

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR
COMMEMORATION OF 150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF MAHATMA
GANDHI**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, May 2, 2018

1. I welcome you to Rashtrapati Bhavan for the meeting of the Commemoration Committee of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. As we all know, Gandhiji was born on second October, 1869 at Porbandar. The two-year Commemoration we are here to discuss will begin on second October, 2018, only five months from now.
2. Mahatma Gandhi was born in India but he does not belong to India alone. He remains one of India's greatest gifts to human-kind and his name finds resonance across the continents. Mahatma Gandhi was the most influential Indian of the 20th century. He was the inspiration for our largely non-violent, inclusive and democratic freedom struggle. He remains the ethical benchmark against which we test public men and women, political ideas and government policies, and the hopes and wishes of our country and our people. His legacy is so rich and so wide that we cannot do justice to it if we were to meet for a few days, let alone a few hours.
3. Mahatma Gandhi was a multifaceted person. He was a nationalist and an internationalist; a political leader and a spiritual mentor; a writer and thinker and an activist; a person comfortable with the traditions and civilisation of India, and yet an eager revolutionary for social reform and change. But above all, he was India's conscience keeper. He strived to lead us to not just political independence – but to a better India, a more principled India and a society free of caste, religious, economic and even gender prejudice.

4. Even today, 70 years after he left us, he remains our moral guide. It is worth recalling that Gandhiji did not hesitate for a moment when he stopped the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922, following the attack on a police station in Chauri Chaura. There were others who told him that this was an isolated and minor incident, and that he should look at the importance of the bigger struggle. But he was unmoved from his principles. For him no incident was “isolated” – the minor occurrence and the bigger struggle were equally important. As he often said, the means to the end are as critical as the end itself.
5. Not all of us can always live up to those principles – but Mahatma Gandhi’s watch-word is forever there to guide us, and to gently admonish us if we stray. That is why his message remains our guiding light. To quote one of Gandhiji’s favourite hymns, it is a light that leads us “amid the encircling gloom”.

Ladies and Gentlemen

6. The 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi is more than a celebration of a great life and a remembrance of history. I imagine Gandhiji himself would have wanted it to be a moment of renewal, of making a fresh commitment to the goals of a just, honest and fair society – at home and abroad.
7. The Mahatma is our past, he is our present and he is also our future. So many of the themes and ideas he spoke and wrote of – some of them far ahead of their time – are even more relevant today.
8. When we work for an India free of caste and religious prejudice, we invoke Gandhiji. When we strive towards Swachh Bharat, and a cleaner and more hygienic India, we invoke Gandhiji. When we speak of the rights of women and children and of civil liberties of small and disadvantaged groups, we invoke Gandhiji. When we talk of the health and well-being of the Indian farmer and the Indian village, we invoke Gandhiji. When we strive for energy access for the last village and the last home, we invoke Gandhiji. When we build capacities in solar and renewable energy, we invoke

Gandhiji. When we battle climate change and promote green, eco-friendly living, we invoke Gandhiji. And what is sustainable development if not an expansion of Gandhiji's simple mantra: "The earth has enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed."

9. Mahatma Gandhi led India's freedom struggle through practice of non-violence and Satyagraha. His leadership inspired anti-imperialistic movements in several other nations that were fighting colonial rule. The principle of Ahimsa is very relevant in today's world, which is experiencing violence in the form of terrorism and other conflict. In such times the values espoused by Mahatma Gandhi can guide our planet towards a better future.
10. It is for this reason that the 150th Birth Anniversary Commemoration has world-wide meaning. Let us elevate this to a global celebration, using platforms such as the United Nations and other multilateral organisations. The focus should not just be on events, but on tangible, actionable legacies that will make a difference to the lives of ordinary people – wherever they may be.
11. The Mahatma continues to be of significance for all of us in all countries. The world needs to incorporate his ideas in the building of a 21st century that is marked by justice and equality, by peace and wisdom, and by the elimination of poverty. This would be a world that would do the Mahatma proud. Let us celebrate his 150th birthday in ways and means that befits the great person that Gandhiji was. I call upon all of you present here to share your ideas and suggestions on how we may commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. I look forward to hearing your views in this regard.

Thank you

Jai Hind!