

**Speech of Ambassador at the celebration of the 146<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and the International Day of Non-Violence today**

**(October 2, 2015, KazGUU, Astana)**

**Excellencies, respected Mr. Talgat Narikbayev, Rector of the University, distinguished guests and dear friends,**

It gives me an immense pleasure to greet you and extend warm welcome to the celebration of the 146<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and the International Day of Non-Violence today.

The students present in the audience have seen the documentary on Mahatma Gandhi a little while ago. We have also put up a photo and book exhibition outside the auditorium to give you the glimpse of some of the important moments of Mahatma's life.

In my view, there is no better way to celebrate Gandhi's birthday than to remember the ideals, which he stood for. These ideals were: Ahimsa (Non-Violence), Satya (Truth), Asteya (Honesty), Aparigrah (Non-Possessiveness and Non-Attachment) and Brahmacharya (Celibacy). These five principles have deeply influenced generations of Indian spiritual thought and practice.

The principle of non-violence goes far back into the time. It was first conceived and preached by an epoch-making man Lord Rishabdev or Adinath who is believed to have lived over 5000 years ago and left a deep imprint on the Indian civilization, culture and thought. He is considered the first Tirthankar by Jains, an incarnation of Hindu God Lord Vishnu by Hindus, an Apta, one who is worthy of being worshipped by the Buddhists. It is after his son's name Bharat that India is known as Bharat since times immemorial.

Although Mahatma Gandhi was not the originator of the principle of nonviolence, he was the first one to apply it successfully in the modern political landscape at a large scale.

He was born on October 2, 1869, at Porbandar, in the Indian state of Gujarat. At a young age, Gandhi gave an evidence of sound reasoning, intelligence and deep faith in the ideal of truth. He sailed to England in 1888 to study law.

In 1893, he accepted a year's contract to work for an Indian firm in Natal, South Africa, where he tasted bitter experience of racial discrimination. He was pushed out from the first class compartment of a train because he was 'coloured'. Shivering in cold and sitting in the waiting room of railway station, he decided that it was cowardice to run away, instead he would fight for his rights. With this incident

evolved the concept of Satyagraha (insistence on truth). Mahatma Gandhi founded a political movement known as the Natal Indian Congress, where he developed his theoretical belief in non-violent protest into a tangible political stance for struggle for civil rights.

A little later, my esteemed colleague, the Ambassador of South Africa will throw more light on Gandhi's life in South Africa, where he spent 23 of his most youthful years.

On his return to India in 1916, Gandhi developed his practice of Non-Violent Civil Movement still further. He set about organising farmers, and urban labourers to protest against excessive land-tax and discrimination. His first Satyagraha in India was at Champaran in 1917 for the rights of peasants on indigo plantations. When British Government ordered Gandhi to leave the place, he defied the order by declaring that "British could not order me about in my own country".

In 1919, he called for Civil Disobedience movement at national scale against Rowlatt Bill. However, a violent incident forced Gandhi to suspend the movement as he felt that people were not yet ready for a non-violent struggle.

When the British introduced a tax on salt in 1930, he famously led a 250-mile march to the sea to make salt. On reaching the seashore, he picked up a fistful of salt and declared, "with this salt, I resist the might of the British empire. Join me in this struggle of right against the might."

Recognizing his political influence, the British authorities were forced to negotiate various political concessions with Gandhi over the following years. Gandhi led a protest in 1942 calling for the British to Quit India. The Quit India Movement became the most forceful movement in the history of the Indian independence struggle and played a major role in eventual independence of India in 1947.

It was through the force of his teachings, his words, his ideas, his own life and personal example that he was able to move the whole nation and people as one. At the heart of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence was his belief that strength comes from righteousness, not force. Power comes from truth, not might. Victory comes from moral courage, not by imposed submission. He said: "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."

His teachings of truth and non-violence resonated with the followers of all religions and sections of society in India and continue to be as relevant today as they were a century ago. The world today is being torn apart by the forces of terrorism, religious fundamentalism and extremism. These challenges can be addressed only through the values of truth, non-violence, mutual respect and tolerance.

Another important dimension of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy was his unflinching belief that means and ends are inseparable. He said that means themselves shape the ends and unworthy means can never produce worthy ends.

He was passionate about the virtue of simple living inspired by the principle of aparigraha or non-possession. He said, "there is enough for everybody's need, but not enough for anybody's greed.....The civilization, in the real sense of term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants." This is so profound and at the same time so relevant when we are struggling to save the planet in face of adverse effects of the climate change led by overconsumption and unsustainable lifestyles.

The struggle and victory of Indian independence movement resonated throughout the British Empire and by the end of the 1960's the majority of the remaining colonies in Africa and the West Indies were granted independence. Gandhi was responsible for the Civil Rights movements in 12 countries across four continents. After Gandhi's demise, the struggle for civil rights and the strategy of non-violence, inspired and energized marginalized populations all over the world, in countries as diverse as the United States, Brazil and South Africa.

Many noble laureates were inspired by Gandhian philosophy. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "As I read, I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of non-violent resistance. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform." Another iconic man, Nelson Mandela, emulated Gandhi and successfully ended the apartheid by showing the power of courage and truth and promoting a path of reconciliation.

Dalai-Lama of Tibet, Lech Walesa of Poland, Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar and Desmond Tutu of South Africa – all drew inspiration from Gandhi. Speaking before India's Parliament in November 2010, President Obama said, "I am mindful that I might not be standing before you today, as the President of the United States, had it not been for Gandhi and the message he shared with and inspired America and the World".

Gandhi also inspired prominent personalities in science and business. Albert Einstein said about him, "I believe that Gandhi's views were the most enlightened of all the political men in our time. We should strive to do things in his spirit: not to use violence in fighting for our cause, but by non-participation in anything you believe is evil." Apple co-founder Steve Jobs wore circular glasses as a tribute to the great man.

It is not surprising that over 150 countries have depicted Gandhi on their postal stamps and over 70 countries have installed statues of Mahatma Gandhi.

Government of Kazakhstan issued a postage stamp on Mahatma Gandhi on his 125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary two decades ago and a full-length statue of Mahatma Gandhi was installed in Almaty at a park named after him on Shivchenko Street in October 2003. Government of Kazakhstan also named a street and a school after Mahatma Gandhi in Almaty. The Embassy supports an annual Gandhi Chess competition for schoolchildren. Currently, we are working on setting up a Mahatma Gandhi Centre at the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and considering a proposal for naming a lecture hall in KazGUU after Mahatma Gandhi.

The marking of 2<sup>nd</sup> October, birthday of Mahatma Gandhi as the International Day of Non-Violence by UNGA in 2007 is a significant contribution by United Nations to the world community. The principal of nonviolence is essential to secure a culture of peace, tolerance, understanding and harmony across nations.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Gandhi's life, ideas and work are of crucial importance to all those who want to make a better world. The ideals he stood for in theory and practice are universal in character and in both space and time. They shall remain relevant across generations and continue to offer solutions to the challenges faced by the humanity.

I thank KazGUU Academic Diplomatic Club for hosting this event and all of you for your time and attention.

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