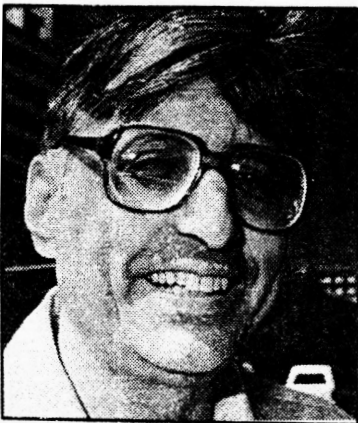


The devils are just human beings, says Gandhi's grandson

VENILLA YOGANATHAN



UNDERSTANDING:
That's the message from Rajmohan Gandhi.

The grandson of Mahatma Gandhi came to Durban this week bearing a message of tolerance, understanding and peace.

On a three-week fact-finding mission to South Africa, Rajmohan Gandhi said the greatest tragedy of South Africa was that its people did not know each other. "This is one of the country's biggest obstacles to peace," he said.

The former member of the Indian parliament compared the escalating political violence here to that of ethnic violence between Muslims and Hindus in India.

Mr Gandhi, 58, said the key to bringing an end to the bloodshed was to get people to understand one another.

"It's all very well for the high-level politicians to be able to get on and agree with one another, but what really matters is that people at grassroots level are able to communicate," observed

Mr Gandhi.

"When we get to know the people who appear to us as devils, then we'll realise that they are in fact only human beings."

It was a worldwide trend, he added, for people to "find their own with their own lot", but it was a misperception that loving your own people could only be achieved by hating others.

"Demolishing your neighbour's house is not the way to build your own."

And South Africa, Mr Gandhi believes, has a once-in-a-lifetime

opportunity to put this right.

If South African leaders can come together in agreement, "it will be an amazing thing for mankind", he said.

But Mr Gandhi also urged South Africans to take heed of the mistakes made by India.

"Indians have a tendency of not listening to what their political opponents have to say and to rush into judgments — South Africans must take care not to make that same mistake," he advised.

Mr Gandhi, who is in the country with his wife Usha, said he had always wanted to visit South Africa where his father Devadas Gandhi, the youngest son of the famous Mahatma, was born.

Currently a research professor for the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, Mr Gandhi has also written books based on his studies of Hindu-Muslim relations in the last 150 years.

He said he hoped to gather enough information during his visit here to write a book.