

## **The Non-Violence Manifesto**

In a world steeped in violence, we dare to affirm non-violence as the highest value. Non-violence, towards others as well as towards oneself, is essential to making life worth living, for all.

We propose January 30th – the day Mahatma Gandhi fell to three fatal shots – as a day of imaginative world-wide experimentation in non-violence. For Gandhi, non-violence (ahimsa), was inseparable from civil disobedience (satyagraha or ‘holding on to the truth’). In his time, such insistence took simple but bold forms, as, for example, a nation harvesting salt from the sea in defiance of imperial law. The Paris school-children who sent out the Call for Ahimsa Day also demanded requested ‘simple’ things that any child could understand: to stop spending on weapons, to ensure food, water, health, housing and education for all. Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian Peace Nobel laureate, was the first to support their call, at the World Social Forum in Bombay in 2004.

In our age of killing for oil-wells, or simply killing for speed, many before us have dreamt of cycling, walking or dancing in the streets without getting killed by polluting and speeding objects (search “Carless Day”, “In Town Without My Car” on the web!) In our times of “natural” catastrophes, many have asked if it is not men who have provoked nature, or refused to learn from her lessons. Faced with merciless human relationships at the workplace, or with violence in the family or at school, they have tried to grasp the links between “personal” situations and the ways of a wider world hurtling along with nowhere to go.

In an age of dying for branded clothes and shoes, many have wished to live without branded bodies and minds (search “No Logo”!). In a world ruled by money, they have questioned the consumer society, the ad culture, the need to buy endlessly (search “No-Shopping Day”, “Buy-Nothing Day”, “Adbusters”...!). They know, the sun and the rain, love and laughter, curiosity and conversation – the best things in life are free.

On this one day we could speak up and act together across the world to reject violence in its many forms, violence deployed for a thrill, or vengeance, or in the name of “higher causes” – nation, honour, order, progress, market, gross domestic product, revolution or other gods – most of all for the suppression of women’s rights and desires. If we could, we would surprise ourselves, and find the confidence to do

better.

The forms of non-violent action are many. From very personal – silence, fasting or prayer – to collective campaigns such as those planned at a World Social Forum. Other examples could be peace concerts at disputed borders, with children befriending the ‘enemy’, chatting on line. We could hand out a poem in the street (as school-children did in Paris in their first experiment), or share a meal with strangers.

Also, at 17:13 Indian time (11:48 GMT) on January 30th, let us rise up together in different lands, perhaps answering the three gunshots with three gongs, or drum rolls, for a minute’s silence and introspection. Let this rising in communion express our common humanity and our refusal to condone violence, to forsake non-violence for any higher cause in the world.