

**GANDHI, KING, IKEDA EXHIBITION OPENS IN ATLANTA
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Hundreds of people of diverse races, religions and cultures gathered on March 31, for the grand opening of the “Gandhi, King, Ikeda: A Legacy of Building Peace” Exhibition and Interfaith Convocation at the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta.

The gathering and exhibition celebrated the lives of three great leaders—Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and SGI President Daisaku Ikeda—who have fought for a peaceful and nonviolent society. These three men, from three different cultures and continents, dedicated their lives to saving and reviving the human race.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony marked the preview opening of the exhibition. Participants included Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell, Morehouse College President Walter E. Massey, Dr. Lawrence Carter Sr., dean of the chapel, the Reverend Dr. Michael Beckwith, president of the Agape International Spiritual Center, and SGI-USA Vice General Director Richard Brown.

The exhibition was created at the request of Dean Carter and designed by the Hughes Group of Washington, D.C., headed by Bob Hughes. “There is an awesome message of connectedness at the heart of this exhibition,” said Hughes. “Dean Carter has often stressed the connection between Tho-reau and Gandhi, the connection between Gandhi and King and his belief that all three of these men’s ideals are embodied in President Ikeda.

“This exhibition breaks down the artificial separation of people by skin color, belief systems and cultural traditions,” he continued. “There’s the Indian tradition of Gandhi, the Western tradition of King and the Eastern tradition of Ikeda. All three men share the same dream and the same ideals. It is important for us to draw confidence from their struggles to be able to face our own troubles with the same spirit.

“Also, this exhibition shows the vision of President Ikeda. It provides a means to understand that we are all connected, not superficially, but on a deep level. By embracing that belief, it gives us one more opportunity to take a step toward peace. Because of this exhibition, many people will be able to see President Ikeda in a new context—as a living emissary of peace in the same category with Dr. King and Gandhi.”

After viewing the exhibition, the crowd proceeded inside the chapel to begin the interfaith portion of the gathering and view a film entitled *Gandhi, King, Ikeda: Heroes of the Global Community*.

The film depicts the lives of the three men, observing the parallels of their struggles and how each dedicated themselves to building a peaceful society. In the film, Dr. Alfred Balitzer, formerly of Claremont McKenna College and now dean of faculty at Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, mentions that “if Gandhi and King were still alive today, I believe they would pull Daisaku Ikeda up to the podium alongside them, because he is the next generation.”

The Agape International Choir opened the ceremony as honorees made their way to the stage. The choir enriched the program’s theme of “One River, Many Wells” through spiritual song. The renowned group, whose music has been heard all around the world, is a multi-ethnic choir with 150 active members. The combination of rhythmical sounds,

superb vocalists, talented musicians and various styles of ethnic dress ignited the audience. Forty-nine choir members traveled from Culver City, Calif., paying their own way to participate in the event.

Also on hand were local state and city officials, as well as representatives of various religions and denominations who, alongside the Morehouse College constituents and SGI-USA members, were presented three separate awards bearing the Gandhi, King, Ikeda name: the Spiritual Courage, Liberty and Courage of Conscience awards.

The Spiritual Courage award was presented to people of different faith traditions. Buddhist, Bahá'í, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, New Thought and Unity believers were given the award to thank them for their continuous work in their respective organizations and for getting their members to participate side-by-side in this event.

The Liberty award was presented to government officials instrumental in changing the design of the Georgia state flag. The new design is helping to bring about a new feeling amongst Georgia citizens, who were at odds over the Confederate symbol, which is now at the bottom of the flag. Shrinking the Confederate symbol and placing it at the bottom of the flag help depict a portion of Southern tradition and history, rather than representing the entire population.

The Courage of Conscience award was presented to the Mayor of Atlanta and the Governor of Georgia. The two were both instrumental in uniting the citizens in the Southeastern United States—Mayor Bill Campbell for initiating interfaith meetings that began in 1999 and Governor Roy Barnes for his work on the new flag.

Mayor Campbell commented that, through the exhibition, he hoped the public will “gain a better understanding and appreciation for the global nature of the struggle for freedom.”

—*Nicole D. Collier contributed to this article.*