

**Closing Remarks at the Skills and Technology Accelerating
Rapid Transformation (START) Technology for Sustainable
Development Programme
United Nations, New York**

**Wednesday 8 July
Mr. Vijay Nambiar**

I am honoured to be here addressing you today.

Let me begin with an observation. Since the dawn of history if human beings have learned to live side by side with each other, that has been because they have recognized the need for boundaries. But we do not know when these boundaries became barriers. What is the difference between boundaries and barriers? Boundaries are built on respect. Barriers are built on fear, ignorance or prejudice. Today we erect barriers between religions and between nations, between the affluent and those in despair, between technology and those to whom it is denied.

As we celebrate the United Nations' 70th anniversary, those of us with long personal involvements with the Organization recognise that the UN has brought the world's governments together respecting boundaries between nations. But it has yet to bring down the barriers between the people those governments represent. Over the years, the UN is contributing to bringing down the walls between the peoples of the world, within nations, among nations. Your conference today is a significant moment in that process.

This conference has been a partnership between UNAI---the United Nations Academic Impact---and Amrita University. UNAI was established just a few years ago as an initiative of the Secretary-General to make connections between higher education and the United Nations. Thus UNAI itself was born of the process of removing barriers.

Breaking the walls that separate “academe” from the rest of society has long been a mission of progressive teaching. Students learn better and enjoy their learning more when they can connect what they learn to some purpose beyond the walls of the academy.

This does not mean that all research must have immediate applications, but it does mean that research should not be oblivious to its larger purpose. The connections that such research encourages prevent us from engaging in the kind of narrow, parochial work that is the bane of good science, and good thinking. So linking the academy to the rest of society is a virtuous goal.

This brings me back to all of you, to Amrita University, and to Amma’s work. You all know this is true, Today, you are engaged in the removal of other important barriers as well. I commend all of you for rising to the ideals of Amrita University by believing that science and technology are not just for the elite. Technology can and must serve the needs of the poorest of the poor. It takes courage and imagination to do what Amrita researchers are doing: bringing technology to villages that may not even have electricity.

In the process, we surmount walls not only between people but between concepts as well. We are prone to separating cognition from emotion, reason from passion, science from religion. But it need not be this way. As Amma and Amrita have so clearly demonstrated, there is no necessary antagonism between faith and reason. Spirituality, founded on that most basic principle of compassion for others, compels us to use our own skills to help improve the lives of others.

The Internet has assisted the world to use its intelligence in the service of society. The Web brings science and scientific conversation to those previously cut off from academic dialogues and academic research, connecting peoples wherever they are, with the potential to inspire them, to empower them.

The connections we make—between scholarship and society, between technology and the troubled, between science and citizenry—are all in the best spirit of the United Nations and its mission to bring people together in harmony and peace, in a spirit of compassion and service.

And do this using our inherent skills together with the immense bounty of Technology, so that the transformations we seek become both rapid and accelerated. That is the mission of START--- Skills and Technology Accelerating Rapid Transformation.

When launching UN Academic Impact, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said and I quote: “by joining the United Nations Academic Impact, you pledge to make these connections. By doing that, you get more than the immense personal satisfaction of teaching, learning or individual research... you get the even greater pride of seeing your scholarship help people cope with their day-to-day struggles.” Unquote

Thank you for your distinguished presence at this conference today.

.