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PRESS RELEASE

**THIS SEPTEMBER 11th, HUNDREDS JOIN TO COMMEMORATE
CENTENARY OF BIRTH OF SATYAGRAHA**

New Delhi, India (September 4th, 2006)—On September 11th, 1906, Satyagraha was born—the nonviolent weapon of human liberation that would deliver India to freedom. That day, one century ago, three thousand Indians in South Africa—Hindu and Muslim, rich and poor, ‘free’ and indentured—joined together in spiritual and cultural unity to defy an unjust law foisted upon them. Mahatma Gandhi led the assembly in a solemn pledge, with God as witness, that they would disobey their colonial masters, but never lash out in violence. With that pledge Satyagraha was born.

For the past three years, Swaraj Peeth has commemorated the birth of Satyagraha in light of the cycle of violence and counter-violence that began on September 11th, 2001. The juxtaposition of this same date, ninety-five years apart, challenges us to ask which path ultimately liberates us from violence: terrorism and anti-terrorism; violence and counter-violence? Or the power of fearlessness and soul force?

The nation’s present social and political culture have somehow given up on the great legacy of India’s mass experiments in nonviolence, as a result of which we are all suffering from countless fractures in our national unity. The reliance on violence to express our political, economic, and religious grievances has made it clear that we must develop the capacity to nonviolently resolve our conflicts. We often lament that Mahatma Gandhi has been forgotten by the people of India. Has he been relegated to speeches that invoke his name in token reverence?

To commemorate the Birth of Satyagraha - nonviolent insistence to truth - in a meaningful way, Swaraj Peeth has undertaken an experiment in building dialogue on social and communal harmony and the role of nonviolence in our public life. Our work is centered around Mahatma Gandhi’s seminal text *Hind Swaraj*, written in 1909 as a response to the extremists who favoured terrorism to drive out India’s captors. Here Gandhiji presents in its purest form his vision of a truly free India, rooted in its own civilization and liberated from the modern culture that has enslaved it. Our experience of bringing *Hind Swaraj* to people reveals to us that the common masses, especially the younger generations, are hungry for the kind of vision Gandhiji offers.

Our commemoration of the birth of Satyagraha is not a ceremonial event. It is not an occasion to merely light lamps and recount great moments in history. On this

September 11th we will gather to articulate what vision unites our people today. The people of India are searching for a national vision that provides a valued place to their diverse social and cultural identities—*Hind Swaraj* guides us toward such a vision. Our commemoration of Satyagraha is a celebration of the method to achieve that vision.

Inspired by the message of *Hind Swaraj*, groups of people are preparing the groundwork for nonviolent responses to their communities' conflicts. One such response is the formation of Shanti Sena units, trained community-based peace forces that will nonviolently intervene in situations of social and communal conflicts. We are working with these groups by organizing a five-step process toward strengthening communities' capacity to resolve conflicts nonviolently. The steps include 1) public meetings on social disharmony and the place of nonviolence in a democratic society 2) three to four-day *Hind Swaraj* study camps 3) voluntary enlistment of Shanti Sainiks and pledge taking 4) training of Shanti Sainiks 5) identification of conflict situations and intervention of Shanti Sainiks. The first four steps have been initiated over the past three years; the fifth will be undertaken as we expand our capacity. To bring focus to this campaign, we are initially concentrating our efforts in Saharanpur, Bijnor, Moradabad and Rampur districts.

This September 11th men and women from Western UP involved in dialogue on *Hind Swaraj* will gather at the Aiwan-e-Ghalib Auditorium, Ghalib Institute in Delhi to pay tribute to the birth of Satyagraha. Leaders from each area we are active will report on their experiences with *Hind Swaraj* dialogue. A group of men and women that has resolved to dedicate themselves to nonviolence will take the pledge of Shanti Sainiks. These men and women are proving that Mahatma Gandhi's message still inspires our people today.

The occasion will culminate in an event to honour the birth of Satyagraha. In an effort to expand the dialogue on Swaraj and nonviolence, Swaraj Peeth will release the first Urdu translation of *Hind Swaraj*.

A number of leaders, closely associated with our campaign, will address the gathering. These include the respected educationist Saiyid Hamid, chancellor of Jamia Hamdard and former Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh University; Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche, Prime Minister of H.H. The Dalai Lama's Government in Exile; Sushri Nirmla Deshpande a veteran Gandhian and M.P. Rajya Sabha; Maulana Anzar Shah Kashmiri, Sheikhul Hadis, Darul-Uloom Waqf and, Prof. Anand Kumar, Centre for Political Studies, JNU.

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