

Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (“Amma”) “EMBRACING THE WORLD FOR PEACE AND HARMONY” CONFERENCE

Cochin, India, September 2003

India's 'God Woman', Sri Mata Amritanandamayi or Amma, is a world-renowned spiritual leader who has been compared to Mother Teresa or Mohandas Gandhi. From humble origins in a poor Indian fishing village, Amma's life is entirely dedicated to uplifting humanity regardless of race, caste, creed, age or nationality. She receives all without reserve, like a mother with her children. In her boundless compassion for humanity, Amma has tenderly embraced an estimated 21 million people globally in the past 30 years. Amma's teachings are universal - she asks only that people inquire into their own real nature and believe in themselves. Her message is simply selfless love, service and peace.

Amma is a living example of how personal peace is the essence of world peace, and her vast influence extends on both levels: as a spiritual teacher and as the initiator of a vast network of charities. Amma herself has described her entire life as being like an incense stick, burning to spread the fragrance of divine love for the benefit of all beings.

Recognized internationally for her tireless work and massive humanitarian projects to relieve the suffering of humanity, Amma received the "Gandhi-King Award for Non-Violence" at UN Headquarters in Geneva, October 2000, during the first ever 'Global Peace Initiative of Women Spiritual and Religious Leaders'. Previous recipients were Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan and primatologist, Dr. Jane Goodall, who in presenting the award, described Amma as "*God's love in a human body*".

During her acceptance speech, Amma said: *'Men and women are equal in Amma's eyes. But, at present, most women are asleep. Women have to wake up and arise! This is one of the most urgent needs of the age. Not only women living in developing countries need to wake up—this applies to women all over the world. Women in countries where materialism is predominant should awaken to spirituality'..... 'In truth, no external power can possibly obstruct woman or her innate qualities of motherhood—qualities such as love, empathy, and patience. It is she, and she alone, who has to awaken herself. A woman's mind is the only real barrier that prevents this from happening.'*

In September 2003, the "Amritavarsham50 ~ Embracing the World For Peace Harmony" Conference celebrated the Golden Jubilee of Amma in Cochin, India. Its unifying theme was "Changing the Individual and the World Through Spiritual Love and Compassion". This vibrant event promoted Amma's inspiring vision for world peace, one in which men and women alike everywhere develop the qualities of 'Universal Motherhood' within themselves ~ love, compassion and patience.

At the inauguration of 'Embracing the World', Amma said, *"Amma's wish is that her birthday will be used to usher in a new era of peace and harmony. The silent longing of each and every one of you will create subtle positive vibrations for world peace."* Among the many distinguished guests present, Alan Ganoo, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia said that, *"Amma is an embodiment of love that spontaneously springs from the heart."* As a minister of state, he said he has always benefited from the wisdom and knowledge of Amma, and that he seeks Her advice in silence and is sensitive to Her divine guidance.

This extraordinary Conference was held at the International Stadium with hundreds of thousands of people from all over India, including over 5000 international visitors attending the spectacular 4 day event. All hotels were booked out months in advance and the entire city welcomed Amma with huge posters of her radiant face adorning buildings everywhere.

In the spirit of 'Love and Serve', 12,000 volunteers worked in three shifts around the clock under the supervision of Swami Jnanamritananda, who mobilized and trained them over 45 days. More than 30 departments were set up at the stadium, including crowd control, canteen, accommodation, transport, etc. Free food was distributed to 150,000 people per day!

Media from all over the world attended, including a French team who filmed a documentary about Amma, which will be released next year. Reporter Charles Havilland from BBC Radio said *'The spirit of volunteerism is great and you're helped with a genuine smile. It is amazing to see the rich and poor both standing in the same queue to enter the stadium for a long time.'* Daily headline stories were reported in an enthusiastic coverage by the Indian press with headlines such as, "Amma's Projects Invite Instant Embrace", "Amritapuri brims with spiritual ecstasy", and "Confluence of faiths spreads rare fragrance". A journalist from Dehli, Om Prakash, described the event as *'A perfect blend of modernism, spirituality and professionalism. A miracle has happened. The convergence of the world has started.'*

As an example of Amma's grand vision of uniting the world in peace and harmony, "Embracing the World" was also an amazing international peace summit, with flags from 191 United Nations countries paraded through the city in a ceremony called the 'Confluence of the Waters' in which representatives from each of 191 nations carried vessels bearing water from a river in their country, a flame and their flag. Each group of representatives was led by a student from one of Amma's schools, carrying a sign with the country's name. As they walked towards the stadium, participants chanted a universal prayer for peace, 'Om Lokaha Samastaha Sukhino Bhavantu - May all the Beings of this world be happy'.

Thousands of spectators spread out in every direction. The ceremony culminated with the pouring of all the waters into one vessel, symbolising the unity of all nations, just as all rivers merge into the seven oceans, which all merge into each other as one. Similarly, Amma said, *'the one indivisible truth shines in each one of us, uniting us in all our diversity'*

As the parade of nations arrived in the hall at the stadium, Amma entered and raised her palms above her head and bowed to the ground, saluting everyone in a gesture of absolute humility. Finally a girl from Kashmir walked up to Amma and presented her with water from the Ganges, considered to be the most sacred river in the world. Some of the merged water was then poured onto a sapling banyan tree which will be planted at a new meditation centre, where which future generation will find solace and inner wisdom under its shade. Observers described the entire event as very beautiful and emotional

Cochin is itself a multi-faith city, with Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Jews living together harmony for centuries. So appropriately, the first session of the program was the Interfaith Summit, "Embracing Religions for Harmony and Peace", with speakers from all religions ~ Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Zen who discussed the roles and responsibilities of religions in society.

The Secretary General of the World Council of religions, Bawa Jain, led a prayer for destitute mothers and children around the world, and addressed Amma, saying, *'It is your mission and responsibility to unite the religious leaders of the world together in harmony and peace. You are not bound by religious institutions nor traditions.'* One of Amma's initiatives has been to ordain women priests in her temples, a revolutionising act in India, let alone elsewhere.

Rabbi Leah Novack, in her talk, 'The feminine Face of God: Nurturing its reflection in men and Women' said that *"for centuries, Jews have been praying to come under the wings of 'Shekhinah', the Divine Mother – 'she who dwells within' who is considered to be God's imminence... This tells us that despite male-centred society, memory of God the Mother has never left us.. I thank Amma for giving me the experience of the Divine Mother. It has been 13 blissful years."*

At the Women's Summit, eminent international women spoke on the subject of "Embracing Universal Motherhood for Harmony and Peace", including Yolanda King, the daughter of Martin Luther King, and director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Centre for Non-Violent Change.

In her speech she described her first meeting with Amma. *'After Amma's darshan, for the first time in my life, I felt complete fulfilment'*. She said *'many people over the world are doing good. But there is something unique and special about Amma – she is a woman, also she is such an embodiment of who and what she believes, she is genuine, she is the real thing!'*

Ms. King added, *'it is important to bring spirituality into politics, the principle that we are one. Only then is real transformation and peace possible.'*

Some of the ten resolutions of the Women's Initiative include gender awareness, targeting harmful social customs such as dowry, female foeticide and infanticide, as well as providing safe havens for destitute and young women; spiritual education boys and men, especially offenders; women in public realm; temple religious customs. To demonstrate, Amma married 108 poor couples who were provided with clothes, rings and all necessities for a wedding in a mass ceremony.

The President of India, Dr. Abdul Kalam (who has donated 10 months of his salary to Amma's charities) attended, as well as eminent dignitaries and speakers from all over the world. Dr. Kalam also presided over a mega Youth Meet, as well as a CEO Summit where leaders from major multinational companies met – 'the who's who of the Indian business community in Silicon Valley and the East Coast came together with successful executives of the largest Indian companies in answer to the call made by Amma and the President of India.' For 2 days they discussed linking spiritual values with business, as well as the goal of how to bring India to developed nation status by 2020.

At the youth meet, young people from several countries, including Holi Birman from Tasmania, spoke about how Amma had influenced their lives.

"Embracing the World" was also attended by the Australian Aboriginal "Tal-kin-jeri Dance Group" from the Ngarindjeri Clan in the Coorong lakes area in South Eastern South Australia. Representing Australian Culture, the 8 dancers of Tal-kin-jeri (which means "Wild Bush Turkey") performed on 27 September, Amma's 50th Birthday a 45 minute series of dances showing their appreciation of the creator, life and the creation. They began with the Cleansing Dance to bless the ground and clear away any unwanted spirits, and to bring in the good.

This naturally led to the Welcome Dance, to welcome travellers from the four directions. Dances which followed were called Creation, Spirit of Animal and Bird, Berry Picking Dance, and finally the Show Off Dance where each dancer performed individually, showing their feelings about celebrating life. They were absolutely thrilled to perform for Amma, whom they had never heard of prior to being invited by the Adelaide M.A. Centre, which organised the dance group's journey to India, including travel expenses.

Tal-kin-jeri also presented Amma with waters from the Murray River, which were incorporated in the merging waters ceremony. The leader and founder of the group, Major Summer, also presented her with a special traditional gift of a mat woven from the reeds and grasses near the Murray, together with a kangaroo skin. As they danced, and throughout all the international cultural presentations each night, Amma bestowed her blessings, hugging thousands of people each evening and well into the night, during as Amma's famous Darshan...

On the Birthday evening, greetings from international dignitaries were delivered to Amma. Australian congratulations to Amma for her work and Birthday came from the Governor General, Simon Crean, Steve Bracks, Phillip Ruddock, Peter Beatty, Natasha Stott Despoja and various other politicians. These felicitations were read to the entire stadium by Kieran O'Callaghan, a yoga teacher from Canberra. The conference concluded with Amma hugging thousands more people in an all night marathon that finished well after sunrise with Amma still looking 'fresh as a rose'.

Other new initiatives from Embracing the World included: the launching of an AIDS hospital; handing keys of new homes to destitute women; formation of a legal cell of 108 lawyers who will offer free legal aid to the poor; the incorporation of Amma's colleges into a University; environmental initiatives.

People interviewed at the Conference spoke effusively. A retired Christian missionary said, 'Mata is different; have you ever heard her preach religion? She is preaching love. She is doing a lot of good work for people'. An American devotee described, 'The celebration is a beacon of light in troubled times'.

A police officer claimed, "For me Amma is God. She is light – sunlight. She reforms souls". An old water carrier after 20 hours work said, "I am very happy to do this job. I am ready to work for Amma anywhere". An office manager thought, "The main thing she teaches is that we are all the same. There is no difference between blacks, whites, and Indians". A Californian devotee enthused, " I saw how Amma infuses us all with love. She's leading a revolution of love around the world".

PLEASE FURTHER MEDIA ENQUIRIES TO

Sydney: Gavan Evans - 0428 264510 gavan.evans@atradius.com

Melbourne: Michaela Rost - 9347 5036 / 0421 202990 melbournepr@ammachi.org.au

M.A. CENTRE (AUSTRALIA) FOUNDATION Ph. 03 9417 5151 Fax. 03 9417 5152
250 George St. Fitzroy 3065 PO Box 1499 Collingwood 3066

www.amritapuri.org