



**Remarks**

**by**

**H.E. Ambassador John W. Ashe**

**President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations**

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**International Day of Non-Violence**

*Please check against delivery*

Ambassador Mukerji  
Excellencies,  
Secretary-General,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

On this day when we in the international community observe the International Day of Non-violence, I am deeply honoured to be here with you on this occasion that promotes the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence, and the values of peace, tolerance and understanding.

We celebrate this day which is the birthday of one of history's greatest advocates of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi, who proved through the example of his life that the moral and spiritual power of non-violence is far greater than any form of physical force or human brutality. Gandhi Jayanti- as this day is known in India - is a unique opportunity for all of us to reflect upon the fact that Gandhi's firm belief in the value of non-violence transcends borders and, I daresay, even time.

What is so remarkable to so many across the world is that Gandhiji's fundamental and unshakeable belief that non-violence was the strongest force for change in the world permeates across generations, cultural and religious boundaries. In fact, his legacy of thought and action is as relevant today as a beacon of hope in our troubled times to the men, women and children living under all forms of oppression, as it was to the men, women and children who embarked on the Civil Rights struggle in this our host country.

When Gandhi wrote in 1947 that "the non-violence of the strong is the strongest force of the world", and that "there is no hope for the aching world except through the narrow and straight path of non-violence", the most valuable lesson that we all learnt was to persevere for a peaceful resolution to conflicts even if the odds were against us. We learnt

through the legacy of Gandhi that even in the face of extreme injustice, acts of violence cannot lead to true and lasting peace.

For Gandhi- the practice of non-violence or Ahimsa- in the widest sense means a willingness to treat all beings as oneself, and engage in selfless actions. We learnt through his life and his actions, the intrinsic value and worth of the practice of Ahimsa. We learnt that non-violence was the means by which individuals and nations could live. And it is this idea and this message that has a deep significance and resonance because it is closely connected to the tenets of the United Nations Charter.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our shared assembly of nations was founded in the aftermath of a great tragedy, a World War so profoundly gruelling that it raised fundamental questions about the very nature of what it meant to be human. But in the face of unspeakable atrocities, human decency and desire to work toward a better tomorrow resulted in the key ideas enshrined in our UN Charter including the need “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”, and “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small”.

Distinguished Guests,

The ideas that are central to the UN’s founding – ensuring peace and security and improving human well-being – are still central to our shared human global journey and what each of us must work together to support. The path of non-violence is guided by our broader desire and yearning for peaceful measures for settling disputes, human rights and guaranteeing fundamental freedoms for all. History favours the interwoven path of peace and non-violence, which has stood the test of time and continues to inspire humankind. Those who have succeeded in reaching their aims through peaceful means, in the face of overwhelming obstacles, are those whom we remember, revere and aspire to

emulate: Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Aung San Sui Kyi.

We are here to honour the virtues of non-violence in a world beset by violence in its many gruelling manifestations. We are bombarded with news reports of wars; civil and sectarian blood-shed and strife; poverty and malnutrition; environmental degradation; and violence against women, youth and other vulnerable members of society. Around the world, citizens live under the threats of intimidation and aggression.

But, we also cannot consign millions of families and communities to eke out a living in the dark, without access to clean water, adequate food and safe sanitation services. At the dawn of our Millennium, the leaders of the world came together here in this city, and adopted eight goals to guide the world to a better tomorrow, in areas such as reducing poverty and hunger, child mortality and disease burden; increasing primary education enrolment; improving gender equality and maternal health; and ensuring environmental sustainability. These goals, known as the Millennium Development Goals or MDGs, created a sense of momentum and optimism, uniting governments, private sector and civil society from all parts of the world around a global anti-poverty movement with one focused set of targets.

Throughout the past thirteen years, we have seen significant and admirable progress in meeting the targets such as halving extreme poverty, putting more children in primary school and reducing deaths from HIV/AIDS and other diseases. However, progress around the world has been uneven both within and among nations. More than one billion people still suffer from extreme poverty. Many go to bed hungry from the day before, and many living in conflict ridden areas are also fearful of the fresh horrors that the next morning will bring.

The deadline for the MDGs is upon us in 2015, and the international community is now beginning to shape a new agenda – for the post-2015 era- one that applies to all countries of the world, and one which responds to climate change, preserves our forests and

oceans, creates systems of justice within our societies, provides access to clean water, and sanitation services. Arguably, this may be the boldest and most ambitious and most collaborative project that the United Nations has ever had to undertake, and our Assembly of Nations, will need to be equally audacious, ambitious and collaborative if we are to rise up to the task we have chosen for ourselves.

Excellencies,

Laying the groundwork for this new agenda, is laying the groundwork for a non-violent world – one that values peace and well-being for all.

Regardless of circumstances, it is the right of all people to live in a peaceful world free of all forms of violence. I would posit that that the path of non-violence belongs to all of us; it speaks to the kind of society and world in which we want to live. That is why in the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly, we will have a focused thematic debate that will directly address the issue of ensuring peaceful and stable societies in the post 2015 development agenda, precisely because of the absolutely crippling effect war, and terrorism and conflict have on development. Those countries that are perpetually locked in a cycle of violence are most vulnerable and in need of attention, support and fresh ideas. In those countries, the price of violence is paid in the scars on the psyche of generations of young people, of those forced to live in fear of their neighbour, in the loss of people in their most productive and creative years, in the spiralling costs of care and the erosion of development prospects.

The path of non-violence is not only about transforming the global but the personal, and Mahatma Gandhi reminded us that it is the path of the courageous, not the fearful. It is an option that is available to each one of us in how we relate to each other and respond to injustice. We are all responsible for employing the tools of non-violence, and thereby helping to create a more peaceful world for all. For it is only when we truly call and accept all as one, and recognise that violence equally diminishes those who are violent

and those who are the victims of violence, that non-violence become the moral imperative.

I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of India for this portrait of Mahatma Gandhi, and for reminding all who work in our shared assembly of nations of the benefits of the path of non-violence.

Thank you.