

**ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE CONFERMENT OF HONORARY DOCTORATE
BY AL QUDS UNIVERSITY**

**October 13, 2015
Ramallah**

Hon'ble Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Rami Hamdallah,
Hon'ble Minister of Education, His Excellency Mr. Sabri Saidam,
Hon'ble President of the Al-Quds University Mr. Imad Abu Kishek,
Members of the Faculty and the academic community,
Distinguished guests,

I thank the President of the Al-Quds University for his generous words. I would like to begin by reciprocating his warm sentiments. I am touched by the gesture of this prestigious University in conferring upon me an Honorary Doctorate. I value it as a sign of friendship and regard of the people of Palestine for the people of India and for me. I accept this honour with deep humility in my capacity as President of India and on behalf of its people.

2. I thank the Presidents and senior representatives of all the universities in Palestine, the Minister of Education and the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Mr. Rami Hamdallah and to convey to them that I am proud to be associated with this premier institution of higher education.

3. I am aware that this University has contributed significantly towards the pursuit of academic excellence. In this, it has been inspired by the vision that only an educated and enlightened citizenry can safeguard the future of Palestine. Your pursuit of scientific knowledge and advanced research places this University at the centre of Palestine's national development programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

4. I am in Palestine on the first ever State Visit by an Indian President. It is therefore a great privilege for me to have this opportunity of visiting you. My visit reflects the keen interest of India in further deepening the rich and historic relationship that we have with Palestine.

5. India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its principled support to the Palestinian cause is rooted in our own freedom struggle.

Over the years our approach to Palestine crystallized into a policy with three core dimensions: solidarity with the Palestinian people; support to the Palestinian cause; and support to Palestine's nation building and capacity building efforts. The entire Indian political leadership remains steadfastly committed to these policies.

6. India has always been at the forefront in promoting the Palestinian cause – India voted against the partition of Palestine at the United Nations General Assembly in 1947. We recognized the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974; India was the first non-Arab country to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. We spearheaded the campaign for recognition of Palestinian statehood by the UN in 2012 . India supported the successful resolution for flying the Palestinian flag at the UN Headquarters last month. We congratulate the people of Palestine on the momentous unfurling of their national flag at the United Nations - for the first time in history - on September 30, 2015.

7. Ladies and Gentlemen, India had co-sponsored a draft resolution on "the right of Palestinians to self-determination" during the 53rd session of the UN General Assembly. India then voted in favour of UN General Assembly Resolution in October 2003 against construction of the separation wall by Israel and supported subsequent resolutions of the UNGA in this regard. India voted in favour of accepting Palestine as a full member of UNESCO.

8. These strong foundations and our shared belief in peace, prosperity and development for the people of Palestine propel us to do more . One of the aims of my visit to Palestine is to suggest a framework for the future of our relationship. While we continue to follow our traditional policy on Palestine, we see that the framework of our partnership can be reinforced through three principal pillars. These are:

First, closer political interaction;

Second, deeper economic engagement and academic collaboration;

Third, wider cultural contacts and people-to-people exchanges.

9. India shares the perception that the Palestinian issue is at the center of Arab-Israeli conflict. Peace and stability in the region is in India's interest. Today the speed with which an event happening in one place of the world triggers a response in another, is unprecedented in terms of its impact and scale. Maintaining regular contacts at all levels is, therefore, important. There are a number of areas of convergence in our relationship which we may step up further by intensifying our

exchange of information. At the multilateral level, we have already started the process with the League of Arab States.

10. Ladies and Gentlemen, the expansion of our economic ties will surely present great new opportunities. I know that brand India is popular here and inspires trust. Government of India's 'Make in India' scheme welcomes all of you to manufacture in India. India can facilitate your journey from being consumers to manufacturers. We are confident of the abundant talent and entrepreneurship of the Palestinian people. Apart from our bilateral trade in goods, there is vast scope for trade in services. India's strength in IT and IT-enabled services as well as consultancy can pave the way for greater engagement in the IT sector. I had the privilege to inaugurate the India-Palestine Center for Excellence in ICT today. It will have a satellite centre in Ramallah and forward linkages with industry. India will build a similar Center in Gaza. We look forward to the success of the Techno-Park in Ramallah. It will be jointly built and operated by the Palestine Investment Fund and the Indian public and private sector.

Friends,

11. India has always been happy to partner Palestine in promoting education. Over the years, around 12,000 Palestinian students have graduated from Indian Universities, many of them on scholarships offered by the Government of India. Today, these students serve as a bridge between our two countries.

12. It is also a good sign that scholarships offered by the ICCR are usually utilized in full by Palestine. It gives me great pleasure to announce that my Government has decided to increase the number of these scholarships from 10 to 25 per annum.

13. I also take this opportunity to announce the setting up of an India-Chair in the Al Quds University.

14. Friends, India is proud to have built the Jawaharlal Nehru Library at the Al Azhar University in Gaza city; and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College at Deir Al Balah in Gaza. We are glad to have built the Jawaharlal Nehru Secondary School for Girls in Asira Al-Shamaliya. Today, I will inaugurate the Jawaharlal Nehru Secondary School for Boys in Abu Dees. India is also happy to have equipped seven Vocational Training Centres in Palestine.

15. I have noted with satisfaction the successful conclusion of the first ever India-Palestine Academic Round Table this morning. I recognise the contributions made by H'ble Minister of Education H.E. Mr. Sabri Saidam, Presidents of the different Palestinian Universities and the representatives of premier Indian universities in making this event a success. This interaction marks a quantum leap in our academic relations. MoUs signed today will facilitate our continued engagement and pave the way for joint R&D and innovation, student and faculty exchanges etc. As Visitor of 114 central institutes of higher learning in India, I am aware of their enthusiasm for global partnerships.

16. India has long been committed to the capacity building efforts of Palestine under the ITEC scholarship Programme. As of date, 760 Palestinian nationals have availed training under this scheme. I am happy to announce that the Government of India has increased the ITEC slots for Palestine from 50 to 100 per annum.

17. We welcome the interest of our Palestinian friends in Indian culture and, particularly in Yoga. Both our peoples cherish the fact that our cultural connections go back to our ancient history. The Indian Hospice located in East Jerusalem bears testimony to this fact. We look forward to strengthening these ancient linkages.

18. With these words, I once again thank the Al Quds University for bestowing upon me this honour. I look forward to your continued friendship and fruitful exchanges with India. The youth of Palestine are the future leaders of this country. May you flourish and take your nation to new heights of progress and prosperity. I wish all of you every success in your academic careers and a very bright future.

Thank you!

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