

Remarks of the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, at the launching of the Goa Dialogues, at the International Centre Goa, India on 28 December 2007

I am very happy to have this opportunity to visit the International Center, which in less than 20 years, has come to occupy a prominent place in the intellectual life of our country, and I congratulate all those who had been instrumental in ensuring that this centre does come up to the expectations of its founding fathers.

We live in an age where there is so much intolerance, hatred and distress and it is incumbent on scholars to use their intellect to build bridges among communities, among peoples, among countries, among continents. As I see the world there is a great paradox: on the one hand modern science and technology have opened to us enormous opportunities for abolishing poverty from the face of this earth. Never before in human history has it been possible, as it is now, to get rid of chronic poverty, ignorance and diseases which still afflict millions and millions of people in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

At the same time there are new tensions which seek to derail the process of cohesion, the process of integration and the process of inclusive development. Terrorism is the latest manifestation of the great divide that now afflicts our world. I do sincerely believe that no idea can be simply set aside or can be ignored if there are people with evil ideas. It is the role of the intellectual communities all over the world to grapple with that reality.

Winston Churchill once said “the empires of the future are going to be the empires of the mind”. Therefore, scholars everywhere have an obligation to promote the process of dialogue and discussion and to encourage diplomacy to find meaningful and peaceful solutions to the numerous problems which the world faces today.

It is in this context that your new experiment of the *Goa Dialogues* is of great significance.

If within our own country there are forces of intolerance which seek to divide our people on the basis of religion, caste, and creed at least in some parts of the country some communities feel threatened. If we are faithful to the values which underline the great constitution that the founding fathers of our republic had bequeath to us then we must fight and fight hard these divisive tendencies in the same way there are tensions

arising out of uneven development. Non-inclusive development have left some regions behind development processes and have not touched the life of some communities particularly in the whole tribal belt of central India where, I think, great tensions have arisen out of uneven development.

When we look at South Asia democracy everywhere faces great danger. Only last night we saw the horror of the brutal assassination of one of the most promising and prominent leaders of Pakistan who was committed to moderation and to strengthening democracy and I note with great appreciation her recent utterance of trying to promote understanding, goodwill, and friendship between India and Pakistan.

The ultimate foundations of policies are laid in the minds of the people who make the critical decisions of our nation's life and it is therefore very important that those who make these critical decisions should have access to the best possible information and the best available knowledge so that when they take decisions on behalf of their countries they do the best that they are capable of. It is in this context that the role of the intellectual communities in our country assumes great importance. They are the path-finders who must lead us forward from ignorance into light, from hatred to promotion of goodwill.

I recall when I took my degree more than fifty years ago the convocation address was delivered by no less a person then Dr. S. Radhakrishnan who quoted a couplet which I still remember from his convocation address when talking about the need to promote tolerance and mutual goodwill: "there is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us that it really behooves any of us to find fault with the rest of us".

Our country, our region of South Asia needs men and women who are committed to promoting goodwill, understanding, reconciliation and inclusive patterns of development. I am very happy that this great centre has undertaken this task very seriously. The Goa Dialogues are going to be path finders and I therefore join all of you in congratulating the board-of-trustees for scaling more heights for setting more goals for the progress of this great centre.

I take this opportunity to wish all of you a very Happy New Year.