

Delivering plenary speech at 2018 Parliament of World Religions in
Toronto. #2018PoWR.



After the historic speech by Swami Vivekanand 125 years ago in Chicago in 1893 it was Swami Agnivesh who spoke so powerfully about Swami Dayanand, The Vedas and the true universal message , rebutting the narrow , hate and violence mongering Hindutva of RSS and BJP.

Full Speech Link -https://youtu.be/GECAa3A_N_w

6th Nov,2018
Toronto

Namaste to all of you.

Which means, "With all the love and respect of my head and heart, I bow down to the divine in each one of you."

Namaste

As a very proud and progressive Hindu I go by what the Vedas proclaim.

Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti

Which means, “God the truth is one, and wise people call it by different names.”

And therefore I will start off by saying: OM
Bismillahir rahmanir Rahim

At the outset I invoke the blessings of God Allah the most compassionate, the most merciful.

Waheguru ka khalsa waheguru ki fateh

34 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK, I was personally witness for the first time to the state-sponsored hate crimes, violence and genocide of thousands of innocent Sikh men, women and children in India. But none of the accused till this day have been brought to justice. It is this denial of justice which gives rise to extremism and terrorism. We need to equally condemn the genocide of innocent Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 when the current Prime Minister Modi was the Chief Minister of the State. In 2014 when Modi was campaigning as a Prime Ministerial candidate, and he was asked by media if he is ready to apologize for the carnage in Gujarat, he said, “Yes, if a puppy comes under our car while driving, you feel a little sad.” Sorry Mr. Prime Minister, you have failed our expectations.

Let me show you two video clips – first of 17th July, and the other of 17th August this year – when I was myself a victim of hate mongering and mob violence.

SHOW VIDEO

This was done not by Muslims or Christians or Sikhs or Jains or Buddhists, but by the very people of the religion into which I was born.

What I am trying to convey is that I have been a part of the Arya Samaj movement trying to reform the Hindu practices like Sati or Caste System, female feticide and a few others. The Arya Samaj was founded by one of the greatest reformers, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, in 1875.

Now you might have seen on the video, 150 of these assailants raising slogans, “Jai Shri Ram” while beating me up. Swami Dayanand way back in 1875 gave a clarion call, back to the Vedas, which meant back from all sectarianism, blind faith, dogmatism, caste system and gender inequality towards universal God of Truth, Love, Compassion and Justice. He too had to pay the price – he was poisoned to death by his own people at the age of 59 on that fateful Deepavali day.

Rig Ved says – Aano bhadra krtavo yantu vishwatah
Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides.

Swami Dayanand's life and mission inspired me most. But I took equal inspiration from Gautam Buddha, Mahavir, Jesus of Nazareth, Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Gobind Singh, Kabir, Basavanna, Martin Luther, Abraham Lincoln, Lenin, Karl Marx, Tolstoy, Swami Vivekananda, Martin Luther King Junior, Nelson Mandela, Dr. Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, Narayana Guru, Albert Einstein, and last but not least, Mahatma Gandhi – who was shot dead by a bigoted Hindu nationalist named Nathuram Godse.

I have myself been sent to jail more than 11 times and there have been more than 6 attempts on my life. But I refuse to give up.

Inspired as I am by all great reformers and revolutionaries, I got initiated as a monk 50 long years ago - 1968. I dedicated my life to be the voice of the voiceless millions, the poorest of the poor in the world, those who are victims of modern day slavery, called bonded labor and child labor. In these years of our struggle, we have been able to liberate 178,000 victims of modern day slavery including several 1000s of children. But the struggle goes on. There are minimum 500 million victims of bonded labor system today in India, 86% of whom are Dalits and indigenous people.

I am also a fierce campaigner against female feticide. Some 50 million girl children have been slaughtered in India even before they were born because of son preference. In the mother's womb, they find out the gender of the foetus and if it is a female, finished! They want a son, they don't want a daughter!

Together with hundreds of such great men and women, many of whom I find present within this great Parliament of World Religions, my mission is to fight this Hate, Violence and War Mongering, Capitalism, Neo-Liberalism, and the present incarnation of Fascism, in the name of Hindutva.

The real challenge is to fight the forces of Untruth, Tyranny, Unfreedom, with more Truth, More Love, More Compassion and Justice Unlimited.

This is what our great prophets and messengers of God have inspired us to do. But for that to succeed, we have to clearly identify not just the individuals but the structural forces of Hate, Violence and the War Machine.

The most abominable of these structural forces are the CASTE SYSTEM, GENDER INEQUALITY, RACISM, HOMOPHOBIA, all of which start with the sheer accident of birth. They get reinforced by deliberate and diabolical forces of Capitalism, creating a worldwide rich and poor divide, where hardly 1% of the people control 99% of the world's wealth. Where people of First Nations, the Indigenous people, the Adivasis, the Aborigines, the Maoris, are made victims of murderous exploitation, land alienation, cultural genocide, by the so-called civilized marauders.

In India, many of our land rights and human rights activists have been imprisoned, maimed, tortured and murdered, and have been called Urban Naxals by the Right Wing Hindu Nationalists.

These very forces are defying landmark Supreme Court judgments, women in thousands are being denied their constitutional fundamental right to equality in religious practices in the name of Menstrual Cycle. Swami Sandeepanand Giri Ji is sitting in front of me and he was a victim on the early morning of the 29th October 2018, two weeks ago, where his whole Gita ashram was set on fire and vehicles burnt down by these very Hindu Nationalist forces.

Two weeks ago RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat released a set of books in which I myself, Swami Agnivesh, have been called an Urban Naxal. You should not be surprised if upon my return to India, I too am charged

with being an Anti-Hindu Anti-National for making this speech in Toronto, and sent to jail for the crime of sedition.

These modern day Talibans, Al Qaeda, ISIS exist in all our world religions, be they white supremacists in the USA; or people in power denying children their fundamental right to be with their parents – across borders, blocking asylum seekers from Central or Latin America; or Rohingyas of Myanmar or religious minorities of Uighers in China, Chechnya, Kashmiri Pandits, or Tibetans in Exile with the Dalai Lama.

Finally, the theme of this parliament, 'The Promise of Inclusion' should mean NO to exclusivity of religion and YES to freedom of expression, freedom to doubt, freedom to debate and if necessary, freedom to dissent.

Similarly, 'The Power of Love' should mean standing up against those who are brazenly in love of power, the nefarious nexus between greedy corporates and the corrupt politicians, out to commodify everything and to destroy this Planet Earth.

Is it not ironic that while we are calling for justice in this age of plenty, 21,000 children are dying of starvation every day and cattle and pigs are being fed and overfed in animal agriculture for profit. 1 billion birds and animals are being slaughtered everyday, to satisfy our taste buds. This is unacceptable!

Is it also not ironic that while we are raising our voice for peace, \$1700 Billion US dollars are being spent annually on armaments and war machines?

We the people of the world need to unite and demand a World Government and a World Parliament based on an Earth Constitution. It is high time we stop preaching to the choir or converting the converted! We should mean business! Politics is too important work to be left in the hands of only the corrupt and criminal politicians, we should join and take back that power which can bring about transformation.

Therefore, in keeping with the spirit of this Parliament, please respond by saying NON-NEGOTIABLE to these moral imperatives:

Gender Equality and LGBTQ Rights
NON NEGOTIABLE

End to Caste System and Racism
NON NEGOTIABLE

End to Modern day slavery
NON NEGOTIABLE

Freedom of thought and expression
NON NEGOTIABLE

End to Religious Violence and Extremism
NON NEGOTIABLE

Respecting the sacredness of the Earth and all life forms
NON NEGOTIABLE

My friends, let me convey my deep Deepavali greetings to all of you.

It was on the day of Deepavali that Swami Dayanand breathed his last, and therefore Deepavali should mean instead of cursing darkness, let us light a candle of love, hope and solidarity.