

**COMBATING GLOBAL VIOLENCE:
THE HUMAN SPIRIT KNOWS NO BORDERS
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Youth violence knows no borders. It happens in Japan just as it happens in the United States. The weapons used by youth to commit acts of violence might differ in each country, but the result is the same: People are harmed, sometimes fatally.

Why is there such violence? What can a person do to prevent it in one's immediate environment? These are some of the questions considered by panelists and participants at the SGI-USA-organized symposium "Creating Violence-Free Communities," held at the SGI-USA New York Culture Center on May 25, co-sponsored by the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence.

Commentary abounds in the media, linking youth violence to what young people see on television and on the Internet. It also cites the two-generation nuclear family living in comfortable but increasingly impersonal suburbs as another cause. If these might be "micro-level" theories, what are some "macro-level" reasons?

"Homelessness in the hearts of youth" is how Yvette Edmond, co-chair of SGI-USA's Victory Over Violence program, accounted for global youth violence. One explanation for this is the lack of love at home and in society. Young people strike out in violent ways to obtain the attention they need—even if it is infamy. Why do families and societies become this way, particularly in prosperous, industrialized societies, in which one would expect more civility?

Dr. "Raj" Ramanathapillai of the M.K. Gandhi Institute shared the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, commenting that "overconsumption leads to violence." According to Dr. Raj, acquisitiveness makes people more likely to disregard the humanity of others, and more prone to violent acts. It follows that while capitalism and industrialization have enabled entire societies to achieve unparalleled material abundance, this has not happened without cost to the human spirit. Dr. Raj added that Gandhi would often say that people make the mistake of hating the person and not the act, and saw unconditional forgiveness as a sacred path.

A legacy of the American civil rights struggle was shared by Dr. Paul Smith, who observed that his mentor, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "was always making himself vulnerable." Dr. Smith advised that to overcome serious hatred, individuals need to do this repeatedly.

Nonviolence activist Nickolai Parker suggested that one needs a release for hatred and pointed to spiritual practice as the means that enables individuals to connect with their higher selves.

Yes, the human spirit is ailing. But the human spirit—which knows no borders—is also undaunted in the face of inhumanity. The philosophy of nonviolence traveled from India to the United States to inspire the civil rights movement. It is once again gaining in importance as the philosophical backbone of the human rights movement that is SGI-USA's VOV project.

In like manner, the song "We Shall Overcome" was first sung during the nonviolent Indian struggle for independence. The hymn then became a rallying cry of the civil rights movement. It has recently returned to its native India, where downtrodden (low-caste) Dalits are singing it to gain inspiration in their struggle for equality. The song today is a shining international symbol of human resilience. Violence may know no borders, but the human spirit is equally unfettered by boundaries in its struggle to overcome inhumanity.