Inaugural Address of Hon’ble LEM for the
International Conference on South-South Cooperation –
Innovations in Public Employment Programmes
for Sustainable Inclusive Growth
01st March 2012: Time: 9.30 a.m.
Venue: NASC Complex, Pusa, New Delhi

Hon’ble Ministers from participating countries,
ILO Regional Director Ms. Sachiko Yamamoto,
Mr. Salazar, Executive Director ILO,
Labour Ministers of various States,
Ambassadors of various countries,
Secretary (L&E), Dr. Mrutyunjay Sarangi,
Representatives of UN bodies,
Representatives of Central Trade Union Organizations and Employer bodies,
Officials from various Central Ministries and State Governments,
Friends from Media,
Ladies & Gentlemen.

Let me extend a warm welcome to you in New Delhi for the International Conference on South-South Cooperation- Innovations in Public Employment Programmes for Sustainable Inclusive Growth. I am delighted that you all are here in India at this time and by your distinguished presence have made this a historic meeting. Together we constitute the southern developing nations of the world and how we collaborate is going to shape the future of the world.

Collaboration between emerging economies through South-South Cooperation is going to be an important feature of Global Economic Development in the current century. Developing countries share a strong bond based on common ideals and this relationship is not bound by conditionalities. The economies of the developing countries have their own inherent strengths. The challenge in front of us is to channelize our resources in such a manner so as to make our growth process faster, sustainable and more inclusive. While we move towards this common shared vision, the ILO’s Decent Work Policy framework helps in charting out a road map for this purpose. Governments of India, South Africa and Brazil signed a Declaration of Intent along with ILO in 2010 for promotion of Decent Work not only in our three countries, but with all other developing countries across the globe in general and in their region in particular.

The common thread of such initiatives for meeting the aspirations of our people is promotion of peace, security and social development in all parts of the world. Coming together of the countries of South-South will lead to exchange of high quality information. It will lead to understanding of the best practices prevailing in these countries, and development of effective technical cooperation programmes. Such common endeavors will go a long way in bringing developing countries together and improving their economic and social condition. South-South Cooperation has led to developing partnerships in the area of technical, economic and political exchanges between these countries. Many UN agencies have also been associated in such efforts.
The organization of this International Conference on South-South Cooperation is a shining example of such coordinated efforts.

ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, lays emphasis on the Decent Work agenda of which ‘Employment’ is one of the four pillars. During the Global Economic Crisis, ILO came out with the Global Jobs Pact in 2009 which focused on Job Centric Recovery. This International Conference through South-South Cooperation aims at building meaningful partnerships and exchange of information. My ministry is regularly interacting with ILO Partnership Division for taking concrete action for furthering ILO-IBSA Declaration on Decent Work. We have been very forthcoming and have offered sharing of our expertise in the area of Labour Policy, Skill Training and Safety to other developing countries.

Government of India has taken a number of steps for ensuring quality employment and extension of social security to the unorganized sector. We have made Right to Education for children of 6-14 years a fundamental right. Our Flagship Employment Programme MGNREGA assures 100 days of guaranteed employment to adult members of rural households. The annual outlay of this scheme is around 8 Billion US dollars and this programme has no parallels in the world. We have enacted Right to Information Act for bringing greater transparency and accountability. We are also moving towards legislation on Food Security. Progressively we are moving from a ‘Scheme Based Approach’ to a ‘Rights based Approach’. We support the idea of Social Protection Floor.

In this forum I will also like to share the success of our National Health Insurance Scheme (RSBY). This scheme has covered around 120 million persons upto now and caters to the hospitalization expenses of mainly Below Poverty Line Workers. The scheme works through a ‘Smart Card’ on a state of art software platform. This scheme has made inroads in the Unorganized Sector and we are extending it to the other category of workers.

A significant portion of the world’s total youth population lives in India. The challenge of equipping millions of our youth, who are entering the labour market every year with commensurate skills is a gigantic task. Ever since the initiation of planning process in India in 1950, the Government has stressed on the goal of increasing employment opportunities and eventually eradicating unemployment from the country.

Government of India has launched the National Skill Policy and made skill development a major national priority especially for the youth. A Coordinated Action Plan for skill development has been framed to have a target of 500 million skilled persons by 2022.

We have drafted a National Employment Policy. The basic objective is to create more productive, sustainable and decent employment opportunities. Economic growth itself has to be more employment-intensive. This would require that the pattern of growth is oriented not only towards high employment generating sectors. This would
also imply that in each sector and sub-sector, policy instruments that tend to favour more inclusive employment are devised.

Quality employment is the foundation of Government of India’s vision for growth. Decent work and employment are not merely outcomes, but drivers of economic growth. Such an approach requires mitigation of barriers to access, based on education, gender and social inequalities in the labour market and increasing employability through skill development.

I am proud to emphasize that despite global slowdown; India has not only maintained its employment standards but also succeeded in reducing unemployment from 8.3% in 2004-05 to 6.6% in 2009-10. This is a major achievement. The decline in unemployment in the recent period is due to the success of public employment policies and various stimulus measures initiated in response to the crisis and the recovery.

A new scheme- Modular Employable Skills under our Skill Development Initiative Scheme has been started with an objective to train one million persons in short term modular courses in five years and then one million every year thereafter, particularly in the unorganized sector. We are also creating a strong labour market information system.

India is mandated to create a work environment conducive to achieving a high rate of economic growth with due regard to protecting and safeguarding the interests of the working class in general and those of the vulnerable sections of the society in particular. This process will be sustainable in the long run if it is in tune with the emerging needs of the economy such as attaining higher levels of productivity & competitiveness and increasing employment opportunities. Economic growth and policies of social inclusion mutually reinforce each other and this has become evident in the way our economy could withstand the severe global financial and economic crisis.

I hope that this International Conference will help build capacity and facilitate sharing of knowledge among the developing countries. This will also lead to better appreciation of the range of policy issues relevant to public work programmes and employment guarantee schemes. Innovative Solutions thus arrived at around convergent holistic framework will lead to better cohesion for ‘inclusive growth’.

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