

**Remarks by
Valentin Rybakov
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus**

**The Diwali Stamp Dedication Ceremony
Trusteeship Council Chamber, December 5, 2016**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ambassador of Belarus has just lamented his unfortunate ignorance of the great festival of Diwali.

Well, I guess I am lucky to have been blessed with the knowledge of this great tradition for the past – let me see – thirty years!

It so happened that early in my professional career as a young interpreter I had a chance to work in India. I loved the amazing natural mixture of colours of life of this great country, the beauty and wisdom of traditions of the people of India. I warmly cherish my memories of that time. This is why I am so thankful to the organisers for the honour of participating in this truly unique ceremony.

I think it is only so right that the great Festival of Lights – **Diwali** – **has finally taken ground** in the diplomatic capital of the world. Not only because it is celebrated by so many people in the world.

I think that no lesser claim to its prominence is the **universal captivating and overpowering message of Diwali** – light over darkness, good over evil, knowledge over ignorance and hope over despair. It looks like **a perfect motto** for the place we call the United Nations!

The ambassador explained the reasons for the Permanent Mission of Belarus taking up the responsibilities of one of the hosts for this event. I will have to tell you that **this outlook on the world**, attitude to those close to you and distant friends **comes to Belarusians naturally**. I sometimes even think that a special friendship-building and peace-making gene might be embedded somewhere in our genetic code.

Even so, I was really startled – to say the least – when my colleagues have shown me a list of co-sponsors for the event focused on a tradition of a single culture.

Over the years, I attended many thematic events where nations of the world were sharing with the world **the beauty, wonder and uniqueness of their own customs and heritage.**

To see so many countries where Diwali is not widely present – let alone observed as a state holiday – to lend their sponsorship and support to this initiative is a real treat!

Not just to acknowledge and accept the diversity in this world **but to celebrate it** – and not generally but in very practical terms of a specific tradition and culture – for me, this is a **convincing expression of the very meaning of human openness, empathy and kindness.**

Seeing these **subtle but telling manifestations of magnanimity** gives me bigger hope about **how much more united** our nations can really be.

Last but not least, today we celebrate not only the great festival of lights – and, as I understand, not so much the joys of stamp collecting – but also Ranju Batra's truly **magnificent labour of love.**

Her passion and tenacity made the dream of many a reality. On behalf of Belarus, as one of the co-hosts of this ceremony, I have the honour to express our sincere admiration with her accomplishment that is **a wonderful testimony of the power of one.**

Most of our achievements are collective but they all start with a single daring dream, with a single beating heart, with a single soul that believes that one can make a difference!

Thank you very much!