

High Commission of India

Pretoria

Press Release

A historic celebration to mark the 100th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's return from the shores of South Africa to India in 1914 took place at the Tolstoy Farm, Lenasia outside Johannesburg today. The event held at the site of the Tolstoy Farm, a settlement founded by the Mahatma in 1910 with the help of his architect friend Herman Kallenbach, to propagate and practice *Satyagraha*, also launched a formal structure to revive the settlement in the form of a "Garden of Remembrance" to nurture and cherish Gandhi's way of life.

The function to mark the anniversary was organised by the High Commission of India, Pretoria in collaboration with the local South African Indian community. The event was attended by a large gathering of South African Indian community members, notably Chief Guest Ms Mani ben Sita, a leading anti-apartheid activist; Minister for Road and Transport of Gauteng Province Mr. Ismail Vadi; Ex- Federal Minister Mr. Essop Pahad; Councillor and leading member of the African National Congress Prema Naidoo; family members of Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela; distinguished representatives of the Government of South Africa; and prominent members of the Indian community.

The celebration began with a community walk, in perfect tribute to the Mahatma's way of life and his struggle against the imperialist powers, which he so prominently used in his political action be it the Transvaal March of 1913 in South Africa or the Salt March of 1931 in India.

Welcoming the gathering on the august occasion, High Commissioner of India to South Africa Shri Virendra Gupta reminded the people of the values and principles that Gandhiji stood for and urged them to make this historic day a font of inspiration to cherish the Mahatma's universal values of justice, peace, equality and respect for humanity. Conveying India's gratitude to South Africa for having nurtured two of the tallest leaders of our time, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, he noted how the two leaders symbolised common ethos and values for the humanity. He applauded the sustained efforts made by the community elders and the High Commission to bring to fruition a formal structure, a Non-profit organisation, to turn the Tolstoy Farm into a "Garden of Remembrance". He expressed his hope that the initiative will take its final shape shortly and more and more people both from South Africa and India would be drawn to the Tolstoy Farm as a source of inspiration and engagement.

Chief Guest Ms Mani Ben Sita, daughter of Nana Sita, an associate of Gandhiji, recalled Gandhi's frugality as a choice of life that he made in sympathy with the poor. Noted Gandhian Ms. Shobhana Radhakrishna, the keynote speaker, narrated the simple life practiced at the Gandhi ashrams in Phoenix and Tolstoy in South Africa, or in Sabarmati and Sevagram in India and emphasised on community living as a practical model for regeneration of villages in India and elsewhere. Great granddaughter of the Mahatma, Ms Kirti Menon thanked the High Commissioner for all his hard work in setting in motion the "Garden of Remembrance" project, which she said was much overdue and would inspire people to walk in *Bapu's* footsteps. Ms Ndileka Mandela, granddaughter of Nelson Mandela, recounted the influence the Mahatma had on her grandfather and the common approach they had in their action, thought and values as they both engaged to fight injustice for their peoples. Minister Ismail Vadi and ex- Federal Minister Pahad affirmed how South Africa shaped Gandhi's initial thought on passive resistance, a doctrine which he later so powerfully put into practice in India.

The celebration in keeping with Gandhian practice and observance was marked by chanting of inter-faith prayers and ended with the Mahatma's favourite bhajans – “ *Vaishanava Jayate..*” and “*Ramdhun..*”

Pretoria

20 July 2014.