

Statement by the Indian Delegation at the closing session (Bandung, 24 April 1955)

Caption: At the closing session on 24 April 1955, the Indian Delegation celebrates the success of the Bandung Conference as regards the right of self-determination of colonised peoples.

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Statement by the Indian delegation at the closing session (Bandung, 17-24 April 1955)

Mr. President,

For seven days we have been in this pleasant city of Bandung, and Bandung has been the focal centre — perhaps I might even say the capital, of Asia and Africa during this period.

All the world's eyes have been upon us. We have laboured for these seven days, as you all know, and we have wrestled with many problems and we have come to certain conclusions that have been placed before you. Why did we meet? Some persons called the Prime Ministers of five countries invited you. Do you think that is the reason why you met? They were the conscious or unconscious agents of other forces. We met because there is an irrepressible urge amongst the people of Asia and Africa for us to meet. We met because mighty forces are at work in these great continents moving millions of people, creating a ferment in their minds, and urges and passions and a desire for a change from their present conditions. So, however big or small we might be, we represented these great forces. We met. What have we achieved? Well, you have seen the draft statement which has been read out to you and I think it represents a considerable achievement. Other delegates have referred to it and you'll read it. But I should like to draw your attention, to direct your minds, not to that statement which is an important statement, but rather to the imponderables, to the fact that we have met and gathered here from thousands of miles, conferred together, seen each other, and in spite of all manner of differences and arguments, made friends with each other.

My friend, the Prime Minister of Burma, referred to our diversities of opinion as our differences and our arguments. We wrestled with each other these many days because we were not all of the same opinion. Because, obviously, the world looks different from where you are. If you are sitting in the Far East of Asia, you have a different perspective of the world and the world's problems. If you are sitting in the Far West of Asia, you have a different perspective again, and if you are in Africa, naturally the problems of Africa overwhelm you. So, we all came with our own perspectives, with our own problems, considering each one, no doubt, his own problem the most important in the world, but, at the same time, trying to understand that big problem, that is the problem of the world; and the second big problem, that is the problem of Asia and Africa, and trying somehow to fit in our little problems in this larger context because in the ultimate analysis all our little problems, however important they might be, are part of this larger problem and can hardly be solved unless that larger problem is tackled and solved. How will you solve this problem or that problem if peace itself is endangered and thrown overboard? Obviously, you cannot. The very primary consideration is peace. You and I sitting here in our respective countries are passionately eager to advance our countries peacefully. We have been backward; we are backward. We have been left behind in the race, in the world race, and now we have got a chance again to make good. We want to make good and we have to make good rapidly because of the compulsion of events. It is not so much a choice of yours and mine, but a choice dictated by this compulsion of events, because if we do not make good, we fade away or we stumble and fall again, not to rise again for a long time. We are not going to do that; we are determined not to do that. We are determined in this new chapter of Asia and Africa to make good. Not, primarily, not to be dominated in any way by any other country or continent. Secondly to rise in the economic domain, in the social domain; to become prosperous, to bring happiness to our people. To put an end to all the age-old shackles that have tied us; not only political — you call them colonialism, rightly — but the other shackles of our own making, which are tighter.

We criticised other nations in our resolutions, and it is a fact that criticism is just; therefore we advanced it. But in the final analysis the criticism has to be directed against ourselves, because a country falls because of its own failings, not because another attacks it or does anything to it. It is because we failed that we fell, and it is only when we make good that we'll succeed, and not all the resolutions in the world make much difference if we are weak of heart and weak of spirit.

But there is yet another spirit of Asia today, as we all know, for Asia today is not static, Asia is not passive, Asia is not submissive, Asia does not tolerate things which it has tolerated for so long. Asia is dynamic; Asia is alive, full of life. Asia will make mistakes, has made mistakes, but it does not matter so long as life is there. If life is there, every mistake is tolerated and we advance. If life is not there, all our right words and

right actions and right eloquence will not hold good. What have we achieved then? I think our achievement has not only been great in the agreements we have arrived at. But much greater is the background of that agreement, because as I said, we wrestled with problems, we have wrestled with our difference, we have argued till we nearly — what shall I say? till fatigue overtook all our bodies and minds. And finally in spite of those differences, we have agreed — that is the main thing. We are not 'yes-men' I hope, sitting here saying "Yes" to this country or that country, saying "Yes" even to each other. I hope we are not. There are great countries in the world who rather like having submissive friends; if I may say so, who like to dictate. Well, if there is one thing which Asia wants to tell them it is this: no dictation there is going to be in future; no 'yes-men' in Asia, I hope, or in Africa. We have had enough of that in the past. We value the friendship of the great countries and, if I may on your part, I should like to say that we send our greetings to the great countries of Europe and America. It is not in any spirit of hatred or dislike or aggressiveness we meet here with regard to Europe or America; certainly not. We send our greetings to them I hope from all of us here, and we want to be friends with them and to cooperate with them. But, we shall only cooperate in future and we shall obviously only be friends and equals; there is no friendship when nations are not equal, when one has to obey another and when one only dominates another. That is why we raise our voices against the domination and colonialism from which many of us have suffered for so long, and that is why we have to be very careful that any other form of domination does not come in our way. Therefore, we want to be friends with the West and friends with the East and friends with everybody, because if there is something that may be called the approach to the mind and spirit of Asia, it is one of toleration and friendship and cooperation; not one of aggressiveness.

I wish to speak no ill of anybody. In Asia all of us have many faults as countries, as individuals. Our past history shows it. Nevertheless, I say that Europe has been in the past a continent full of conflict, full of trouble, full of hatred, and their conflicts continue, and their wars continue, and we have been dragged in their wars because we were tied to their chariot wheels. Now, are we going to continue to be dragged in, and tie ourselves to Europe's troubles and Europe's hatreds and Europe's conflicts? I hope not. Of course, Europe and Asia and America and Africa and all these countries are all dependent on one another. It is perhaps not quite right to think of them as isolated, because we are not isolated; we have to live together and cooperate together in this modern world which is going up toward the idea of a one world. Nevertheless, Europe has got into the habit of thinking and other great countries in America — whatever political or economic persuasion they may be in America or Europe — got into the habit of thinking that their quarrels are the world's quarrels and therefore the world must submit to them this way or that way. Well, I do not quite follow that reasoning. I do not want anybody to quarrel, to quarrel in Europe, or Asia or America, but if at least others quarrel, why should I quarrel and why should I be dragged into their quarrels and wars? I just do not understand it. Therefore, I hope we shall keep away from those quarrels and exercise our pressure on all others not to quarrel. I realise, as the Prime Minister of Burma said, that we cannot exercise tremendous influence over the world. Our influence will grow, no doubt; it is growing, and we can exercise some influence even today. But whether our influence is great or small, it must be exercised in the right direction, in an independent direction, in a direction which has integrity of purpose and ideals and objectives behind it. It represents the ideals of Asia, it represents the new dynamism of Asia, because if it does not represent that, what are we then? Are we copies of Europeans or Americans or Russians? What are we? We are Asians or Africans. We are none else, and for anybody to tell us that we have to be camp-followers of Russia or America or any country of Europe, is, if I may say so, not very creditable to our new dignity, our new independence, our new freedom and our new spirit and our new self-reliance.

So, we mean no ill to anybody. We send our greetings to Europe and America. We send our greetings to Australia and New Zealand. And indeed Australia and New Zealand are almost in our region. They certainly don't belong to Europe, much less to America. They are next to us and I should like indeed for Australia and New Zealand to come nearer to Asia, where they are. I would welcome them, because I do not want what we say or do to be based on racial prejudices. We have had enough of this racialism elsewhere. We have it today, my friends. We have passed many resolutions etc. about this country and that country. But I think that there is nothing more terrible, there is nothing more horrible, than the infinite tragedy of Africa in the past few hundred years. When I think of it everything else pales into insignificance, all that we have had in Asia. That infinite tragedy of Africa ever since the days when millions of them were carried away in galleys as slaves to America and elsewhere; the way they were treated, the way they were caught, the way they were

taken away, 50 per cent dying in the galleys. We have to bear that burden, all of us. We did not do it ourselves I mean, but the world has to bear it. We talk about this little country and that little country in Africa or outside, but let us remember this Infinite Tragedy. But unfortunately, in a different sense, even now the Tragedy of Africa is greater than that of any other, I venture to say, even today. Whether it is racial, whether it is political, whatever it may be, it is there, and it is up to Asia to help Africa, to the best of her ability, because we are sister continents.

So, Sir, I trust that the achievement that we have had in this Conference has left, I am sure it has, a powerful impress on the minds of all who are here. I am quite sure, that it has left an impress on the minds of the world. We came here, I repeat, consciously or unconsciously as agents of historic destiny, and we have made some history here. And we have to live up to what we have said and what we have thought and, even more so, we have to live up to what the world expects of us, what Asia expects of us, what the millions of these two continents expect of us. I hope that we'll be worthy of the peoples' faith and our destiny.