

**Text of Speech delivered by Hon'ble Human Resource Minister at
UNESCO Leader's Forum, 16 Nov. 15**

Excellencies;

Mr. President of the General Conference

Chairperson of the Executive Board;

Madame Director General;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

As the sun set on Friday evening in the city of Lights and death unleashed itself on the streets, Parisians resolutely looked into the eyes of hate and said No! No, we shall not be subjugated by fear.

And with this message as the sun rises on the 70th anniversary of UNESCO, let it be known that those who unleash terror on humanity will be met by justice, those who endeavour to sow the seeds of hate in the hearts of our young shall be defeated, those who conspire to kill peace shall be met by our collective determination to ensure hope in humanity.

Seven years ago in this very month of November, the city of dreams, Mumbai, was brutally attacked by those who wanted our dreams of prosperity to perish.

Mumbaikars all, Indians all, today say to our brothers and sisters in Paris – we shall overcome; overcome the desire of a select few to suppress our liberty, fraternity and equality.

I commend UNESCO, Heads of State and the distinguished audience here, this eminent collectively, for their presence, support and solidarity in the face of this attack not only on Paris and Parisians but on all mankind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we all know, UNESCO was established by the community of nations, amidst the rubble and disarray in the aftermath of the Second World War. It was intended and planned to be an institution with a difference, with a message and a mission. Never before has its message been more relevant, its task more immediate and urgent. The message 70 years ago was loud and unequivocal. It was enshrined, not just in stone outside this building but in the preambular statement of its Constitution and belief and practice: “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”

India stands committed to the ideals of UNESCO, and to the furtherance of its role and activities. On our part, we bring to the Organisation a five thousand

years old legacy of tolerance and inclusiveness, discourse and debate, harmony and cooperation, all reflected in the unparalleled diversity of our nation called Bharat, a land of many languages, cultures, faiths and ethnicities.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

India, with its national creed wedded to peace and nonviolence has been a staunch and ardent supporter of UNESCO. As early as 1947, Mahatma Gandhi had expressed the deep Indian interest in the efforts of UNESCO to 'secure peace through educational and cultural activities'.

On several occasions in the past eighteen months, I have had occasion to turn to his writings, to glean from them the wisdom and vision that can guide our educational system. Some of Gandhiji's most compellingly expressed views were on education. He did not want the education system to only benefit the mind or the intellect, but to provide as well for physical and moral development of a child. Education must not only produce learned minds, but enlightened souls too, said Gandhiji.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education is the bedrock on which we can build an enlightened society bounded to the universal values of compassion for all, tolerance for diversity, respect for women, inclusion of the marginalised and sustainable development for all.

India is one with UNESCO in the prioritisation of girls' education. We have launched an initiative BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO which celebrates the girl child and seeks to ensure the continued participation of girls in education. It seeks to not only create equal opportunities but also to change mindsets.

Some of those factors inhibiting participation in education, like the provision of toilets in schools, may seem trivial to many here. But we know it is a deciding factor for many girls who seek to continue their education. Therefore through our SWACCH VIDYALAYA initiative, we have ensured that those basic necessities do not impede or inhibit any girl child's education. In a historic first, by leveraging technology and through a collaborative spirit reflective of human resolve to provide time bound solutions, we have ensured separate toilets for our girl students in all government run schools. Over 400,000 toilets built in over 250,000 schools, all in one year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our civilisations are built on the spirit of enquiry and reform. These values were cradled in the venerated traditions of India, which encouraged a certain spirit of enquiry - a sense of curiosity that seeks to ameliorate the human condition. Our developmental challenges have further shaped our thinking and the emphasis that we place on science, technology and innovation. This belief has prompted our government to launch “The Rashtriya Avishkaar Abhiyaan” (The National Innovation Movement), to motivate and engage children in Science, Mathematics and Technology through observation, experimentation and fructification of ideas through inferences and model-building.

We share UNESCO’s conviction that the Sciences, through the innovations and technologies that they foster, will be critical in unearthing the possibilities for sustainable development. Our efforts towards channelizing more resources for research and development in India are rooted in the belief that widely-accessible and environmentally responsible scientific solutions will be the key to our vision for the world beyond 2015. It is with this belief that over the years, government funding for our premier institutions like IITs has increased manifold to focus not only on basic research but also translational research for benefits, both to our society and economy. However, funding alone does not create innovations, which need an ecosystem to sustain them and require the best and brightest to be part of it.

Through our government's GIAN (Global Initiative for Academic Networks) and in the spirit of international cooperation and exchange, we invite academicians and experts from all over the world to fill knowledge gaps by engaging with our students and faculty and create academic networks for long-term research.

One of the more celebrated outcomes of education is its role in the expansion of the frontiers of our knowledge. Our goal is to leave an IMPRINT on time through support for Research, Innovation, and Technology in India. The research that we seek to encourage is one that is in alignment with the needs of our country. And we want to take this research to evolve appropriate technologies for sustainable rural development, with focus on water management, organic farming, renewable energy, frugal technology, infrastructure, rural livelihood and employment.

It is my belief that market forces necessarily do not always encourage socially relevant innovations, unless provided the necessarily impetus by governments. This has prompted us to launch a unique programme called Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan (Developed India Movement), which seeks to engage our premier institutions with local communities to address developmental challenges through technological solutions to their problems. As a part of this programme, each premier institution identifies a number of villages to identify and address

problems requiring technological interventions. Education must be socially and contextually relevant and rooted in the lives and aspirations of the people.

Higher Education is built upon the foundation that School Education provides. India has been able to attract boys and girls to schools through its emphasis on education for all or the SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN and, during the last 15 years, there has been a significant rise in enrolment in schools and, as a result, at the higher education level. However, a sharp increase in the number of students and educational institutions has led to an increased need for quality teachers. In order to meet this demand, Prime Minister Modi launched the National Mission on Teachers and Teaching on 25th December 2014. The Mission has a two-pronged strategy- increasing the availability of teachers and, secondly, improving the quality of existing teachers through training and retraining. The Mission also focuses on improving the administration of our schools and higher educational institutions through leadership programmes to be anchored by top management institutions in the country.

One of the most exciting developments in recent history has been the welcome addition of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) to our globalised lives. India has been fortunate to be able to fill its sails with these winds in the seas of Communication and Technology and we endeavour to use ICTs to expand educational opportunities.

We are creating a National e-Library for supporting learners through the availability of quality learning courseware. The e-libraries, even today almost a million volumes and growing rapidly, will provide free and unfiltered access to knowledge and learning; bringing a new and catalytically different dimension. As we look ahead, this could be a game changer delivering education and knowledge to millions. We invite countries, educational institutions and UNESCO, all to be a part of this remarkable initiative.

We are also in the process of developing a robust Indian platform called SWAYAM which means self or the reflexive myself in English, for this purpose. From this platform will flow specially designed MOOCs courses - close to 2.50,000 hours of e-learning for students to learn and absorb, inexpensively and at their own pace. Likewise, e-Pathshala is a web portal and mobile apps which hosts all school books from grade 1 to 12 free for our students, teachers, parents, researchers and educators. Through SHAALA DARPAN parents shall be kept informed digitally, in real time, about the child's presence at school, mark sheets and time table. Shaala Siddhi', is a comprehensive instrument for school evaluation to enable schools to evaluate the performance of our students in a more focused and strategic manner to facilitate a professional judgment for continuous improvement. 'Saransh' is another tool which allows the schools to identify areas of improvement in students, teachers and curriculum to facilitate

and implement change and gives parents subject-wise learning outcomes to help engage with their children more productively.

The attempt is clearly to leverage new technology to create new learning opportunities for our children.

In this and more, we seek to partner with UNESCO, and I would in fact urge the Organisation to take initiatives for collaborative knowledge sharing in the virtual space, which would further help us all in our collective efforts towards achieving Agenda 2030 in a timely manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All of our efforts are aimed at opening the windows of opportunity to education. Our approach to education is built on a philosophy in which human existence is looked upon as a rare gift to be utilised both for inner development and for the welfare of society, at large. And this approach benefits greatly from an increase in genuine dialogue and engagement between countries and cultures. We have thus sought to enable greater interaction of scholars and scientists from all over the world with our students and faculty. I encourage all of you to come to India to experience the transformation that is afoot and contribute to it by sharing your perspectives.

The spirit of global cooperation is prominent in our engagement with the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals. The goals, including the one on education, reflect the international community's acknowledgment that education can play a decisive role in fostering a sense of shared responsibility and in bringing about fundamental changes in how we coexist with each other and our planet.

We have worked with other countries to ensure that the goals are acceptable and universally-relevant to all countries, while acknowledging their unique national contexts and socio-economic diversities.

Ultimately, we believe that we need to arm young people with the skills and compassion that allows them to carve a self-confident identity, while being respectful of others. This is also one of the targets of the SDG on education.

We are already contributing to that global campaign through the New-Delhi based Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development. The MGIEP is an Institute which was set up in partnership with UNESCO to help countries in the South-Asian region, and beyond, transform their education systems, drawing on UNESCO's experience and inspired by the Mahatma's legacy.

Gandhiji said, when we educate our children, we give them the strength to stand up to violence with peace. We give them the right to a life of fair trials and the freedom to learn from mistakes. And we help them define their identity in ways that make them appreciate differences, tolerate diversity and see the universal human spirit in all of us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are at the crossroads of a momentous turn in History.

The next few years will be ones of historic changes, as the world renews, rediscovers and recreates itself, and rediscovers, absorbs and assimilates the elixir of a sustainable way of life. We have been entrusted with the responsibility of transforming the world as we know it through the 2030 Agenda. This developmental agenda will not only guide our efforts for the next 15 years but define our legacy for the generations to come. As the Honourable Prime Minister Modi has noted, the United Nations needs to seize this historic opportunity for renewal lest we risk irrelevance and a tragic withering.

Our future must rest on building a sustainable planet for our generations to come.

UNESCO, with its recognized expertise and mandate in the areas of education, the sciences, culture and communication and information can do much, on the one hand, to empower people with requisite knowledge, technical and vocational skills and capacities and, on the other hand, help the international community and individual countries to devise new solutions to complex challenges.

The contemporary discussion has to revolve around an integrated, holistic philosophy in which human existence is looked upon as a rare gift to be utilised both for inner development and for the welfare of society and the world. It is also because of this timeless current of thought that India has an unwavering belief in multilateralism. We need a genuine dialogue and engagement between countries. And that is why we stress that political resolve and an inclination to share - both technology and financial resources - are essential to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A purposeful movement towards a more equitable socio-economic order that respects the unsustainable burden we are presently placing on our planet is essential if the future is to be defined by peace. Ultimately a world in which a few appropriate the vast majority of the world's resources is not a sustainable paradigm.

Jai Hind
