

Remarks of High Commissioner of India to Kenya

Ahimsa 2026 – International Day of Non-Violence
University of Nairobi | 5 October 2026

Theme: Non-Violence, Dialogue and International Cooperation

Dr. Obijiofor Aginam, Director, UNESCO MGIEP (Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Education for Peace and Sustainable Development),

Prof Ayub Gitau, Vice-Chancellor, University of Nairobi,

Distinguished speakers,

Excellencies,

Members of the faculty,

Dear students and young friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning!

It is a privilege to join you today for the 2026 Ahimsa Lecture and Dialogue. The theme for this year's conference '*Non-Violence, Dialogue and International Cooperation*' is particularly relevant given the current geopolitical tensions and conflicts around the world. The timing for the Conference is equally apt as it comes soon after the 'International Day of Non-violence' on 2nd October – the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, an apostle of non-violence, truth and peace.

2. Mahatma Gandhi's life and ideals demonstrated that non-violence is not simply the absence of violence. It is a positive force — a force of courage, moral conviction, restraint and ultimately, transformation. The United Nations rightly established the International Day of Non-Violence on this day, to disseminate his message of non-violence through education and public awareness. The Ahimsa Dialogue today is a right step in this direction.

3. The question posed to us today is an important one: **how can the principles of non-violence, dialogue and mutual understanding remain relevant to building peaceful societies in an increasingly complex and interconnected world?**

I would argue that these principles are not becoming less relevant. They are becoming more than necessary. And I would make the following points to support this notion:

My first point - Non-violence is not passivity :

There is sometimes a tendency to understand non-violence as passivity — as avoiding confrontation, tolerating injustice or stepping away from difficult questions. That was certainly not Gandhiji's conception of *ahimsa*.

For him, non-violence demanded courage. It required the strength to oppose injustice without adopting the methods of injustice itself. In fact, refraining from retaliation when faced with provocation or injustice can require greater strength than fighting back.

What could be a better example of this than one of Captain Smit Machchhar - the Indian pilot who fought off a savage attack by his copilot and helped prevent an apparent hijack of a Flydubai plane heading to Israel last week with more than 170 people on board.

For people like us practicing diplomacy, the concept of non-violence is very relevant to international relations as well.

Every country has its own national interests. Every country has security concerns. Nations will disagree. They will compete economically and strategically. They will sometimes have sharply differing assessments of regional and global developments.

The question is not whether such differences can be eliminated. They may not and sometimes cannot. The real question is **how those differences can be managed**.

Diplomacy exists precisely because some disagreements are inevitable.

Dialogue, negotiations, international law and multilateral platforms provide societies and nations with alternatives to coercion and conflict. Their purpose is that if differences cannot be erased, it must nonetheless ensure that competition does not become confrontation, disagreement does not become a dispute and dispute does not lead to violence and conflict.

This leads me to my second point - Dialogue is most important when it is difficult

It is easy to advocate dialogue among those who already agree with one another. But the real test of dialogue comes when positions are far apart.

Meaningful dialogue does not require a country to abandon its interests or principles. Nor does it mean that all positions are morally or legally equivalent. It means maintaining the possibility of communication and peaceful resolution even when disagreements are profound.

This is also why diplomacy requires **patience**.

International relations increasingly operate in an environment of instant communication and instant reaction. But difficult political questions are rarely resolved through instant solutions.

Dialogue therefore requires something increasingly scarce in public life today — the capacity to listen before responding, to understand without necessarily agreeing, and to search for common ground without pretending that differences do not exist.

At the same time, **dialogue cannot become a euphemism for indifference to violence**.

India has faced the scourge of terrorism for decades. Our experience has taught us that there can be no justification for terrorism in any form or manifestation. There is no contradiction between advocating dialogue and insisting on accountability. Non-violence cannot mean accepting violence against innocent people. India's actions against terrorists as part of Operation Sindoor last year were therefore consistent with the principle of *ahimsa*.

Protecting human life, preventing radicalization and ensuring that terrorism is never normalized or legitimized are integral to building a culture of peace.

My third point - Interdependence has changed the meaning of international cooperation

There is another reason why dialogue and cooperation have become indispensable. The defining challenges of our era increasingly do not respect national borders.

Climate change does not stop at immigration counters.

Pandemics do not require visas.

Cyber threats operate across jurisdictions.

Disruption in food, fuel or supply chains in one part of the world can have consequences for families thousands of kilometres away.

Artificial intelligence, maritime security, terrorism, migration, biodiversity loss and global financial instability similarly present challenges that no country — however large or powerful — can address entirely on its own.

Many of these issues, intertwined and multifaceted, require collective regional and global efforts, effective multilateralism and humane international governance.

Interdependence is therefore not simply an aspiration. It is a reality.

The choice before the international community is whether that interdependence should be managed through cooperation, or allowed to become another arena for confrontation.

For India, this finds expression in an ancient idea: **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — the world is one family.**

India has sought to carry this philosophy into its international engagements: through dialogue, development partnerships, humanitarian assistance, capacity building, peacekeeping and advocacy for the concerns of the Global South. If you see any recent natural catastrophe in any part of the world, India has been one of the first responders with humanitarian aid.

But cooperation must also be fair. A peaceful international order cannot rest indefinitely on institutions that do not adequately represent the world as it exists today.

Global institutions established in the middle of the 20th century like the United Nations have made an enormous contribution to international peace and cooperation. But the world has now transformed dramatically and such organizations need to be made ‘fit for purpose’.

Africa today comprises more than one-quarter of the membership of the United Nations, yet remains without permanent representation in the UN Security Council. Similarly, countries like India being the most populous country of the world and the 4th largest economy cannot be outside any

meaningful global governance framework system. In the words of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Global South needs to transition from being “rule-takers” to “rule-shapers” in so far as global governance is concerned.

Reformed multilateralism is therefore not simply an institutional question.

It is a question of inclusion.

It is a question of legitimacy.

And ultimately, it is also a question of peace — because societies and nations are more likely to have confidence in institutions in which they believe their voices are genuinely heard.

Let us take the example of India and Kenya - it offers a particularly relevant example of how international relationships can grow through sustained engagement and mutual respect.

The links between India and the East African coast are much older than our modern diplomatic relations. Trade across the Indian Ocean connected our peoples long before the emergence of contemporary nation-states. India and Kenya also share the historical experience of anti-colonial struggle, with Indians participating in and supporting Kenya’s freedom movement.

Today, the relationship is broad and multifaceted. It encompasses trade and investment, development cooperation, defence and security, health, education, digital public infrastructure, capacity building, culture and extensive people-to-people contacts.

But perhaps the deeper foundation of the relationship is mutual respect.

India’s engagement with Kenya — and with Africa more broadly — has been guided by the principle that partnerships must respond to priorities identified by our partners themselves.

Cooperation is most durable when it is not prescriptive.

This principle has practical relevance for peacebuilding too.

Whether between countries or within societies, durable solutions cannot simply be imposed. They must command ownership, participation and trust.

This brings me to my fourth point - From tolerance to understanding - another dimension to this conversation.

We often speak about tolerance as an essential attribute of peaceful societies. It certainly is.

But perhaps we should aspire to something deeper than tolerance — **understanding**.

Tolerance can mean simply accepting that another person exists despite our differences.

Understanding requires curiosity.

It asks us: Why does this person see the world differently from me? What experience shaped that view? Is there something I may learn by listening?

We are not obliged to agree with every answer.

But societies capable of having such conversations are much less likely to allow differences of ethnicity, faith, nationality, ideology or political opinion to become permanent fault lines.

And the same applies internationally.

States do not need identical interests in order to cooperate.

They require a willingness to understand one another's perspectives and identify areas where interests intersect.

My fifth point - Education and the foundations of peace

This is why the overarching theme chosen for Ahimsa 2026 — **“Education for Peace in a Time of Polycrisis: Building Resilient, Inclusive and Peaceful Societies”** — is so pertinent.

Education must certainly equip young people with knowledge and skills for employment and economic opportunity.

But it has another role that is equally important.

It must teach us how to reason.

How to question.

How to distinguish evidence from misinformation.

How to engage respectfully with those who disagree with us.

And how to separate disagreement from hostility.

This is particularly important in our digital age.

Never before have young people had access to so much information.

But never before has misinformation been capable of moving so quickly either.

Algorithms can reinforce our existing beliefs. Social media can reduce complex questions to slogans. Anger often travels faster than nuance.

In such an environment, education for peace cannot simply be a separate subject in a curriculum.

It must cultivate habits of critical thinking, empathy and responsible citizenship.

A university should therefore be one of society's safest spaces for difficult conversations.

Not because everyone agrees.

Precisely because they do not.

Young people are already shaping peace

This is especially relevant to the young people present here today.

We often describe youth as “the leaders of tomorrow”.

But that formulation increasingly understates your role.

Young people are already shaping politics, technology, entrepreneurship, culture and public discourse. The choices you make therefore matter now.

Every generation inherits institutions from the previous one. But each generation also determines the culture within which those institutions operate.

Do we debate ideas, or attack individuals?

Do we seek information, or simply confirmation of what we already believe?

Do we regard someone who disagrees with us as an opponent to persuade, or an enemy to defeat?

These may seem like small choices.

Collectively, however, they determine whether societies become more resilient or more polarised.

Peace is not created only at diplomatic negotiating tables.

It is built every day — in classrooms, workplaces, communities, families and increasingly, online.

Gandhi's message for international relations today

There is one final element of Gandhian thought which I believe remains particularly relevant to international affairs.

For Mahatma Gandhi, **means and ends could not be completely separated.**

The methods we employ ultimately shape the outcomes we create.

This insight has great relevance for the international system.

A sustainable peace cannot be built through methods that permanently normalize hatred, terrorism, indiscriminate violence or the denial of human dignity.

Equally, a cooperative world cannot be created if dialogue is replaced by coercion every time differences emerge.

The answer is not naïve idealism.

States must defend their citizens. International law must be upheld. Terrorism must be confronted. Aggression and violence have consequences.

But even while responding to immediate threats, we must preserve the larger objective: creating conditions in which disputes are resolved peacefully and dignity is protected.

That is where *ahimsa* moves from philosophy to statecraft.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We live in a world of enormous technological capability.

We can communicate instantaneously across continents. We can analyse vast quantities of information. We can explore space, develop extraordinary medicines and build technologies unimaginable to earlier generations.

Yet one of humanity's oldest challenges remains unresolved:

How do we live with people who are different from us?

How do communities live together despite different identities?

How do nations pursue different interests without becoming permanent adversaries?

How do we confront injustice without reproducing hatred?

Mahatma Gandhi did not offer an easy answer to these questions.

He offered a demanding one.

Non-violence requires courage.

Dialogue requires patience.

Mutual understanding requires humility.

And international cooperation requires recognition that no nation can build lasting security and prosperity entirely on its own.

Non-violence gives us the ethical foundation.

Dialogue gives us the method.

International cooperation gives us the framework.

And education gives each new generation the capacity to sustain all three.

That, I believe, is why *ahimsa* remains not merely a memory from another era, but a living principle for our own.

And perhaps, in a world that is becoming ever more interconnected but not always more understanding, its message is more urgent today than ever before.

Thank you. Asanteni Sana