

**Speech by H.E.Venu Rajamony, Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of the
Netherlands on the occasion of Reception hosted to mark the 71st Republic Day of
India
The Grote Kerk, The Hague
[January 27, 2020]**

Hon'ble President of the Senate Prof. Dr. Jan Anthonie Bruijn;
Excellencies, Ambassadors of different countries;
Deputy Mayors of The Hague
Bert van Alphen & Kavita Parbhudayal;
Our special guest from India, Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi;
Former Deputy Mayor Rabin Baldewsingh;
Dignitaries, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

I am extremely happy to welcome all of you this evening for this Reception organized to mark the 71st Republic Day of India.

2. This historic church dates back to the fourteenth century. It has witnessed many important events including the marriages of Queen Wilhelmina and Prince Hendrik and Princess Juliana and Prince Bernhard, as well as the baptism of Princess Beatrix and then Prince now King Willem-Alexander. Considering the close connection the Church has with Dutch Royalty, we are happy to present this evening an exhibition on the recent State Visit to India by Their Majesties King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima, which I hope all of you will enjoy.

3. Mr President, it is a great privilege to have you amidst us today. You preside over a 205 year old institution which sits in one of the oldest Parliament buildings in the world still in use. You would be happy to know that the Republic Day marks the day the people of India adopted, enacted and gave unto themselves the Indian Constitution in the year 1950. India is popularly known as the world's largest democracy and it is this Constitution which has made possible our parliamentary system. What we celebrate today is the fact that our country is governed by the rule of law with fundamental freedoms guaranteed for our citizens.

4. India is proud of her democracy. Over 670 million people voted in the election to our lower house of Parliament in May last year. At the same time, we are clear that the true meaning of democracy is not limited to the periodic conduct of elections. Democracy has to become a living reality for the 1.3 billion people of our diverse country which is home to every religion in the world, where 22 major languages are spoken and every state and region is an autonomous culture with its own traditions, dress and food habits. The Preamble to our Constitution states that the purpose of the Republic is to secure for its citizens, social, economic and political justice; liberty of

thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and opportunity and to promote amongst its people, fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and unity of the nation. Every Republic Day reminds us of our responsibility to constantly work towards these ideals and strive to realize them in each nook and corner of our vast country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. I am happy in this context that joining us today is Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, a man who has devoted his entire life to fighting exploitation of children and campaigning for their rights. Mr. Satyarthi represents the best of Indian civil society and in a democratic society, civil society plays an extremely important role as a sentinel, watch dog and conscience keeper. India's vibrant civil society adds lustre to our democracy.

6. Friends, we meet today amidst difficult times. Conflict and tensions rage in many parts of the world. Global economic growth has slowed down and trade tensions simmer. The havoc caused by recent bushfires in Australia is a dire warning to all of us about the dangerous effects of climate change. The whole world is watching with bated breath how far the Coronavirus will spread and how soon, it will be brought under control. No country is free from the dangers of extremism, radicalization and terrorism nor have we overcome hunger, intolerance, prejudice and exploitation of women and children.

7. Addressing global challenges requires determined collective efforts and greater international cooperation. In this regard, India-Netherlands relations stand out as a success story. Our ties have never been as good as they are now. The highly successful State Visit of Their Majesties King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima in October last year, took place in continuation of two visits to India by Prime Minister Mark Rutte in 2015 and 2018 and a visit to the Netherlands by Prime Minister Modi in 2017. Their Majesties were accompanied on their visit to India by four ministers and a 250 member Trade Mission, one of the largest ever to go from the Netherlands to any foreign country. The Mission attended the first ever Technology Summit between India and the Netherlands and held wide ranging discussions with Indian counterparts across various sectors. High level exchanges in 2019 also included visits to the Netherlands by Chief Ministers of two important states of India, as well as our Foreign Minister.

8. A strong foundation for rapid progress in the coming years has been laid through these visits and interaction at various levels. The Netherlands has consistently been one of the largest investors in India and last year it was the third largest investor with investments of around US\$ 3.87 billion. Indian companies are also investing in

the Netherlands in a significant manner. Total investments from India in the Netherlands was estimated at over US\$ 12 billion, as of March 2018. India sees the Netherlands as an economic powerhouse. Sectors like water management, agriculture, and the maritime sector where the Dutch have world class expertise are exactly the areas where our rapidly growing, 2.9 trillion dollar economy has maximum needs.

9. Ladies and gentlemen, on a personal note, this is the last Republic Day reception my wife and will host in the Netherlands. We are extremely grateful for the love and affection we have received in this country as well as the enthusiastic support for all our initiatives. It was a great honour to have my book on India and the Netherlands released at Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam last September with His Majesty King Willem-Alexander receiving the first copy. Last year, a large number of people from all walks of life, including Dutch armed forces, enthusiastically participated in the biggest ever Yoga Day celebrations held on the Dam Square, Amsterdam. The Gandhi March for non-violence initiated by the Embassy in 2017 is now a regular feature on the annual calendar of this wonderful, multicultural city of The Hague – the city of peace and justice. Our outreach programme to schools disseminating the message of non-violence received great support. Further, I am grateful to C Post of Curacao for bringing out recently a special postage Stamp to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. India greatly values its ties with Aruba, Curacao and St. Maarten on the far reaches of the Kingdom, where Indians and people of Indian origin form an important part of society and in particular, the business community.

10. Friends, if at all there is an area of tension between India and the Netherlands, it is only in the hockey field. I hope our Dutch friends will forgive us for beating them last week in the FIH Pro League Men's Hockey Tournament in India.

11. Much has been accomplished and yet much remains to be done. There exists great scope for India and the Netherlands to work together in the coming days for mutual benefit and for building a world of our dreams, based on common values.

12. The great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, author of our national anthem and the first Asian to win a Nobel Prize for Literature, visited the Netherlands in 1920. He quickly acquired a fan following in this country for his poetry, as well as important message of an underlying unity amongst all religions.

13. Let me conclude reading the lines of his well known poem written for India, but which applies to the whole world and is more relevant than ever.

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments

By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

Thank you, Jai Hind

[January 27, 2020]