

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ



**Address by
His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom,
President of the Republic of Maldives,
at Subject Session – I on
“A Non-violent Approach to Conflict Resolution and Peace-
building”,
at the International Conference,
organised by the Indian National Congress,
to commemorate the centenary of
Mahatma Gandhi’s Satyagraha movement,
“Peace, Non-violence and Empowerment –
Gandhian Philosophy in the Twentieth Century”**

Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi
Monday, 29 January 2007

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Madam Chairperson, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to thank the Honourable Congress President, Shrimathi Sonia Gandhi, for the kind invitation she extended to me and the leadership of my party, DRP, to attend this Conference organised by the Indian National

Congress, to commemorate the centenary of the Satyagraha movement launched by one of the greatest men of the last one hundred years – Mahatma Gandhi.

I also thank the Government of India and the Indian National Congress for the warm welcome and for the excellent arrangements made to ensure our comfort.

Let me also say that I am, as always, very happy to be here in India, a nation with whom the Maldives enjoys very warm and cordial ties, and one with whom we look to further consolidating our wide-ranging relationship.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

By example, by effort and by precept, Mahatma Gandhi changed the course of history, not only in South Asia, but also in many other parts of the world. Empires and ideologies have crumbled before ordinary people energized by the spirit of Satyagraha.

The presence today at this conference of leaders, teachers and activists from all corners of the earth and from diverse civilisational backgrounds is testimony to the abiding relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's vision and ideals. It was interesting to learn of the detailed operational plan developed by Dr. Sharp on Gandhi's Satyagraha principle.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Mahatma Gandhi was born at a time when imperialism was riding high, when oppression of peoples was a norm, and when whole continents could be pillaged, and when prejudice and fear stood as the basis for authority and legitimacy. War and aggression were still legitimate instruments of relations between nations. He challenged the order of the day, not with war but with compassion, not with prejudice but with empathy, not with cowardice but with conviction, not with arrogance but with humility, not with bigotry but with tolerance.

Twice in his life time, the powers of the day chose not the path of Satyagraha, but the Clausewitzian path of "politics by other means", and embroiled the whole world in total war. Their prescription for the so-called "20 years' crisis" between those two wars was more of the same – not appeasement, but being so called Realists, pursuing power that came from tank divisions and gun barrels. The upshot of all that was that the powers that be proudly articulated the comforts of "mutually assured destruction" or MAD. Of course, to disguise our moral bankruptcy we use nice words such as deterrence, and when it fails, equally misleading words, such as smart weapons and collateral damage.

But the fact is, the so called Realist vision, with its focus on dominance and power, is unsustainable. Just as General Reginald Dyer's bullets at Jallian Walla Bagh could not save the British Empire. There are clearly limitations to what is called "hard power". It can sometimes suppress a conflict, but, more

often than not, it would only aggravate a dispute. But surely, the use of violence can never resolve a conflict or establish durable peace. "Soft power", such as that of moral suasion, can establish the foundations of lasting peace. Mahatma Gandhi showed that power does not have to come from the barrel of a gun.

Our own experience in the Maldives, and our predicament as a small state, demonstrates that peace does not equate with military prowess. Our independence was secured without bloodshed, and it has been safeguarded through friendly relations with our neighbours and with the entire world.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The second half of the twentieth century showed greater regard for Satyagraha. War did not bring lasting freedom. Freedom won by non-violent activism has proven to be more sustainable. No one would doubt the fundamental importance of the ideals propounded by Mahatma Gandhi, especially given the nature of the challenges that the world faces at present.

Mahatma Gandhi understood the fundamental importance of co-operation for viable and sustainable social and political order. Co-operation achieved not through coercion or subjugation, as many of his more powerful contemporaries understood it, but through empathy and compassion, as all civilizations and religions have taught.

Islam, for example, teaches us the importance of empathy. In the Holy Quran, the Almighty Allah says:

“O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other).”

All the great religions of the world stress the importance of non-violence. In a reference to the conflict between Cain and Abel, the Holy Quran describes in Sura 5 verse 29 that Abel's response, which is the response of the righteous, to the threat by Cain to kill him was, and I quote: ‘If you do stretch your hand against me, to slay me, it is not for me to stretch my hand against you to slay you, for I do fear Allah, the Cherisher of the worlds.’”

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In recent decades, advances in technology have revolutionised the world and have accelerated the process of globalisation. What has followed have been many benefits but also numerous problems, such as the rapid spread of disease, the rise of terrorism, the breakdown of nations, the degradation of the environment, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. But, it is evident that force is not the solution.

The European Union has shown that swords can indeed be turned into plowshares. ASEAN is showing us that the same experiment can work very effectively even in other conditions. South Asia, the birthplace of Mahatma

Gandhi, must demonstrate that it has the will to co-operate to achieve its vision of durable peace and dignity for the peoples of our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As Mahamata Gandhi observed, the worst form of violence is poverty. Eradicating poverty must remain a foremost goal of creating a world that is just and peaceful. I am confident that one of the outcomes of this memorable gathering would be to rededicate ourselves to the urgent tasks of eradicating poverty and the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals. I also hope that this conference would provide an impetus to the SAARC Summit that is to be convened here in two months' time. The vision of Mahatma Gandhi has direct relevance not only in matters of high politics, but also in inspiring us to work harder towards a just and equitable world. "Peace," he had said, "will not come out of a clash of arms but out of justice lived and done by unarmed nations in the face of odds."

Indeed, as Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out, peace is not merely the absence of war, but a condition of mind brought about by the serenity of the soul. Achieving that condition requires respect for human dignity and equality, freedom and compassion, justice and truth. Building peace requires promoting understanding and co-operation, and tolerance and dialogue.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The essence of Satyagraha is the power of the truth. It is about openness, and fairness. Clearly, violence cannot be the answer to the world's woes. War has never been a solution. It is evident where the world is going wrong. But Satyagraha will triumph, as borne out by history. As Mahatma Gandhi noted: "When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it--always."

The sooner the world accepts these truths, the better!

Thank you.