

Ahimsa Day Wednesday 15th October 2014

Grand Committee Room House of Commons

Address by Ms Mimi Bekhechi Director PETA Foundation

Jai Jinendra!

I'm delighted to be here to accept this award on Ingrid's behalf. I know she would've loved to be here herself to receive it but sadly she had prior commitments in America.

Let me tell you a bit about this remarkable lady. Ingrid was born just down the road in Surrey and lived in Europe until she was 7 years old, when her family moved to New Delhi. She made lots of Jain friends there. They would ask themselves as children what they wanted to be when they grew up. Some wanted to be ballerinas and jet pilots and all sorts of grand things. But Ingrid wanted to be a Jain!

Ingrid may not be a Jain by birth, **but she is one in spirit** and PETA, the organisation that she founded over 30 years ago, which today has grown into the largest animal rights organisation in the world, is founded on Jain principles.

Asteya: Leather, milk, eggs, meat, and animal bodies and eyes for testing, are not **willingly** offered, they are all stolen goods. Aparagraha means we don't take. Satya allows us to educate others by telling the truth about where such things come from. Ahimsa **demand**s that we reject them all.

That principle is at the core of PETA's motto - that animals are not ours to use for food, clothing, experimentation, entertainment, or any other reason.

Today on Ingrid's desk is this Rabindranath Tagor saying about work: "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and found that life was service. I worked and Behold, service was joy." Ingrid has spent her life in the service of animals. Under her leadership, PETA and its international affiliates have achieved great things. From the first conviction of an experimenter for animal abuse back in 1981, to convincing high-street stores such as Topshop, Mango, H&M and Zara to declare themselves to be fur-free or exotic skins-free. Earlier this year we released an investigation revealing harrowing video footage from angora rabbit farms in China which caused huge waves in the fashion industry, and convinced luxury and high-street retailers from Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger to ASOS and John Lewis to make the compassionate decision ban all angora products. We also worked for years towards a Europe-wide ban on cosmetics tested on animals which came into effect last year, and just yesterday we celebrated the news that, following years of campaigning by PETA India, India has now banned all cosmetics tests on animals as well as imports of products tested on animals anywhere in the world. There have been many more victories along the way, and we'll continue working on behalf of all the animals suffering in abusive industries until their bodies are no longer viewed as commodities to be used and abused.

If she was here herself, I know Ingrid would end her address to you with an appeal. Ahimsa isn't just a personal belief - animal-friendly practices can and should be incorporated into all aspects of our lives. Jains are uniquely placed to advance the cause of ahimsa in the modern world, especially through their professional lives. For example, Jains in medical education can do wonders by promoting the use of non-animal training methods within their universities. And whatever our professional, any of us can make sure that our offices, schools, and other places of work and worship do not buy floor cleaners, bleach, and other supplies that are tested by dropping them into rabbits'

eyes or by force-feeding them to guinea pigs, mice, and beagles. PETA provides a list of cruelty-free companies you can happily support. Or, why not put copies of our free vegan starter kits which you can order from our website out for people to read as they wait for appointments or leave them on trains or planes. The point is, we can do a lot of good by seizing opportunities to educate constantly. Or, as Ingrid puts it, to nag productively!

The Dalai Lama said, “Look at the moon, isn’t it beautiful? But, we don’t live on the moon, we live here and our job is to make it beautiful down here!”

I’m very honoured to know and work with a woman so focused on trying to make it “beautiful down here” by making the world a far Jain-er place. I know she’s especially touched and grateful to receive this award. Thank you.