

Speech by Mr Mahesh Sachdev, Indian Ambassador to Benin

**HE Mr Jean-Marie EHOZOU, Minister of Foreign Affairs,
HE Mr Issifou TAKPARA , Minister of Health
HE Mr Fracis Abiola Adebayo, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research,
Ambassadors of Benin in Nigeria and China,
Excellencies,
Ladies & Gentlemen,
Friends,**

Greetings!!

It is my privilege to participate on India's behalf in this ceremony to handover sixty ambulances as donation to Republic of Benin.

This gift being made today redeems the offer of one million dollar in grant-in-aid to Benin's health sector made to President of Benin HE Dr Boni YAYI by Indian PM Hon'ble Dr Manmohan SINGH on March 3 2009 during the historic State visit to India.

Although they took their time, I compliment our friends in Benin for having made a very wise choice. These ambulances would extend the precious gift of basic and mobile healthcare to the needy and the vulnerable. Judicious deployment of these sturdy and durable Tata Ambulances among Benin's 77 communes would enable near universal coverage of the healthcare services in an unprecedented manner. These ambulances would go a long way in carrying out Presidential promise for free caesarean operations to expecting ladies.

I wish to use this opportunity to mention that India has also implemented most of the decisions reached jointly during the historic Summit of March 2009. These have extended from supply of locomotives for OCBN, establishment of six food processing plants, Buses and Computers for Higher Education and Tractors for Agriculture. We are working with Benin's authorities to set up an IT Centre and an Incubation Centre as other gifts from India. Separately an India-funded rural electrification project is bringing power to a large number of villages in Benin.

Mr Minister, Sir, as Your Excellency is well aware, our Prime Minister has not only written to you to offer our deepest condolences of on the devastating floods in Benin, we have also rendered \$ 500,000/- in cash assistance to the to the victims.

We in India strongly believe that the fair bilateral trade is an effective way to stimulate and sustain the economic growth. We have therefore offered Republic of Benin Duty Free and Quota Free access to most of its exports to the vast Indian market in 2009. It is hardly a coincidence that according to reliable data, last year India has become the largest foreign market for Benin, taking over 14% of your exports. According to Indian projections for current Indian financial year that ends on March 31 2011, Benin-India bilateral trade is expected to touch a figure of half a billion dollars – with Benin enjoying a surplus! Congratulations!!

I also wish to inform that only last week, a Conference on India and 48 Least Developed Countries (-of which Republic of Benin is one) was held in New Delhi, Indian capital. As host, India offered a number of measures, such as \$ 500 million in credit lines, more training fellowships, etc. to help the LDCs. I hope that the Republic of Benin will be able to take good advantage of these offers.

Excellencies, Friends, Kindly permit me to conclude by paying a tribute to all the concerned stake-holders who have enabled this consignment of 60 ambulances to be put to good use in a record time of less than two weeks from arrival at Cotonou port.

Thank You All!