

## THREE DAYS IN INDIA

- *Christian Bartolf*

For the international conference on "Peace, Nonviolence and Empowerment -Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st Century" 29-30 January 2007 in India's capital and seat of government New Delhi delegates from 90 countries and 122 organisations were present, among them numerous national governments and nongovernmental organisations (NGO's).

The governing Congress Party of India (Indian National Congress, founded in the year 1912 and for decades the governing party in India with Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi) has been presided by Rajiv Gandhi's Italian-born widow Sonia Gandhi, who had organised and invited to the Conference.

In December 2006, the Indian Ambassador in Germany, Meera Shankar, sent me her warmest regards while forwarding the formal invitation sent by the Chairman of the Mahatma Gandhi Satyagraha Centenary Commemoration Committee (commemorating the first Satyagraha on 11 September 1906. Our Chair considered this official invitation as formal acknowledgement and honour of our society's yearlong activities and welcomed my conference participation wholeheartedly.

- Participants and main speakers of the Conference were the Nobel Peace Laureates Mohammad Yunus (Bangla Desh), Lech Walesa (Poland), Desmond Tutu (South Africa) as well as relatives of Gandhi (e.g. Mahatma Gandhi's granddaughter Ela Gandhi from Durban, South Africa, who I had a friendly talk with together with her younger relatives from Durban and Johannesburg). Participants of the Conference were academic peace researchers nammen, e.g. Dr. Gene Sharp (Albert Einstein Institute, Boston, U.S.A.) and Dr. Johan Galtung (Oslo, Norway), with whom I had friendly conversations. In addition I was glad to meet and speak with government members and representatives from India, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Germany, Djibouti, Georgia, Ghana, Italy, Malaysia, Maldives, Macedonia, Mexico, Netherlands, Austria, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Spain,

Tanzania (Sansibar), Thailand, U.S.A., Zimbabwe, among them German members of parliament Edathy (SPD, Chairman of the German-Indian group of parliamentarians) and Wimmer (CDU), as well as Dr. Suman Khanna Aggarwal (Lecturer for Philosophy, University Delhi) and the former member of the U.S. Congress (1971-1991) Mr. Walter E. Fauntroy, who had organised the March on Washington in August 1963 with Dr. Martin Luther King jr..

The atmosphere of the Conference was peaceful and fruitful. The Conference participants talked seriously, with humour and irony; they approved of the final Conference Declaration, because this Declaration is a clear commitment to the ethical and political principle of Nonviolence and nonviolent conflict resolution.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs was so kind to cover the expenses for my flight from Berlin via Frankfurt to New Delhi and back. The Indian National Congress paid for board and lodging at Hotel Ashok in New Delhi. All Conference participants received book presents (the two autobiographies written by Mahatma Gandhi). The Conference took place in the large Conference hall Vigyan Bhavan, the lunch and dinner receptions after invitation by government members at Hyderabad House and in the hotels Ashok and Taj Mahal. The Indian Prime Minister Singh and the Congress President Sonia Gandhi were addressing the delegates, in addition the Indian ministers of Defense and of External Affairs. The Indian government expressed their programme to organise comprehensive nuclear disarmament with reference to a nuclear disarmament scheme of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi which he expressed in 1988 in his speech at the United Nations, the possible basis for new negotiations and agreements in Geneva. Unilateral nuclear disarmament (as e.g. in Kazakhstan and South Africa) was not the main topic of (neither the Indian nor the Pakistani) delegates. Possible solutions for regional conflicts (as e.g. in Kashmir or Sri Lanka) were discussed -to prevent any escalation of military and political violence to a worldwide spread of wildfire.

The Conference participants discussed in four working groups on the Dialogue between the Cultures, on the Eradication of Poverty, on nonviolent conflict resolution and nuclear disarmament. These contributions to the Conference during several hours were documented, a comprehensive Conference documentation is in preparation. This Indian Conference was organized in close cooperation with the government of South Africa in order to continue the official celebrations to

commemorate the Satyagraha Centenary in South Africa (e.g. on Robben Island) starting in September 2006. Nelson Mandela delivered an impressive video message to the delegates and he confirmed his high appreciation of and identification with the nonviolent Satyagraha principle of Mahatma Gandhi (as did Lech Walesa in his personal statement).

In my letter to the Congress President, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, I suggested a follow-up Conference to this extraordinary and excellent event: a 2008 Conference on Tolstoy and Gandhi. Governments of numerous nations contributed their ideas; I listened to thoughts from Algeria, Belarus, Bolivia, Greece, Italy, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Slovenia, Syria, Zambia). In around 50 talks about different topics I became acquainted with delegates of different countries by spreading information about our Center and our English language publications on Tolstoy and Gandhi.

**DECLARATION ADOPTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE ON "PEACE, NONVIOLENCE AND  
EMPOWERMENT -GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE  
21ST CENTURY"**

**29-30 JANUARY, 2007, NEW DELHI**

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We, the representatives from 90 countries and 122 organisations, participating in the "International Conference on Peace, Nonviolence and Empowerment -Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st Century", convened by the Indian National Congress at New Delhi on January 29-30, 2007, dedicated to the commemoration of the Centenary of the Satyagraha Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa, acknowledging the historical contribution made by him, and deeply cherishing the ideals of nonviolence and peace, which guided him in his struggle against injustice,

Having affirmed

That the values espoused by him are of enduring relevance, which continue to influence movements against oppression and discrimination across the world;

- o That only just means can lead to just ends and bring an end to the escalating spiral of violence and bloodshed that the world is witnessing today;
- o That 'Satyagraha' or the 'Force of Truth' can arrest the descent of humankind into fratricidal conflicts and lead to the path of peace and understanding;
- o That the revival of eternal principles of love, compassion and fellow-feeling is indispensable for re-establishing trust and harmony in the world;
- o That civil society has an important role in creating public awareness on issues concerning good governance;
- o That violence and conflict are often engendered by widening socio-economic disparities;
- o That despite tremendous economic advancement across the world, large sections of the humankind continue to suffer in poverty, illiteracy, disease and hunger;
- o That developmental activities must take adequate care to protect the environment and humanize the social order;
- o That in spite of globalisation which has brought the world closer, regressive prejudices pertaining to race, religion and gender continue to prevail, leading to intolerance and fanaticism;
- o That there is a strong reservoir of universal goodwill and common human values cutting across societies, religions and cultures through which humankind can address critical issues and instill confidence in the basic virtues that have brought human civilization forward; and, Therefore agree
- o That the basic concept of Satyagraha can carry forward the message of mutual understanding by reiterating its emphasis on:
  - tolerance and mutual respect for diverse cultures;
  - abhorrence of violence in thought, expression, belief and action;

- the pursuit of Truth and promotion of ethical values and moral principles in public life,
- the dignity of all human being.

o That the way shown by Mahatma Gandhi a hundred years ago in his fight against injustice through his Satyagraha embodies the best principles drawn from all religions and beliefs; and,

o That his immortal precept that "violence cannot be dispelled by violence just like darkness cannot be dispelled by darkness" is as relevant today as ever before, And urge people throughout the world,

o To re-dedicate themselves to the principles of Nonviolence to resolve their differences through peaceful means;

o To ensure human freedom and equality;

o To mobilize public opinion against all forms of injustice;

o To promote the spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding;

o To act in concert in fighting the scourge of terrorism, which today afflicts all parts of the world;

o To empower the weak, the underprivileged and the oppressed to help them find their voice and become aware of their rights;

o To invoke the latent moral force of humanity by exposing the futility of adopting violent and coercive means to resolve conflicts;

o To help disseminate true knowledge for self-realisation and inter-cultural harmony;

o To dispel ignorance and misunderstanding through dialogue among cultures and civilizations;

o To ensure universal access to education and healthcare;

o To promote an equitable strategy to effectively deal with the phenomenon of global warming, which threatens the survival of humankind;

- o To promote a democratic and multilateral world order, where consensus-building rather than unilateralism is the guiding principle;
- o To strengthen the UN system as the principle mechanism for conflict resolution and the pacific settlement of disputes;
- o To work for reforming the various organs of the United Nations in order to reflect the changes that have taken place since its inception;
- o To appeal to the UN to declare Mahatma Gandhi's date of birth, October 2, as the International Nonviolence Day, And resolve
- o To work towards:
  - A world free from hatred and violence
  - A world united in mutual trust, harmony and friendship;
  - A world with more equitable access to global resources;
  - A world united in its struggle against poverty, illiteracy, disease, injustice and hunger;
  - A world free from nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction;
  - A world where territorial boundaries become irrelevant, where cultural frontiers are in an inclusive and ever-expanding mode, and where local values merge in the ocean of universal humanitarianism.

As representatives of the humankind, we take a solemn vow to nurture the values espoused by Mahatma Gandhi, to pursue Truth, to privilege peace and reject violence in all our activities, to respect diverse viewpoints, and to practice the philosophy of Nonviolence to win over the forces of violence and injustice through tolerance, empathy and love.