

WELCOME / CONTEXT Discovery & Dialogue

Rajmohan Gandhi

President, *Initiatives of Change International*

'My wife and I recently completed an unusual voyage of discovery and dialogue to: Sri Lanka, Indonesia, South Africa, Kenya, Palestine, Israel, Norway, Romania, Ukraine, Japan, the USA, Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil.

An utterly simple thought which seemed to intrigue people everywhere was that each of us can live to make the other person great, not just to make myself great. That we can seek and assist the greatness of our colleagues and associates, of everyone in our team or circle.'



First I would like to salute Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun for his continuing inspiring leadership of the Human Security Forum. Next I would like to thank John Bond and the wonderful team around him for the work done to prepare and organize the forum.

As many here know, my wife and I, also supported by a terrific team, recently completed an unusual voyage of discovery and dialogue that included the following countries: Sri Lanka, Indonesia, South Africa, Kenya, Palestine, Israel, Norway, Romania, Ukraine, Japan, the USA, Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil. Many here joined that voyage through good wishes, prayers, or funds. My profound thanks thanks to everyone who did that.

What did I learn on the voyage that may be relevant for this forum?

I saw, as you might expect, fatherless, motherless families. I saw, thanks to Aids and violence, children raising children. I saw a sense of helplessness over drug wars. I saw the pervasiveness of corruption and of acceptance of corruption. I saw unending informal settlements – shanty towns that break your heart because of their limitless extent. I saw the immense overpowering presence of illegal settlements and walls.

Yet I found hope in the human spirit and a resolve in human beings to make the seemingly impossible happen, a will to pray and work so that the impossible happens. I saw what I had known before, but I saw it again -- that actually we are all the same underneath. In country after country, people responded alike to real stories of real human beings.

This was true of white Afrikaaners and Black leaders of the Pan African Congress, Arab leaders in Palestine and Jewish leaders in Israel, Sunnis and Shia in Indonesia and South Africa, Favelados in Brazil and members of elite clubs in Colombia.

An utterly simple thought which seemed to intrigue people everywhere was that each of us can live to make the other person great, not just to make myself great. That we can seek and assist the greatness of our colleagues and associates, of everyone in our team or circle.

But they also responded to a line from the poet Tagore that my grandfather Gandhi loved: 'Ekla Chalo Re'. Dare to Walk Alone. Make the other person great,

but walk alone if need be.

This is what Gandhi said two weeks before he was killed: "Society is made up of individuals. It is we that make society. . . If one man takes the initiative others will follow and one can become many; if there is not even one there is nothing."

On Easter Day in April I was in the Holy Land. That day I found myself in the spot in Jerusalem where it is believed that Jesus was born, and also in the place in Hebron where it is believed that Abraham was buried.

Impelled by the pain I had seen, the fears I had seen, and the faith I had seen, I prayed that day, in each of the two sacred places, two silent prayers. One prayer was for the liberation of Palestine. The other prayer was for the safety of the people of Israel. As far as my heart knew, each prayer was as ardent as the other.

We are here from so many different lands. Each of our lands has so many human needs. The lives of so many of our brothers and sisters are so deeply insecure. May we in the coming days encourage one another, hear one another's stories, learn from one another, and find ways of aiding a momentum already existing in our world towards healing, justice, and peace.

Prof. Rajmohan Gandhi *India*

Rajmohan Gandhi is President of *Initiatives of Change International*. A writer, historian, and former member of the Upper House of the Indian Parliament, Rajmohan Gandhi currently serves as Research Professor at the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA. His recent biography of his grandfather, the Mahatma, was awarded the prestigious Biennial Barpujari Award of the Indian History Congress in December 2007. He has also written widely on the Indian independence movement and its leaders, India-Pakistani relations, human rights and conflict resolution. In 1990, Gandhi led the Indian delegation to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. From 1992 to 2000 he was Research Professor at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. He has been associated with *Initiatives of Change* since 1956.