



SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR'S GLOBAL INITIATIVES

2008 IN REVIEW

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is a renowned spiritual leader and humanitarian whose mission of uniting the world into a violence-free global family has inspired millions the world over to broaden their spheres of responsibility and work towards the betterment of the world. An icon of non-violence and universal brotherhood, he seeks global peace through service and fostering human values.

In 1981, he started the Art of Living Foundation, an international nonprofit educational and humanitarian organization with a presence in over 140 countries. Its educational and self-development programs offer powerful tools to eliminate stress and foster a sense of wellbeing. In 1997, he founded the International Association for Human Values, a humanitarian organization that advances human values in political, economic, and social spheres.

Sri Sri has revived ancient techniques that were traditionally kept exclusive, and made them available to the world. Through personal interactions, teachings and humanitarian initiatives, Sri Sri has reached out to millions of people worldwide. A leading activist in human development and social transformation, his initiatives include conflict resolution, disaster and trauma relief, environmental conservation, prisoner rehabilitation programs, youth leadership, women's empowerment, campaigns against female foeticide and child labor, and education for all. Sri Sri has been a leading proponent of integrating ethics and integrity in business and government through major international initiatives and keynote addresses in international symposiums such as International Anti-corruption conference in South Korea (2003) and Turkey (2004).



“Unless we have a stress-free mind and a violence-free society, we cannot achieve world peace. We have to create harmony within the individual, and harmony in society.”

—Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CIVIL SOCIETY’S ROLE

BANGALORE, INDIA, JANUARY

The Art of Living Foundation (AOLF) in partnership with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) hosted a conference aimed at addressing climate change through a grassroots response. The conference titled “Sangam 2008” brought together key stakeholders from civil society, the private sector, and the government to discuss ways of achieving the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).



VEDANTA AND BUDDHISM: BRINGING GLOBAL PEACE

BANGALORE, INDIA, FEBRUARY

Several hundred monks and saints from Cambodia, India, Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam convened at the interfaith conference entitled: “Vedanta-Buddhism: Bringing Global Peace” held at the Art of Living International Headquarters in Bangalore. During his address, Sri Sri stated that “Vedanta and Buddhism have the solution to combat problems of depression, violence and conflicts as they connect you with inner strength through meditation.”

Organized by the Art of Living and the Maha Bodhi Society, this two-day-conference shed light on the complementary roles both traditions play in resolving the problems facing the world. “The world needs to know how to live amidst differences and celebrate those differences,” Sri Sri said.

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN SOUTH ASIA

OSLO, NORWAY, APRIL



Speakers included: Norway’s Special Envoy for the Peace Process in Sri Lanka, Ambassador Jon Hanssen-Bauer, Colin Archer, Secretary General of the International Peace Bureau, Mr. Vaiko from Tamil Nadu, India, Arumugam Thondaman, Minister for Youth Empowerment and Socio-Economic Development, Sri Lanka, Dr. Jayalath Jayawardena, MP, and several prominent Buddhist Monks.

The Peace and Reconciliation Conference was held under the aegis of IAHV and focused on finding amicable solutions to the conflicts endured by South Asia for decades. “Conflicts are bound to arise—we have to make them a stepping stone to achieve the ultimate goal of global peace,” said Sri Sri to stakeholders in the peace process and policy experts from the region. The conference emphasized spirituality as a way forward. Special workshops on the Naxal violence in India, ethnic Tamil strife in Sri Lanka, and oppression in Myanmar were conducted during the conference.



Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's World Tour (partial listing, '07-'08)



REDUCING VIOLENCE IN ARGENTINA

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA, MAY

Sri Sri and Mayor Muricio Macri of Buenos Aires signed a mutual cooperation agreement between the Art of Living Foundation and the Government of the City of Buenos Aires to work together to reduce violence in the schools and streets of Argentina. Sri Sri addressed the Argentinean Senate where he stated that “decision-makers need to be free from stress to come up with great ideas... Dignity in politics, and ethics in business ensure buying power. Only then can an economy prosper.”



UNITING IN THE BATTLE AGAINST HIV/AIDS

BANGALORE, INDIA, JUNE

The Art of Living Foundation and UNAIDS jointly organized a “Hindu Leaders Caucus” against HIV/AIDS. “If all of us can take on this project to educate youth about healthy living, positive thinking and a stigma-free, inhibition-free attitude towards people, we would have taken a big step,” said Sri Sri. The Hindu Leaders Caucus unanimously resolved to spread awareness about HIV/AIDS through public discourses.



Bottom Left: Hindu Leader Caucus, Bangalore, India; Bottom Right: People of Jammu and Kashmir meet with Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

BRINGING AN END TO ETHNIC CONFLICT

RAJASTHAN, INDIA, JUNE



50,000 members of the Gujar community meet Sri Sri in Pilukapura. June 10, 2008.

Sri Sri negotiated peace between the Government of Rajasthan and the Gujar community who were embroiled in a 19-day violent unrest over the community’s demand for scheduled tribe status and reservation benefits. In his address to more than 50,000 members of the Gujar community, Sri Sri stated “do not take to arms, for that does not hold the answer. We can achieve our rights in a non-violent way.” Sri Sri’s efforts helped the two parties arrive at an amicable solution in just a few days.

RESOLVING THE AMARNATH LAND ROW

JAMMU AND KASHMIR, INDIA, AUGUST

Sri Sri played a major role in finding a solution to the Amarnath land imbroglio that triggered large-scale violence and protests throughout Jammu and Kashmir. At a time when the issue was getting polarized along religious lines between the Hindu and Muslim communities, Sri Sri convinced leaders from both sides to cease violence and come to the negotiating table. Sri Sri underlined the need for the majority community to take responsibility for protecting the minority community. “Wherever Hindus are in majority, they need to protect the Muslims and vice versa,” he said.

THE POINT OF PEACE SUMMIT

STAVANGER, NORWAY, SEPTEMBER



Participants included Ole Danbolt Mjøs, Chair Norwegian Nobel Committee, Rajendra Pachauri Chair Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Stein Tønnesson, Director Peace Research Institute Oslo, H.E. Kim Dae-Jung, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2000, Former President of South Korea.

Sri Sri spoke at the conference of Nobel Laureates on the power of dialogue. “There is a great need for dialogue and for creating mediators. The role of a mediator is vital and he needs to play the role of a catalyst without imposing himself,” he said. “Most conflicts are based on identity crisis. We have forgotten that first and foremost, we are all human beings; then other identifications such as religion, nationality and gender follow. If people get stuck with their limited identity, they are ready to die for it. We need to move beyond our narrow identities to overcome fear, mistrust and conflict in the post 9/11 scenario,” he added.

MISSION GREEN EARTH

BANGALORE, INDIA, OCTOBER

Sri Sri reiterated his global commitment to safeguard the environment as well as promote sustainable and eco-friendly practices. “We have to create a new society, one that takes responsibility and that has a sense of belonging to our society, our country and our earth,” said Sri Sri. Over 10 million trees have been planted across the globe as part of the Mission Green Earth: Stand Up Take Action Project, a joint initiative of the Art of Living, United Nations Millennium Campaign (UNMC) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).



In support of Mission Green Earth, Sri Sri and the Karnataka Minister for Higher Education, Aravind Limbavali plant a sapling at Bangalore University.

UNESCO CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS & RELIGION

STORRS, USA, OCTOBER

“The root cause of violence is stress and a lack of understanding,” Sri Sri said at the comparative human rights conference which addressed the extent to which religious values and philosophy promote human values. “All cultures need to secularize religion,” Sri Sri told the audience at the University of Connecticut. “The youth need a multi-cultural and multi-religious education, to help them understand that everyone is part of the worldwide human society.” Citing Mahatma Gandhi’s method of combining spirituality and political activism, Sri Sri said every nation must “spiritualize politics.”



CONFERENCE OF IMAMS OF INDIA

HYDERABAD, INDIA, NOVEMBER



Sri Sri addresses the largest body of Muslim clerics in Hyderabad at the 29th National Meeting of Jamiat-Ulema-i-Hind.

Sri Sri addressed the 29th National Meeting of the Jamiat-Ulema-i-Hind, the largest body of Muslim clerics in Hyderabad, India as the chief guest. He urged the audience of 6,000 clerics to prevent youth from treading the path of terrorism. He also appealed for unity between the Hindu and Muslim communities and within the Muslim community itself. “The Shias and Sunnis are like two eyes of Islam and both should remain united. Unfortunately, Muslims are being branded as terrorists and this attempt can only be fought when the community remains united,” Sri Sri stated.

THE CIVILIZATION OF PEACE

NICOSIA, CYPRUS, NOVEMBER



Sri Sri shared his vision for world peace at the 'The Civilization of Peace: Faiths and Cultures in Dialogue' Conference in Cyprus. "The spirit loves diversity, god loves diversity. That is why he created so many different types of flowers, fruits and people. Honoring diversity is the only way we can be at peace," said Sri Sri. He also noted that when conflict arises in the mind, an individual, or family, it then spreads to the community and finally comes between nations.

RESPONDING TO TRAUMA POST 11/26 IN MUMBAI

MUMBAI, INDIA, DECEMBER



Art of Living trauma and stress relief camps organized for people of Mumbai following the terrorist attacks in November 2008.

"Being peaceful does not mean being inactive," Sri Sri told thousands who gathered for a peace meditation after the 11/26 terrorist attack in Mumbai. He encouraged the masses to bring about a revolution through peaceful means. "What has happened has traumatized people, yet

we will not waver from our nature. With non-violence and peace, we will transform the situation," Sri Sri said. While in Mumbai, Sri Sri also visited the trauma relief work being conducted by Art of Living volunteers in the city.

THE WORLD CONGRESS OF IMAMS & RABBIS FOR PEACE

PARIS, FRANCE, DECEMBER

The "Sacredness of Peace" Conference brought together Imams and Rabbis working to help build peace in the Middle East. Speaking with the delegates, Sri Sri called for a strong resolution to work towards peace in the individual as well as peace among communities and nations. "The world will not be a safe place, even if a small part of the world lives in ignorance," he said. Referring to the terror attacks in Mumbai, Sri Sri said that the anger and frustration amongst peace-loving people needed to be channeled towards a creative and productive future.

"As the youngest speaker in the Congress, representing the oldest religion, I want to point out that we all have to remind ourselves and our society that we belong to *One World*," said Sri Sri. "The world and life itself are sacred and no one has any right to destroy them."



Sri Sri addresses delivers his address at the Sacredness of Peace Conference.

THE VOICE OF NON-VIOLENCE

BAGHDAD, IRAQ, DECEMBER



Sri Sri Ravi Shankar with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Baghdad.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar reiterated the importance of peace and non-violent means of conflict resolution on his second visit to Iraq since 2007. Sri Sri met with religious, political, and civil society leaders with whom he shared his vision of a violence-free Iraq. He also met with the Vice-President, Health Minister and Youth Minister to discuss means of creating harmony in Iraq. "The Iraqi people have suffered so much. The Art of Living Foundation is working to help reduce and eliminate stress so that the people can be joyful again," said Sri Sri.



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