



Inaugural Address by Minister of State, Dr. R. R. Singh, Ministry of External Affairs at the BRICS Civil Forum 2021
28 July 2021

Excellencies, Distinguished participants and my dear friends,

- Let me begin with quoting Hon'ble PM Modi Ji who said, "Democracy is not any agreement, it is about participation". The Civil platform is a tool providing opportunity to interact with the vibrant civil society and making the BRICS process more participatory.
- It gives me immense pleasure to interact with you for the first time at the BRICS Civil Forum 2021.
- I thank RIS and the presenters from CSOs from BRICS countries for their insightful remarks. It has been a good start to this two day event. Your thoughts, ideas and perspectives are important inputs for structuring the BRICS agenda.
- Today, we meet in the shadow of the pandemic that has fundamentally changed the way we think and work. While I would have preferred to interact with such an intellectual gathering in in-person format, we are forced to meet virtually.
- Pandemic has put a lot of stress globally not only on the medical infrastructure but its social and economic impacts have also been very substantive. Even after almost 20 months the pandemic refuses to relent. It has highlighted the inter-connectedness of the world and the need to combat such challenges together.
- I take this opportunity to thank the frontline organisations and workers and which in many cases are the Civil Society Organisations, who have worked tirelessly to help others in need. There have been many heart-warming stories and lessons from across countries including India on how civil society and communities have enabled timely delivery of response in demanding situations like disasters and pandemics.



- Civil Societies represent the collective conscience of our peoples. In these difficult times the role of our Civil Societies assumes even greater relevance to amplify the collective voice of peoples for the welfare and benefit of people.
- 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.
- Covid-19 Pandemic has eroded years of gains and as per reports millions have been pushed back into poverty globally. We have entered the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We feel that CSOs have a very important role to play particularly for enhancing the participation of women and youth. Civil society organizations have been playing an important role in localization of efforts towards achievement of SDGs and in strengthening local capacities.
- Recognizing the role of the people based movement reaching upto the grassroots in economic development, our Government has created a new Ministry of Cooperation. This is expected to usher in a new era for these organizations and the role they play in empowering our citizens.

- BRICS brings together five major emerging economies, comprising 42% of the world population, almost 30% of the land area, 24% of global GDP and over 16% of world trade. The five nations represent the voice of the developing world.
- BRICS, which completes 15 years this year, has increased its agenda from humble beginning to scores of sectors spread across the three pillars of political and security; economic and financial; and cultural and people to people exchanges. India values its cooperation with BRICS, which incidentally is the only grouping to have its own Development Bank, and a safety net of Contingent Reserve Arrangement.
- However, it is also critical that just as we congratulate ourselves on our achievements, we also pause to take stock of the gaps that exist and review our work and working methods to make BRICS more effective and efficient.
- India as the Chair of BRICS for 2021 has been working for further strengthening the intra-BRICS cooperation under the theme of Continuity, Consolidation and Consensus and the 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 June this year, BRICS Foreign Ministers came out with a joint statement calling for strengthening and reforming the multilateral system. Last year BRICS partners had also adopted a BRICS Counter Terrorism Strategy. Our experts are working closely to come up with practical action plan in this regard.
- India has always been a proponent for promoting intra-BRICS People-to-people cooperation. PM Modi's leadership has been decisive in this regard and has resulted in many P2P initiatives including BRICS games, BRICS film festivals, youth engagements etc. Despite the pandemic we have tried to maintain the momentum in this track and continue with the meetings of BRICS Civil Forum, BRICS Parliamentary Forum, BRICS Academic Forum, BRICS Youth Summit, BRICS Business Forum, BRICS Women's Business Alliance etc.
- As Chair, we have also taken the initiative to undertake a comprehensive Stock-Taking and Streamlining exercise this year to examine BRICS institutions and mechanisms across the three pillars of our cooperation. As part of this exercise, we have collectively revised the Terms of Reference for BRICS.
- I have been given to understand that ever since its launch in 2015, BRICS Civil Forum, has been actively fostering constructive dialogue between a variety of stakeholders, most prominently Civil Society Organisations and academia in BRICS countries on a wide range of cross-cutting socio-economic issues to promote inclusive and sustainable development.
- I also understand that during our previous Chairship of BRICS in 2016, India hosted the 2nd BRICS Civil Forum in New Delhi that was instrumental in forging a deeper engagement among Civil Society Organisations of BRICS countries.
- This year, with efforts of RIS the horizon of BRICS Civil Forum has expanded further. During the BRICS Civil Forum process 2021, several important themes and topics relevant for BRICS cooperation have been covered including Reformed Multilateralism; Development Finance and Global Public Goods; Pandemic Response, Partnership and Role of Civil Society; Wellness, Health and



Traditional Systems of Medicines in BRICS; BRICS Economies and Women's Participation; Quality of Economic Growth and Inclusion; and Future of Education and Skills.

- I am happy to note that through these dialogues, there have been strong calls for reforming various multilateral institutions, including the UN Security Council, WTO, WHO, IMF etc, to make the global governance architecture more representative, inclusive and participatory. I am pleased to see that several recommendations have also emerged to strengthen and deepen intra-BRICS collaborations on social sector development and wellbeing. The CSOs have also called upon BRICS countries to collaborate to create and nurture Global Public Goods and digital solutions for the welfare of their citizens and humanity at large, for the achievement of SDGs.

- I feel that it would be useful to further consolidate the BRICS Civil Forum process so that the learning and partnership becomes more effective, meaningful and enduring. I urge all the key partner institutions to envisage a roadmap and work together towards the realization of a durable mechanism.
- I am pleased to note that RIS has launched the BRICS Civil Forum website, which can evolve into a permanent repository and knowledge platform for all BRICS Civil Forum activities in future. I congratulate RIS for organising the BRICS Civil Forum 2021 process very effectively.
- I 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 meeting and look forward to receiving valuable suggestions from the Civil Forum.
