

VICTORY OVER VIOLENCE CAMPAIGN CONTINUES

The youth division's Victory Over Violence campaign generates dialogue in Denver and San Diego.

Arun Gandhi Encourages Denver Youth

We have to begin with ourselves and in our homes. We have to create peace there, create peace with our friends and relatives, and let that radiate into peace around the world.... We have a great task to perform.”

With these words, speaker Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, encouraged the capacity crowd gathered in the Ikeda Auditorium of the SGI-USA Denver Culture Center to embrace the concept of peace and begin “planting the seeds” of nonviolence in their daily lives.

Several hundred SGI-USA members and guests from throughout the community came to the culture center on the beautiful Sunday morning of Jan. 30 for a celebration of peace and nonviolence planned and organized by the youth division. Attendees listened to experiences and were ushered in groups through the culture center on a “Journey for Peace” where, in various rooms, they participated in discussions, listened to speakers and did other activities.

Everything was centered on the three main themes of the youth division's Victory Over Violence pledge: 1) I will respect my life; 2) I will respect all life; and 3) I will inspire hope in others. After their tour, participants enjoyed food and beverages and were entertained by a variety of talented singers and dancers, and the musical groups Jazz Explosion and the Snow-Capped Rocky Mountain Chorus.

The highlight of the half-day affair was the speech by Mr. Gandhi, who spoke at length about how to make nonviolence a reality in the modern world. He stressed how all of us must make nonviolence “part of our nature and really live it.” He also emphasized that nonviolence goes beyond not using physical force against another person; true nonviolence must include the key components of love, compassion, understanding and respect. Those that say nonviolence is not relevant today “are saying that love, understanding, compassion and respect are not relevant,” Mr. Gandhi states. Peace in the world “must come from love, not through fear.”

Mr. Gandhi also recalled his grandfather's advice on using anger effectively when confronting injustice. His grandfather told him that “anger is like electricity”—when channeled properly, anger can be a force for many good things. If not, channeled properly, it will create nothing but destruction.

Mr. Gandhi praised the youth division for its efforts to promote peace and nonviolence. “The SGI youth,” he said, “have a great deal of commitment and have already taken wonderful steps to make people aware of violence and of our need for peace.”

—*SHELBY FORSYTH*



SGI-USA Denver Youth Join Youth Summit

Denver youth division members awoke bright and early on Saturday morning, Jan. 29, to attend the kick-off event of A Season for Nonviolence in Colorado with 500 middle school and high school students and their parents from throughout Colorado and surrounding states. The Peace Quest 2000 youth summit at Lakewood High School included speakers, discussion sessions, performances and a keynote address by Arun Gandhi. Ten junior high and high school division members were official participants in the summit.

Other youth division members were on hand to answer questions at a booth and present information on the SGI-USA Youth Peace Committee's Victory Over Violence campaign.

The youth summit focused on helping youth discover ways to initiate peaceful dialogue with one another in their daily lives. In the morning sessions, students broke up into small discussion groups to identify different forms of violence and discuss the difference between passive and aggressive violence. From there, students spent the afternoon brainstorming different nonviolence methods and programs to implement within their schools and communities.

Many students were able to hear Mr. Gandhi speak for the first time. His M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence in Memphis, Tenn., initiated the annual Season for Nonviolence in 1998, the year marking the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and the 30th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

Gandhi opened his speech by asking everyone in the audience to pair up with a partner, with one of the partners making a fist. He said that inside the fist was the world's most precious diamond—the other partner should try to get the diamond out of his or her partner's hand. Gandhi then asked: "Did you ask for it or did you forcefully take it? Usually it's the second one." This exercise, he said, shows how violent people usually are.

"Nonviolence is something for the brave," Mr. Gandhi said. "You are the young leaders of tomorrow. You're going to inherit the world tomorrow. I hope that you will spend your time trying to learn about life."

Mr. Gandhi also said that each of us has the responsibility to stop passive and physical violence from occurring in our daily lives. He asked, "Why is it that violent [TV] shows get the highest ratings? We have to make that change in ourselves and not want to watch these shows." In dealing with others who are violent, Mr. Gandhi said that people should try to reach out to them instead of blocking them out. "Violent people weren't born evil," he said. "They were nice, good young kids who had something happen to them. We need to be more understanding and compassionate with people who are less fortunate than us."

—LISA MATSUO



San Diego Victory Over Violence Committee Hosts Seminar on Holocaust Survivor

Nearly 200 participants filled the SGI-USA San Diego Kearny Mesa Community Center Jan. 16 for a moving reenactment of the Nuremberg Trials. The seminar/workshop, titled "From the Ashes," drew 48 guests from the community, some who had survived

concentration camps during World War II. To open the day's events, Judge Norbert Ehrenfreund, who covered the 1945 Nuremberg Trials for the Stars and Stripes newspaper, interviewed a San Diegan, Lou Dunst, who had survived four concentration camps, including Auschwitz, in an interview style similar to that used in the trials. Members and guests listened in disbelief to his account of the torture, slavery and starvation Lou and his friends had undergone.

In 1944, Mr. Dunst, then 18 years old, was living in a small Czechoslovakian town where his family practiced Orthodox Judaism. German soldiers came knocking on their door one day, instructing them to leave their home and all their belongings and go to the village square—or be shot on the spot. After spending several days with all the other Jewish townspeople in the square, they were marched down to a field by a cemetery where they were told to dig their own graves. Several days later, instead of being murdered, they were forced into crowded boxcars, with no food, water, ventilation or sanitation facilities. Nearly a week passed. Many of the older people and sick people died. Pregnant women gave birth, and when they were finally taken from the boxcars, the babies were kicked away “as footballs.”

At Auschwitz, his family was forced to separate. It would be the last time Mr. Dunst would see his mother. Men were forced into slavery, into building missiles, constructing their own crematoriums and carrying dead bodies. Many resorted to cannibalism to keep themselves alive, eating the livers of their dead neighbors. After a year and a half of imprisonment, the American army overpowered the Nazis and liberated the camp. At the time of their emancipation, Mr. Dunst had been left for dead on a pile of corpses.

Judge Ehrenfreund followed up the interview by questioning how and why such an event could ever occur. “How could so many participate in the widespread murder of so many innocent people?” he asked. “The Holocaust is like a black pit that is so deep, and that could never, ever be closed.” He recalled that, as he sat and studied the faces of the 21 Nazis on trial, they appeared as common people, and he realized that this “beast of Nazism” could live in any one of us.

—*M.J. WARRENDER*