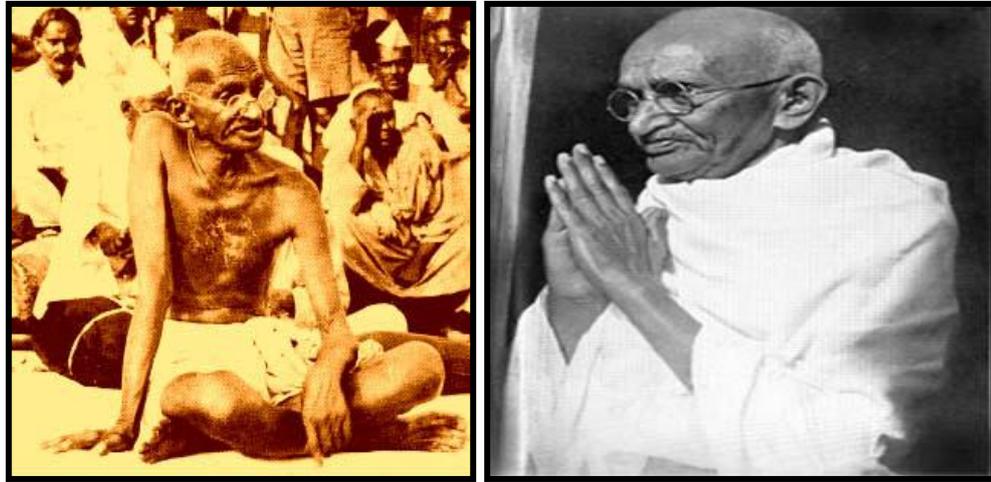


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STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. PRANAB MUKHERJEE, MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
OF INDIA ON THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL DAY OF NON-VIOLENCE AT THE 63<sup>RD</sup>  
SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 02, 2008



**Your Excellency Rev. Brockmann, President of the General Assembly,  
Your Excellency Mr. Ban, Secretary General of the United Nations,  
Your Excellency Dr. Zuma, Minister of Foreign Affairs of South Africa  
Excellencies, distinguished delegates,**

It is a great honour for me to address the United Nations General Assembly on the Second Anniversary of the International Day of Non-violence and the 139<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Last year, on this very day, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, the Chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance in India, while speaking from this podium, conveyed the gratitude of the people of India to the General Assembly. May I today add my own voice to hers, and express my deep appreciation to all member states that supported this initiative to pay tribute to the life and legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, truly one of the greatest men the world has seen.

### **Excellencies,**

Sixty years ago an assassin's bullet silenced forever the voice of the Mahatma. His mortal body was consigned to the flames. But the message, for which he lived and died, could not be extinguished. That almost sixty years after the death of Mahatma Gandhi, the General Assembly decided last year to commemorate his legacy, is eloquent testimony to this.

Today, on the second International Day of Non-Violence, we pay tribute again to this great apostle of peace. But even as we do so, we must ask ourselves, what is his relevance? Why should the message of a man, who preached peace and non-violence, be relevant in a world stockpiled with weapons that can destroy our planet a hundred times over? Why should the deeds of a man, who sought to counter hate with love, be relevant in a world where terrorism has become a global menace? Why should the legacy of a man, who wore the livery of the poor as a badge of honour, be relevant in a world where even today millions are deprived of food and safe water to drink? Why should the voice of a man, who opposed insensitive materialism, be relevant in a world bent on destroying its own sustaining climate and environment?

I submit that it is precisely because the world continues to be plagued by these problems, that the message of Mahatma Gandhi is even more relevant today.

### **Excellencies,**

Non-violence or 'Ahimsa' is not a mantra. It is not simply the opposite of violence, although it is fundamentally opposed to violence. Non-violence

is about the absence of hate, and the victory of love and compassion. It stands for principle in the face of expediency. It is about changing people's hearts and minds.

Central to the idea of *ahimsa*, which literally translates into "non-injury", is the notion of justice and equity. If our current economic and political order is based on unjust methods and stark inequalities, that too is a form of violence, which requires urgent resolution. In this globalized age of instant communications, we cannot continue to indefinitely maintain islands of prosperity in a larger sea of poverty. The Mahatma's message reminds us of the need for a moral compass that would guide all our actions, to enable us to evaluate the impact of our deeds upon the poorest person in our memory. He called this his "talisman", and as history affirms, it never failed him.

### **Excellencies,**

If non-violence was the message of Mahatma Gandhi, satyagraha or peaceful non-cooperation and civil disobedience was his tool. Satyagraha, he proclaimed, is for the strong in spirit, not the doubter or the timid. Its aim is to convert the repressor, but never through coercion. For those who practice it, there is no enemy. 'I can combine the greatest love with the greatest opposition to wrong', Gandhiji said. It was a policy that brought to an end the British colonial rule in India but, in tribute to this policy, the British left India as friends, not enemies.

In the practice of satyagraha, the means were as important as the ends. For Mahatma Gandhi, principles could not be flexible. Truth was not a convenience. Conviction could not be bartered on the altar of expediency. This moral argument continues to be relevant, including in two vital areas affecting us. These are terrorism and non-proliferation. If we accept the premise that a worthy objective can be achieved only through the most carefully considered measures, we should never be able to condone our failure to act unitedly, determinedly and decisively to stop international terror once and for all. No matter what the objective is, no cause and no religion either justifies or sanctifies recourse to acts of terror. There is no right way to do a wrong thing. In the area of non-proliferation, the dichotomy between means and ends explains why we have moved so far away from our objective of universal nuclear disarmament. The core difficulty is the notion that some may retain nuclear weapons while others may not. Unless we begin

to move towards a genuine, comprehensive disarmament programme, we will not be able to achieve our objective.

### **Excellencies,**

We have set ourselves the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) which above all aim at the eradication of poverty and hunger. Each of our nations has reaffirmed its political commitment to achieving the MDGs by 2015. However, we need to display greater collective urgency if we are to achieve these goals. Recognizing the mismatch between our capacities and our actions, the Mahatma said that "the difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems". The chasm between our enormous collective capacity and our modest action on the ground, should stimulate us into greater efforts in the seven years that remain to achieve the MDGs.

### **Excellencies,**

Some may argue that this degree of idealism is not practical. It is unrealistic. Undoubtedly, such a path is not easy. But, I would like to ask a counter question: Has violence succeeded in bringing an end to our problems? Has bloodshed been a more effective way to resolve disputes? Has over exploitation of nature's bounty led to a better life? Has inequity in global institutions helped promote international understanding?

Mahatma Gandhi will always remain an inspiration in the troubled world we live in. That is why Martin Luther King believed, and I quote: 'Gandhi was inevitable. If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted, inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony. We may ignore Gandhi at our own risk'.

### **Excellencies,**

It is my hope and conviction that the message of Mahatma Gandhi will not remain a call in the wilderness. He held no office. He commanded no army. But millions in India, and, indeed, across the world, revere him because he had the courage to dream of a saner and more civilized world, and was prepared to walk alone to achieve it. A song written by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali was his enduring favourite:

***Jodi tor dak shune keu na ashe tobe ekla cholo re  
Ekla cholo, ekla cholo, ekla cholo, ekla cholo re***

If they answer not to thy call, walk alone  
If they are afraid and cower mutely facing the wall  
Open thy mind and speak out alone

I thank you.

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