

Address by the Hon'ble President of India
Shri Ram Nath Kovind
On the occasion of inauguration of the First World Youth Conference on
Kindness

New Delhi, August 23, 2019

1. Namaskar, good morning and a warm welcome to all of you, especially to the youth leaders from 27 different countries. I am happy to be here to inaugurate the First World Youth Conference on Kindness. Few weeks from now, on October 2nd, we will celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. This event on 'kindness', a value synonymous with Gandhiji, is very relevant for us.
2. I congratulate the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development and other organisations that have come together to organise this event.
3. Gandhiji was born in India but he belongs to entire humanity. His life and values inspire people across continents. The most influential Indian of the 20th century, Gandhiji remains the benchmark against which we assess our public functionaries, political ideas and government policies, as well as the hopes and aspirations of our country and our people – and of our shared planet. He not only led us to freedom, but he also urged us to cherish freedom and preserve the concept of universal peace.
4. Mahatma Gandhi was not just a great leader and visionary, he was one who personified certain timeless ideals and values. We could place Gandhiji in a time machine and transport him to any period of human existence and we would find him to be relevant. This is also true of the times we live in. Gandhiji remains extremely relevant to our present day concerns such as need for peace and tolerance, terrorism and climate change.
5. Gandhiji believed in the ancient Indian concept of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" – that is – the entire world is one family. This captures his advocacy of the theory of universal love and compassion. It means tolerance and openness to different cultures and ideas; it means non-application of any judgmental criteria, except the criteria of truth. Mahatma Gandhi believed that our actions should ultimately aim to enhance the dignity and destiny of all human beings, more so those who are socially or economically disadvantaged. The world would indeed be a better place if all of us try to apply this principle to guide our actions and our thoughts.

6. For Gandhiji, remaining firm on the path of Satya or Truth and its pursuit was essential. This belief was the genesis of his movement, Satyagraha, which essentially means insistence on Truth. His main tool in pursuit of Satyagraha was Ahimsa or nonviolence. He considered Truth the goal and Ahimsa the means. Mahatma Gandhi effected transformational changes by nonviolent means. His powerful message of peaceful coexistence stands all the more relevant, in the present times. His favourite bhajan or song - “*Vaishnava Jan To Tene Kahiye*” calls for compassion, kindness and goodness for others, for once and for always. His universal ideas have influenced some of the greatest leaders of our age from Martin Luther King to Nelson Mandela.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. The central theme of this Conference is kindness. We can draw from Mahatma Gandhi to remind ourselves that the key to address many issues that humanity and our planet faces today lies in making our world more compassionate, humane and kind. These values have been emphasised in all religions too. For instance, in Buddhism, a perfect person needs to possess *Karuna*, that is, compassion and kindness. One of Buddha’s great followers was Ashoka, the great Indian emperor from 3rd century BC. On one of his edicts inscribed on a pillar is as follows:

“Dhamma sadhu, kiyam cu dhamme ti?
Apasinave, bahu kayane, daya, dane, sace, socaye”

It can be translated as:

“Dhamma, that is, the universal law of nature is good, but what constitutes Dhamma?
That is – absence of evil, goodness, kindness, generosity, truthfulness and purity.”

8. We need to be kind towards mother-nature if we are to stop and reverse the damage caused to our environment. We need to be kind to respect and understand differences as failing to do so leads to conflict. We need to be kind to empathise and help others. We need to be kind to ensure that compassion becomes the inner voice that drives our children, societies and civilizations to retain and nurture their humaneness and their sensitivity.
9. But, how do we ensure that this indeed happens. We as individuals and societies need to cherish kindness as a value and a deed. Let us all consciously remember to do at least one kind act a day. This alone will enable each and every one of us to practice and nourish our inherent kindness. If we do this, imagine that the sum total would be billions of kind deeds every day.

10. As individuals, as families and as societies, we need to celebrate and share stories of kindness that we witness around us. By celebrating such acts of kindness, howsoever big or small, we can promote goodness in our midst. Mahatma Gandhi also said and I quote “The simplest acts of kindness are by far more powerful than a thousand heads bowing in prayer.” [Unquote]
11. Being grateful for what we have can also be a gateway to access our inherent kindness and its free expression. A simple exercise such as writing down every morning three things in your life for which you are grateful, will enthuse you with positivity. Feelings of gratitude are known to reduce our anxieties and insecurities. Experiencing gratitude shifts our focus from our worries to the blessings that life has offered us, freeing us to share our innate goodness and compassion with others.
12. The strife and violence that we see in the world today is often based in deep-rooted prejudices. These make us see the world through the binary of “us versus them”. Following Gandhiji’s footsteps, we must let ourselves and our children interact and engage with those whom we tend to define as ‘them’. Greater interaction is the best way to develop a sensitive understanding, which can help us overcome our prejudices.
13. Here, education too can play an important role. We need to evaluate and evolve the premise, goals and structure of our education system. Education needs to go beyond mere literacy. Education must facilitate and challenge the young to search deep within themselves and build their inner strength to sympathize or relate to the suffering of others. We need to educate young people such that they can defy and transcend boundaries of class and race. We need them to be educated and creative to find solutions to entrenched structural injustices and inequities. We need an education that can touch our emotions and our spirits.
14. In this regard, I am happy to know that over the last three days, youth leaders and experts present here have been working together in Capacity Building Workshops focussed on developing compassion, kindness, impulse control and empathy. These are commendable efforts. It is important to be conscious of the need to be inspired and to live by these humane values. Compassion kindles the light of compassion, an act of kindness is returned by an act of kindness, and empathy spurs empathy. I am sure that what you learn and experience in this Conference will inspire each one of you to be the ambassadors of kindness for rest of your lives.
15. This Conference has brought together youth leaders from around the world. You and millions of young men and women like you, have the biggest stake in making our world kind, compassionate and peaceful. All of you are celebrating kindness at a time when we are commemorating the 150th birth anniversary of

the Mahatma. I have no doubt that Gandhiji would have blessed this Conference.

16. Once again, I congratulate all the participants and the organisers of this First World Youth Conference on Kindness. You have indeed started something that promises to bring Gandhian values into our everyday lives and make our world better. I wish you all the best.

Thank you,
Jai Hind!