

Speech for Astana conference

Ela Gandhi

May I firstly congratulate the Government of Kazakhstan for the bold stand it has taken in banning nuclear testing as well as nuclear weapons in its territory. Indeed together with Kazakhstan we applaud the 26 countries for standing up to vote for legal instruments at the U.N. to eliminate nuclear weapons all together. The 9 countries who voted against this move and the three that abstained need to ask themselves whether they have the inhumanity to inflict such misery on a people as we have seen in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Will these countries have such hatred to inflict such horrors on any country regardless of any provocation. Then we ask why keep the weapon?

I believe that a country's stature will certainly be enhanced worldwide if it has the courage and the conviction to respect humankind and dismantle nuclear weapons.

May I quote Mahatma Gandhi when in responding to the use of atom bomb he exclaimed,

"Oh, on that point you can proclaim to the whole world without hesitation, that I am beyond repair. I regard the employment of the atom bomb for the wholesale destruction of men, women and children as the most diabolical use of science."

He went on to say,

"There have been cataclysmic changes in the world. Do I still adhere to my faith in truth and non-violence? Has not the atom bomb exploded that faith? Not only has it not done so, but it has clearly demonstrated to me that the twins constitute the mightiest force in the world. Before it the atom bomb is of no effect. The two opposing forces are wholly different in kind, the one moral and spiritual, the other physical and material. The one is infinitely superior to the other which by its very nature has an end. The force of the spirit is ever progressive and endless. Its full expression makes it unconquerable in the world. In saying this I know that I have said nothing new. I merely bear witness to the fact. What is more, the force resides in everybody, man, woman and child, irrespective of the colour of the skin. Only, in many it lies dormant. But it is capable of being awakened by judicious training....It is further to be observed that, without the recognition of this truth and due effort to realize it, there is no escape from self-destruction, the remedy lies in every individual training himself for self-expression in every walk of life, irrespective of response by the neighbours. (H, 10-2-1946, p. 8)"

This was Gandhiji's response to the use of the atom bomb 71 years ago. His plea to humanity to use nonviolent means for the resolution of conflict instead of violence and destruction. 71 years ago he spoke about the effect of such violence on the climate and the earth and today while we know and are concerned about the many natural disasters causing untold misery around the world we still are unable to take the rightful step to dismantle nuclear weapons as a

first step towards acceptance of the fact that we can resolve conflicts in far more constructive ways through the use of nonviolent means.

For those who may regard the Gandhian message of satyagraha as pacifism and disregard it as simplistic and unattainable, may I quote Albert Einstein, the architect of the Bomb, He said in a message on November 2, 1948 to the Indian Peace Congress,

“Brutal force cannot be met successfully for any length of time with similar brutal force,.... Let us do whatever is within our power so that all the people of the world may accept Gandhi’s gospel as their basic policy before it is too late.”

And again on June 18 1950 in a question and answer session in the United Nations sponsored series “Pursuit of Truth” he said,

“The remedy doesn’t lie in preparing oneself for the possibility of a future war. We must start with the conviction that security against military disaster can be realised only through patient negotiation.An armament race is the worst possible method of preventing an open conflict. On the contrary, real peace cannot be reached without systematic disarmament on a supranational scale.”

These are words of our great leaders. We ignore them at our own peril. We call on the 9 + 3 countries to do the right thing, support nuclear disarmament now.