

Ahimsa Day: IOJ Introduction and formal welcome

My Lords, Members of Parliament, Friends.

Many of us here have deep roots in Kenya, and the events of recent days there have saddened us immensely; but continue to remind us why days like today, which promote and celebrate *Ahimsa* are not only important, but relevant in the world in which we live.

We have heard stories of courage, and of unbelievable violence; of selfless sacrifice and of wanton destruction. In the end, the words of Mahatma Gandhi continue to ring in our ears: “An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind”.

The IoJ Ahimsa Day is celebrated in October to celebrate the Birth Anniversary of Gandhi-ji; a man who personified this quality of non-violence even under extreme stress. This is the [10th] consecutive Ahimsa Day held here in Parliament and I am delighted that what started as a small gathering has grown into an important day of observance for us all.

Over this time we have considered Ahimsa as an alternative to the many important challenges that we see around us; abject poverty, lack of universal education, environmental destruction and so on. And we have had eminent speakers talk of solutions that are both viable and non-violent on these topics. We must continue not just to bring awareness, but to build a global conscience and a political will.

Last year, the winner of our 2012 Ahimsa Award, Scott Neeson, showed how one man can be driven to give up the pinnacle of material life as President of 20th Century Fox Studios in Hollywood, and dedicate his life to the pursuit of eliminating poverty and driving education near a toxic dump in Cambodia. We hope that our recognition of his achievements, continues to inspire others to follow suit as well as support such endeavours.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Institute of Jainology, I am grateful to the Friends of India of the three main parties, and the numerous Parliamentarians who have supported us in the past, and those who are here today to support us. In particular, I would like to thank our co-hosts for today's event; Lord Dholakia, Mr Barry Gardiner and Mr Sailesh Vara. I believe that in Ahimsa Day, the cause we all support is not only universal but will continue to stay relevant beyond our lifetime.

I am also grateful to my fellow Directors for their efforts in organising this Ahimsa Day. I know that they have selected a worthy winner for this year's award; one that continues to illustrate how there is a more non-violent, more compassionate and more meaningful way for us to share this planet. Finally, my warm welcome to you all. As our supporters and Patrons, you continue to allow us to promote Ahimsa in all its forms. I am delighted to announce that this year we completed the initial 5-year Jainpedia project successfully and that the project has received many accolades. As we embark on the next stage, we look forward to your continued support and encouragement.

I trust that you will have a good evening and I look forward to meeting you all after the event.

Thank you.