

Dr. Homer A. Jack

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Promoting Gandhian Values outside India-1992

Born on 19th May 1916, Dr. Homer Jack has devoted about 50 years to furthering peace in this strife-torn world. His work has focused on three major themes: defense of human rights, disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons, and inter-religious co-operation.

While still a student at the University of Chicago, he was among the founders of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942 which used Gandhian methods to lessen racial segregation. That same year he picketed the British Consulate as part of the "Quit India" campaign. In the 1950s he edited 'The Wit and Wisdom of Gandhi' and The Gandhi Reader. He visited South Africa in 1952 to oppose apartheid. He spent a week with the Manilal Gandhi family at Phoenix Farm and later wrote about the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa.

Dr. Jack's involvement in the social-action stems from his deep spirituality and keen commitment to human values. Deeply opposed to all forms of racial and religious discrimination, he helped resettle Japanese Americans who had been incarcerated in relocation camps during World War II. A Unitarian Universalist Clergyman, Dr. Jack was head of the Division of Social Responsibility of the Unitarian Universalist Association of North America and was involved in the American civil rights movement with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. from 1956 until the latter's death in 1968. He was also instrumental in the adoption by the U.N. General Assembly in 1981 of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief.

After traveling to Hiroshima and Nagasaki and seeing first-hand the horrors of nuclear holocaust, Dr. Jack helped found the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy in 1957. This was the direct result of the demand in the mid-1950s by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that nuclear weapons testing be stopped. He was Executive Director of SANE from 1960-64. In this period, he cooperated with Dr. Albert Schweitzer in Africa and also wrote two books about this humanitarian physician and opponent of nuclear testing. He was founder of the NGO (Non-Government Organisations) Committee on Disarmament set up in 1972 at U.N. Headquarters, serving as its Chairman during the first and second Special Sessions of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament.

Dr. Jack, together with non-Protestant religious leaders, founded the U.S. Inter-Religious Conference for Peace in 1966. As part of the Gandhi Centenary, Dr. Jack was Co-Secretary of an inter-religious symposium in New Delhi co-sponsored by the Gandhi Peace Foundation. This effort later became the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) at Kyoto in 1970. Dr. Jack was elected Secretary-General of WCRP and filled this position until 1984 when he became Secretary-General Emeritus. He also directed WCRP projects for the relief of Vietnamese boat people and aid to Cambodian refugees. WCRP, of which the late R.R. Diwakar and Archbishop Angelo Fernandes were Officers, has 25 chapters world wide including India.

A firm believer in human rights, he has worked for the freedom of countries under colonialism in Asia and Africa. He was a founder of the American Committee on Africa in 1953, its Associate Director in 1959-60, and editor of 'Africa Today'. He also assisted many African leaders in their petitions to the U.N. Dr. Jack wrote a series of articles against apartheid and has repeatedly given testimony against apartheid in the U.N. bodies.

Internationally, Dr. Jack has investigated violations of human rights throughout the world, from the Philippines to South Africa to the Soviet Union and the U.S.A. He worked with Justice Abu Sayyed Choudhury (later the first President of Bangladesh) at U.N. Headquarters in 1971 and with Jayaprakash Narayan for the independence of Bangladesh.

Dr. Jack has written many articles to interpret the life and thought of Mahatma Gandhi. He has also worked with a succession of Indian Ambassadors in Washington in the 1950s and at the U.N. in the 1960s and 1970s to help promote better Indo-American relations.

The author of many books on religion and peace and disarmament, Dr. Jack has received honours from the City of Chicago, Meadville Theological School, International Association for Religious Freedom, Niwano Peace Foundation, U.N. Association of Illinois, Unitarian Universalist Association and Sarvodaya Peace Movement in Tamil Nadu.

