

# Vijay Mehta

Vijay Mehta's father, K L Mehta, a liberal solicitor in pre-independence India, would take young Vijay to prayer meetings convened by Mohandas Gandhi, the "Great Light" whose vision offered an alternative to the wars sweeping Europe and Asia in the 1940s, and to the Imperial British government that controlled India. Vijay's grandfather, Lala T D Mehta, had been a social reformer and champion of Hindu-Muslim unity, and Gandhi's message of non-violence struck a chord with the younger Vijay that would shape his character across decades to come.

Vijay graduated from Hindu College and went on to complete a Masters degree at the University of Delhi, the city in which he met his wife Shanti. Despite Gandhi's fasting almost to the point of self-destruction in a bid to deter inter-communal violence, Shanti's brother-in-law was one of millions who died in the chaos that enveloped India during the partition of Pakistan in 1947, an avoidable tragedy created by the hubris and mismanagement of a disconnected political elite. In the late 1960s the couple moved to England to pursue a new life. Vijay embarked into the clothing industry, with remarkable success, and the couple welcomed into the world four children: Sanjay, Vimal, Ajay and Renu. Vimal was born with Down's Syndrome, a living reminder to Vijay of his personal responsibilities to the vulnerable.

By the 1980s the business was sufficiently well established for Vijay to hand its management over to the next generation. This would allow him to focus on the overriding preoccupation and passion of his life working for peace, the resolution of conflict and abolition of war. Vijay is Co-Founder and Chair of Uniting for Peace, an organisation one of whose creator was Philip Noel Baker a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Uniting for Peace is working since 1979 devoted to building and promoting a global culture of peace, nonviolence and poverty reduction. It is working continuously to avert the prospect of nuclear annihilation offered by the Cold War logic of Mutually Assured Destruction - a prospect all too foreseeable to those who had witnessed the horrors of India's Partition. Vijay's second career as a votary of peace led him around the world, from Belfast to The Hague and back to his homeland, India, a country still rocked by unseen conflicts so often ignored by those who focus on Mumbai's new tower blocks, highways and Bollywood glamour.

Vijay would go on to establish other organisations including the Mehta Centre, promoting the UN's Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Vijay is a founding trustee of Fortune Forum charity. It held two summits in London in 2006 and 2007. The summits attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage. The keynote speakers for the first and second summit were Bill Clinton, former US President and Al Gore, former US vice-President, and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007.

Buoyed by the same work ethic that made a success of two very different careers across two very different continents, today Vijay is the author of several books and is a regular fixture of the news media, as he deploys his boundless energy and optimism as an advocate of non-violence and dialogue. Alas, with a world that grows more chaotic and unpredictable with every passing year, and one in which security crises are entangled with rapidly changing economic, social, and technological trends, Mehta's global and diverse outlook, his skills and dedication are needed today more than ever for ending vicious cycle of violence, poverty and building a peaceful world.

## *Peace activism and campaigning*

Vijay Mehta is the Chair of Uniting for Peace, President of Mehta Centre and Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity. He is a renowned author and global activist for peace, development and human rights.

Vijay's peace activism and campaigning has taken him on extensive travels around the globe advocating peace, an end to wars, arms trade, militarism and campaigning for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

In 2009 Vijay went to Belfast to take part in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Britain and Ireland. Before going to Belfast he met Archbishop Desmond Tutu at a reception in 10 Downing Street, London and had a good chat with him about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. In Belfast, he met former prisoners and hunger strikers and learnt first-hand the problems of keeping the peace after the Good Friday Agreement in Belfast. The findings of the commission and Mehta's lecture was published in the Irish Times.

Vijay Mehta has served on many advisory bodies on peace and disarmament and was a member of the team of international experts who met in Greece, at the invitation of the Mayor of Athens and Global Governance Group. As a result, The New School of Athens was created on November 2004. In the classical tradition of ancient Athenian democracy, the school is determined to bridge divergent opinions so as to produce pragmatic proposals in favour of innovative international dialogue and more effective global governance.

He has addressed students at many colleges and universities including Magdalen College, Oxford University and St. Andrews University, Scotland.

**One of his and Uniting for Peace's flagship campaigns is 4D for World Peace.** A campaign to create global frameworks for taking actions on interconnecting global issues of disarming and demilitarising the world and the savings thus achieved to be deployed for development and democracy. The 4D for World Peace campaign is a major initiative and has aroused much interest worldwide. Many luminaries including **Mairead Maguire**, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate (1976), Northern Ireland, **Dr. Shirin Ebaadi**, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate (2003), Iran, **Deepak Chopra**, Best Selling Author and Founder Chopra Foundation, USA, **Richard Falk**, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for Palestinian Territories, USA **Jeremy Gilley**, Founder Peace One Day, UK have supported 4D for World Peace.

Vijay is a member of National Council of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). As part of CND group, he travelled to UN Headquarter in New York to participate in Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference in 2005. And he has taken part in NPT March in New York and Aldermaston March in UK and other protests for abolition of nuclear weapons. He has also attended DPI/NGO conference on Millennium Development Goals at the United Nations.

In 2009, Vijay was invited by Bookmakers & Dreamers Club and Pages for Peace foundation to contribute to "**The Big Book: Pages for Peace Project**" in which kids built the biggest book in the world. Each page of the book is 12 feet by 10 feet. The questions the contributors were asked to answer were: What is world peace? Would there ever be world peace? Where would you like to see the world in twenty years? Among other contributors to the Big Book were Former US President **Jimmy Carter**, **His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama**, UN Ambassador **Anwarul K Chowdhury**.

One of the most stirring events was when Vijay Mehta participated on the **historic march** against the threat of **War in Iraq**. Just before the outbreak of the Iraq war, a demonstration and a march took place in 2003 in which millions of people participated all over the world. The February 15, 2003 anti-war protest was a co-ordinated day of protests across the world against the imminent invasion of Iraq. Millions of people protested in approximately 800 cities around the world. According to BBC News, between six and ten

million people took part in protests in up to sixty countries over the weekend of the 15th and 16th; other estimates range from eight million to thirty million.

## *Publications*

Some of his notable books are:

**The Economics of Killing: How the West Fuels War and Poverty in the Developing World [2012]** – In this original and thought provoking book, Mehta examines the power of Military Industrial Complex, it's continuous engagement in perpetual wars bringing untold suffering to mankind. He also outlines a world which can move away from war economy to peace economy based on policies of disarmament, demilitarisation and sustainable development.

**Development Dialogue, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation [2011]** – This volume is about Erskine Childers, who devoted his career as an international civil servant to the tireless promotion of ideals, visions and relevance of United Nations. Distinguished authors have written a selected texts on the life and work of Erskine Childers.

**The Fortune Forum Code: For a Sustainable Future [2006]** – The book explores the threats and challenges of crippling poverty, global warming, worldwide diseases and interrelated issues of International Security and Development. It also examines how we can link the agenda of development, security and environment together for a sustainable future. The book was launched at the inaugural philanthropic summit of Fortune Forum in 2006.

**The United Nations and Its Future in the 21st Century [2005]** – The book is a collection of essays exploring many aspects United Nation's history, its successes and failures and propose possible reforms for making it a truly global organisation fit to face the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The launch of the book took place in Friends House London and the keynote address was given by Judge Rosalyn Higgins, Former President of the World Court.

**Climate Change 365 [2005]** – This challenging book lays out 365 ways to save the planet from Global Warming, 1 idea for each day of the year. This book is aimed at all individuals, NGOs, Civil Society, Corporations and governments seeking solutions of Climate Change crisis. To support environment, and save the carbon emissions, the book was not published and was straight away posted on the website for people to read and take actions for the betterment of the planet Earth.

**Arms No More [2003]** – A groundbreaking book, which examines global threats posed by spread of small arms, light weapons and weapons of mass destruction in bringing terror, wars and conflicts worldwide. It puts forward the case for reduction and eventual abolition of all weapons to end military superiority and enhance global peace and human security.

Most of his books, videos of his talks, and his other work are available free of charge to be downloaded from the website [www.unitingforpeace.com](http://www.unitingforpeace.com).

## *Notable conferences*

Vijay Mehta has addressed and attended many international conference, some notable ones are:

### **At Jaipur, Rajasthan, India (2011)**

An international conference on "Universal Wellness through Meditation, Yoga and Holistic Health". In that conference Vijay addressed the delegates and the title of his talk was "**From Inner Peace to a Vision of Universal Peace**"

### **At Rajsamand, Rajasthan (near Udaipur) (2010)**

At the third International Nonviolence Leadership Training Camp, he spoke about **Peace-Building in an Unstable World and the Innovative Approaches to World Peace in 21<sup>st</sup> Century**.

### **International Peace conference, Hague (1999)**

Vijay Mehta and Sue Davis (CND) took 11 youngsters from Tower Hamlets Borough of London on a seven day trip to Hague Netherlands to take part in the Hague Agenda for Peace conference. Some 10,000 participants – including Nobel laureates, religious leaders, and the UN secretary-general – met in the Netherlands for the 4-day conference to discuss how to create ‘a culture of peace’ in the new millennium. The conference had four major strands:

- Root causes of war/culture of peace
- International humanitarian and human rights law and institutions
- Prevention, resolution and transformation of violent conflict
- Disarmament and human security

Participants included hundreds of civil society leaders and representatives from 80 governments and international organizations - including UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh and Wim Kok of The Netherlands, Queen Noor of Jordan, Arundhati Roy of India, and Nobel Peace Laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Rigoberta Menchú Tum of Guatemala, Jody Williams of the United States, José Ramos Horta of East Timor and Joseph Rotblat of the United Kingdom.

Vijay Mehta, ‘**Why I am going to Hague**’ article was published in ‘Non-violent Action Monthly,’ prior to the conference.

### **At the Barcelona Forum (2004)**

Vijay Mehta, member of the council of International Peace Bureau attended an international conference at Barcelona, Spain. It was well attended by delegates from various countries. Vijay gave presentations at three different sessions on **UN reforms, Terrorism and International Law** (‘**Are rulers above the law**’?) The title of the conference was ‘**Towards a World Without Violence.**’

### **European Peace Conference in Prague, Czech Republic (2003)**

At the European Peace Conference in Prague (2003), Mehta spoke on the war in Iraq, entitled “**Unite for Peace and Justice: Stop War and Terrorism.**” The speech was well received as it was the start of the Iraq war. He also attended a rally about the war on Iraq and addressed thousands of people in the Old Town Square in centre of Prague.

### **European Peace Conference in Prague, Czech Republic (2005)**

He visited Prague again in 2005 to address a conference on the remarkable woman, Noble peace prize winner, Bertha Von Suttner on the 100th anniversary of her winning the Nobel peace prize. The title of Vijay Mehta’s speech was “**Ending war and building a just, peaceful and sustainable world.**” He spoke on international peace and security with special reference to two important documents.

**1) The UN High-level Panel Report on Threats, Challenges and Change (2004).**

**2) The 2005 World Leaders Summit Outcome Report**

### **Make Poverty History in Edinburgh, Scotland (2005)**

Vijay Mehta went to the Make Poverty History march in Edinburgh, Scotland. The Make Poverty History campaign a coalition of charities, religious groups, trade unions, campaigning groups and celebrities who mobilised around world politics in 2005 to increase awareness and pressure governments into taking actions towards relieving absolute poverty. He presented the discussion paper **Development in Africa: Shaking the Curse of Poverty, Hunger and Disease.**

### **Global Governance Conference, Athens, Greece (2006)**

Vijay Mehta went to Athens, Greece 2006 to attend an international conference on the title 'Beyond the Millennium Declaration: Embracing Democracy and Good Governance'. At the conference Mehta presented a paper "**Revitalising Global Governance and Democracy-for a just, peaceful and sustainable world.**"

### **World Peace Forum conference in Vancouver, Canada (2006)**

In June 2006, he attended the World Peace Forum which was one of the largest peace gatherings over three thousand international delegates from 97 countries attended in the beautiful, green and clean city of Vancouver. Vijay Mehta gave talks on **a) UN reforms, b) The Danger of Arms Trade in the Global Economy and Building Civil Society**. He gave a TV interview to Think Peace Documentary.

### **International Peace Bureau conference "Climate of Peace", Oslo, Norway (2010)**

In 2010 Vijay and Shanti Mehta attended the international conference hosted by IPB. It was an important conference as it celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the IPB's receiving of the Nobel Peace Prize. In the conference, Vijay gave a speech on "**Disarm the Military Juggernaut for Peace and Development**". In this important event attended by distinguished dignitaries, a keynote address was given by Federico Mayor, Formal Director-General of UNESCO

## *Organisations Founded or a Founding Member*

Vijay Mehta helped to start a number of organisations. Some of which are below:

### **Movement for the Abolition of War (MAW)**

Helping to build a civil society movement for the abolition of war by challenging popular thinking about the acceptability of war.

### **Nonviolent Peaceforce, Brussels (formerly Peaceworkers UK)**

The mission of Nonviolent Peaceforce is to promote, develop and implement unarmed civilian peacekeeping as a tool for reducing violence and protecting civilians in situations of violent conflict.

### **INLAP – Institute for law Accountability and Peace**

INLAP is a citizen group working to uphold the law concerning matters of law and peace.

### **Arms Reduction Coalition (ARC) now part of Uniting for Peace**

ARC is a coalition of organisations and supporters from all over the world calling for the United Nations to agree a legally binding instrument requiring UN member states to reduce the amount of resources spent of arms by between 1% and 5% per year. This is based on Article-26 of UN Charter.

### **Peace Rights**

Peace Rights is an NGO established to promote peaceful conflict resolution, challenge threats to peace and to develop educational and research initiatives for those concerned with peace and justice in the world.

### **Non-violent Action Magazine (Now part of Peace News)**

For up-to-date news and views from the international peace and anti-militarist magazine (Peace News) and the monthly magazine for UK actions (Non-violent Action). Peace News is written and produced by and for activists, campaigners and radical academics from all over the world.

## *Appreciation of Vijay Mehta*

Some of luminaries and newspapers and media has this to say about Vijay Mehta:

Thank you for all you do Vijay - both the Organisation and yourself are inspiration and give us all hope that both yourself and Uniting for Peace can bring a world without war. Indeed it is possible, even in our own time.

**Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate (1976)**

Vijay is a leading peace campaigner working tirelessly for peace. He is amazing. If anyone could sell fridges to Eskimos it will be him.

**Bruce Kent, Vice President, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).**

A leading activist once taught me UN values and its mission to solve the world's most intractable problems—challenges that directly or indirectly affect us all: issues such as health, the environment, human rights and justice, peace and security, population, hunger and peacekeeping. For all of our human diversity, the UN represents the global, the local and the truly indispensable. That activist and my mentor is also my father Vijay Mehta.

**Renu Mehta, Founder Fortune Forum Charity**

People like Vijay are 1 in a million

**Norbert Stute Director Better World Links**

Vijay Mehta, Your commitment to peace is total and your constructive endeavours in this direction are highly commendable.

**Dr. S.L. Gandhi, International Co-ordinator, Non-violence Leadership Training Programme, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India**

Longstanding activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment, who along with his daughter, Renu Mehta, has set a precedent for striving to change the world.

**The Sunday Times (London, 1 February 2009)**

"Vijay Mehta lends intellectual credibility to the project and wrote 'The Fortune Forum Code for a Sustainable Future', a sort of manifesto that will underpin the group's future activities."

**The Independent (London), 26 September 2006**

## *Conclusion*

Vijay has got a strict work ethic in which he comes to office every day of the week to write, prepare for talks and strategise how best to spread the words of peace. Vijay enjoys long walks, Yoga and meditation. Vijay is a vegetarian and teetotaler. He has a habit of drinking herbal tea made out of his own recipe along with reading piles of newspapers and books.

To spread the message of peace and change public opinion, Vijay Mehta has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World, Press TV, Ajjak-24 hour Indian news channel, and Think Peace documentary, Canada. Independent, Observer and Guardian newspapers, among other journals have written about him. He has given many interviews to radio Stations in UK and Europe.

Vijay Mehta has said that *"Life has taught me to be humble and realise how small a cog you are in this universal scheme of things. Understanding this essence of life, I try to spend every waking hour to speak, write and act for reducing violence, wars, suffering and bringing peace, justice, harmony joy and happiness. My passion and spirit is in my motto – Be good and do good."*