

## Jeremy Corbyn

### Acceptance Speech for The Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Bruce is, as ever, giving me my clear guidance and instructions. If anything goes wrong at St Mellitus Bruce appears out of nowhere and suddenly takes command and control without it being obvious and everything works out very well.

Could I say a big thank you to everyone for having come along this evening. I'm quite overwhelmed to receive this award; it is a great honour when one thinks of all the people and organisations that do so much to try and bring about a better, more just and peaceful world and I want to say thank you very much to the Gandhi Foundation for giving me this and to you Bruce for what you said; you're wrong, I was actually 10 minutes late, not 11. I was measuring it. The reason was, I went to the switch-on of lights at Newington Green and they deferred it from 6 to 6.30 and so I left Newington Green at 6.30 and came here. It is all downhill (bicycle speak) that is true. They are a great community and I wanted to be there with them to share their nice event for the evening. I also want to say thank you so much to those who come from North Islington this evening, you know who you are. North Islington is a wonderful place, it's incredibly tolerant, particularly of me and I'm very grateful to everyone in Islington for support over the years and particularly to people in North Islington Labour party who have probably disagreed with me at some point on something, perhaps everyone at some point disagrees with me on something, and some people disagree with me on everything all of the time but we're still there together so it kind of works, and also I want to thank the various members of my family; that's my older brother (David) which is quite unnerving. He's made the journey from Bristol this evening, I wasn't expecting this so thank you very much, and I am very touched by that; various other members of my family including Seb who's here; Ben is looking after his youngster and Tommy is away at university educating himself; and all the others; Nicolette, Ruth, Jack from my office are also here; thank you very much for all that you do.

A few thoughts I want to share with you this evening.

Gandhi is someone we all think we know and think we understand and the more you read about Gandhi and the more you think about Gandhi you realise the less you know and the less you do understand. There are people who approach Gandhi from an entirely critical point of view because of things he said and did in the early part of his life and he's sometimes condemned for wearing a suit in London when he was a student here, and things like that, but you have to look at the totality of his life and the extraordinary contribution that he's made in the long run to ideas of peace and justice.

If I could just take you through the 6 main aims, it's in fact the Gandhi Foundation promotion (leaflet) but nevertheless, it's well worth understanding and remembering them so I'll go through them.

First, non violence to replace war and aggression. Now that is an interesting concept in itself because that challenges so much of what we read and think about in our lives.

Secondly, egalitarian economics, emphasising self reliance, cooperation and trusteeship. The idea being that the economy is there to ensure we survive rather than ensure that some people enrich themselves at the expense of others. "Simple lifestyles that avoid an endless quest for more possessions and superficial experiences. This is essential to protect the planet's resources and ecology." Now that's quite a challenging one in the society that we live in which is very much dominated by the acquisition of material goods rather than concern for sustainability, and so we have to take that one on board very seriously.

Grassroots democracy - decentralized human scale and involves active participation of everyone. There are many who see democracy in terms of elections only, and not in terms of a lifestyle or how people achieve things in their lives, or indeed their right to speak, their right to organise and their right to an independent judicial system.

The last two are tolerance and pluralism. Gandhi regarded different religious philosophies as each possessing some, but not the whole truth. The more one looks at faith and religion and I'm not one who holds particularly strong religious views, but I find religion endlessly fascinating to talk about, study and discuss. The motive and force that it is in people's lives, and the huge degree of similarities there are in the

central message of all of the faiths is something that brings people together a great deal. You Bruce (Kent) have done a great deal in bringing different faiths together around our own community in north London and on a much wider scale.

The last one which would be seen by many as slightly zany these days is respect for animals and an end to their exploitation. So Gandhi, having developed the ideas then tried to put them into practice. I have seen the pictures of Gandhi coming to London for the roundtable conference in 1931, or thereabouts, dressed as he was in a very simple cloth, living in the East End of London during the conference, eschewing the big hotels and all the rest of it, to take on the mite of the British Empire to demand independence and sustainability for the people of India. His vision of India was always one of developing Indian village life rather than the huge industrial scale economics that Nehru and others in the Congress Party were promoting, and there were quite sharp differences between Nehru and Gandhi all through the debates running up to Indian independence. And Gandhi didn't really agree with quite a lot of it and he certainly was not in favour of the whole partition plan.

Gandhi saw India as a place where you had to respect all faiths and all religions and then of course he was tragically and cruelly assassinated in 1948. His power and his legacy live on and there are enormous lessons we can all learn from his life. I think, as people go through life now and go on into this century to become more and more challenged by a) the obvious limits of consumerism on the planet and b) the rush and thirst for war, amongst those that either manufacture arms or those who gain from the manufacture of arms or those who seek to gain from the minerals exploited because of conquests and so on, and there are some very strong lessons to learn from that, but also from the growth of a huge peace movement around the world. I'll come back to this in a moment but think for a moment of the significance in 2003 of there being a worldwide demonstration against the war in Iraq. There was a demonstration in every major city (600 cities around the world) on every continent including Antarctica. It didn't stop the Iraq War but it certainly awakened an awful lot of people to the need for a degree of unity to prevent a war taking place. I'll come back to that as there are a few other things I want to say on that.

Next year we're going to be commemorating the First World War. David Cameron rather incautiously at one stage, called it some kind of celebration, which he then dropped, but it should not be a celebration of any sort. It should be a commemoration, and we should learn the lessons from it. Notably, the way in which interlocking empires were in rivalry with each other over colonial possessions, in rivalry with each other over commercial gains and possibilities, and ended up going to war because of a knock on series of interlocking military alliances in 1914.

This was envisaged many years before by a man called J L Hobson who wrote a very interesting book on the analysis of imperialism in 1902 in which he predicted that within ten years there would be European conflict of massive proportions. He was two years out with his date, but beyond that he was absolutely correct in his predictions.

World War 1 was not universally supported at the beginning. I was brought up with a history teacher who told us that the whole country rushed out onto the streets in August 1914 to celebrate the war and were very pleased it had started and were waving flags. Yes there were people out waving flags, and some who were motivated by jingoistic mentality, but there were many who opposed it.

Bruce and I will be organising an event next year in Finsbury Park to recreate a massive public meeting that took place in my constituency the day after war was declared, and at it they unanimously passed a resolution they were opposed to the war because they had no problem with Germans or German workers and didn't want to go and kill them. They wanted their housing, health and education issues solved, and didn't want their resources taken up with war. The anti war movement carried on for quite a long time and even in 1915

there was a women's conference for peace held in The Hague which, whilst it obviously didn't stop the war or the killing, the fact they managed to get together to have the conference did have some influence on President Woodrow Wilson and the 14 points that later came out at the end of the war.

Those who died in the war, what did they die for? They died a horrible death in a terrible situation in ghastly conflict. Many more died afterwards from other illnesses, and many committed suicide, and even more died as a result of a flu epidemic at the end of the war. It was a disaster for millions of people all over the world but what it did was it created a massive industrial killing machine. It was industrial level warfare, the like of which had never been seen

It started with cavalry and horses and ended with planes and massive bombs and huge war ships which then went on to become part of a war machine much later on. The consequences of the war were what?

The Versailles Conference was a debate between Woodrow Wilson on the one hand, with his idea of self determination and a long term peace, and those who were pushing for the development of the League of Nations which the United States eventually never signed, despite the fact Woodrow Wilson went on a massive journey around the country to try to get the support to ratify it which was ultimately unsuccessful, and so many saw it as an opportunity to grab each others' empires. The People of New Guinea stopped being German subjects and became Australian subjects. The peoples in the region of (now) Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, had been part of the Ottoman Empire and suddenly found themselves in either French or British mandated territories.

Then came the idea that you had to punish people for the war, and so we had the idea of reparations to be paid by Germany and a huge price was extracted which resulted not in the reconstruction of Germany but in the continued destruction of Germany and German industry, with massive inflation, huge levels of anger and unemployment and eventually the breeding ground from which the Nazis rose into the massive, and even greater industrial killing machine of World War II. Surely the lessons from that are that at the end of the conflict, you don't extract even more, you try to understand why you got into this conflict in the first place and then create the conditions so there isn't another conflict at the end of it. Surely that is the lesson.

Post World War II the United Nations was established, which was far more successful than the League of Nations but fatally flawed in structure, inevitably because it was a tradeoff between the big powers and we're still paying the price for that over the power of the veto of the Security Council to bring about peace.

But a couple of other things came from the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, including nuclear weapons. Bruce and I met each other first through the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and we're both very active in it.

I cannot in any way say anything other than that: the presence, possession, and/or threatened use of nuclear weapons is just a deeply immoral thing to do. How can you possibly support a weapon that is one of ultimate mass destruction, and of indiscriminate killing that will ultimately lead to the destruction of the planet.

There is no such thing as a contained or limited nuclear explosion or war. The knock-on effects of the "small" explosion of 1945 being countenanced forever more throughout Japan and other places where nuclear weapons testing is taking place, and the development of greater weapons of mass destruction than there has ever been before.

We have a series of treaties regarding the development of even greater weapons of massive destruction than there's ever been before with the Test Ban Treaty, the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, which of themselves are all very important step forward but again, the flaws that exist within them have to be understood and dealt with.

Nonetheless, the opportunities for a long term nuclear peace are very present. For a moment, let's reflect on the current situation we're in.

We have been in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, in Libya, Mali, and then came the question of Syria.

Now I've been in every parliamentary debate for the past 30 years on wars/interventions, nuclear weapons and the like, and the debate that was held at the end of August on the possibility of Britain and the USA going to war in Syria was fascinating because the specter that was going around the chamber all day consisted of people who had voted for the Iraq War in 2003 and personally and bitterly regretted it ever since, feeling shame and guilt for the conflict that took place. Ultimately, never mind the exact wording of the resolution, the Prime Minister was seeking British parliamentary support for military intervention, that was in the end refused on a vote of the House of Commons. That was utterly extraordinary and I can find no similar episode in British history.

I like to think it is a turning point in our relations and attitude to the rest of the world. I sincerely hope it is but nothing is certain in these matters.

Think though what might have happened, had we, Britain and the USA gone into Syria at the end of August, planes would have gone in, drones would have gone in, bombing would have taken place, arms would have been supplied to one set of opposition and not the other. Russia would have increased its supply of arms to the regime.

It doesn't bear thinking about.

Suppose a Russian missile had shot down an American plane or the other way around, what then happens, where does it then go to?

But, because the British Parliament said no, that meant the British government could not take part, and although this wasn't the only factor in US thinking, the US didn't take part either, for a series of quite complex alliances, almost the mirror image of what Woodrow Wilson faced at the end of the First World War, ie his problem was US isolationists wanted nothing to do with the rest of the world and therefore opposed the League of Nations.

This time, there was the combination of those opposed to war in the USA and the isolationists who didn't want to get involved in another war in the USA. It was a strange series of circumstances and we didn't go to war.

As a result, the US and Russia had to meet, and Iran had to be brought into the equation. Syria had to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention and the elimination of chemical weapons stocks throughout Syria is taking place and now a tentative nuclear agreement with Iran which, though there are a lot of people analysing it in a lot of ways, I look at it in a very general way: It is a very significant step forward that Iran was prepared to come to an agreement with the EU, the US and others on limiting the enrichment of uranium and confirming that it will not manufacture any nuclear weapons.

I hope the details of the agreement over the next six months are successful, but I also hope that we build on that and have a nuclear weapons free zone conference, which must obviously include Israel, and must start from the standpoint of Israel decommissioning its nuclear weapons. A nuclear free weapons zone in order to achieve a nuclear free weapons free Middle East!

It might sound 'pie in the sky' but at one time people said these things were pie in the sky all over the world. We have a nuclear free weapons zone in central Asia, a Latin American nuclear free zone, an African nuclear zone

Surely our contribution in Britain should be not to spend £100bn on replacing the Trident nuclear system but instead say, we are going to join in the general surge around the world to get rid of nuclear weapons. North Korea is moving along similar lines to Iran.

Let us say, we are not going to replace the Trident nuclear system, instead, we'll give those brilliant engineers and ship builders something useful to do for a peaceful use and not a warlike use.

That is a prize surely worth working for.

I would love to think that a political party (if only mine) in Britain would have the courage to stand up and say: this is the time, this is the chance, this is the opportunity of making our contribution, to bring about a nuclear free world, rather than the nonsense I'm told, that we favour a nuclear free world but in the meantime we'll just develop some weapons.

There is an opportunity, and there is a chance there.

My last point focuses on what causes war, and back to Gandhi and his ideas.

Gandhi grew up as part of the British Empire, he went to South Africa and saw what was going on there, and the disgraceful way that Indians and African workers were treated by those in control of them.

Then he came to London, returned to India and became very involved in the independence movement there, focusing on a democracy based on the village communities.

He made this incredible contribution with his hunger strikes, salt marches, and being the figurehead of the Indian Independence movement. He had this idea of a sustainable world.

If you start to think about the cause and motivation of wars in the world, there are many and they're complex. Partly it's a grab for raw material by countries powerful enough to grab those materials, as well as those who manufacture weapons, partly it's about the conflicts that do exist, and the denial of human rights, the power of dictators to try and protect themselves, and of course there are also environmental concerns. Many are driven away from new territories, hence some of the conflicts in Sudan and other countries that are brought about at least in part by environmental causes.

It's an attitude of mind that we have to start to think about and to explore.

If anyone gave me one thing to do to our education system, I would say, look at the teaching of history, the quality of it, and the nationalism that is inculcated into children all over the world, by the teaching of their national story.

Their national story is often worth teaching but many of them were at the expense of someone else's national history and so we need the teaching of world history, and of the environment, and other important issues, including those that are good for the world (and there are many things that are good for the world) as well as the dangers of conflicts.

There are many who are narrow minded racists, with some idea of recreating the British Empire which would give them superiority over the rest of the world.

Our point of view must start from the need for our children to learn that going to war is far from glamorous, despite the way in which it is portrayed. Turn on the history channel every night and you'll find yet another film of great heroism in various wars, and they always present wars from the victor's point of view and never from the vanquished point of view.

Surely to live in a world that survives we must share the world's resources.

Human rights are available to all and we must recognize that sustainability limits are being tested to the limit.

In Britain and the US at least, this is the first generation that doesn't necessarily look forward to an increased standard of living. This is due to a combination of the overexploitation of the planet, as well as ideas that a free market economy can bring about the kind of economically sustainable world people want. We can learn a lot from Mahatma Gandhi, a lot from what he taught in his life and perhaps develop some of those ideas.

We can also recognise that if we go to war, as in Afghanistan and Iran, there's a price to pay.

At one level its £30bn of public money, for destructive purposes, with a huge loss of many lives in many countries, as well as our civil liberties being eroded, a natural consequence of increased security within a war state.

The lessons there are very strong indeed.

If we can mobilise people in 600 cities in one day as we did in 2003 then it's that mobilisation of people, to a vision of a world that is better, sustainable, and achievable, that provides a real possibility, and is endlessly fascinating.

The British parliament is almost the last place to think about philosophy, high ideals and high minds. During the time I've been in parliament I've been a part of every one of these debates and after a while people come round and start to think that there must be something in what you say: "maybe you've got a point ...you've been saying it for so long ..."

I hope to be here quite a lot longer, and yesterday, even William Hague conceded that I've raised the issue of the nuclear free zones so many times and so often that I must be right and perhaps he'll get on with organising this conference.

I have to go by what he said; he's an honorable gentleman! \*\*

When we have peace movements like CND, Stop the War, the National Peace Council and all of these other groups, and people like Bruce Kent who have dedicated their whole life toward peace, it does get through; the message is understood.

It was quite interesting watching the interplay between guards, soldiers and protestors outside Greenham Common. After a while there grew a degree of respect from the guards to the women who camped outside Greenham Common and other places. They could see that, actually; these people are doing something they believe in and they're not getting anything out of it.

Do we want to spend more on drones, nuclear weapons, super high speed planes that bomb without us knowing, or do we wish to use technology to conquer the real issues.

It's a mentality and state of mind. That's what the peace movement is about and I'm delighted to be here tonight and thank the Gandhi Foundation.

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\*\* *Hansard quote from 25 November: Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement and draw his attention to what he said about momentum in the process in the region. I obviously hope that a detailed agreement is reached within six months. Will he now turn his attention to the need for a nuclear weapons-free middle east, and the importance of reconstituting the conference, which Finland was supposed to have held, involving all countries in the region? Without an agreement on a nuclear-free middle east,*

*somebody will develop nuclear weapons or Israel will go on being unchallenged as the only nuclear weapons state in the region. This is urgent.*

**Mr Hague:** *As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are keeping our focus on that. I pay tribute to him for keeping his focus—relentlessly—in his questions in Parliament, but we are also keeping our focus and continuing our work to bring the conference together. If we can carry our success on this agreement through to the success of a comprehensive and final settlement, it will be a big advance towards what he has been campaigning for and remove more of the excuses of other nations against such discussions. I think, therefore, that he can view this as a step forward in that regard.*

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