

**16th General Session of the Afro-Asian Rural Development
Organization (AARDO) Conference**

New Delhi, 6th January 2009

**Inaugural Address by Shri Pranab Mukherjee,
Minister of External Affairs**

**Shri Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, Minister for Rural
Development,**

**Dr. Abdel Safar, Minister of Agriculture and Land Reforms
of Syria and President of AARDO,**

**Smt, Suuryakanta J Patil, Minister of State for Rural
Development,**

**Shri Chandra Sekhar Sahu, Minister of State for Rural
Development,**

**Mr. Abdalla Yahia Adam, Secretary General, Afro-Asian
Rural Development Organization,**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be amidst all of you
and inaugurate the 16th General Session of the Afro-Asian
Rural Development Organization (AARDO) Conference.

On behalf of the Government of India and on my own behalf, I welcome all the distinguished delegates in this historic city of New Delhi.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

New Delhi hosted the first Afro-Asian Conference on Rural Reconstruction in 1961. This historic meeting led in 1962 to the creation of the Afro-Asian Rural Reconstruction Organization. This is now known as Afro-Asian Rural Development Organization.

India was one of the founder members of AARDO and we are privileged to host its Secretariat in New Delhi and provide the building that houses it. We hosted the 13th General Session of the AARDO Conference in January 2000 and were President of the Organization for the triennium 2000-2003.

In January 2007, the Government of India hosted in New Delhi the Inter-Ministerial Summit of AARDO member countries on “Rural Development: Afro-Asian Perspective”. The “New Delhi Declaration” adopted at this meeting has become the guiding spirit for AARDO underscoring the imperative to address rural

poverty in a comprehensive, integrated and holistic manner through mobilizing political, economic and social resources for sustained development and by channeling the flow of national resources and international development assistance for this purpose.

India has also been actively contributing to the technical activities of AARDO. The Ministry of External Affairs, under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme (ITEC), regularly conducts training courses for AARDO-sponsored candidates in our centers of excellence.

The Government of India offers 50 fellowships every year to the nominees from AARDO member countries in the field of small industry development, fertilizer quality control, information technology, sustainable development, women's empowerment, textile designing and a host of allied subjects.

In addition, study visits and field level training programmes expose nominees from AARDO member countries to various Indian rural development institutions from time to time and our experts in agriculture and rural development assist AARDO member countries on a regular basis.

We have now decided to contribute an additional amount of Rs 10 million every year for the next three years to support the technical cooperation efforts at AARDO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poverty alleviation is a key pre-requisite for sustainable and inclusive growth. An estimated 1.4 billion people live in extreme poverty, i.e. have per capita income less than 1.25 US \$ a day, and about another 3 billion have per capita income of less than 2 US \$ per day. Of these, three fourths live in Asia and Africa. These are also the regions with a higher proportion of rural population that is dependent on agriculture and allied activities.

Special attention to make agriculture more productive and profitable is, therefore, obviously imperative.

And, in addition, there is need to diversify rural production activities and create employment and income generating opportunities on a larger scale, also to cater to the landless and those with small holdings.

We, in India, have been focusing on integrated rural development in our policy planning for decades. Recently, we have launched the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme. This is a historic initiative which provides a universal rural employment guarantee of 100 days to every rural family. We are also implementing Bharat Nirman and the National Rural Health Mission to provide better infrastructure and health care facilities in rural areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Conference is taking place at a difficult time for developing countries given the magnitude of the global financial and economic crisis of today. Developing countries were not the cause of the crisis, but may become its worst victims.

And this can also have a negative impact even on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) given that at the half-way mark to the target date of 2015, it is clear that many developing countries will not be able to achieve the Millennium Development and other Internationally Agreed Goals in any case.

It is imperative that at this time our global partners ensure that their commitments on ODA and capacity building are not diluted but up-scaled in view of ebbing private flows. Moreover, enhanced investment in infrastructure, including rural infrastructure, by the multilateral financial institutions will also have strong counter-cyclical impacts.

It is also important for us to remember that economic growth, particularly growth in agriculture and employment, especially in laggard geographical regions, are the keys for a better life for the vast majority of the people in Asia and Africa. Infrastructure development such as roads, transport, electrification, telecommunications, water and sanitation particularly in rural areas is critical in this endeavor.

India is committed to South-South cooperation, which is a corner stone of our foreign policy. We strongly believe in strengthening the horizons of cooperation and collaboration in different areas with all the developing countries as well as international and regional organizations with the objective to improve living conditions. In particular, we advocate the need

for more investment and technology transfer to Asia and Africa – the two regions with the highest incidence of poverty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The new millennium offers a major opportunity for us in Asia and Africa to work together and ensure a better life for our people. To this end, India is happy to share its knowledge and expertise in areas of agriculture and various facets of rural development, including infrastructure build-up, with member countries of AARDO, which, we believe, provides a strong platform to strengthen Afro-Asian solidarity.

Thank You.