

Opening Statement

by



Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia

Director General, ICWA

at

AIIA-ICWA Dialogue

at

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We are grateful to the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) for its gracious invitation, generous hospitality and excellent arrangements that have been made for our visit. We are delighted to be in this peaceful and vibrant city – Melbourne.

2. As MoU partners since 2008, our two institutions have finally begun to work together closely. In 2013, we had opportunities to welcome your scholars at our interesting outreach events. We also welcome and value the chance to work with your partner institution – Australia-India Institute. As India’s oldest foreign policy think tank, the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) is committed, through policy research, outreach and interaction, to interpreting India to the world and the world to India. I am confident that this Dialogue will help considerably in broadening and deepening our mutual understanding. Hopefully it may also trigger new ideas and plans for cooperation between not only our institutions but also our nations in future.

3. Sixty-seven years ago, Jawaharlal Nehru, the future first prime minister of India, addressed the Asian Relations Conference organized by ICWA. Speaking on 24 March 1947 in Delhi, he referred to “that deeper urge to the mind and spirit of Asia which has persisted in spite of the isolationism which grew up during the years of European domination.” He stressed, “Ours is the great design of promoting peace and progress all over the world.” Nehru welcomed observers from Australia and New Zealand, pointing out: “....we have many problems in common, especially in the Pacific and in the Southeast region of Asia, and we have to cooperate together to find solutions.” We are happy to be here, bearing goodwill and showing determination to build further on cooperative ties that have happily developed between India and Australia since Nehru’s times.

4. In the past seven decades, and especially in the post-Cold War period, our two countries have gone through a multi-faceted transformation. Our policies towards the world and particularly towards each other have factored in the changes in the international environment. Consequently greater proximity in strategic terms, stronger political understanding and closer economic cooperation has followed. As one of the key drivers and beneficiaries of a resurgent Asia, India has noticed and appreciated Australia’s endeavour to treat the Asian century as ‘an Australian opportunity.’ From our point of view, the White Paper entitled ‘Australia in the

Asian Century’ of October 2012 made two significant points: firstly, Asia would become ‘the biggest economic zone, the biggest consumption zone and home to the majority of the world’s middle class’ and secondly, Australia’s continued growth would not occur in ‘a strategic vacuum’; instead, it would require stable relations among the major powers in Asia and the Pacific.

5. In this broad context, may I briefly delineate India’s worldview as reflected in its contemporary foreign policy. India favours multi-polar Asia within a world characterized by dynamic multipolarity. It works for stability, security and prosperity for all, including itself. The inevitable link between security and development drives our foreign policy. India adopts a holistic approach, blending purposeful pro-activism in bilateral affairs and enlightened multilateralism and interest in working through institutions such as UN, G-20, IORA, EAS and other ASEAN-centered mechanisms. An innate impulse towards independence of judgment and examining every issue on its merits, perhaps reincarnated as ‘Strategic Autonomy’ in today’s globalised world, motivates our policy makers. They are driven by values and pragmatism and prefer to judge nations by their action rather than mere rhetoric. Significantly, India’s commitment to peace and peaceful co-existence does not preclude vigilance and our readiness to face all other eventualities. Finally, our external relations are managed in such a manner that the economic development dimension is kept in constant focus.

6. Our Parliamentary elections are around the corner. In terms of logistics, they represent the biggest event of its kind in human history. Politically and in other ways, they will obviously impact India and beyond. A fascinating debate is underway regarding the nature of blend of change and continuity in India’s foreign policy that may unfold after the forthcoming elections.

7. Our discussions today will revolve around several important themes: the international situation, the geo-political landscape in your and our sub-regions within the larger Asia Pacific or Indo-Pacific region; the state of our nations; an assessment of India-Australia relations and the challenges and opportunities we may face in the coming decade.

8. We are privileged to have with us a compact and representative delegation, reflecting the richness and diversity of India's strategic community. Our delegation will listen, reflect, speak, and share, guided by its collective desire to understand the views and thinking of the host side and to contribute to the friendly ties that bind our two nations.

9. Once again, I warmly thank our Australian hosts for their generosity towards us. We wish the Dialogue every success.

