

**86th Annual General Meeting
December 21, 2013, New Delhi**

Vote of Thanks by Sidharth Birla, President-Elect, FICCI

Hon. Sri Anand Sharma, Minister for Commerce & Industry
Ms. Naina Lal Kidwai, President FICCI
Dr. Didar Singh, Secretary General, FICCI
Hon. Ministers and Senior Officials of the Government
Your Excellency's, Members of Diplomatic Corps
Past Presidents of FICCI, members of our National Executive, FICCI constituents
Business Leaders, Members of the Media, Ladies & Gentlemen

I am pleased to propose a Vote of Thanks to Hon. Anand Sharmaji for gracing our AGM. Sir, we greatly appreciate your vision and untiring attention to India's business interests. We value positive voices like yours which provide balance in difficult times. Our congratulations are also due for your stellar role at WTO. I compliment President Naina for a wonderful year, and Dr. Didar Singh for his exertions. Equally I thank each one of you for being here; your presence imparts elegance and relevance to our AGM.

Sir, may I share some thoughts for the year ahead. As we stand on the threshold of a general election, the economy needs bold policies and bolder action; we cannot hope to address the imminent challenges with habitual responses. The key question is how India returns to 8% growth? Growth is not an end in itself but the means to meet aspirations of living standards, with food, energy and water security.

The obvious way is to drive investment over consumption, and inspire enterprises to invest creating jobs in new and expanded businesses. FICCI stresses manufacturing as a core enabler if properly supported by government actions to notably enhance competitiveness, scale, and global market access.

India's business attractiveness is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for an obvious investment destination. Capital readily flows to jurisdictions with a fair risk-reward tradeoff, and predictable policy outcomes. A key need is ease of doing business which requires process reform, effective implementation by Center and States, reasonable appetite for taxes, and quick judicial or dispute resolution. It is time to consider a sunset-point for business rules and laws, reevaluate them for relevance and scientifically address control-raj in any avatar.

At present, businesses and the common man face strained disposable incomes, socio-economic disparity and a weakened social moral fabric. As a first step, business and government must re-establish mutual confidence with society. Good

governance and objective enforcement restores moral fabric and allows people to share dignity, businesses to function well, and civil society to be comforted. A propensity to entertain hindsight is counterproductive, as it allows aspersions to be cast on past decisions. Greater cultural sensitivity is needed to treat decisions as good faith judgments and not presume otherwise at first doubt, or decision making will collapse.

Lastly, in our social context the disadvantaged need to be supported. Yet, compassionate choices sometimes undermine a comprehensive and larger picture. Patronage has potential to distort markets, and discount governance and fiscal prudence. Simply redistributing to inclusive policies ultimately needs to be sustained by production, or asset creation. We must plan that economic growth generates prosperity with space for individual reward and social equity.

Friends, in closing, permit me to glance at the past in order to look at the future.

The Japanese say vision without action is a daydream, action without vision is a nightmare.

In this context, it is noteworthy to recall the remarkable Vision of FICCI's forefathers. On the eve of India's independence a group of stalwarts, including my great grandfather, visualized an economic blueprint, later called the Bombay Plan, which spoke for the nation and not just business. It captured the developmental aspirations of Free India. Even 68 years later its core objectives are relevant: a multiple increase in per-capita income, agricultural & industrial production accompanied by development of infrastructure.

I believe the time is ripe for a similar, bold "NATIONAL VISION" with acceptance across the political spectrum. FICCI works to build consensus on economic policies and will be delighted to participate actively in such an exercise that can speak for INDIA.

On this note, I request this Vote of Thanks be carried with acclamation.