Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentleman

It is a great honor for my country the Czech Republic and myself to commemorate with all of you the International Day of Non Violence and the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi.

A few weeks ago, when my honorable colleague, the Ambassador of India Asoke Mukerji spoke to me about this important commemorative event, he mentioned the strong bondbetween the philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and our ex president and leader Václav Havel.

The connection between them is more than natural and obvious. But I have to say that only during the preparation of this speech I realized how much in common, at the first moment invisible, these two historically and personally relatively distant thinkers, fighters, prisoners and politicians have and what links them together.

In our history many Czechs were fascinated by Mahatma Gandhi’s charisma and his highest moral standards, by how he always put his personality and an individual example into his engagements. And precisely this was something that caused the then communist regime in my country great problems. Because this regime tried to drown all the individuality,

even it’s own, in the respective communist ideology.

Mahatma Gandhi was therefore for many years presented in my country only as a fighter against colonization and advocate of the poorest. His thoughts about human rights, faith and religious tolerance were largely played down.

Interestingly, the first unbiased book about Mahatma Gandhi, without any visible interventions of communist censorship, appeared in the Czechoslovak bookstores shelves in early 1989.

And it is also symbolic that the first motto of the Czech Velvet Revolution has become a chant of students encircled by the police forces at the Prague National Street the November 17th, 1989, "We have bare hands". During that very evening, still, the force defeated the idea, and those who had no bare hands, who bore arms, surely enjoyed their victory. But they certainly did not know it was their last victory. After a week in the streets, there was such a mass of people that scared not only the police, but even the army was afraid.

And this is the momentum when the power of the powerless was changing into the helplessness of those in power.

I can not omit that Mahatma Gandhi was a contemporary of Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, the first Czech president, president founder and liberator. The common thinking that links bought of them is the idea that any political struggle is based on small individual work.

I must recall Professor Patočka, the ideological father of Charter 77, who in his theoretical studies referred to Mahatma Gandhi. On the occasion of the death of Professor Patočka, Václav Havel wrote his most important political essay, Power of the Powerless, which became the ideological basis for the formation of dissident structures. Their fight and mainly their personal example led Czechs to a peaceful transition to democracy.

It should be noted that Mahatma Gandhi by his engagement inspired also the second generation of Czech dissidents. For example Mr. Stanislav Devátý, who by his hunger strikes and disappearances to the illegality brought the secret police of the communist regime to despair.

What was interesting about the newly formulated Czech politics in the 90-ties, was that the thoughts and ideas of Mahatma Gandhi attracted individual politicians from both the left and right of the political spectrum.

Maybe this is the most interesting fact regarding the personalities like Mahatma Gandhi and Václav Havel. As if their engagement, that at the beginning seemed futile to everybody, had been transformed by their personal authority into a force that led to the destruction of the dominant power.

They were able to walk, even when they went by themselves. Their inner strength was much more internally anchored than not only of their opponents, but their supporters observed. It was based in a great power of personal knowledge and education, and multiplied by huge human humility and personal courage. At the moment, when their opponents restricted their personal freedom, they did the worst thing they could, because from the prison returned even stronger adversaries who accepted every turn of their fate as a challenge.

Václav Havel was awarded many times, but as he once said, one of those that he mostly appreciated was the **The Mahatma Gandhi Peace Prize in 2004.** During the ceremony in New Delhi he said:

“Each and every one of us must look within ourselves, and however insignificant our influence on the general march of events may seem to be, strive to contend with both seen and unseen threats to the world. This is the eternally fresh message of Mahatma’s lifelong work and activity.”

There are men that by authority of their personalities exceed their nations to raise the world.

Sometimes it happens, and it is strange, that at the moment, when they begin to understand the world, a part of their nation ceases to understand them.

When in 2010 Václav Havel died, there were condolences coming from all around the world.

His Excellency Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed his sympathies saying that he was the moral voice of his country and his era and that we will miss his truth.

Mahatma Gandhi and Václav Havel are connected by an absolute respect for the truth and for the willingness to endure sacrifice because of it. Men who are willing to die for the truth are particularly needed at a time when it seems that the truth is losing its value. The truth and love do not always automatically create the goodness, but the lies and hatreds automatically generate the malefice.And evil bears violence no matter on which side of the barricade.

Let us celebrate every single day without violence.