



## Let Us March!

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India.

दुनिया भर के मेरे प्यारे बच्चों] Your Majesties, Your Royal Majesties, Royal Highnesses, my dear daughter Malala, Excellencies, dear brother Tom Harkin and my sisters and brothers,

मैं आज शान्ति और मानवता के इस पवित्र मंच से वेद के मंत्र को उच्चारित करते हुए बहुत गौरान्वित महसूस करता हूँ।

इस मंत्र में एक ऐसी प्रार्थना, कामना और एक ऐसा संकल्प निहित है जो सम्पूर्ण विश्व को मनुष्य निर्मित त्रासदियों से मुक्ति दिलाने का सामर्थ्य रखती है।

संगच्छद्वम् संवदद्वम् संवो मनांसि जानताम्

देवा भागम् यथापूर्वं संजानानाम् उपासते!!

हम सभी साथ-साथ चलें। वैश्विक आर्थिक तरक्की और विकास के रास्ते में दुनिया के दक्षिणी छोर से उत्तर तक और पूर्वी छोर पश्चिम तक हम में से कोई भी पिछे ना रह जाए, हममें से कोई भी बिछुड़ न जाए।

हम सभी साथ-साथ बोलें और साथ-साथ चिंतन करें। और साथ मिलकर ऐसे ज्ञान का सृजन करें जिससे समस्त विश्व का कल्याण हो सके।

आज मैं सबसे पहले अपने स्वर्गवासी माता-पिता को, स्वर्ग से भी महान् अपनी जन्मभूमि भारत और समस्त धरती माता को विनम्रता से नमन करता हूँ।

मैं उन हजारों बच्चों का स्मरण करता हूँ जिनको आजाद कराने में मैं स्वयं मुक्त होता रहा हूँ। मुक्ति की पहली मुस्कराहट में मैंने बार-बार, हर बार उनके चेहरों पर ईश्वर को मुस्कराते हुए देखा है।

मैं इस सम्मान का सबसे बड़ा श्रेय अपने आन्दोलन के शहीद कालू कुमार, धूमदास आदर्श किशोर और पाकिस्तान के नन्हे शहीद इकबाल मसीह और ऐसे तमाम लोगों को देना चाहता हूँ, जिन्होंने बच्चों का बचपन लौटाने के लिए हसते हसते अपना सर्वोच्च बलिदान कर दिया। मैं आज उन सभी लोगों की तरफ से, दुनियाभर में बच्चों की आजादी और शिक्षा दिलाने में लगे तमाम कार्यकर्ताओं की तरफ से, और मेरे समस्त देशवासी बहनों और भाईयों की ओर से बहुत विनम्रता से यह आपका पुरस्कार स्वीकार करता हूँ।

भगवान बुद्ध, गुरुनानक और महात्मा गांधी की धरती से नोर्वे तक की मेरी यह है यात्रा विश्व शांति और मानवता के एक छोर को जो प्राचीन छोर है दूसरे जो आधुनिक छोर है उसको जोड़ने की यात्रा मैं मानता हूँ।

The Nobel Committee has generously invited me to deliver a “lecture.” Respectfully, I am unable to do that.

Because I am representing here—the sound of silence. The cry of innocence. And, the face of invisibility. I represent millions of those children who are left behind and that’s why I have kept an empty chair here as a reminder. I have come here only to share the voices and dreams of our children—because they are *all* our children.

I have looked into their frightened and exhausted eyes. I have held their injured bodies and held their broken spirits.

Twenty years ago, in the foothills of the Himalayas, I met a small, skinny child labourer. He asked me:

“Is the world so poor that it cannot give me a toy and a book, instead of forcing me to take a gun or a tool?”

I met with a Sudanese child-soldier he was kidnapped by an extremist militia. As his first training lesson, he was forced to kill his friends and family. He asked me: “What is my fault?”

Twelve years ago, a child-mother from the streets of Colombia—trafficked, raped, enslaved—asked me this: “I have never had a dream. Can my child have one?”

Friends, All the great religions, teachers tell us to care for our children.

Jesus said: “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to them.” The Holy Quran says: “Kill not your children because of poverty.”

Friends! There is no greater violence than to deny the dreams of our children. Therefore . . .

I *refuse* to accept that all the temples and mosques and churches and prayer houses have no place for the dreams of our children.

I *refuse* to accept that world is so poor, when just one week of global military expenditure can bring all our children into classrooms.

I *refuse* to accept that all the laws and constitutions, and judges and police are not able to protect our children.

I *refuse* to accept that the shackles of slavery can ever be stronger than the quest for freedom.

## I REFUSE TO ACCEPT.

My only aim in life is that every child is free to be a child,

- free to grow and develop,
- free to eat, sleep, see daylight,
- free to laugh and cry,
- free to play and learn,
- free to go to school, and above all,
- free to dream.

I have the privilege of working with many courageous people who have the same aim. We have never given up against any threat or attack and we never will.

We have made progress in the last couple of decades. We have reduced the number of out-of-school children by half. We have reduced the number of child labourers by a third. We have reduced Child mortality and malnutrition, and we have prevented millions of child deaths.

But, let us make no mistake, great challenges still remain.

Friends! The biggest crises knocking on the doors of humanity today are fear and intolerance.

We have utterly failed in imparting an education to our children. An education that gives the meaning and objective of life. An education that gives a sense of global citizenship among the youth.

I am afraid that the day is not very far when the cumulative result of this failure will culminate in an unprecedented violence that will be suicidal for humankind.

Rights, security and hope can only be restored through education.

Young people like Malala . . . I started calling her my daughter Malala not just Malala . . . So my daughter Malala and other daughters including Kayanat . . . in fact—two Kayanats, Shazia and my daughters from Africa are rising up from all over the world and choosing peace over violence, tolerance over extremism, and courage over fear.

The solutions are emerging. But, these solutions can not be found only in the deliberations in conferences, alone and cannot be found in the prescriptions from a distance.

They lie in small groups, local organisations and individuals, who are confronting the problem every day. Even if they remain unacknowledged, unrecognised and unknown to the world, the solutions are with them.

You may ask that: What can one person do? I recall a story of my childhood: A heavy fire had broken out in the forest. All the animals were running away, including lion, the king of the forest.

Suddenly, the lion saw a tiny bird rushing towards the fire. He asked the bird, "What are you doing?" To the lion's surprise, the bird replied "I am going to extinguish the fire." He laughed and said, "How can you do it, keeping just one drop of water in your beak?" The bird was adamant, and she said, "*I am doing my bit.*"

Eighteen years ago, millions of individuals marched across the globe and demanded a new international law for the abolition of the worst form of child labour. It has happened, we did it, millions of individuals did it.

Friends! We live in an age of rapid globalisation. We are connected through high-speed Internet. We exchange our goods and services in one single global market, thousands of flights connect us from one corner to another corner of the globe.

But there is one serious disconnect, and that is a lack of *compassion*.

Let us inculcate and transform this individuals' compassion into a global compassion. Let us *globalise compassion*.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "If we are to teach real peace in this world . . . we shall have to begin with the *children*." I humbly add, let us unite the world through the compassion for *our children*.

I ask: Whose children are they who stitch footballs, yet have never played with one? Whose children are they who harvest cocoa, yet have never tasted chocolate? Whose children are they who are dying of Ebola?

Whose children are they who are kidnapped and held hostage? They are all *our children*.

I remember an eight-year-old girl we rescued from intergenerational forced labour from stone quarries. And she was sitting in my car right after her rescue she asked:

"*Why didn't you come earlier?*"

Her angry question still shakes me—and has the power to shake the whole world. Her question is for all of us. What are we doing? What are we waiting for? How many girls will we allow to go without rescue?

Children are questioning our inaction and watching our actions. We need *collective* actions with a sense of *urgency*. *Every* single minute matters, *every* single child matters, *every* single childhood matters.

Therefore, I challenge the passivity and pessimism surrounding our children. I challenge this culture of silence, this culture of neutrality.

I call upon all the governments, intergovernmental agencies, businesses, faith leaders, workers, teachers and NGOs, and *each* one of us, to put an end to all forms of violence against children. Slavery, trafficking, child marriages, child labour, sexual abuse, and illiteracy: these things have no place in any civilised society.

Friends, we can do this.

Governments must make child friendly policies, and invest adequately in education and young people.

Businesses must be more responsible, accountable and open to innovative partnerships.

Intergovernmental agencies must work together to accelerate action.

Global civil society must rise above the business-as-usual and fragmented agendas.

Faith leaders and institutions and all of us must stand with our children.

We *must* be bold, we *must* be ambitious, and we *must* have the will. We *must* keep our promises.

Over fifty years ago, on the first day of my school, I met a cobbler boy my age sitting outside the gate of my school. I asked my teachers: “*Why is he working outside? Why is he not with us in school?*” My teachers had no answer. One day, I gathered the courage to ask the boys’ father. He said: “*Sir, I have never thought about it. We are born to work.*”

His answer made me angry. It still makes me angry.

As a child, I had a vision of tomorrow. A vision of that cobbler boy sitting with me in my classroom.

Now, that tomorrow has become TODAY. I am TODAY, and you are TODAY. TODAY it is time for every child to have a right to life, right to freedom, right to health, right to education, right to safety, the right to dignity, right to equality, and right to peace.

TODAY, beyond the darkness, I see the smiling faces of our children in the blinking stars. TODAY, in every wave of every ocean, I see my children playing and dancing. TODAY, in every plant, in every tree, and mountain, I see our children growing freely with dignity.

Friends, I want *you* to see and feel this TODAY inside you. My dear sisters and brothers, as I said many interesting things are happening today, may I please request you to put your hand close to your heart—close your eyes and feel the child inside you?

I am sure you can—Now, listen to *that* child. Listen please.

Today, I see thousands of Mahatma Gandhis, Martin Luther Kings, and Nelson Mandelas calling on us.

Let us democratise knowledge.

Let us universalise justice.

Together, *let us globalise compassion!*

I call upon you in this room, and all across the world.

I call for a march from exploitation to education, I call for a march from poverty to shared prosperity, a march from slavery to liberty, and a march from violence to peace.

ਭੋਜਵ ਤਫ਼ਾਕ ਹੰਤਲੰਘ ਜੰਤੋਵ ਤਫ਼ਾ ਰਲਵਜਪਤ ਹੰਤਲੰਘ ਤਫ਼ਾਜਲਵਤ ਤਫ਼ਾ ਤਫ਼ਾਜਮਿ ਹੰਤਲੰਘ

Let us march from ignorance to awakening. Let us march from darkness to light. Let us march from mortality to divinity.

Let us march!

Portrait photo of Kailash Satyarthi by photographer Thomas Widerberg.