

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE GRM AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY, SANTA CRUZ,
BOLIVIA ON THE TOPIC: 150 YEARS OF MAHATMA GANDHI -
RELEVANCE FOR TODAY**

Santa Cruz, March 29, 2019

1. I am delighted to be at the Autonomous University of Gabriel Rene Moreno. I appreciate the platform the University has provided me to address the students and academic community here and, through you, reach out to the people of Bolivia. I must also acknowledge the gesture to name this impressive auditorium after Mahatma Gandhi. It is a fitting tribute to a great man whom we in India consider the Father of our Nation and whose 150th birth anniversary is being celebrated in 2019.

2. I have been told that this University is one of the oldest and largest centres of higher education in Bolivia. It has 110,000 students who represent a legacy going back almost 140 years. It leaves me with a warm feeling as I realise that when this University was founded, Mahatma Gandhi still walked the Earth. In fact, he was a young boy. It is fitting therefore that Gandhiji should be the theme of my address today. We are blessed by history – I am confident this will help our countries overcome the distance of geography.

3. I am the first President of India to be visiting Bolivia. This visit has been long overdue. The land named after Simon Bolivar, the Liberator of Latin America, and the land of Mahatma Gandhi, who led India and South Asia in a largely nonviolent struggle for liberation from colonialism, have much in common. And much to catch up on. We became free nations with the same dreams and ideals for our people and for the dignity of the poorest and the most underprivileged. The time has come to channel those ideals into a fruitful and mutually beneficial partnership. My State Visit is a part of that process. The process, I must emphasise, is inspired by the ethic of Mahatma Gandhi.

4. Gandhiji was born in India but he does not belong to India alone. His name finds resonance across continents. Mahatma Gandhi was the most influential Indian of the 20th century. To this day, he remains the 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 – and of our shared planet. He not only led us to freedom, but he also urged us – every man and every woman, every individual and every institution – to cherish and preserve freedom, and to cherish and preserve the concept of universal peace.
5. Mahatma Gandhi was a multi-faceted person. He was a nationalist and an internationalist; a political leader and a spiritual mentor; a writer, a thinker and an activist; a person comfortable with the traditions and civilisation of India, and yet an eager revolutionary for social reform and change. 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 community, religious, economic and even gender prejudices.
6. Mahatma Gandhi is not merely a great figure from our past. He is a guide for our today and a beacon for our tomorrow. Our domestic and foreign policies, India's very approach to development and diplomacy, to the smallest village and to the global village – in some manner or the other are located in Gandhian philosophy.
7. Mahatma Gandhi gave us two watchwords – Satyagraha and Sarvodaya. Satyagraha literally translates to being steadfast to truth. It signifies reaching the truth by the path of truth, reaching noble goals by noble methods, and committing to both the ends and the means to those ends. Sarvodaya, on the other hand, means the uplift of all – of every man, woman and child, every nationality and every ethnicity; and most acutely, of the most underprivileged among us. It respects the dignity of every human being.

8. In his own words, Gandhiji gave us a talisman to judge any policy and indeed any action – to assess if the proposed action would enhance the life, dignity and destiny of the poorest person we had met. This is a talisman for all times, all places and all conditions.
9. These principles have shaped India's developmental experience. That is why the true measure of India's economic success is not just that it is the fastest growing major economy in the world, but also that it is moving briskly towards eliminating extreme poverty in the next decade. The large national missions we are proud of in India are not only those that have had us undertake, over the past half-decade, the most rapid and ambitious road and highway expansion in our history, but also those that have brought cooking gas to the kitchens of millions of poorer families and electricity to every house in every village.
10. Our idea of achievement is not just inaugurating India's first Bullet Train by 2022, when we complete 75 years as an independent nation. It is also to ensure that every Indian family, however underprivileged, has a house of its own by 2022. Our sense of enterprise is not only to build a pharmaceutical industry that is the biggest manufacturer of low-cost, high-quality drugs and vaccines. But also to use these products to make healthcare accessible to the less well-off, whether in India or elsewhere.
11. A few months ago, the government of India launched Ayushman Bharat, a universal health coverage programme that is the largest such in the world. This is an attempt to leverage our quality-conscious and cost-effective pharma, hospitals and healthcare infrastructure for the benefit of deprived and underprivileged families. I understand that only a month ago the government of Bolivia inaugurated a programme with a similar vision. India looks forward to assisting and partnering Bolivia in its endeavour.

12. It is appropriate to recall that public health was an issue that Mahatma Gandhi often brought up, and was very much part of his conception of freedom and liberty. He was one of the first political leaders in modern history to speak about the importance of sanitation. As such, India's best tribute to him in his 150th year will be the completion of the Swachh Bharat Mission on October 2, 2019, his birthday. Over five years, Swachh Bharat has been a government-initiated and people-driven movement aimed at ending the age-old practice of open defecation, and universalising modern sanitation. It is already beginning to give significant health and economic benefits – as well as contributing to gender equity and human dignity.

13. For us in India, Swachh Bharat has been an enormous learning experience. It has combined the Mahatma's wisdom with IT and digital technologies, contemporary management practices and a behaviour change mass movement. It has demonstrated how technology can be a force multiplier in achieving social sector goals. In September 2018, such findings were shared at the Mahatma Gandhi International Sanitation Convention in New Delhi. I was privileged to inaugurate the Convention, at which we welcomed a ministerial delegation from Bolivia.

Ladies and Gentlemen and Dear Students,

14. The world of today is very different from the world that Mahatma Gandhi lived and worked in. And yet, Gandhiji remains extremely relevant to 21st century global concerns. In his advocacy of sustainability, ecological sensitivity and living in harmony with nature, he anticipated some of the pressing challenges of our times. The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations are Gandhian philosophy in action.

15. It is almost natural to invoke the Mahatma in any discussion on climate change action. India's role in the International Solar Alliance, an international organisation co-conceived and headquartered in our country, too is reflective of

Mahatma Gandhi. We are delighted to have Bolivia as part of the ISA family.

16. For India, solar and renewable energy is not slogan – it is a nonnegotiable. We are the first major economy that is seeking to make that leap into industrialisation while also combating climate change, and while reducing the intensity of dependence on fossil fuels. India has set a target of 175 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2022, of which 100 gigawatts will comprise solar energy. We are on course to not just achieving that target but exceeding it. There are obvious synergies with Bolivia's own solar and clean energy programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. In its essence, Gandhian philosophy is people-centric. It treasures, cherishes and renews the wisdom, culture, resources and life systems of common citizens, ordinary families and indigenous communities who have lived for centuries in the lap of nature – nature with all its diversity and biodiversity. Like Bolivia, we in India give great importance to the preservation of indigenous languages and knowledge systems.
18. One example is yoga, which is India's gift to the world and is celebrated every year on June 21 on International Yoga Day. I am happy to note that some of the most memorable International Yoga Day events have been held here in Bolivia, including in Santa Cruz and, in 2017, at the iconic Lake Titicaca. For me, this is evidence of how the people of Bolivia and India, as inheritors of ancient civilisations, instinctively relate to each other.
19. A people-centric approach also adopts a sensitive and holistic blueprint for economic projects and harnessing of natural resources. We need to measure such projects not merely in terms of productivity and balance sheets, but assess them using the metric of sustainability, and job and value creation for local communities. Business initiatives and investments must enlighten and embellish, rather than just extract. Such thinking is

central to India's economic partnerships with other countries – and here too, we follow in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi.

20. It is with this spirit that India offers a hand of friendship to the people and government of Bolivia, to partner with you as per your developmental priorities – for the benefit of Bolivia and for the future of the youth of Bolivia, including of course all of you in this auditorium. With those words, I once more thank the University for this opportunity to share my thoughts with you and, on behalf of the people of India, wish each one of you and wish the people of Bolivia a bright and happy future ahead.

Thank you.

Muchas Gracias.