Indian Diaspora Council

Indian Diaspora Council International

Shared heritage, aspirations and interests

www.indiandiasporacouncil.org

Post Office Box 650523 New York 11365 USA

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Press Statement

Commemoration of 166th Anniversary of Indian Arrival in South Africa

The Indian Diaspora Council (IDC) joins with its global affiliates and membership in paying honored tribute and expresses its gratitude to those who made the first journeys as indentured laborers from India to arriving in Natal, South Africa on 16th November 1860. Year 2026 marks the 166th anniversary of arrival of the first indentured Indians, an event with far-reaching results for the Colony of Natal. The descendants of Indian Indentured labourers are now over 1,500,000 in South Africa and have progressed in all segments of society.

The first ships arrived in November 1860 having left Madras and Calcutta the previous month. The voyage, in a sailing ship or paddle-steamer in those days took an average of 45 days from Madras and 54 from Calcutta but a few decades later, when steamers were used, the journey considerably shorter and 600 passengers could be transported in comparison with the 300 or 350 that the *Truro, Belvidere, Lord George Bentinck* and *Spirit of Trade* carried in 1860.



We are always reminded of their pioneering spirit, determination, persistence and endurance under extremely harsh conditions. While survival must have been the primary concern, they strived and persevered to maintain their sense of origin, traditions and culture. Their children, grandchildren and following generations will always take pride in this unique accomplishment, recognizing and appreciating the sacrifices and achievements made on their behalf. We also recognize the invaluable contributions they have made to the diverse culture and economic development of South Africa.

Rita Abraham of South Africa Women's Forte and Indian Diaspora Council states: "Today 16th November marks 166 years since Indians arrived in South Africa and sowed the seeds that marked the birth of a great community that has progressed and prospered. We owe them a debt of gratitude and honour them in our hearts and minds"

IDC president Ashook Ramsaran states: "We pay homage and commemorate an historic event which took place 166 years ago and recognize the journeys, hardships, travails and perseverance of a people – while looking at today and tomorrow which can take lessons from that history of journeys not so long ago. While acknowledging that past, we can triumph by taking bold steps same as those who came to South Africa and other lands with just a promise, with lots of hope and determination. Their ancestors came here partially by choice, many forced but resolved and persevered under very difficult and harrowing conditions. That shared experience, that saga of shared history, fostered an unusual kindred spirit of resolve, togetherness and kinship – a triumph over obstacles and difficulties with dreams and aspirations of a destiny intertwined by history and fate".

We extend Indian Diaspora Council's congratulations to the Government and people of South Africa on the commemoration of this 166th anniversary of that historic day. We also extend our continued best wishes to all the descendants of those early pioneers for peaceful and prosperous co-existence both in South Africa and other lands where they have subsequently settled. We continue to encourage and support active promotion of the rich and enduring Indian traditions which served their forefathers so well. We also wish to remind all the descendants of those early pioneers to recognize and reach out to others of Indian origin whose forebears also embarked on similar journeys.

For more information contact: Ashook Ramsaran at AshookRamsaran@gmail.com Mobile (USA) +1 917 519 5783

Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC), established in 1997, is an international non-profit organization with global affiliates and membership in 21 countries with the objective to embrace, engage and enhance the shared heritage, aspirations and interests of persons of Indian origin with optimum inclusivity.