

**High Commissioner's remarks on the occasion of
157th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi**
(Wellington, 2nd October, 2026)

Smt Manisha Morar, President, Wellington Indian Association;

Shri Naginbhai Patel, Chair of Pujaya Mahatma Gandhi Birthday Commemoration Committee and its members;

Prof Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Interim Director, New Zealand India Research Institute;

Members of the Indian and Kiwi friends

Namaste and Tena Koutou Katoa

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all today as we commemorate the 157th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation. We began our programme at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi outside Wellington Railway Station on Bunny Street. The statue was gifted by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and was unveiled on 2 October 2007 .

2. The International Day of Non-Violence is observed on 2 October, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the Indian independence movement and pioneer of the philosophy and strategy of non-violence. According to the United Nations General Assembly resolution of 15 June 2007, which established the commemoration, the International Day is an occasion to "disseminate the message of non-violence, including through education and public awareness". The resolution reaffirms "the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence" and the desire "to secure a culture of peace, tolerance, understanding and non-violence".

3. The Mahatma said "Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man". His message is ever more relevant today as we face wars, conflict and uncertainty around the world

4. For India, Gandhiji is an integral part of our history. But his message is universal, timeless and was never limited to India. It inspired American Civil Rights movement leader Dr Martin Luther King Junior and South Africa's President Nelson Mandela in his fight against apartheid, to name only a few amongst many and I know his message rings true here in Aotearoa with his statue prominently placed in Wellington. Gandhiji's guiding principles of Ahimsa (non-violence), Satyagraha (force born of truth) and Sarvodaya (upliftment of all) remain as relevant today as they were a century ago. Government of India has translated his core philosophies into comprehensive national programmes that address the very issues he championed. Some of them are Khadi and Village Industries, Self-Help Groups and most recently Swachh Bharat Mission

5. Government of India, including Indian Missions around the world annually observe Seva Pakhwada from 17 September, a nationwide fortnight-long service campaign, which concludes today on Gandhi Jayanti. This year we partnered once again with Wellington Indian Association to celebrate Viksit Bharat Run, with the tagline "Run to Serve the Nation" around Evans Bay as a 3 km community run, a cleanliness drive titled "Ek Din, Ek Ghanta, Ek Saath" and planting tree saplings under "Ek Ped Maa ke Naam."

6. Gandhiji has made a profound impact on my own life. He is my moral compass that I draw inspiration from when facing important decisions and challenges. In my previous assignment, I worked closely with the United Nations in New York, Vienna and Geneva. Outside the United Nations Palace of Nations headquarters in Geneva, I would pay my respects to Gandhiji's statue which has his saying inscribed "My life is my message". What stands out clearest to me from any of Gandhiji's sayings is that he lived what he preached. As we remember Gandhiji today, perhaps the most meaningful way to honour him is not only by paying our respects to him once a year. It

is by emulating his life and putting his words into practice. It can be something very simple.

Choosing to do the right thing even when no one is looking

Leaving the place cleaner than when we arrived

Plant a tree sapling

Listening to someone with a different opinion.

Helping a person who needs support.

Encouraging young people to participate.

Respecting people from different backgrounds.

Choosing dialogue when there is a disagreement.

7. These may look like small steps, but an impactful society is built brick by brick through such small actions. Today is an occasion for all of us to reaffirm our resolve to live by the values and ideals espoused by Mahatma Gandhi.

8. On this occasion, let us also reflect on the kind of society we want to create for the next generation.

I would like to thank you all for marking this very important occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's 157th Birth Anniversary with us.

Dhanyavaad

Jai Hind!
