



STATEMENT BY H.E. MRS. SONIA GANDHI, CHAIRPERSON, UNITED PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST OBSERVANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF NON-VIOLENCE AT THE 62ND SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY INFORMAL PLENARY MEETING ON OCTOBER 02, 2007



Your Excellency President Srgjan Kerim,
Your Excellency Foreign Minister Dlamini Zuma,
Your Excellency Secretary General Ban Ki-moon,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to address the United Nations General Assembly, as we observe on Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary, the "International Day of Non-violence" for the first time. This is a collective homage of the world community to one of the greatest men of all time, an homage that rises above politics and speaks to all humankind. May I convey to the General Assembly, the gratitude of over a billion people of my country for this

tribute. I also extend our sincere appreciation, to all those member states who co-sponsored the resolution and extended their support to it. To South Africa in particular on whose very soil, Mahatma Gandhi, on the 11th of September 1906 started his political and spiritual journey, the "*Satyagraha*" or "Truth Force" movement.

War, conflict and bloodshed, have long been rooted in human history and the human psyche as the preordained and inevitable instruments of power. Violence has come to be regarded as the norm and, nonviolence as a mere aberration. It is striking, as one observer has pointed out, that there is no proactive word for nonviolence in almost any language. It has not been regarded as a concept in itself, but simply the negation of something else.

Other concepts have their own antonyms: war and peace, sin and virtue, hatred and love. Yet even though all the world's religions preach nonviolence, there is no affirmative, independent word for it. Thus, in our very thought processes, the concept of violence has been central, that of nonviolence marginal.

Not surprisingly, then, fallacies about non-violence abound. Some think that it is a sign of weakness or cowardice. Nothing could be further from the truth. Nonviolence goes far beyond passive resistance or even civil disobedience. To practice it in its true spirit demands strict discipline of mind: the courage to face aggression, the moral conviction to stay the course and the strength to do so without harbouring any malice towards the opponent.

At the heart of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, was his belief - that strength comes from righteousness, not force. Power comes from truth, not might. Victory comes from moral courage not imposed submission. He held that means and ends are inseparable, and that in fact the means themselves shape the ends. He believed unworthy means can never produce worthy ends.

History, both past and contemporary, confirms that violence only begets violence in an unending spiral, fostering hatred and revenge. Violence seeks to impose and overwhelm, which is why its victories are transitory. Nonviolence seeks to engage and persuade, which is why its results are enduring.

The Gandhian practice of nonviolence took many forms, but it always required an intense engagement with the opponent. The victory that Mahatma Gandhi strove for was to win over the adversary, not to vanquish him. The dialogue that he fostered, was founded on a spirit of genuine

tolerance - the appreciation and understanding of the "other" or "others". He asked us to introspect, to reach out and engage, to look within and ask to what extent are we ourselves responsible?

Can anyone really claim a monopoly over truth and righteousness? We must allow space for understanding and accommodation, for the soaring spirit of humanity to rise above the hopelessness and despair which threatens to ravage the human soul.

It is often said that Mahatma Gandhi's times, were radically removed from those we live in today. Some question the relevance of his methods in today's fast-paced and globally interlinked world, where threats to peace, security and social harmony abound. But the essential validity of Mahatma Gandhi's truth has not changed, because human nature itself has not changed.

Looking back, if the 20th century was the most bloody in human history, it was also the century where non-violence saw its greatest triumphs, cutting across the boundaries of continents and faiths. It is worth remembering that among the myriad civil disobedience movements, the only army of non-violence, was the one led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan known to history as '**The 'Frontier Gandhi'**'.

Today individuals and movements all over the world, continue to develop innovative, nonviolent ways to overcome oppression, combat discrimination and build democracy. These are the successes which keep the flame of hope burning bright.

Mahatma Gandhi himself was, first and foremost, a man of action. While he was indeed a man of deep contemplation, he was also a man of galvanic energy. It is this energy, that enabled him to overcome resistance arising from hostility, indifference and cynicism. It is this energy that gave him the resilience to press ahead, in spite of tremendous obstacles and tribulations. As he himself once said: "we must ourselves become the change we seek."

As we look around us today, we see violence everywhere.

- Violence against each other reflected in the spread of terrorism, the disturbing emergence of non-state players and our collective failure to move towards comprehensive, universal nuclear disarmament.
- Violence against the poor and the vulnerable, against women and children, caused by social strife and inequities spawned by economic globalization.

- And violence against Planet Earth reflected in man-made, climate-changing activities and unsustainable lifestyles.

Even as we are inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's life, let us today affirm our commitment to the Gandhian way, a commitment that is reflected in demonstrable actions and results. Let us ensure that this Day, does not get reduced to an annual ritual. Let us strive to adopt his methods to our present day challenges, with earnestness and perseverance.

Ladies and gentlemen it is not the relevance of Mahatma Gandhi that is in question today. What is in question today is whether we have the courage to emulate, what he preached and practiced, what he lived and died for. There are some who believe that violence and aggression, are innate in human nature. There are those who have shown that human beings, can and have often evolved to a higher stage.

For Mahatma Gandhi, the remarkable personality we honour today, a man who achieves complete non-violence, "is not a saint". He is "truly a man".

Let us then strive to follow this path of non-violence and in so doing become "truly human".

I thank you.

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