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Dear Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi,

I am writing to you because I am experiencing a most tremendous headache on this otherwise delightful morning of December 10th, 2014. My agony is not of the medical kind – that is why I seek your guidance and not that of a doctor. Today is Human Rights Day - on this day, in 1948, the year of your unfortunate departure, the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The cause for my unsettlement on this day is the fact that, despite having embraced most of what is likewise called “the common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”, we have not yet fully accomplished these goals in any country. But we seem to fail to realise that we already possess the nonviolent weapon to fight some, if not all, of them: technology.

Injustice, as you undoubtedly know from your experience on this planet, takes many forms. Today I choose to consider the problem of people with disabilities – but I believe that every new day brings not only a novel sunrise, but also another issue to be addressed. Technology is, in my book, the cure for the problem of social inclusion with which the handicapped are faced. Ordinary working environments could, with the help of technical advancement, be altered to include sound-based devices for the blind, mobility facilitators for the wheelchair-confined or any such arrangement suitable for different impairments. It is also crucial to include these mechanisms in other fields, such as emergency management policies or the entertainment industry, to ensure that no door is closed for those who cannot reach the handle.

Another obstacle which must be overcome if we are to call the Declaration “universal” is that of accessibility. Even though technology has an unlimited assistance potential, it is often too expensive to be affordable for everyone, because of reasons which exceed the manufacturing and selling costs. Bringing information and the means to enjoy it within reach for everyone should be a matter of obligation, not of charity. Gandhi, in your beloved India, for example, more than two percent of the population struggles with a disability and most of these persons live in rural areas, where access to appropriate resources is limited or altogether absent! Health and knowledge are already considered global public goods – it is time for inclusive technology for disabled individuals to be added to the list, don’t you agree?

You died a few months before the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but it seems to me that you of all people would have approved of this document and of the thoughts that torment me at present. I ask both you and myself: do you think there will ever come a day when the word “disability” will simply mean “different ability”?

Yours sincerely,

Iulia