

NEWSMAKER

Give Peace A Chance

Gandhi International Institute For Peace, founded by Dr. Raj Kumar after the 9/11 attacks, celebrates Mahatma Gandhi's birthday Oct. 2 as an International Day of Nonviolence

STORY BY
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PHOTOS FROM
DR. RAJ KUMAR

Sept. 11, 2001, is etched in most Americans' minds as the day the world, as we knew it, changed forever. But from that fear and uncertainty came hope here on Oahu in the form of Gandhi International Institute for Peace.

Dr. Raj Kumar, president of Indian American Friendship Council, founded GIIP on that fateful day and since then has worked tirelessly to promote nonviolence.

"Through GIIP, I'm trying to change one thing at a time," says Kumar, who is set to release his new book, *Gandhi's Wisdom for You*, a compilation of Mahatma Gandhi's "best quotes for self-realization, social change and world peace."

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The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others. — Mahatma Gandhi

on Mahatma Gandhi Day and International Day of Nonviolence Oct. 2, when the institute will celebrate Gandhi's 147th birthday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at his statue under the banyan tree outside Honolulu Zoo. It's free and open to the public (participants are asked to wear white), and begins with a Hawaiian blessing by Kahu Kamaki Kanahale, Dr. Terry Shintani and Surya Kumar, as well as sacred Indian offerings.

Kumar will give the

welcome speech. Keynote speakers are former U.S. Sen. Daniel Akaka and Maya Soetoro-Ng, director of community outreach and global learning at the University of Hawaii Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, and sister of President Barack Obama.

Also slated to speak are state Sen. Mike Gabbard, state Rep. Ken Ito, City Councilwoman Kymberly Pine, and Misty Kelai, director of Arts and Culture, City and County of Honolulu. Gov. David Ige will present a proclamation, and guests will present interfaith dialogues on world peace.

The Royal Hawaiian Band will play the U.S. and

2 as "Mohandas K. Gandhi Day," and Gov. David Ige signed the bill into law in April 2015, making Hawaii the first state in the union to so honor Gandhi.

Then, in 2016, the state Legislature passed a resolution to establish a sister-state relationship with Goa, India, and Kumar was tapped as a liaison to promote education, cultural exchange programs, international faith and peace conferences, and spiritual pilgrimages between the two countries. In December, Hawaii Pacific University history department head Mark Gilbert and 20 of his students will head to Goa.

Kumar, who has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and is the author of a number of books, had a life-changing experience in 1998 when he underwent open-heart surgery.

"I went from materialism to spiritualism," he admits.

It was then that he wrote his first book, *From Darkness to Light*, followed by *The Secrets of Health and Healing* and *Pearls of Wisdom for Everyday Living*, with yet another to release in June of next year.

"We all have a purpose," he says, "to serve others selflessly and remove pain and suffering."

Gandhi's relentless pursuit of peace and nonviolence eventually led to India's independence from British rule in 1947, and he since has been revered there as "Father of the Nation." He led a worldwide peace



(above) Dr. Raj Kumar stands beside the statue of Mahatma Gandhi outside Honolulu Zoo, where the International Day of Nonviolence observance will be held Sunday. (below) Kumar with Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi International Institute for Peace invited Gandhi to Hawaii in April 2011, when he gave lectures about nonviolence, peace, social change, terrorism and human rights at University of Hawaii at Manoa, Hawaii Pacific University, Iolani School, Pacific Buddhist Academy, the state Capitol and MOA Wellness Center



movement, urging universal harmony and, says Kumar, "Gandhi urged others not to fight in the name of God."

"Gandhi said, 'God creates all human beings equally, and we are brothers and sisters.' He also said, 'I am Hindu, Muslim, Jew and Christian.'"

"He meant we are one world family."

According to Kumar, the current acts of violence by radical militant groups such as ISIS are not in line with what is taught in the Quran, which says to "stand against oppressors in a nonviolent manner." And he's encouraged as more and more people are raising their voices for peace.

"Now moderate Muslims are speaking out against violence," he notes.

In conjunction with Spark Matsunaga Institute and HPU, an international peace conference is slated for 2020, and Kumar is reaching out to several organizations to participate. The goal is to someday have a "Peace Department" in every school (Iolani already has one in place), starting as young as possible.

"When you plant the seed at an early age," he says, "then the children will practice nonviolence in their lives."

GIIP is a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization. For more information or to donate, visit gandhianpeace.com or email gandhianpeace@gmail.com.