

Speech by CG on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti & Int'l day of Non-Violence organized by IASH (Hannover) on 4th October 2021

A very good evening Mr. Thomas Hermann, Hon'ble 1st Mayor of the City of Hannover

Mr. John Barker, Director and Mr. Stefan Handwerker, Managing Director International School of Hannover

Dr. Christian Bartolf, Gandhi Information Centre, Berlin

Dr. Bala Subramaniam Ramani, Member of SPD Hannover City Council

Dr. Partha Dabke, President of IASH

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you, Mr. John Barker (and students of the International School of Hannover), and IASH for the warm welcome. My wife and I are delighted and honoured to be here today as we celebrate the 152nd birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Indian nation who led the freedom struggle against the British in India. Gandhi's philosophy is based on three principles: **non-violence** (*ahimsa*), the **fight for truth** (*satyagraha*) and **individual and political freedom** (*swaraj*). His most potent weapon against the British during the freedom struggle was passive resistance and non-violence. He was a pioneer of **Satyagraha**, which believed in resistance to tyranny through mass civil disobedience, firmly founded upon total non-violence. This was a strategy later successfully employed by other civil rights movements. It inspired other great leaders such as Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and has impacted the lives of millions of individuals around the globe. For this very reason Gandhiji's birthday, 2 Oct has been declared the International Day of Non-Violence by the UN.

The great scientist Albert Einstein said of Mahatma Gandhi, '**Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.**' Addressing the nation after Gandhi's assassination, PM Jawaharlal Nehru said, '*The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere.*' Here I would like to quote a little more of Nehru's speech on that occasion: '*The light has gone out, I said, and yet I am wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that illuminated this country for many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later, that light will be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts. For that light represented something more than the immediate past. It represented the living, the eternal truths, reminding us of the right path, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom.*'

Nehru was right because Gandhi's life, example and philosophy continues to illuminate and influence people all over the globe. He continues to be a source of inspiration to leaders and normal citizens all over the world. Indeed, Gandhiji continues to be a source of inspiration today on issues such as Climate Change and the Environment which are matters of great concern and was even one of the big issues in the recent federal election for the Bundestag. As the world continues to grapple with how to respond to climate change, biodiversity loss, persistent poverty, and poor health and nutrition, Gandhi's commitment to what we now call sustainability is perhaps more relevant today than in his own time.

His concern for nature and the environment is reflected in one of his famous quotes: 'The Earth has enough resources for our needs but not for our greed'. International conferences such as the Stockholm Conference of 1972 or the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 were convened much later than the concerns raised by Gandhi about the environment and its effects. Even in India, major movements to protect environment such as the Chipko movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan derived inspiration from Gandhi. Gandhi had cautioned the world, much before any modern day environmentalist, about the problems of large-scale industrialization, which we are confronting today. Gandhi visualized that mechanization will not only lead to industrialization, to massive urbanization, to unemployment, but will also lead to the destruction of environment. His seminal work, **Hind Swaraj**, written more than 100 years ago in 1909 warned of the dangers the world is facing today in the form of environmental destruction and the threat to the planet. Perhaps we can learn from Gandhi's emphasis on production by the masses instead of mass production to achieve sustainable growth and development which, according to him, will result in the development of an economic system that can minimize environmental degradation and achieve sustainable development.

Gandhi was influenced by Jainism, which looks at nature as a living entity and exhorts human beings to continually purify themselves by respecting diverse life forms. The Gandhian idea of Satya and Ahimsa can be useful to reduce the greed of the individual and society. His concept of non-violence thus encompassed all living beings and embodied the eternal values of life in his thought and actions. He insisted on the eternal sacredness of life that included all life including humans, plants and animals. The English historian Edward Thomson once reportedly remarked to Gandhi that wildlife was rapidly declining in India, to which Gandhi replied with sarcasm, "Wildlife is decreasing in the jungles, but increasing in the towns." According to him reckless and limitless pursuit of industrialization by all nations has posed serious problems for the very existence of not only man but also for all living creatures and all kinds of species on our planet.

These are a few thoughts on Gandhiji that I thought I would share today on the occasion of his 152nd birth anniversary and I greatly look forward to learning about more aspects of Gandhiji from Dr. Christian Bartolf later in the programme.

This year is also extra special because we are also celebrating 75 years of Independence. Indeed we have come a long way, thanks to the sacrifice of our great freedom fighters including Mahatma Gandhi. Under the banner of India@75 and 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' which is an initiative of the GOI to celebrate and commemorate 75 years of progressive India and the glorious history of its people, culture and achievements, the Consulate has been organising a series of events since March this year. The celebrations will continue with many more programmes lined up for the next months and years till 2023. I would request and urge you to please keep on checking our social media pages on FB, IG and Twitter for updates and details of the programmes in which you can both enjoy and learn more about India. In fact, our next big event is the India Week Hamburg during 8-14 Nov 2021 which will feature more than 75 events throughout the week in Hamburg. My wife and I come from the NE of India and, in fact, one of the special features of the Week is a special promotion of the NE states of India where we will have a very special fusion-rock band from Shillong, known as the Rock Capital of India, in Meghalaya state, coming to perform. The band will be performing at Kampnagel, apart from the Consulate as well as at TUHH. Apart from Hamburg, they will also be performing in Bremen on 6 Nov and, hopefully, also in Hannover, the UNESCO City of Music. As I said, please check on our social media pages for details of their performances as well as other events and programmes that will be coming up.

Finally, I commend Dr. Dabke and the IASH team who in cooperation with the International School of Hannover have been instrumental in organizing Gandhi Jayanti during the past years. Let us all continue to celebrate and emulate a noble man who has contributed immensely to the lives of people in India and abroad.

Thank you.