

**Speech by High Commissioner on the occasion of
PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS, 9th January 2022**

Ms. Maureen Mwamba, Hon'ble Minister of Community Development and Social Services, Republic of Zambia our Guest of Honour

Mr. Suresh Desai, Former Member of Parliament our Chief Guest

Dear Community Members, Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Namaskar &
Good morning to you all,**

It is my privilege and honour to welcome you all on the occasion of PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS (**Overseas Indian Day**) being celebrated this year as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsava [75 Years of India's Independence].

2. 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsava' is an initiative of the Government of India to celebrate and commemorate 75 years of India's glorious history and its progress in socio-cultural, political and economic fields. The 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsava' celebrations which commenced on 12th March 2021 will continue till 15th August 2023. 'Pravasi Bhartiya Divas' is celebrated on 9th January to commemorate the return of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, to India from South Africa on this day in 1915 and also to recognize the contribution of the overseas Indian community towards the development of India while making significant contribution to the country of their residence.

2. Government of India has been organizing Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Conference since 2015 to strengthen the bonds of engagement of the overseas Indian community with the Government of India and to reconnect them with their roots. This year the main Pravasi Bharatiya Conference was held virtually on the topic **"Role of Diaspora Youth in 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsava'- Innovation and New Technologies"** for the youth. It was aimed at deepening the engagement of the Government of India with the rapidly growing population of Youth Diaspora who have made a mark in the upcoming technologies and Innovation. India's engagement with Indian Diaspora is characterized under the rubric of 4 Cs, namely, Care, Connect, Celebrate & Contribute.

3. I would like to avail this opportunity to thank the Community members who have been supporting the events being celebrated by the High Commission as part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsava'. I also urge our Diaspora to whole-heartedly support our future initiatives to hold various events related to 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsava'. The High Commission has been organizing two 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsava' events per month. At present, keeping in view the surge in the number of COVID-19 cases, most of the events are being organized virtually. I assure you that the celebrations will revert to full swing in the physical mode as soon as the current wave of the pandemic subsides.

4. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the sizable Indian Diaspora Community in Zambia estimated to be around 30,000 strong in strengthening the relations between our two friendly countries. The Indian Diaspora in Zambia comprises mainly of the People of Indian Origin (PIOs) from the Gujarat State of India, who have now acquired Zambian citizenship. It gives me pride to state that some of you have been occupying important positions in the Zambian government like Mr. Suresh Desai, ex-Cabinet Minister in the previous Movement for Multi-Party

Democracy government, who graciously agreed to be the Chief Guest for today's function. I would also like to mention the name of Justice Ms. Abha Patel, Judge in the High Court of Zambia in Ndola, Copperbelt Province and who was the Chief Guest of the Constitution Day Function held on 26th November 2021.

5. I am pleased to say that the Indian community in Zambia has been peacefully coexisting since early 20th Century while contributing to the economic development of Zambia. Most of our community members are engaged in business activities while some are employed as Teachers, Doctors, IT professionals, Accountants, etc. It gives me satisfaction to mention that the Indian community is known and respected for communal harmony. I specially thank the Government of Zambia for allowing religious institutions of different faiths to operate in the cities of Lusaka, Ndola, Kitwe, Kabwe, Chipata, Chingola, Livingstone, etc. and all our diaspora members have been freely professing their respective religion. Our community has been working hand in hand for the welfare of the local communities and contributing generously to the Zambian Government's fight against ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the Indian organizations which stand out for their generous contribution during this difficult time include Association of Indian Communities in Zambia, Lusaka Hindu Association, Lusaka Muslim Society, Kabwe Hindu Association, Ndola Hindu Samaj, Yash Foundation, Airtel Zambia Ltd and Vedanta Centre.

6. In the context of higher education, I can specifically mention the contribution of Indian universities like DMI Saint Eugene University and Texila American University which are successfully operating in Zambia and have been providing courses in higher education in the streams of Science, Commerce, IT, Medicine etc. These universities have now diversified into distance/online mode of education after onset of COVID-19 pandemic. An Indian school has started its operations in 2018 and about 250 students of different nationalities are studying there. Further, there are some Indian NGOs working in Zambia for the welfare of Zambian communities such as Home of Joy based in Lusaka and a Center for Blind and Deaf based in Solwezi. Home of Joy, with a staff of 23 Indian sisters and two Zambian sisters, has been working in the field of charity since year 2000.

7. I am pleased to convey that the High Commission has remained at the service of the community throughout the pandemic. In addition to the regular Consular services, we had arranged seven chartered flights to evacuate the community members stuck here due to cancellation of flights in year 2020. Of course this would not have been possible without the support of Government of Zambia and the Diaspora associations which supported our efforts by providing assistance in the form of boarding and lodging to some of the needy community members. I would like to encourage all of you to visit our website and social media channels regularly to keep abreast with different cultural and social activities undertaken by the High Commission. You are also requested to subscribe to our new initiative PRAVASI RISHTA PORTAL to connect more closely with your High Commission. This will certainly help you at the time of any unforeseen crisis.

8. I sincerely thank you all for your participation in the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations and wish you all a very happy, healthy, peaceful and prosperous New Year, 2022.

Lusaka

9th January 2022