

**Interactive Dialogue on Harmony with Nature
On the occasion Of Tenth Mother Earth Day**

**Statement by
Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin
Permanent Representative**

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President of the General Assembly, Her Excellency María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés,

Excellency, Deputy Minister of Environment, Biodiversity, Climate Change and Forest Management and Development of Ecuador,

Permanent Representative of Bolivia,

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by wishing everyone a Happy Mother Earth Day. I also congratulate the Plurinational state of Bolivia for having championed the quest for harmony of the earth and its ecosystems that nourish our lives and provide us with sustenance.

2. Observance of the Earth Day provides all the opportunity to raise public awareness around the world to the challenges, to the well-being of the planet, and all the life it supports.

Madam President,

3. Scientist once ridiculed the idea of a living planet, not any more. The Earth today is just as alive as you are. In case any of you have doubts about it, I would suggest you to read the New York Times of yesterday, a very interesting article about Earth being as alive as you and I are.

4. Let me thank the President of the General Assembly for her stewardship in convening this interactive dialogue on the theme, “Mother Earth: Education and Climate Change”.

5. Many ancient cultures tell us how communities lived in harmony with nature with a tradition of reverence for elements that constitute the eco-system, drawing their sustenance from natural resources, while protecting the environment that sustains them.

6. The ethos of India’s civilisation has always been one of living in harmony with nature. The oldest visual image of human fascination, love and reverence for nature in India can be found in 10,000 year-old cave paintings at Bhimbetka, in Central India, depicting birds, animals, and human beings living in harmony. Historically, conservation of nature and natural resources was an innate aspect of the Indian psyche and faith.

7. One example of traditional practice in India, which has made a profound contribution to conservation in our villages, has been the maintenance of patches of land or forests as “sacred groves” dedicated to a local deity and is thereby protected.

Madam President,

8. Inculcation of such values of reverence and commitment through education, to each successive generation, is supportive of a sustainable future for our planet and ensuring our own survival.

9. We see the discussion today as an opportunity for reminding ourselves of the need to live in harmony with nature and for placing this unique concept as part of the global discourse on sustainable development.

10. Recognising the importance of an educated global population to address Climate Change, that Article 6 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is wholly dedicated to education, training, public awareness and access to information related to climate change.

11. A UNESCO report titled, “Education for people and crisis caused by human behaviour”, released in 2016, has laid bare how education shapes values and perspectives.

12. There is no doubt that an educated and aware population that is sensitized to its planetary footprint will be better equipped and more disposed to addressing the problems of the planet. We witness that the millennials are much more tuned to the environmental issues, precisely because of the education that they received. In due course, they are likely to have a bigger impact.

Madam President,

13. In India, historically knowledge passed through traditional and informal means has been the process for inculcating the values to revere mother earth.

14. However, in recent years, India has taken on more active policies for environment and climate education. In 1991, the Supreme Court of India provided directives on environmental education and in 2003, it issued directives to educational institutions across the country, laying down the compulsory mainstreaming of environment education. The landmark judgment resulted in over 300 million students in 1.3 million schools and over 600 universities having compulsory lessons on environment and climate change in their curriculum.

15. Outdoor time, hands-on activities, and discussion of the social and economic aspects of humanity’s relationship with the natural world, are all integral parts of environmental education.

16. Going forward, education and equipping rural and urban communities to build resilience against natural disasters, adapt to environmental changes, and manage potential risk, cannot be confined to classrooms. Non-school initiatives need to take over. For example, the "Science Express Climate Action Special" is an innovative mobile science exhibition, mounted on a 16-coach train, which is a unique collaborative initiative of India’s Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

(MoEFCC) and Ministry of Railway. Over a decade, it has been visited by more than 15 million school children as it travelled over 142,000 km, all over India.

17. Also, literary writers need to focus on climate change issues in children's literature. Mainstream films can consider ways to incorporate key aspects of climate change in their stories. Further, as gaming apps gain popularity, such apps can integrate climate change issues as themes.

18. These are all different means of educating different segments of populations about environmental sustainability and the impacts of climate change on food, water, nutrition and health.

Madam President,

19. Facts are easy to ignore, but experiences are not. We need to heed to this wisdom and revamp climate education to become more personal and experiential, and that too in smart, innovative and fun ways.

20. Education and climate action work together in several ways. Education fills knowledge gaps; it challenges apathy towards the need for climate action and education furnishes across a broader base, the technical knowledge needed to build a better future through innovation - one that includes clean and safe energy, sustainable agriculture and smarter cities.

21. In short, education is an asset and a force multiplier for Climate Action. It advances climate change awareness, risk perception, climate adaptation and mitigation goals.

22. Fortunately, there are growing indications that the next generation is better educated and more committed to reducing their own carbon footprint than our generation was. Efforts focusing on education will hopefully make them and all of us act more quickly to address the causes of Climate Change; make us more willing to mitigate the damage it can cause and help us make greater efforts to adapt to its effects.

23. I thank you for providing me the opportunity to join in this endeavor.
