

Indo-U.S. Startup Accelerator Workshop November 22, 2013, New Delhi

Remarks by U.S. Ambassador to India Nancy J. Powell

Namaste, assalam - mualakim, and good morning. I'm delighted to be here with you this morning to welcome you to the U.S.- India Accelerator Workshop. We've timed our bilateral event to coincide with Global Entrepreneurship Week, a celebration of the innovators who bring new products, services, and processes to the marketplace.

I'd like begin by again offering a very warm welcome to UIDAI Chairman Nandan Nilekani, DST Secretary Dr. T. Ramasami, FICCI Director General Dr. Arbind Prasad, Indo-U.S. Science & Technology Forum Director Dr. Rajiv Sharma, Intel Global Manager Manav Subodh and distinguished participants from all over India.

In 2009, President Obama highlighted "entrepreneurship" as a critical pillar of U.S. global engagement. Since then, the U.S. Government has committed to supporting entrepreneurship to help channel the creativity, innovation, and potential of millions of individuals around the world to create economic opportunity. Two years later, President Obama proclaimed that November would be National Entrepreneurship Month, noting, "Because the new businesses created by entrepreneurs are responsible for most of the new jobs in our country, helping them succeed is essential to helping our economy grow. That is why my Administration has fought tirelessly to invest in entrepreneurs and small businesses so they can do what they do best -- take risks, develop new ideas, grow businesses, and create new jobs."

It is the entrepreneurs in clean energy, medicine, advanced manufacturing, information technology, robotics, nanotechnologies and other fields who will build the new industries of the 21st century and solve some of our toughest global challenges.

I am very pleased to see so many young entrepreneurs here. Today's workshop is not only about promoting the culture of entrepreneurship among youth. It is also about the challenge of scaling startups into profit-making businesses. It is you, the young minds here today, who will lead the way into the future for social and economic development in India and the world. Just last month, Secretary Kerry said at the Fourth Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Malaysia: "It is young people who push us forward, always by building something that no one else thought to build - who push us forward by saying aloud something that no one else had the courage to say."

Entrepreneurship is the engine for global economic growth and increased productivity of workers in any, economy. This is true for both developed and developing economies. The challenge for governments and private stakeholders is to provide an environment where entrepreneurship can flourish and where entrepreneurs can quickly bring their ideas and products to market. Entrepreneurs are by nature risk takers and sometimes their ventures fail. Many successful entrepreneurs achieved their success on their third or fourth attempt to start a viable business.

The startup ecosystem should allow for such failures and not result in dire consequences, such as drying up of funding sources.

Let me share how the U.S. Government encourages entrepreneurial pursuits at home. "Startup America" is a White House initiative to celebrate, inspire, and accelerate high-growth entrepreneurship throughout the United States. This is a coordinated public/private effort to bring together an alliance of the country's most innovative entrepreneurs, corporations, universities, foundations, and other leaders, working in concert with a wide range of federal agencies to dramatically increase the prevalence and success of America's entrepreneurs. Many Indian entrepreneurs in the US. are involved in this program. Innovative enterprises form the basis of economic growth in both the United States and India and play a key role in our strategic partnership. Indian entrepreneurs are the faces behind a growing number of U.S. technology startups. A study by the U.S. based Kauffman Foundation shows that since 2006, one-third of the cofounders of engineering and technology firms founded by immigrants in the U.S. were Indians.

I am happy to share that both of our governments are committed to nurture entrepreneurship through a number of U.S.-India bilateral programs. Let me cite just a few examples: The U.S.-India Science & Technology Endowment Board provides seed-capital grants to promising innovations that show commercial viability. So far it has awarded nine grants, including two young entrepreneur awards. I am very pleased to inform you that our very first grantee is now quite successful, so much so that it has now attracted traditional venture capital funds to expand its operations and market its products.

Similarly, the U.S.-India Millennium Alliance, a joint initiative of USAID, FICCI and the Government of India, supports Indian innovators that have developed solutions to some of the development challenges in India and around the world. The Millennium Alliance awarded nine winners in its first round last June. One of the key requirements for robust entrepreneurship is market access to risk capital. Angel funds, professional venture capital funds, private equity funds, mezzanine funds, and not-for-profit social funds, all provide diverse sources of funding for innovative enterprises. It is important that governments create a climate for these funds to flourish. Moreover, a simplified process for small and medium sized enterprises should be available to offer their equity in initial public offerings to access market funds.

As the world becomes more interconnected, and more countries become knowledge-based economies, it is no longer optional -- but essential -- for public and private enterprises to collaborate across borders. We live in exciting times where economic and social challenges can be overcome by human ingenuity. We look forward to continuing our work with the Indian government on promoting a collaborative entrepreneurial environment. The potential for mutual benefit through our cooperation is limitless.

I would like to conclude by quoting President Obama's remarks during his 2010 trip to India, "Our nations are the two largest democracies on Earth. We are bound by a common language and common values; shared aspirations and a shared belief that opportunity should be limited only by how hard you're willing to work, only by how hard you are willing to try." I am happy to see such an excellent line-up of speakers in the workshop. I expect there will be some very candid and productive discussions today, and I look forward to the outcome of today's workshop.