

PM's address at the presentation ceremony of Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development

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The President of India, Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil presented the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development – 2008 to Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, Director General, International Atomic Energy Agency in New Delhi today for his impassioned opposition to the use of nuclear energy for military purpose. The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh addressed the gathering on the occasion.

Following is the text of the Prime Minister's address:

“It is a matter of great pleasure to speak at this function which seeks to felicitate Dr Mohamed ElBaradei with the prestigious Indira Gandhi Prize.

This award was instituted in the memory of one of the greatest leaders of India and indeed the modern world. Mrs. Indira Gandhi had an enlightened vision of human progress that grew from her deeply held belief in higher civilizational values cherished by all men and women. She was a powerful voice of the poor and the downtrodden and worked ceaselessly for an international order based on the principle of equality of all nations. In her personal life and work she embodied enormous strength, goodness and grace – human qualities that endeared her to fellow countrymen and inspired people all over the world.

It is therefore befitting that the Indira Gandhi Prize honours those who have made significant contributions to peace, disarmament and development – causes that were so dear to Indiraji.

Today, we honor with this Award a very distinguished diplomat, a scholar, an international civil servant of the highest order and a world statesman. As the Director General of the IAEA since 1998, Dr Mohamed ElBaradei has brought about a fundamental transformation in the way we look at atomic energy. The Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 recognised the efforts of Dr. ElBaradei and the IAEA in ensuring that nuclear energy for peaceful purposes is used in the safest possible manner.

Nuclear energy is vital to meeting our energy and developmental needs, particularly those of large developing countries like India. The applications of nuclear energy in agriculture, medicine and industry have also enormous potential. We need the concerted and collective efforts of the world community to promote the peaceful uses of nuclear energy as widely as possible. Its benefits should not remain confined to a privileged few.

The growth of nuclear energy must go hand in hand with measures to reduce and eliminate risks of its misuse. We should work to strengthen public trust and confidence in issues related to nuclear safety and security.

The IAEA and its Statute weave together these important factors. The international community has a vital stake in strengthening global energy security through the use of nuclear energy as a clean, safe and sustainable energy source. So we should spare no effort in providing the necessary support to the IAEA to perform its functions as provided in its Statute.

India's long-standing relationship with the IAEA has been spotless. We are committed to providing all the necessary support for the Agency to perform its designated role and functions to facilitate the expansion of nuclear energy.

The IAEA is a technical organization with a justifiable reputation for its competence and fair independence. But it does not work in isolation. During the past decade, the Agency has had to work in a complex international environment.

It is a testimony to Dr Mohamed ElBaradei's vision, his integrity and his leadership that the Agency has emerged stronger over the years and is now seen as an indispensable international institution.

The role of the IAEA is bound to grow in the years ahead not just in the traditional areas of nuclear energy and applications, but also in helping nations secure themselves against other nuclear dangers, such as those posed by terrorists gaining access to nuclear materials.

Dr ElBaradei has been a vocal champion of nuclear disarmament. He has played an invaluable role in generating the current positive momentum in the ongoing international debate on nuclear disarmament.

He has also spoken eloquently about global efforts at poverty reduction and conflict resolution and shown a deep understanding of the intrinsic links between peace, disarmament and development, ideas which were so dear to Smt. Indira Gandhi's heart.

The successful conclusion of India's civil nuclear initiative was in no small measure due to the enlightened approach of Dr ElBaradei to the issues involved. I would like to convey to him the heartfelt appreciation of the Government and people of India. India is now poised for a major expansion of its nuclear programme in which international cooperation will be an important component.

A major milestone in this process was the conclusion of India's safeguards agreement and its Additional Protocol with the IAEA. This gives India the possibility of additionally accessing a whole range of technologies and resources from the rest of the world. It also enables the global nuclear industry to benefit from India's technical and industrial expertise.

In conclusion, I congratulate Dr. ElBaradei on the award of the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development. I take this opportunity to wish him a long and productive life and one of continuing service to humankind."