

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE IN RESPONSE TO WELCOME SPEECH BY
PRESIDENT OF COTE D'IVOIRE**

Abidjan, Africa: June 14, 2016

1. It is indeed a singular honour for me to be the first Head of State of India to pay a visit to your beautiful country. I am deeply touched by the warm welcome accorded to me - and to my delegation - and the unstinting hospitality extended to us since our arrival.
2. I feel greatly honoured, Excellency, by your gesture of conferring on me the National Order of the Republic of Ivory Coast. I consider it to be emblematic of the long standing mutual friendship between the peoples of our two countries.
3. It is rightly believed that the mutual goodwill between India and Ivory Coast is inversely proportional to the geographical distance separating us – our longstanding friendship and fruitful co-operation has made it irrelevant.
4. India appreciated the naming of an information technology park in Abidjan after Mahatma Gandhi, revered in India as the Father of the Indian nation. He was a true son of India as well as Africa. During his initial struggles in South Africa, he espoused the principles of Ahimsa (Non-Violence) and Satyagraha ('Insistence on truth') as tools for emancipation of the people from the exploitative and oppressive colonial rule. These principles later inspired independent India's efforts

in support of the decolonization of Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. It was also at the core of India's solidarity in the anti-apartheid movement.

5. Our commitment continued in the form of South-South Cooperation through developmental assistance and sharing our resources for the development of our brother nations in Africa.
6. Excellency, Ivory Coast has, thanks to your dynamic leadership, transformed into an economic engine of growth for the entire West Africa region. I take this opportunity to commend your tireless efforts in bringing peace and stability to your country.
7. India will remain a steadfast partner in assisting Ivory Coast in its economic development and growth. Over years of working together closely for the benefit of our peoples, our two Governments have developed a successful framework for our bilateral co-operation.
8. We have, over the decades, created unique bonds of trust and mutual understanding - based on our shared values and synergies. Our partnership has, in recent years, become increasingly multifaceted, dynamic and rewarding.
9. Our bilateral trade is steadily increasing and is expected to touch **one billion US dollars** in the next few years. Given the relative size of

our economies and our wide convergences in several sectors of common interests, we both agree that our trade and investment and economic co-operation does, indeed have a greater potential that is waiting to be fully realised.

10. Excellency, your country is blessed with fertile soil and abundant agricultural and mineral resources. Our public and private sectors are keen to join you in exploring these resources efficiently and in setting up agro-based industries.

11. We would be happy to join your Government in developing the infrastructure that you require in the different sectors of your growing economy. At this time - when both our nations are on the path of rapid development, there are infinite opportunities that must be seized.

12. Our two nations share many other commonalities. We have both demonstrated our commitment to democratic values. Both our countries are active participants in regional and international fora and have worked together in close cooperation on matters of shared interest and concern.

13. We both recognize the imperatives of strengthening the UN

system and other international organizations. We would like to see them reformed so that they remain effective in addressing the challenges that confront the world today. In this context, India stands ready to shoulder greater responsibilities in the specialized organs of the United Nations, particularly its Security Council.

14. Both Ivory Coast and India share common concerns in our fight against international terrorism. We have been co-ordinating closely in regional and multilateral fora on this and other key issues including disarmament, climate change and sustainable development.

15. Going forward, as we pursue our bilateral dialogue and implement our decisions, I am confident that we can open more doors to each other and establish the robust trade, economic and political partnership that we both envision today.

16. With these words, Your Excellency, I would like to thank you and your Government for the meticulous arrangements made for my visit and for hosting this splendid banquet.

17. I take this opportunity to most cordially reiterate my invitation to Your Excellency to visit India at a time of your convenience. I look forward to welcoming you in New Delhi.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. I invite you to join me in raising a toast :

- To the health and happiness of His Excellency, President Alassane Ouattara, President of the Republic of Ivory Coast.

- To the continued success, progress and prosperity of the people of Ivory Coast
and

- To the enduring friendship between the peoples of the Republic of India and the Ivory Coast.

Thank you.
