

Words of acceptance - Gandhi International Peace Award – 30 January 2003

**Distinguished Trustees of the Gandhi Foundation,
Omar and Sohair Hayat
Ladies and Gentlemen
And friends**

It is difficult to describe how honoured, and yet humbled, I am to accept the Gandhi International Peace Award. The Mahatma and his non-violent philosophy and approach to life have been known to me since I was a child growing up in Dublin, Ireland. My parents, both Quakers, or more properly members of the Society of Friends, ran a home that overflowed with overseas students, visitors including many from India. One stands out in my mind – Indu Dutt, who I believe was the first to translate Tagore into Hindi. The extraordinary work of Gandhi was often a topic of discussion and admiration.

My father was head of the Irish Pacifist movement for over twenty years and devoted most of his life to non-violent approaches and solutions. He was active in the successful movement to keep Ireland neutral, a status that is being sadly threatened as we meet here in London. In fact on Saturday, 1 February I will join a demonstration at Shannon Airport to protest the constitutional damage and breach of Irish neutrality created by the decision of the Irish government to allow US troops to stop over at the airport on route to Kuwait for war with Iraq.

Thus, you will understand that I would like to accept this award in the name of my father – Stanley McClure Halliday - for his largely unheralded work for peace, for his love and dedication to the teaching of Mahatma Gandhi and for his guidance to me in things nonviolent. One of his joys was attending a War Resisters International Meeting in India followed by six weeks in a Gandhi-gram in the late 1950s. My father would be a proud man were he standing beside me today.

In short, I am pleased to accept the Gandhi International Peace Award in memory of my late father. Thank you. It will serve as a beacon to remind me that I have much to do – whether it be in regard to Iraq, or some other part of the world where the principle of ‘might is right’ and military aggression prevails. None of us can rest while injustice reigns, or fundamental human rights are violated. The Peace Award will encourage me to keep going as I try – along with many other like-minded persons such as your good selves – to support nonviolent solutions to the human-made terror and chaos that swirl around us.

I often have to explain why I resigned from the United Nations after a 30 year career, why I took on the all powerful states of the UN Security Council; and why after five years I continue to serve the well being of the people of Iraq. In reality

there was no choice, and there remains no choice. You all would have done the same had you been occupying my seat as head of the UN Humanitarian Programme in Iraq. I was driven to resignation because I refused to continue to take Security Council orders, the same Security Council that had imposed and sustained genocidal sanctions on the innocent of Iraq. I did not want to be complicit. I wanted to be free to speak out publicly about this crime. And above all, my innate sense of justice was and still is outraged by the violence that UN sanctions have brought upon, and continues to bring upon, the lives of children, families – the extended families, the loved ones of Iraq. There is no justification for killing the young people of Iraq, not the aged, not the sick, not the rich, not the poor. Some will tell you that the leadership is punishing the Iraqi people. That is not my perception, or experience from living in Baghdad. And were that to be the case – how can that possibly justify further punishment, in fact collective punishment, by the United Nations? I don't think so. And international law has no provision for the disproportionate and murderous consequences of the ongoing UN embargo – for well over 12 long years.

International law does not allow for the punishment of an entire people because of government policies, or actions that offend the UN. Were rejection of, or delays in adoption of UN Resolutions to justify the UN Security Council resorting to military aggression, the UN would be at war with more than half the member states of the General Assembly! Let me be clear, I am not in favour of neglect or rejection of UN Resolutions, but member states must be allowed to move at their own pace as per the concept of national sovereignty. We all hope that the US superpower will soon endorse the Convention on the Rights of the Child, just as we want Israel, Pakistan, India and North Korea to curb the build-up of nuclear weapons. However, are ready to go to war? - when Israel refuses to implement resolutions on the occupied territories, and the US considers its citizens above the laws of the International Criminal Court, and China and Russia neglect UN resolutions and the International Court of Justice cannot make its decisions stick.

Now we are faced with another American-led and British-backed war on Iraq. Whether it is a UN Security Council-approved war, or a unilateral attack by the USA and Britain, it will constitute pre-emptive military aggression outside the realms of acceptable international law. Justification for this new war cannot be found in the United Nations Charter. A frustrating weapons inspection process, or even a failed one, does not justify destruction of a sovereign state and the murder of its people. What we are seeing today is the corruption of the UN Charter by the five permanent members driven relentlessly by the one superpower. Just as it is with the ongoing warfare of sanctions, this new war would be incompatible with the provisions of Articles 1. and 2. of the Charter.

Article 1 addresses inter alia the purposes of the UN to maintain international peace and security, and to bring that about by peaceful means and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law.

Article 2 indicates that the Organisation is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its member states; that all members shall settle their

international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered; and that all members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any stateinconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

In my view these provisions and their overriding importance undermine the binding nature of decisions made by the Security Council under Chapter VII Articles 41 and 42. No member state can be bound to a course of action that is in itself incompatible with the provisions of the Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or other aspects of international law such as the Rights of the Child, the Rights of Women.

Member states are bound by the Geneva Conventions and Protocols designed to protect civilians in time of war -- from UN embargoes through UN employment of high level cluster-bombing; from UN use of Tomahawk missiles through UN deployment of weapons "enhanced" by depleted uranium. The same weapons-quality depleted uranium with a half-life of 4.5 billion years that has already contaminated southern Iraq, including Basra. Now Baghdad and other cities will be targeted when weaponised depleted uranium i.e. containing plutonium, is used again by US-led United Nations forces – as in the 1991 Gulf War. We are facing the commission of war crimes yet again in the name of the United Nations. It is difficult to be optimistic regarding what appears to be an imminent cauldron of hate, fear and simple madness.

Recently when I was in the bookshop of the Istanbul international airport, I came across a book on the life of Omar Khayyam. Having just flown in from Amman and Baghdad, my mind was focused on the imminent plight being faced by the Iraqi people yet again. And for me and I hope for you – they are not some remote concept, but friendly faces, children, and grandchildren; mothers, daughters and grandmothers; Iraq is families of loved ones. It is not statistics, or numbers, but people – people with names like Laith, Safa, Ossama, Saeed and Akila. Iraq is about families with hopes and expectations for the future, and dreams for their children. Real people – like you and me – they make up what is Iraq.

As you will appreciate – I was thoroughly depressed as I thought of the injustice of the unending war of UN sanctions on the children and their parents throughout Iraq. I felt then in Istanbul, as I do today, the unacceptability of United Nations double standards applied to Iraq, and the Palestinians. How glaring is the misplaced righteous and aggressive Bush crusade of the so-called war on terrorism – how confused by that dangerously simplistic concept of the "Axis of Evil." Even now, eighteen months after 9/11 few in the USA have had the courage to ask why? With a view to beginning the process of responding to the underlying causes of non-state terrorism – the desperation of the suicide bomber, the isolation, poverty and the negative impact of our often-corrupted western cultural and religious values on others? I fear not. Have we demanded that state terror such as we witness against

the Palestinians must be stopped? I fear not. We are instead set on a modern right-wing conservative born-again Christian crusade of intolerance and greed -- as ugly and violent as a thousand years ago. And once again, it is booty and riches we are after. This time the booty takes the form of oil, without which our high-consumption western economies cannot be sustained.

The words of Omar Khayyam jumped out at me from a page as I was standing in that Turkish bookshop:

“If with evil you punish the evil I have done – pray tell, what is the difference between you and me?”

I knew I had to buy the book by Amin Maalouf. His thought-provoking quote simply rang my bell – as we say! It is such a simple question, and yet we seem to be deaf to it, and blind to the consequences of its neglect. It is our very own double standard.

I was brought up to accept a basic Quaker belief namely that in every man and woman there is goodness, or there is God, as perhaps most Friends would say. Therefore, I believe there are no evil people. No one is inherently evil. There are evil actions, evil consequences and frightening decisions in great chambers made by men in pinstriped suits that have evil impact on innocent people. We are sadly all too aware of that.

In our daily lives this, query of Omar Khayyam can be a real working tool for productive interaction with others. On the larger stage, it makes a mockery of our “civilised diplomacy” when we threaten the transgressors with horrific military violence. And no where is this more true than the UN Security Council chamber. This is the warm place where the ‘suits’ determine the killing of innocents through UN approved force, or by embargo, as they meet behind closed doors. Khayyam would surely have determined that the UN punishes through evil actions – often the evil of neglectful violence incompatible with the spirit of the UN Charter. He might well have determined that the 15 member states are the terrorists.

I am appalled by western rationalisation of violence as though God was on our side in some new crusade against the forces of darkness, the forces of evil. It horrifies me not only because this is the year 2003, but because it is so inherently wrong. And incompatible with the qualities many accord to God. We like to think we are not living in what we Europeans call the “dark ages”, but I fear that we are. The wooden club has simply been replaced with more fancy, and deadly, equipment. We still adopt readily – when it suits - the ancient concept that “the enemy of our enemy is our friend”! We have not moved forward very much at all.

Belatedly some religious leaders have spoken to that abomination – the “just war” concept - always incoherent to me – emphasizing their new belief that the “just war” is finally dead. One has only to listen to Dr Rowan Williams to feel greatly encouraged. The Pope has addressed the same ancient theme and condemned it. I am sure most of us here feel the same way. There is no cause worthy, nor any

justification, for taking life. Sadly, this is not the way world leaders see things, nor the way they inform their supporters, nor how we bring up our children.

One only has to read Gandhi to appreciate our current reality:

“It may be long before the law of love will be recognized in internal affairs. The machineries of governments stand between and hide the hearts of one people from those of another”.

And tragically this is only too true in respect of the leaders we employ in Washington and London. And we cannot forget those who are like-minded elsewhere, from the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan to the deserts of Israel and Saudi Arabia. And in Ireland. None of us can point the finger at others without looking behind us and acknowledging our own failures.

Nevertheless, we cannot give in to the hopelessness of the mess we have created around the world – the rape and greed of corporate globalization, the consumption needs of the ‘haves’ at the expense of the majority – the ‘have nots’. If only those who dominate decision making today could understand thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi and Omar Khayyam! Naïve optimism perhaps, but then surely here in Britain there is capacity to read and the intelligence to understand? Or is British foreign policy also traveling along the street of messianic and simplistic thought – acting out some in-articulated fear of evil, and ready to respond with worse?

The question we have to ask ourselves is how do we make the gigantic leap from the chaos and violence – the point where our governments have taken us today - to opening dialogue, to finding common ground and to making our enemies into our friends?. Why is nonviolence so difficult? Gandhi said:

“It is the acid test of nonviolence that in a nonviolent conflict there is no rancour left behind and, in the end, the enemies are converted into friends”.

How we have failed him! And yet all of us must have hope that we will mature as a people, and find and elect leaders who are mature and balanced men and women of integrity. Or do we wait for the use of what is now known as “tactical nuclear weapons”?

It is stunning for me, and I am sure equally for you, to listen to “statesmen” discuss the use of such weapons in the Middle-East. As a CND person, who once marched from Aldermaston to Trafalgar Square and listened to Bertrand Russell, - I am almost speechless to know that the use of nuclear weapons is again being contemplated. How the spirits of those incinerated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki must be agitated. In their memory, the answer must be no – we must pursue non-violence with aggression!

It is extraordinary how absolutely relevant Gandhi’s thinking is today. He said:

“If the mad race for armaments continues it is bound to result in a slaughter such has never occurred in history. If there is a victor left the very victory will be a living death for the nation that emerges victorious”.

It serves to emphasize just how outrageous it is that the US and Britain seem to be thinking the unthinkable, and considering the viability of using any form of nuclear weapons on the people of Iraq. But then as both countries have refused to acknowledge the terrible impact of weaponised depleted uranium in the first Gulf War – 300 tons no less – why am I surprised?

Whereas we see some rationality in the approach to North Korea apparently in possession of some nuclear capacity, we see something else when it comes to Iraq. As much as I try I cannot understand the obsessions of both Blair and Bush – the anxiety they have in regard to President Saddam Hussein is extraordinary. We have to assume they think they know something the rest of us do not know. And perhaps that is reasonable in that Britain and the US sold Baghdad many of the weapons materials – so-called weapons of mass destruction – that UN inspectors are still seeking. In other words, perhaps they do know something we do not know, and they also have intelligence-gathering means we do not have. They also know, however, that the military resources of Iraq are less than one third of 1991. And that the neighbours of Iraq fear no threat. One can only guess at the fear and paranoia of London and Washington.

So what is it that frightens Blair and Bush so? I believe the fear is linked to oil – that is the missing piece of the puzzle - oil and the control of oil. This has been a US desire for many years and upgraded in recent months since the attack of 9/11 on the New York Twin Towers. The relationship with Saudi Arabia has curdled and is only short of being totally sour because of US economic dependency on Saudi oil. The linkage of Saudi Arabia to the 9/11 suicide attacks and the financing of the Bin Laden/Al Qaeda movement by the Saudi Monarchy has been glaring. The insecurity of the US in this old relationship would seem to be pushing America down the path of war in order to secure in haste for itself - possession of Iraq. That is Iraq - the world's largest reserve tank – some 120,000,000 barrels of oil.

Everyone to whom I have spoken to in the Middle-East this past six weeks from Tunis to Cairo, from Amman to Baghdad believes wholeheartedly that the impending war is not about weapons, but is about oil. The re-mapping of the Middle-East is about oil, and the American desire to have a military presence is about oil. Plus there is the US strategy to protect and enhance Israel at the cost of Palestinian national ambitions. And we have to realise that the thinking behind the strategy goes back to 2000 - one year before the 9/11 attack that so frightened America and created a feeling of vulnerability - when men like Cheney and Wolfowitz planned a scenario whereby the US would become the paramount force world wide and in the Region. And by a strong military presence – take total control of all oil within the Region – a huge percentage of the worlds needs. Thereby America would not only ensure cheap home consumption for the next 50 years, but would control supplies for Europe and Japan. This control is seen in Washington as essential if the US is to maintain its' superpower status and avoid any competition from the EU. This is about social and economic power on a grand global scale and about positioning the American empire for world domination. Here we have

Nineteenth century colonial ambitions in the year 2003? You may laugh, but I fear this is not a mad dream coming out of Texas, but originating in the military industrial complex, backed up by the communications community of the USA. And all this before the terrorist attack of 9 September 2001!

President Jimmy Carter said in his Noble Peace prize acceptance speech that:

“ ...recent appalling acts of terrorism have reminded us that no nations, even superpowers, are invulnerable. He goes on to say that “it is clear that global challenges must be met with an emphasis on peace, in harmony with others, with strong alliances and international consensus”.

President Carter quotes Ralph Bunche, once UN under-secretary-general for Political Affairs:

“to suggest that war can prevent war is a base play on words and a despicable form of warmongering. The objective of any who sincerely believe in peace clearly must be to exhaust every honourable recourse in the effort to save the peace. The world has had ample evidence that war begets only conditions that beget further war”.

We must endeavour to pay heed to, and act upon such thoughts and concepts. They are so fundamentally sound.

Having shared these statements with you, along with the gloomy picture of the UN Security Council today, let me turn to an area of particular interest to me, and move away from nation states per se, and their global ambitions, to an area of personal responsibility. I refer to the democracies and to those of us who enjoy some of the advantages of residing in same. And who also have the obligations that citizenship places upon us as individuals. And the responsibilities that privilege imposes. In recent years I have been - like many of you perhaps - agonizing over the horrifying courage and tragic consequences of suicide bombing – that form of terrorism that occurs often in response to state terror.

We rightly are shocked by blatant attacks on civilians – be they Palestinian, Israeli, British, American or any other nationality. We again find ourselves faced with a double standard – Nation States tell us they can bomb cities, use missiles on urban areas, knowing full well the losses to the civilian population, and then can dismiss deaths as collateral damage - the term that Robert Fisk calls an “obscenity”. That is state terrorism. However, the same politicians, spokesmen who can accept this collateral damage are apparently outraged by non-state suicide bombing - bombing that is in response or in retaliation. I believe we should be equally outraged by both. For many it is apparently easy to buy into the acceptance of the one and express horror at the other, but is that valid in today’s world where civilians cannot be readily separated from the war machines they endorse through the electoral process and fuel through the payment of taxes?

What about those of us who elect government leaders, and entrust them inter alia with foreign policy, and then are too careless to comprehend the impact of that policy; or when informed are too indolent to stop it, or change it; or too uncaring to demand respect for international law, or application of our commitment to domestic

rule of law to others overseas? What about us? Are we really civilians anymore, or are we not in fact responsible for the actions – the interference, greed, the poverty, the killing - that grow out of our foreign policy? Are we not in fact as involved as the military we employ or conscript? Are we in fact not really combatants ourselves? Who is to say that attacks on us – as para-militants or somewhat civilians - are any less valid, or more horrific, than attacks on those we employ, often coerce, to fight and die for us?

What I am suggesting is that if we of the democracies took full responsibility for the actions of the governments and leaders we elect, and were prepared to accept the consequences of retaliation, or a military attack suicide or otherwise and maybe the deaths of our loved ones, we would surely be much more careful about state aggression, about our country, our democracy going to war. In other words, I am suggesting that there are no true civilians anymore – that the Geneva Conventions and Protocols do not apply to those of us – empowered citizens - responsible for various kinds of aggression – from sanctions to nuclear. How carefully we would take our democratic responsibilities were we to be held accountable and if we understood that our families would pay a price for the violence we authorize and finance.

On constraining the madness of violence and war, I want to return to the teaching of Gandhi as he says:

“ If we are to reach real peace in the world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with our children; and if they grow up in their natural innocence, we won't have to struggle; we won't have to pass fruitless idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with the peace and love for which consciously or unconsciously the whole world is hungering”.

This teaching would prepare the way for the kind of responsible citizens and democracies that I believe the world requires – urgently! This message must be shared and its content adopted if the world of all human beings is to have a future that equally includes all human beings. And those of us already privileged - often many times over - have this huge responsibility to speak out, and act out, in the spirit of non-violence of which the Mahatma spoke, and demonstrated.

Thank you.

**Denis J. Halliday, London
30 January 2003**