



**STATEMENT BY
H.E. SRGJAN KERIM**

**PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

**AT THE FIRST
COMMEMERATION OF**

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF NON-VIOLENCE

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Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have assembled here today, in this great amphitheatre of the world, to hand the torch of non-violence to all the nations and peace loving peoples of the world.

I would like to commend the Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, South Africa's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, and Sonia Gandhi, the Chair of the United Progressive Alliance for being the first to carry forth the torch that was lit, many years ago, by Mahatma Gandhi – the great prophet of truth and non-violence.

In June this year, the General Assembly adopted a resolution, by consensus, to make October 2nd - the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi - “International Day of Non-Violence”.

Our goal today is to spread the message that non-violence, tolerance, respect for human rights, democracy, development, and cultural diversity, are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

Who better than Sonia Gandhi to help carry this torch. She epitomizes these interlinked concepts by effortlessly intertwining her Italian heritage with the Nehru dynasty in the largest democracy in the world - over one billion people, 16 official languages, and more than 1000 dialects.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I invite all Member States, United Nations organizations, regional and non-governmental organizations and individuals to commemorate the International Day of Non-Violence by spreading this message.

For Mahatma Gandhi, the pursuit of political objectives through non-violence was a moral quest. In his words:

“Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man”.

Gandhi’s message - the rejection of violence - has as much relevance now as it did during his lifetime. His political philosophy is based on universal human principles that transcend history, nations and cultures.

He believed that intolerance was the worst form of violence: that without genuine tolerance - of the kind that springs from within - no dialogue can have a lasting impact.

This message underlines the importance of the many initiatives within this organization to promote dialogue among cultures, religions and faiths as well as to strengthen mutual understanding between nations.

Many brave and wise people have been inspired to follow the path of non-violence in the struggle for peace, social change, freedom and human rights: Nelson Mandela, Wangari Maathai, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Alva Myrdal, Alfonso Garcia Robles and Mother Teresa – just to mention a few.

When accepting the Nobel Prize for Peace, another champion of non-violence Martin Luther King Jr., reminded the audience that the basic values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations are based on the notion that the only way to reach sustainable solutions to political and social challenges is by taking the path of non-violence.

Let the world know that there are men and women, throughout the world who are determined supporters of the International Day of Non-Violence.

Let this organization stand as a beacon of hope for peace through non-violence.

As Mahatma Gandhi did, we also need to recognize that non-violence and truth – *satya* - are inseparable and presuppose each other. Mahatma Gandhi not only was a great leader, but was also the incarnation of non-violence and compassion.

Following his example, it is our duty to use our highest human potential, and our most creative thinking - based on the values of truth, justice and human rights for all - to forge more peaceful relations between nations.

It is my hope that this spirit will guide us in our joint efforts, not only during the 62nd session of the General Assembly, but also in the future work of the United Nations.

I am convinced through my own personal experience and background that non-violence is the only means to achieve lasting peace between nations and peoples. Even when the political goals are legitimate, violence can never be a justified means to achieve them.

I thank you very much.