

Nomoskar!  
Bienvenidos!  
Welcome!

My Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Leadership Group, it is my great honor and privilege to welcome you all to this historic gathering; the inaugural Congress of *Edmund Rice Education Beyond Borders*.

This is a dream come true! El sueño se ha hecho realidad!

We welcome you all, from every part of the world; from 21 countries; unique and rich cultures where Catholic education, inspired by Jesus and Edmund Rice, makes a difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of young people.

We come from every corner of the globe, united by the common belief that we touch the future by the quality of guidance and care we give to emerging generations.

The paths we have walked to this point have been shaped by the diverse realities of our local communities. We come together at this Congress to consider what maps are needed for the next leg of the journey; a journey we commit to undertaking together.

Thank you for your efforts in coming here to India. We acknowledge that for some, your presence has come only after much sacrifice for you, your families and your communities. Your trust in the possibility and potential of this gathering is deeply appreciated and will be abundantly rewarded I am sure.

Allow me to offer some words to our Latin American sisters and brothers who may be challenged by English (just as we may be challenged by Spanish!)

Queridos amigos. Gracias por haber confiado en el potencial de este proyecto. Ojala que las dificultades del idioma no afecten el poder de la experiencia compartida. La historia del carisma de Edmundo Rice en Latina América, tiene tanto para enseñar al resto del mundo. Es una voz que necesita ser escuchada en este Congreso. Bienvenidos y gracias de todo corazón!

Friends, we gather for our Congress in incredible India! A vast and diverse land of so many contrasts and contradictions; a beautiful and sacred culture that has so much to teach us.

We gather in the spirit of Nomoskar.

In the Bhagavad Gita, a text so integral to Indian spirituality, Lord Krishna proposes that the true essence of education is the acquiring of what He calls 'virtuous knowledge': the capacity to perceive unity in diversity and reverence the universal God presence in all.

What a beautiful encapsulation of the essence of Nomoskar!

I have been coming regularly to this beautiful country for all of my adult life. I have learned more about my faith, the Reign of God and Catholic education from my times in India, than I ever did in any formal University studies.

In this magnificent land I have learned that authenticity and excellence in Catholic schooling has little to do with the numbers of Catholics we have enrolled or the standard of our buildings and facilities.

I have learned that inclusion is at the heart of the Gospel and exclusion is the Gospel's greatest betrayal.

I have learned that a school's capacity to make a difference is not simply dependent on its physical resources but on humble resolve within the school community to build the Reign of God and embrace solidarity with the excluded ones.

As we gather this evening in this extraordinary Edmund Rice school, we acknowledge and give thanks to Br Tino, Jayati, the staff and students of St Joseph's, not only for their magnificent welcome and hospitality made so abundant for us this evening, but for their daily efforts to be the face of God for this community.

We gather now to begin our Congress after most of you has undertaken an immersion experience in some part of this incredible and diverse land. How blessed you are! You have experienced hospitality that knows no limits, you have been afforded a privilege insight into this amazing culture and your presence and solidarity has touched the lives of many. For many gathered here, this experience will be life changing. I pray that it has opened your heart and prepared you well for what you will contribute to and take from this Congress.

Today we walked in pilgrimage to St Joseph's. For a brief time we witnessed the lives of many who live very humbly and whose dignity as human beings is challenged by poverty and exclusion. Please hold these people tenderly in your hearts. May the images of these and other people whom we have been blessed to encounter during our time in India, stay with us during our Congress and guide our efforts to bring to birth a global vision for education based on hope and liberation.

Asa aur mukti ke lie siksa! (Education for hope and liberation)

We gather in Kolkata; colourful, bustling, crowded, proud, indescribable 'City of Joy'. I doubt that there is anywhere else in the world that holds 'the beautiful' and 'the tragic' in such fine balance as Kolkata. A favorite son of this city was poet, educator and Nobel prize winner Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore, who was described by Gandhi as the moral voice of India, proposed that education must free people from narrowness and intolerance. Education wherein, to quote Tagore: '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 of the depth of truth.'

How blessed we are to gather this evening on Gandhi's birthday. May the Mahatma's vision for the world challenge and enlighten our Congress. May his moral strength inspire us, may his regard for the downtrodden move us and may his quest for personal liberation, inextricably linked to the liberation of the most humble of this world, guide us to be the best we can be.

We gather on the weekend when India is celebrating Mother Teresa as Saint Teresa of Kolkata. May we be comforted by Mother's consolation that we do not necessarily need to do great things, but we do need to do all things with great love. May her unbounded love open our hearts. May her simplicity challenge and inspire us and may her love of the poorest of the poor motivate us.

Here in India 50% of children aged 6-18 do not have the opportunity go to school and of the 32 million children that begin school each year, less than half will complete the compulsory 8 years of education. This clearly should not be. But Mother reminded us that there is also much that needs changing in our own cultures: 'Calcutta can be found all over the world if only we have eyes too see!'

We gather at a time of great optimism in our church with Pope Francis calling for urgent recovery of our commitment to be heralds of 'good news' for the poor and marginalised of our troubled and unequal world.

Yes, our work is of and for our Church. In the words of Pope Francis, a church 'of' and 'for' the poor: a Church which recognizes the work of the Divine and the presence of God in all faiths; a generous and inclusive Church that strives ceaselessly to tell the poor and excluded that God loves them and that the Gospel is good news for them as well.

The Church we serve promotes service and compassionate engagement with the challenges of our world as indispensable to the way we worship a loving and expansive God.

I think that Pope Francis would be very proud of what we aspire to do at this gathering. He consistently entreats educators to develop a culture of encounter and integration; a culture of meeting and of building bridges. His words of encouragement highlighted in our Congress call are clear: "Never tire of working for a more just world, marked by greater solidarity with the excluded ones."

We, the followers of Jesus and Edmund, are here to answer our common call to grow the charism of Edmund Rice; to share the extraordinary riches that our differing cultures have brought to this charism over many generations and to take part in the formation of a new expression of the work of Edmund Rice education based on global partnership and solidarity. We proclaim that we can all be stronger by immersing ourselves in each other's realities and casting our lot together.

The charism we share demands that we teach our young to ask deep questions of their world, not simply inhabit it. The education we offer must challenge versions of the world that define success solely in terms of money, accumulation of things and over-emphasis on status and security. It must equip young people to critique their culture and its version of the good, the well lived, the important and the meaningful life.

Our charism entreats us to form students to know that the liberty and freedom that they will hopefully enjoy is not merely a license to do whatever they want; but rather, it is the freedom to do what they ought to do for the making of a more just and equitable world.

Yes friends, ours is a charism that makes bold claims about the way that human beings should engage in our world. It calls us to speak for the voiceless and those who are excluded, about justice, about the way in which we are expected to relate to one another, about the dignity of every human life and about liberation for the disenfranchised.

At this Congress we proclaim and celebrate our new identity as global partners; one community in mission united by a common vision, purpose and heritage; renewed in our belief that education is the vehicle of liberation for all.

Asa aur mukti ke lie siksa! (Education for hope and liberation)

In this room are gathered some of the most spirit filled gifted and passionate educators we are blessed to have in our Edmund Rice schools around the world. The work that you do is an ornament to the charism of Edmund Rice and the dream of Jesus. Your task at this Congress is clear! Listen to and learn from each other; identify with each other; pool your wisdom and listen to the Spirit. Your presence and passion will be your greatest gifts to each other.

Our gathering is of great significance in the history of the Congregation of Christian Brothers. Our efforts and commitments, both at this gathering and subsequently, in giving life to our new partnerships, are central to the Congregation's vision and mission. Br Hugh will speak more of this tomorrow. We are indeed privileged to have all members of the Congregation Leadership Team and so many Brothers with us at this Congress.

On your behalf I thank our Leadership Forum wonderfully supported and guided by Brian Garrone for having the courage to call us to this place. They, together with our Lead Schools, have bravely carried

our original dream to this point. I thank the Brothers, led by Lenny and Tino and our colleagues from India who have worked tirelessly to care for us and extend hospitality that knows no limits. The true spirit of Nomoskar!

In anticipation, I thank our facilitators Ona and Peter for the work that they will do in guiding us through this experience and Br Parag who will lead us in prayer and ritual.

There will be so many others to thank at the end of our program.

So my friends, go forth into our gathering with courage, wonder and gratitude for our great giftedness; allow the Spirit to speak with the new clarity. Give renewed expression to our common mission to bring about liberation and mutual transformation through education in the spirit of Nomoskar. Think the big ideas, dream the impossible and commit to doing the necessary.

Let history remember that in 2016, 200 passionate educators and their supporters, from 21 diverse and rich cultures, inspired by a common belief that education is vital for the future of our planet and its peoples, gathered Kolkata in the spirit of solidarity and deep respect articulated in the blessing 'Nomoskar'. And they made a difference!

I will finish with a challenge from Rabindrinath Tagore who once said: "I have spent my days stringing and unstringing my instrument while the song I came to sing remains unsung"

Our task at this gathering is to discover our unique song in education, to be sung in global unison and solidarity, but with the rich harmonies of our unique and diverse cultures. A song of education for hope and liberation. A song that must not remain unsung.

Asa aur mukti ke lie siksa! (Education for hope and liberation)

May the one God bless us and bless this gathering!

Nomoskar!

