on human values and ethics. This spirit remains an integral part of the Indian ethos. At testing times, we need to remember this.

I believe the regional conference will prove to be a useful platform to share views and experiences, and learn from one

another in addressing the specific themes which are on the agenda of this Conference.

I again congratulate you all, for having come together on a common platform against corruption, which is of a global concern. To address this effectively, it requires the nations to debate and deliberate on improving the effectiveness of international co-operation. I am sure this Conference will provide the right forum to address this.

Thank You.