

Thursday | 8 April 2010

NEWS

Gandhi visits Hermanus

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"Do not underestimate the power of what happened in your country in the early 1990s. It is utterly unique in the history of the world."

These were words spoken by Professor Rajmohan Gandhi, President of Initiatives of Change – International, who was the guest speaker at a special open meeting of the USA held at the Enlighten Education Centre.

He was accompanied by his wife Usha and 10 students. Together they visited SA as part of a 14 nation tour.

Prof Gandhi, at 74, is a Research Professor at the Centre for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Illinois and is the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. He is interested in seeing how difficult and negative political situations can change through individuals who change and find a new vision and purpose greater than themselves.

His last trip to SA was 16 years ago. When Gandhi was still a member of the Indian Parliament, he met Nelson Mandela, before he became President, while he was on a visit to India. Gandhi accompanied him on a tour of some of India's most famous sights and landmarks. Gandhi told the audience in Hermanus on Friday that he noticed how Mandela was always very courteous to the poor and on his departure thanked not only the governors and officials, but the servants as well.

Speaking on his topic for the evening: Trying to Understand and Influence our changing World, Gandhi listed some realities of our world. They included, among others: the shortage of water in many parts of the world; the aging of the planet's population; the role of China and India with their very large and young population – more than a third of the world's population lives in China and India; certain cultures dominating our planet; the question of the Islamic world – where there is now people to people mistrust; and food shortage.

When faced with all these challenges, Gandhi says: "If there is one thing I am sure of, if there is something I really need to know, and if I am silent and I pray... I will connect with the inner voice."

Gandhi said connectivity needs to be restored between world leaders who stood together and fought for similar reforms. However, he said: "The greatest connectivity SA needs is within the family and the neighbourhood. Only then will the reconstruction of SA start."

Prof Rajmohan Gandhi and his wife Usha with Loel and Nico Ferreira from the Enlighten Education Trust. Nico and Gandhi have been friends for 50 years and Nico says: "We have grown old together."

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