



**Inaugural Address at BRICS Civil Forum 2021 by Mr. Sanjay
Bhattacharyya, Secretary (CPV&OIA) and BRICS Sherpa**

April 16, 2021

Excellencies, Friends from the BRICS Community

Thank you for this invitation to join you at the BRICS Civil Forum today. I look forward to hear your perspectives on some of the issues that are important to civil society. In this era of transformation, your interactions will be sign posts for BRICS as it forges ahead.

The dark COVID clouds have not gone away but we do see light ahead. There is promise in the form of vaccines, economic recovery and hopes of return to a new normal. We are at unique cross roads of history, with the deadly pandemic having introduced new modes of working and living, individually and collectively. Even before COVID struck, we were grappling with economic slowdown and technological changes that were transforming the world around us. This is an important year to reflect where we are and how we would like the world to be for our children. I am optimistic by nature and would wish to look through the tunnel at the opportunities ahead.

India, has dealt with the COVID pandemic with science and humanity both for her own citizens and also for the global community. Through the Vaccine Maitri initiative we have delivered 64 million doses of made in India COVID vaccines to more than 80 countries, demonstrating our willingness and capability to shoulder greater responsibility as a first responder in times of crisis. India has demonstrated that she is not only a pharmacy of the world for production of essential drugs but also a reliable provider to the world. We do believe that the global community has to work together in such situations.

Multilateralism, which had already been under pressure for not being able to represent the current realities of our times, again failed to rise to the occasion in handling the pandemic or its impact. While efforts have been made towards equitable vaccine distribution by the Covax facility, it has not been able to prevent the vaccine nationalism. While people in developing countries risk succumbing to the pandemic, some countries are finding reasons for not sharing the vaccines or their Intellectual Property Rights, so as to maximize their profits from vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics for the pandemic. India and South Africa, repeatedly made submissions to WTO to provide waivers to TRIPS for supply of COVID vaccines to the global community. These appeals did not go through, despite wide support from developing countries. I was pleased to see the recent initiatives by certain countries in WTO, in this context. Science provided vaccines, humanity can provide its distribution.



The multilateral system, aimed at promoting development and maintaining security did yoeman service in the early years after WWII. But over time, its inability to reform and adjust to evolving developments, exposed its fault lines, both on scope and efficacy of its decisions and delivery and also on its representative nature. Together we have the responsibility to reshape our global institutions and how we look to the future. Those resisting reforms are clinging to an image of the past that is not the reality of the present and certainly not the hope of the future.

Recent developments demonstrate that multilateralism is not just relevant but also the need of the hour. It is the basis for any long term solution to the challenges faced by the global community, current or future, solutions that benefit all. Multilateralism is a form of global governance based on common rules accepted by multiple stakeholders for our common good.

BRICS brings together five major emerging economies, comprising 41% of the world population, almost 30% of the land area, 24% of global GDP and 16% of world trade. BRICS as a grouping has found a life of its own, determined its directions and is now starting to show its promise in various domains. NDB, a Bank founded by BRICS countries, is now fully functional. The Bank, true to the BRICS philosophy stepped forward in the fight against COVID-19 and offered emergency assistance to member countries in 2020. I am pleased that all BRICS members have been engaged in discussion regarding the importance of reform in the UN system, Bretton Wood Institutions, WTO, WHO and others.

BRICS has come a long way since it began as an economic grouping fifteen years ago. The rapid changes in economic organisation, technologies, use of data and digital technologies and more importantly, in the nature of work itself has altered the socio economic landscape. The balance of this landscape rests on the nature of our response to this transformation. In this period of turmoil, BRICS has been upto the task. It has not only been undaunted in the face of new challenges such as climate change, challenges encountered by multilateral trading system, demographic-shifts, changing character of production and employment, technology-induced transformations etc, it is also adapting itself to the times. We wish to see a BRICS that seeks to put the citizen in the centre and evolve mechanisms that provide benefit to all BRICS citizens and indeed to the global community around us.

India's approach during the Chairship of BRICS is reflected in the theme we have selected BRICS@15: Intra BRICS Cooperation for Continuity, Consolidation and Consensus. We have also identified four broad priority areas: (i) Reform of the Multilateral System (ii) Counter Terrorism Cooperation (iii) Using Digital and Technological Solutions for the achievement of SDGs and (iv) Enhancing People to People exchanges. In terms of deliverables, we hope to put forward a number of action plans on the key priority areas such that the impact and relevance of BRICS experience is expanded for her citizens and to the



global community. The experiences, especially in the past year, tell us that use of technology and digital means enables us to reach out to more people and enhances efficiency of delivery and depth of impact. These should be harnessed effectively to aid in our efforts in the endeavour to implement SDGs.

Civil Societies represent the collective conscience of our peoples. In these difficult times the role of our Civil Societies assumes greater relevance to raise the voice of the people and also to direct multilateralism in the right direction. In order to advance the objective of building an international order in which no one is left behind, participation of every actor, including individuals, civil society, states and multilateral fora, is required. It is in this context, that BRICS Civil Society Forum assumes importance.

The BRICS Civil Forum which was initiated in 2015 with the aim of fostering constructive dialogue between Civil Society Organizations in BRICS countries, academia and businesses on a wide range of socio-economic issues, has the responsibility to ensure that the BRICS grouping does not lose its focus on people and development. You have made great progress in connecting civil society across BRICS partners and coming forth as the voice of the people. Your mission in these challenging times acquires even greater significance.

This forum also serves as an ideas bank for BRICS and offers essential inputs on relevant international economic issues. Since its inception, the forum has helped BRICS to arrive at concrete policy measures and must be commended for the significant contributions over the years. We look forward to the BRICS Civil Forum coming up with innovative ideas and suggestions for BRICS Leaders. I wish you a very successful and productive year and look forward to receiving valuable suggestions from the Civil Forum.
