

*Welcome address by Mrs Sonia Gandhi, Chairperson, Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust, at the award of the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development to Dr M ElBaradei on Wednesday, September 30, 2009 at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi.*

I am delighted to welcome Dr Mohamed ElBaradei who is here to receive the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development.

In a month's time, it will be a quarter of a century since Indira Gandhi was so cruelly taken away from us. Yet, she remains a powerful presence, revered by our people, and remembered most vividly as a tireless champion of the poor and a fearless protector of India's national interest.

This award recognizes the outstanding contributions of men and women from across the globe in areas of profound interest to Indira Gandhi, areas in which she also influenced the public discourse. Among her many facets, the world saw in her an unrelenting advocate for the right of developing countries to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and an influential voice against nuclear proliferation and for global nuclear disarmament.

Dr ElBaradei, few people have done more than you in recent times to give shape to these very principles. No one who cares about the crucial role played by atomic energy in today's world can feel anything but admiration for your stewardship of the International Atomic Energy Agency since 1997. You have long had the support and good wishes of all of us in India, particularly in your efforts to fight for the independence of your organization during a turbulent time in world affairs. Your extraordinary contributions at its helm have been recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in 2005 and by the Governments who elected you to three terms at the head of the IAEA.

In its citation the Nobel Committee praised your "efforts to prevent nuclear energy from being used for military purposes and to ensure that nuclear energy for peaceful purposes is used in the safest possible way." These are objectives dear to the hearts of most Indians, and we join the world in rejoicing at the recognition you so rightly received. Your belief that the challenges of non-proliferation can be met without denying the legitimate aspirations of the developing nations -- who desire to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes -- ensured that the IAEA was an instrument of consensus rather than conflict.

We are also appreciative of your consistently constructive attitude to India's views on issues of nuclear energy. You have approached our country with genuine respect for our stand. Your wise and far-seeing conduct on this and so many other issues makes you an inspiring example of what can be achieved in an international organization through a combination of political astuteness and skillful management.

You have distinguished yourself by being direct and forthright in advocating your beliefs, standing up for your judgements and advocating your convictions. Fittingly, in its citation, the Nobel Committee described you as an "unafraid advocate".

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was also an unafraid advocate of what she believed to be right. It is all the more fitting, therefore, that you receive today the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development. My warmest congratulations to you, and best wishes for whatever you undertake when you relinquish the demanding duties you have so admirably fulfilled.