

Caux, 18 July 2008



Rajmohan Gandhi, Visiting Professor, University of Illinois; former Member of the Upper House, Parliament of India; and biographer of his grandfather, Mahatma Gandhi, speaking on the first evening with the theme, 'Framing the conversation – Why we are here'.

We are in Caux because in Caux, over years and decades and by God's blessing, hearts have been touched, consciences brought to life, hands extended to enemies or people in need, and minds challenged. But Caux would not be Caux if it were not in Switzerland. Without the Swiss people, the Swiss authorities and the Swiss landscape, there would be no Caux. It is the Swiss people's sense of their role and their open hearts that have created Caux and kept Caux going. May I therefore salute the Swiss landscape, the Swiss authorities and the Swiss people as everyone here would want to.

The experts will speak during this first Caux Forum for Human Security. The moderators who will moderate the discussions are people who know what they will be talking about. They are seasoned people, deeply involved in different aspects of human security. Their lives, their hearts, their minds have been engaged with human security. The rest of us are lucky to be able to listen and interact with them. But please look carefully at the questions they are going to have to answer. Why is trust important? What are the underlying causes of armed conflict? How do socio-economic cultural factors add to human insecurity? These are basic questions. You might call them simple or rudimentary questions. There is nothing so fascinating as posing elementary questions to seasoned experts. It obliges experts to simplify their logic and their language. This will be welcomed by the rest of us and I rather suspect that they, the experts, will welcome this chance to express what they really believe, to spell out key lessons from their experience.

The other fascinating thing about the coming days is that we will have not speeches or debates but a conversation. What a relief. Debaters and public speakers seek to influence not their fellow debaters but their audience. In a conversation we seek to understand and influence our fellow conversers, we are ready to be influenced ourselves by them and by our own reflection on what we have heard. To have a conversation in Caux in Switzerland on human security and to have it now – not many things can be more interesting.

After the Second World War, all of Europe seemed to come to Caux. Relationships were built or restored and ultimately a European Community was created. Nowadays we move naturally across this European Community forgetting that what happened was astonishing and quite unlikely. During the coming days representatives from many continents will meet one another and form relationships that, God willing, will help in the emergence of a global community.

When Mohandas Gandhi decided he would aim to liberate and transform India, he was a member of a so called high caste group from the majority Hindu community of India confronting a European power which held India under its seemingly permanent grip. But Gandhi made up his mind that the so-called low castes and untouchables of India, the Muslims and Christians and Sikhs and Jews and Parsis of India were also his people. Many others followed him, and India became more than a geographical space. It became a community – of course with numerous imperfections as we all know. And although Gandhi fought British rule with a steely resolve he made up his mind that the British too were his people. And indeed the British people gave Gandhi their friendship and respect.

I believe that during the coming conversation we will do well to ask ourselves a question not listed on the

agenda but very much implied. Who are my people and who are not my people? This particular juncture of time. The computer, the internet, the cell phone have made our age the age of the citizen. Powerful governments, oppressive governments, powerful or oppressive castes, interests, majority groups, tribes, clans are now weaker in the equation with the ordinary citizen. How citizens can reinforce one another across boundaries and oceans, and how we can free ourselves from what binds us or burdens us or checks our creativity so that we can influence governments – to ask these questions is another reason why we are here.

Let me end with a prayer in the shape of a vision. In this age of the citizen, innocence will have power, decency will have power, the weak will gather strength, individuals will take simple actions and reinforce other another and influence governments and together, God willing, we will say to tyrant individuals or tyrannical governments, to coercive groups and to ourselves, 'Cruelty, oppression and indifference shall not prevail.' It is of course quite mad to utter a vision of this kind. Some will say it is mad even to utter a prayer of this kind. However, the victims of great suffering may not object.

Rajmohan Gandhi

Rajmohan Gandhi, writer, historian, and former member of the Indian Parliament, currently serves as Research Professor at the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA. Author of several books, his new biography of his grandfather, the Mahatma, was awarded the prestigious Biennial Barpujari Award of the Indian History Congress in December 2007. In 1990, Gandhi led the Indian delegation to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. From 1992 to 2000 he was Research Professor at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. Gandhi has been associated with *Initiatives of Change* since 1956.