

News By Parker Banks - Jul 1, 2015

The grandson of the world-renowned peace activist advocated for nonviolence at the 11th annual Youth Leadership Summit on Sunday.



Arun Gandhi was the guest speaker at the 11th Youth Leadership Summit at the Gandhi Youth Forum Program Sunday in Chilmark. — Photos by Larisa Stinga

minds of people, especially young ones.”

Violence, he said, is deeply ingrained into our culture and society, ranging from sports games to movies, and he stressed that we need to adopt a culture of nonviolence.

“Nonviolence is the only way we can transform and bring about peace in this world,” he said.

Violence is not just limited to physical acts, he said. It also encompasses many seemingly trivial actions that we fail to recognize.

To illustrate this point, he told the audience that when he was a child, his grandfather refused to replace a pencil he had thrown into his yard. The making of such an object, the elder



El-Deiry, right, facilitated a dialogue between Arun Gandhi and the audience.

On a hilltop in Chilmark Sunday, self-avowed peace farmer Arun Gandhi spoke to a crowd of about 100 people on the lessons he learned from his grandfather, Mohandas Gandhi, who set an example of nonviolent protest that bedeviled the British and led to independence for India.

Mr. Gandhi was on Martha’s Vineyard at the invitation of the Stone Soup Leadership Institute, host of the Martha’s Vineyard 11th annual Youth Leadership Summit.

Under a tent on a hill overlooking Menemsha Pond, Mr. Gandhi, who now calls New York City home, addressed an audience filled with young people involved in the Stone Soup Leadership Institute, their families, and other members of the Island community.

The theme of nonviolence was central to Mr. Gandhi’s message, and he wasted no time in outlining his mission. “I call myself a peace farmer,” Mr. Gandhi said. “I want to plant seeds of nonviolence in the



El-Deiry, right, facilitated a dialogue between Arun Gandhi and the audience.

Gandhi told his grandson, involved the use of many natural resources, and throwing it away constitutes an act of violence against nature.

“It was the first time I realized that all of these little things are acts of violence,” Mr. Gandhi told the audience.

In order to change our culture into a nonviolent one, he said, we must all have compassion, love, respect, and understanding for each other.

He added that we must also make a greater effort to reflect on our own actions.

“If we don’t change ourselves, we are never going to be able to change the world,” he said. “We all have to do that introspection to see how we are committing violence in society.”



Grammy-nominated flutist Viviana Guzman played an original song that she has performed in more than 120 countries.

He suggested to the audience that they can better understand their own acts of violence by keeping an “anger journal” that documents problems experienced by the writer. In order for the journal to be effective, Mr. Gandhi said, one must actively commit to seeking out solutions — that writing the issues down in the journal is not enough by itself.

“Anger is like electricity,” he said. “It can be powerful, but only if we use it properly. We must channel anger properly to use it to benefit society.”

Following his remarks, asked by The Times about the most important issue he sees today, Mr. Gandhi reaffirmed his views about violence in society.

“I think violence in general is the most pressing issue for us,” he said. “The whole concept of America being the superpower of the world is getting to our head. That notion is going to destroy us if we’re not careful.”

An eventful night

In addition to Mr. Gandhi’s speech, the event also showcased the talents of Ms. Viviana Guzmán, a Grammy-nominated flutist, and Isabella Hazell El-Deiry of Vineyard Haven, a Youth Leadership Institute emerging leader. Ms. El-Deiry is a rising junior at Howard University who works as an intern for CBS News.

Before Mr. Gandhi took the stage, Ms. Guzmán dazzled the audience with a series of songs performed on a variety of woodwind instruments, including a Native American flute and an Irish pennywhistle. Her repertoire included the traditional “Amazing Grace” as well as a snazzy rendition of “The Pink Panther Theme.” She concluded the set with what she described as one of her personal favorites, Sting’s “Fields of Gold.”

After Mr. Gandhi finished his speech, Ms. El-Deiry hosted a question and answer session. Her list tackled a wide range of issues, including how to put people into a position to make change and how to address what she perceived as a tendency by schools to focus solely on having their students earn as much money as possible in their careers. Mr. Gandhi answered the former by saying that the most effective change we can make is within our own community, and the latter by suggesting that we not lose sight of developing character in the educational process.

Busy times

Mr. Gandhi’s speech was the capstone of MVYLI’s Youth Leadership Summit for Sustainable Development, a weeklong intensive program for students affiliated with the Stone Soup Leadership Institute. Students involved in this year’s summit came from the Vineyard and the Hawaiian islands.

Oceanic preservation is the focus of this year’s summit. Students within the program will “envision and develop action plans to realize their dreams for building a more sustainable world,” according to Stone Soup’s website.

After meeting with various leaders throughout the Island, each student within the summit is expected to develop his or her own unique five-year action plan “for their lives, their islands, and the world,” according to a press release.

“We believe in what Dr. Martin Luther King said, which was ‘Each one, teach one,’” MVYLI Executive Director Marianne Larned told The Times.

Other summit activities within the week have included visiting Hope Spots, which are protected sites with the ocean, as well as listening to presentations from more than 50 guests on sustainability practices.

“I’ve gotten to do a lot of cool things through MVYLI that I wouldn’t necessarily have done otherwise,” Mary Ollen of Vineyard Haven, a political science major at Wellesley, said. Ms. Ollen said that she was able to visit Sen. Elizabeth Warren’s office for a day, and also work on fundraising campaigns for President Barack Obama in 2012.

Charlotte McCarron, a rising sophomore at Hobart from Edgartown, voiced similar praise for MVYLI. “MVYLI has always been a nice background for support for me,” she said. Through her involvement with MVYLI, Ms. McCarron has worked with business leaders, helped coordinate the program for this year’s summit, and was also asked by Ms. Larned to meet with Mr. Gandhi prior to the event.

Ms. Larned said she was very grateful to have Mr. Gandhi speak at the event, especially for what she saw as his ability to persuade young leaders to make the world a better place.

“I have been asking him to come for 15 years. For me, it was an answer to a prayer,” she said.

For more information, go to stone4worldinstitute.com.