



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace
and Sustainable Development**

New Delhi, 11 November 2012

His Excellency Mr. Shri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India,
Excellency Mr. Pallam Raju, Minister of Human Resource Development,
Dr Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for Human Resource Development
Shri Jitin Prasada, Minister of State, Human Resource Development,
Dr. Karan Singh,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here today.

I would like to pay tribute to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a visionary, scholar and the first Education Minister of India. He was a fighter for communal and cultural harmony and secularism, a passionate believer in the power of education as a driver of social inclusion and justice. It is fitting that this National Education Day is celebrated on the anniversary of his birth date.

It is not by chance that the Government of India made the proposal to UNESCO to create the *Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development*.

This is the first such UNESCO education institute in India and the first in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Institute bears the name of a man who shaped the 20th century and who continues to inspire the 21st.

Last year, in *The New Yorker* magazine, the Indian essayist Pankaj Mishra wrote that Gandhi – and not Mark Zuckerberg – was “*the presiding deity of the Arab Spring.*”

Gandhi’s appeal lies in his vision of peace and development as being the same struggle.

There was no greater advocate for the transformational power of education.

In his words:

“As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world as in being able to remake ourselves.”

This is the importance of learning.

Education is a basic human right. It is also a motor for sustainable development.

Most fundamentally, education is about what Gandhi called a “*quality of heart*” – it is about dignity and empowerment.

This new Institute sends out a powerful message about the kind of education we want for our societies today.

Too many systems across the world are failing to equip learners with the skills they need to succeed.

They are failing to strengthen the values we need for sustainability.

Education must break down stereotypes and strengthen core principles. It must combat all violence and discrimination. And it must reach every child, especially girls.

Education stands on the frontline of the future we want for all.

This second Millennium Development Goal underpins all of UNESCO's work to advance Education for All, and it guides our leading role in the United Nations Secretary-General's new global initiative, *Education First*.

We must accelerate the pace of progress before 2015 – to ensure every boy and girl goes to school, to enhance the quality of learning, and ICTs are essential here, and to promote global citizenship, and I am happy to have participated in the important launch this morning of the Aakash 2.

Education must rise to the top of the political agenda, and I wish to congratulate India for its leading commitment.

The *Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development* will play an important role in all this work.

The Institute comes at the right time – when UNESCO is defining its medium-term strategy to advance peace and sustainable development, when the world is debating the contours of a new global sustainable development agenda to follow 2015.

The commitment of the Indian Government is vital on all accounts.

The Government has endowed the new Institute with a generous support and a prestigious location.

We have established together an influential body of experts to guide the Institute in its first months and craft a programme that will support educational reform across the Asia-Pacific region.

Drawing on the dynamism of education in India today, the Institute will help catalyse innovation and craft new approaches to education.

I thank the Government of India once again for this initiative.

Gandhi once wrote: "*Non-violence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be inseparable part of our very being.*"

Education is the quickest way to the heart.

To borrow the words of another great thinker and humanist, Rabindranath Tagore, it is the best way to prevent the world from being "*broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls.*"

This, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the importance of the *Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development.*

Thank you.