

**Remarks by Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj on the celebration of the centenary of World War I: Contribution of Indian Soldiers. A special event organized by the Permanent Delegation of India to UNESCO on 11 December 2014 in collaboration with the Governments of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, France, Germany, United Kingdom and Belgium**

Distinguished Ambassadors

Ladies and gentlemen

My dear friends

We are not here to open a debate on the past or the present;

We are not here to open a discourse on the rights and wrongs of the past and the present;

We are neither here to glorify nor eulogise or lionise war.....

We are here to commemorate a centenary that points more than anything to the relevance of this great Organisation. "... that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed";

We are here to acknowledge and honour the memory of those who made the supreme sacrifice in conflict and whose sacrifice has been largely unacknowledged and forgotten;

We are here to build bridges with nations through the remembrance of a shared past;

We are here, above all, to highlight the values of peace, freedom, dignity, honour, self respect, understanding, hope, progress...

Is this too costly? Is this too much to ask? The jury does not believe so, and as Albert Camus once famously said '....it is the only battle worth waging.'

There is of course an Indian dimension to the Great War, which cannot be ignored as it cannot be overlooked. Over one million soldiers served with honour in various battlefields and on numerous fronts around the globe, at the cost of 74,000 lives. The Indian Army dominated, but the Indian Navy also contributed and Indians served in the Army Flying Corps. There were also labour battalions recruited from Bengal. The Indian Army had the distinction of

having fought in almost all theatres of the war – France and Flanders, alongside the ANZACs at Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, Palestine and North Africa

But that is not for me, that is for our experts to tell you ...

In closing and in remembering that peace is fundamental as it is beautiful, let me quote from Mahatma Gandhi, the father of modern India and the pioneer of the philosophy and strategy of non violence:

When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible but in the end, they always fall — think of it, *always!*”

Thank you!