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Address by Dr Jean Swanson-Jacobs, Deputy Minister of Social Development, Republic of South Africa, at the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Social Issues Working Group meeting

12 Oct 2007

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You're Excellencies, ambassadors and high commissioners

Government officials from Brazil

Government officials from India

Government officials from Republic of South Africa

Civil society organisations

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

All protocol observed

Good morning

Buenos dias

Namaste

On behalf the people and government of South Africa I would like to extend a warm welcome to the various delegations of the governments and civil society of Brazil, India and South Africa. We are truly delighted that you are able to participate in another meeting of this Working Group. As developing nations we share a vision of creating a world that is democratic, peaceful, prosperous, caring and a defender of human rights, including the rights to basic social services and sustainable livelihoods.

It is indeed fitting that we gather here in October which is earmarked as Social Development Month. It is a period that is marked by intense outreach by taking social services to the poorest of the poor. As IBSA countries we still face many challenges associated with poverty and underdevelopment. These are challenges we face together and which we need to overcome together.

Our presence here today is the culmination of events that began in 2003 with the launch of the IBSA initiative. This resulted in the first IBSA Summit in Brazil in 2006. As you are aware, South Africa hosts the second summit which begins on Monday, and the third one will be held in India in 2008. The IBSA Social Development Working Group was established with the purpose of facilitating a process towards ensuring that knowledge, lessons and best practices are shared to address the social development needs of IBSA countries. The Working Group met soon after the IBSA Summit in 2006 and its work was informed by the Seminar on Economic Development and Social Equity.

This first meeting proved to be an invaluable experience in terms of knowledge sharing. Brazil's Fome Zero Strategy framework and its Bolsa Família (Family Grant) Programme, South Africa's comprehensive social security system, and India's Swaranjayanti Gram Swarozgar Young (SGSY) self employment programme for the rural poor laid the groundwork for our second interaction.

The second meeting held in November 2006 identified three main areas for trilateral co-operation: poverty alleviation, micro-finance and the application of indigenous knowledge systems for social development. It also highlighted the importance of social inclusion, gender equality and women empowerment and on poverty eradication. The conference also agreed on a Plan of Action that would facilitate the cross-pollination of knowledge across the IBSA countries and those projects targeted for implementation by the IBSA Fund.

These meetings have laid the basis for our work here over the next three days. The theme for this year's IBSA Summit is "Deepening South-South Co-operation for Sustainable Development".

The main focus of this seminar is the development of an Integrated IBSA Poverty Eradication Strategy. Our three countries have commonalities in relation to poverty challenges, arising from income, asset and capability poverty as well as related problems such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancies and youth high school drop out rates. We can also share community development strategies such as sustainable livelihoods and micro financing programmes, with the aim of assisting each other to realise the Millennium Development Goals, in particular that of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

The Heads of State and Government during the Presidential Summit held in Brazil indicated the importance of the Social Development sectors to work together towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This statement was also reiterated during the Fourth Ministerial Summit held in New Delhi, where the three ministers of foreign/external affairs emphasised the importance of the Social Development Sector to work together. During this meeting it was mentioned that the achievements of other sectoral groups rely on the success of the Social Development Working Group.

The following thematic areas were agreed upon as the basis for an IBSA Integrated Poverty Eradication Strategy: Social Policy, Sustainable Livelihoods and Comprehensive Social Security. In addition to government officials, this seminar will also be attended by academics experts and civil society organisations from the three countries. Civil Society has a major role to play with regard to the eradication of poverty and hunger as well as in the development and implementation of policies. It is therefore important to involve them in all policy development processes including the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of programmes. This will also strengthen partnership between all key social development role-players within and between the IBSA countries.

An important outcome of this seminar will be the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The memorandum of understanding is meant to start the process of exchanging policies and strategies for poverty eradication. The Department of Social Development of South Africa was requested to take a lead in the drafting the MOU. It was further agreed that South Africa should circulate the draft of MOU to India and Brazil. The MOU includes the following issues that were adopted as the key priorities for the sector: Poverty Eradication; Social Security; Social Inclusion; Social Policy; Monitoring and Evaluation; Institutional Capacity Building; and Micro-finance.

Human development is about putting people at the centre of development. It is about people realising their potential, increasing choice and enjoying the freedom to lead the lives they value. Poor countries and people face daunting challenges, but their constraints have been defined and are to a great extent solvable. With national commitment and international support, we can realise more equitable economic growth and achieve the human development goals broadly articulated in the MDGs.

In conclusion, I wish you well in your deliberations in this working group, as we seek to create a better future and a better world by promoting sustained economic growth, sustainable development, and global prosperity for all.

I thank you.

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