

## I want to bring peace to Sri Lanka: Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

Indian spiritual guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is keen to play the peacemaker in war-torn Sri Lanka.

Claiming that he enjoys the trust of both the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers, Ravi Shankar says he does not need any invitation to act to try ending one of the world's longest running armed conflicts.

'If someone's house is burning, you don't expect an invitation from them! A sensitive person will simply jump in,' the spiritual guru told IANS over email from Norway.

'Since 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) is in our veins and blood, we can't but act,' he added. 'I think it is quite normal for anyone with a sense of belongingness to just act.'

The Tamil-speaking Ravi Shankar was asked if he wished to play a role to help end the Sri Lankan conflict and whether he enjoyed the trust of Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

'Of course, yes! I guess they realise that we have no ulterior motives other than to bring peace to one and all.'

Ravi Shankar's comments came following the conclusion in Oslo last week of a peace conference organised by his Art of Living Foundation that brought together a variety of players from Sri Lanka, India and Norway.

Cabinet ministers, opposition leaders and Buddhist monks came from Sri Lanka. The most high profile Tamil representative was Vaiko, the MDMK leader from India, who pleaded for the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka. Norway's special envoy to Sri Lanka, Jon Hanssen-Bauer, and members of the European Parliament also took part.

Ravi Shankar, 51, is the founder of Art of Living, which enjoys millions of followers worldwide. He has visited Sri Lanka thrice, the last time in September 2006 when he went to the LTTE-held Kilinochchi district.

Members of the Sri Lankan establishment as well as the Tamil National Alliance, which is sympathetic to the LTTE, have interacted with him in India.

Ravi Shankar said the Oslo conference went off very well. 'Though there were heated arguments and accusations, no one walked out (usually in such instances they walk out)! There was a strong commitment for peace and understanding.'

But can a spiritual leader succeed where international actors have failed?

Answer: 'There may be big powers in the world, but they cannot unite the hearts and minds of people. Mahatma Gandhi was a deeply spiritual person. Only because of that he could engineer the freedom movement.'

'I have always dreamed the impossible and it has become possible. If conflicts could be resolved in

Kosovo, in Ireland, in Baku (where Art of Living played an important role) and if Mahatma Gandhi could bring freedom to India, (the ability to end) the conflict in Sri Lanka through dialogue should not be dismissed.

'I don't mind going to the end of the world if it helps to bring peace and lessen the suffering of the people.'

Ravi Shankar frequently travels abroad. He went to Norway this time after visiting Italy, Germany and Belgium. He will also visit Finland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Taiwan before returning to India later this month.

How successful, or otherwise, has Art of Living been in spreading the message of peace? Ravi Shankar : 'Art of Living received recognition from the government of Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire) for resolving the conflict between two tribes. (Our) peace efforts were lauded in Ethiopia.

'Thousands of youths in Kashmir have found peace and solace through the Art Of Living programmes. Same is the case in Bihar and Chhattisgarh (where Maoists are active). We need more volunteers to replicate these success stories.'

*M.R. Narayan Swamy ( © IANS / India eNews)*