# International Day for Tolerance, 16 November (UNESCO, 1995)

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## News

16 November is observed every year as the International Day for Tolerance. UNESCO's member States adopted the 'Declaration of Principles on Tolerance' at the 28th session of its General Conference on 16 November 1995 – the 50th anniversary of the adoption of UNESCO's Constitution (16 Nov 1945). UN General Assembly resolution 48/126 (20 Dec 1993) proclaimed 1995 the 'United Nations Year for Tolerance', and resolution 51/95 (1996) invited member States to observe 16 November every year. The Declaration defines tolerance as respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of the world's cultures – 'harmony in difference'. The linked 'UNESCO–Madanjeet Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Violence' was created in 1995 to mark the UN Year for Tolerance and the 125th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi; worth US$100,000, it is awarded every two years on 16 November. The 2024 (14th) prize went to the REDINTERPRETE organisation of Mexico. No official 2026 theme has been announced by the UN/UNESCO, and add: 'The 15th award ceremony of the prize is scheduled at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, on 16 November 2026; the laureate had not been announced as of 15 November.'.

## Key facts for the exam

| Point | Details |
|---|---|
| **Date** | 16 November – every year |
| **Declaration** | Declaration of Principles on Tolerance – 28th UNESCO General Conference, 16 Nov 1995 |

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|---|---|
| **UN resolutions** | 48/126 (1993) – 1995 Year for Tolerance; 51/95 (1996) – the Day |
| **UNESCO** | Constitution adopted 16 Nov 1945; HQ Paris |
| **Prize** | UNESCO–Madanjeet Singh Prize – created 1995; biennial; US$100,000 |
| **Indian laureate** | Narayan Desai (1998) – Gandhian |
| **2024 laureate** | REDINTERPRETE organisation (Mexico) – 14th edition |
| **Madanjeet Singh** | Indian diplomat, artist, writer (1924–2013); UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador from 2000; founder, South Asia Foundation (2000) |
| **2026 theme** | None officially announced |

## Background

- Tolerance in Indian history: Ashoka's Major Rock Edict XII urges respect for all sects and restraint in speech, without disparaging others' faiths. Mughal emperor Akbar held inter-faith debates in the 'Ibadat Khana' at Fatehpur Sikri and followed the policy of 'Sulh-i-kul' (peace with all). Gandhi's non-violence and equal respect for all religions fit the spirit of the Day.
- Polity: The word 'Secular' was added to the Preamble by the 42nd Amendment (1976). Articles 25–28 guarantee freedom of religion; Article 51A(e) makes it a fundamental duty to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood transcending religious, linguistic and regional diversities; 51A(f) asks citizens to value the rich heritage of our composite culture.
- Madanjeet Singh: Born in Lahore on 16 April 1924, he served in the Indian Foreign Service as ambassador in Asia, South America, Africa and Europe. In 2000 he founded the South Asia Foundation (SAF) for regional youth cooperation; it offers scholarships through 'UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Institutions of Excellence' in all eight SAARC countries. He died in France on 6 January 2013.

**Tamil Nadu link:** Chapter 16 of the Thirukkural (Book of Virtue), 'Poraiyudaimai' (Possession of Forbearance), praises tolerance – Kural 151: just as the earth bears even those who dig into it, the best course is to bear with those who insult us. The Sangam line 'Yaadhum oore yaavarum kelir' ('Every place is my home; all people are my kin' – Kaniyan Poongundranar, Purananuru 192) is often quoted as a symbol of universal brotherhood.

## Frequently asked questions

**What is this news about?**

16 November is observed every year as the International Day for Tolerance. UNESCO's member States adopted the 'Declaration of Principles on Tolerance' at the 28th session of its General Conference on 16 November 1995 – the 50th anniversary of the adoption of UNESCO's Constitution (16 Nov 1945).

**What are the key facts to remember for the exam?**

Date: 16 November – every year; Declaration: Declaration of Principles on Tolerance – 28th UNESCO General Conference, 16 Nov 1995; UN resolutions: 48/126 (1993) – 1995 Year for Tolerance; 51/95 (1996) – the Day; UNESCO: Constitution adopted 16 Nov 1945; HQ Paris.

**What is the background to this news?**

Tolerance in Indian history: Ashoka's Major Rock Edict XII urges respect for all sects and restraint in speech, without disparaging others' faiths.

## Practice questions (with answers)

**1. Created for the UN Year for Tolerance (1995), the UNESCO–Madanjeet Singh Prize also marked whose 125th birth anniversary?**

**A) Mahatma Gandhi**

**B)** Rabindranath Tagore

**C)** Swami Vivekananda

**D)** Jawaharlal Nehru

**Answer: A** – Explanation: Gandhi (born 1869). The prize carries US$100,000; Gandhian Narayan Desai received it in 1998.

**2. Which Thirukkural chapter praises the virtue of bearing with others' wrongs and insults?**

**A)** Anbudaimai

**B)** Adakkamudaimai

**C) Poraiyudaimai**

**D)** Ozhukkamudaimai

**Answer: C** – Explanation: Poraiyudaimai (forbearance) – Chapter 16, Book of Virtue. Kural 151: like the earth bearing those who dig it, bear those who scorn you.

**3. Mughal emperor Akbar's policy of peace and harmony among people of all faiths is known as –**

**A)** Din-i-Ilahi

**B) Sulh-i-kul**

**C)** Mahzar

**D)** Mansabdari

**Answer: B** – Explanation: Sulh-i-kul means 'peace with all'. Din-i-Ilahi was his 1582 order; the Mahzar (1579) asserted his authority in religious matters.

**4. Which clause makes it a duty to promote harmony and brotherhood transcending religious, linguistic and regional diversities?**

**A) Article 51A(e)**

**B)** Article 51A(f)

**C)** Article 51A(h)

**D)** Article 51A(c)

**Answer: A** – Explanation: 51A(e) – it also asks citizens to renounce practices derogatory to women's dignity. (f) is composite culture; (h) scientific temper.

**5. Which organisation did Madanjeet Singh found in 2000 to promote South Asian youth cooperation?**

**A)** SAARC

**B)** The Asia Foundation

**C)** Aga Khan Foundation

**D) South Asia Foundation**

**Answer: D** – Explanation: South Asia Foundation (SAF) – chapters in all eight SAARC nations. SAARC is an inter-governmental body founded in Dhaka in 1985.

**Sources:** UNESCO – International Day for Tolerance (unesco.org/en/days/tolerance); UN (un.org/en/observances/tolerance-day); UNGA resolution 51/95 (digitallibrary.un.org); South Asia Foundation – UNESCO–Madanjeet Singh Prize (southasiafoundation.org); UN News (7 Jan 2013). © Shanmugam IAS Academy.