

**REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
ON THE OCCASION OF UNVEILING OF THE BUST OF  
MAHATMA GANDHI AT VILLENEUVE, SWITZERLAND**

**Villeneuve, September 14, 2019**

1. I thank you for your warm and traditional welcome. I am honoured to unveil the bust of Mahatma Gandhi in Villeneuve. This year we are celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the Father of Our Nation. I thank the Commune of Villeneuve for giving us the opportunity to celebrate his legacy here and for naming this Square after him.
2. Mahatma Gandhi shared special connection with this beautiful town. He visited Villeneuve in 1931 at the invitation of Noble laureate Romain Rolland. Those, of course, were different times. India was still fighting for its independence led by the Mahatma. His teachings, though, continue to be relevant today, as much as then. The United Nations quite fittingly observes 2 October each year, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, as the International Day of Non-Violence.
3. Mahatma Gandhi's life teaches us many things. He built his first hermitage in India on the banks of River Sabarmati. Today, we have brought him to the banks of Lake Geneva. You have given him a special place, close to nature and close to your hearts. It is a fitting tribute to a man who loved nature and cared so much for it. His legacy shall inspire us as we work together to tackle climate change and to conserve our ecology.
4. Mahatma Gandhi believed in the oneness of humanity. He embraced all cultures and all peoples. He listened to Hindu religious songs and western classical music with equal ease and understanding. In Villeneuve, Romain Rolland played Beethoven for him. They had long conversations on the Great War that had ravaged Europe and how peace could be secured for future generations. As two democracies with deep respect for diversity,

Mahatma Gandhi shall continue to guide us in our shared journey to bring peace and joy for one and all.

5. Gandhian thought has yet another connection with you. The communes have a distinct social and political role in Swiss democratic polity. It is very much similar to the way Mahatma Gandhi laid down his concept of Gram Swaraj or Village Republics.
6. Last year, we celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the India-Switzerland Treaty of Friendship signed in 1948. This was the first Treaty of Friendship that India signed as an independent nation. The seed of amity that we sowed then, has today grown into a luxuriant tree of mutual trust, cooperation and understanding.
7. I once again thank the commune of Villeneuve and all those who have contributed in organizing this special event.

Thank you.