



Motherpage » From Her Childrens Interviews » Olara Ottunu



"NGOs And UN Have Something To Learn From The Work Of Amma"

Interview with Olara A. Otunnu, Former UN Under-Secretary General

22 September 2006 — Amritapuri

Olara A. Otunnu recently paid a visit to Amritapuri. In 2005, Mr. Otunnu completed his eight-year term as UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict. In this capacity, Mr. Otunnu was a moral voice and advocate on behalf of war-affected children, promoting measures for their protection in times of war and for their healing and social reintegration in the aftermath of conflict.



Mr. Otunnu told Amma that he wanted to come to Amritapuri to thank her personally for the love she was bestowing upon the world. "We need you in major parts of the world—in Latin America, in Asia, in Africa, in America—where people are hungry for love, healing and the sense of being accepted and being loved," he said.

Mr. Otunnu asked Amma for her support and advice in relation to the independent international organization that he recently founded in New York, the LBL Foundation for Children, which is devoted to promoting protection, hope, healing and education for children in communities devastated by war.

He also said that he wanted to draw Amma's attention to the genocide plaguing his native Uganda, where for the past 15 years some two million people have been living in concentration camps—1,500 of which are dying each week. "We need Amma's positive thoughts and prayers to end this genocide," he told Amma.

In the 1970s, Mr. Otunnu played a leading role in the resistance against the regime of Idi Amin. He has also served as Uganda's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, during which time he served a stint as President of the Security Council (1981), Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights (1983-84), Vice-President of the General Assembly (1982-83) and Facilitator of Global Negotiations (1982-83).

Why did you come to India?

Otunnu: The original reason was to come to Mumbai to receive an award, the Global Award for Contribution to Human Rights.

I met Amma in New York earlier this year, and I told her that I would very much like to come and see for myself where she is based, to her *in situ*, if you like, and to pay my respects and tribute to

Related Links

« « 1 of 2 » »

- ◀ NGOs, UN to learn
- ◀ Greatest Entrepreneur
- ◀ Law as an
- ◀ Born for
- ◀ Voice for all
- ◀ Feel so small
- ◀ Tranquilizer

Search

Namah Sivaya

Current News

2007 March 13

- Stalanurana of Pune.



Bharata Yatra 2007

her in person. So after the award ceremonies, I decided to come to Kerala and see her where she was born, where she grew up and where she is doing most of her work from.

How was your meeting with Amma?

Otunnu: I was very moved by the meeting. Before the meeting, of course, I'd seen her in darshan. She was receiving a lot of people. And the way in which people bring to her their troubles, their burdens, their grief, and how they seemed to leave it on her shoulders and the comfort and sense of relief that they seemed to feel when they leave her—it was very moving to see that.



And then later I was able to have a more private meeting with her, and the experience that she related to me as to how she has built this phenomenon, which has begun in this village, moved to other parts of Kerala, to India, and on to become a worldwide phenomenon—it is extraordinary.

She is so simple, so modest and yet the power of what she is able to bring forth is truly extraordinary—a very, very moving experience.

I had a very good discussion with her about the humanitarian work she's been doing, about the education she's providing for the children and about some of the other projects that she is now discussing, about how she has come to the support of those who suffer from tsunami. And today I was able to see some of the houses built during that time, and it's phenomenal what she has been able to do.

As someone who has multiple decades of experience in the field of humanitarian intervention, what is your perspective on Amma's humanitarian work, your impression?

Otunnu: It is very striking, because I have been involved with the United Nations, with non-government organisations, and it is very difficult to get good, quality delivery—with all the best intentions in the world it is not easy. By quality of delivery I mean to have quality delivery of services to those in need, to those in distress and to those to whom you are giving support. And to do that in a timely way is exceedingly difficult, especially in the middle of a massive disaster, a massive emergency like the tsunami.

Another problem that we face in terms of international relief work is how much of the resources mobilized to support those in need go to those who are providing support—the personnel. Whether UN agencies or NGOs, the overheads tend to be quite high relative to what actually ends up benefiting the people who are truly in need. I was very struck by how much of what is generated, how much of the money that is mobilized, actually goes and benefits directly those in need. This is remarkable. This is remarkable. It was very striking for me how she managed to get that formula right.

She acts on the spontaneous and instinctive. And that has given a lot of speed and momentum, cut out the bureaucracy, and made it possible to inspire people and to move with them to actually provide timely and quality support to those in need. This is a remarkable thing. And I think that international NGOs and UN agencies have something to learn from the work of Amma and what she has been able to build.

What do you think Amma has to offer to the world?

Otunnu: You see a lot of hatred, a lot of bloodshed, a lot of ugliness in the world, a lot of suffering and despair. And what she's been able to give a lot of people ... is a sense of genuine love, to feel that they are loved, to feel that she cares, and that she is able to relieve their despair. And the world can do with a lot more love than there is right now, and Amma provides that. Amma has that sense of love and comfort.

What do you feel your are taking with you from your visit here?

Otunnu: I am simply very moved by what I've seen here. I have been very touched meeting her, having that private moment with her, seeing people coming and having darshan with her, and also seeing some of the projects that she has been building here. So I leave very, very moved, wanting very much to learn from this experience. And, secondly, wanting to tell the world about this phenomenon of spreading love and good will and support and comfort to people who are in need, to people who are suffering, to people who are in despair, to those in pain.

I have been delighted to have been able to come and see this extraordinary work firsthand.

—Kannadi