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CORRECTIONS

An open letter from Gene Sharp

June 12, 2007

Dear M. Thierry Meyssan,

I am Gene Sharp, Senior Scholar of the Albert Einstein Institution. You wrote about us in January 2005.

We appreciate attention to the technique of nonviolent action, or as I prefer to call it, nonviolent struggle.

In a world of so much violence and injustice, it is crucial that people have access to information about a different means of conducting conflicts and struggling against oppression. No one should, for lack of accurate information, or exposure to inaccurate information, believe that passive submission to oppression and injustices is the only alternative to resort to greater violence.

Your presentation of this technique in the International Edition of *Voltaire* 4 January 2005 is a prime example of inaccuracies about nonviolent action and about myself. Why and how this came to be is somewhat puzzling. Perhaps you were given false information.

Your article contains so many inaccuracies that it is surprising to me that some people can believe much of its contents. It appears, however, that some do. That will have serious consequences to the detriment of future events. Therefore, I feel obliged to point out some of the factual errors that you have presented.

Nonviolent action is a technique for conducting conflicts, as is military warfare, parliamentary government, and guerrilla warfare. This technique uses psychological, social, economic, and political methods. This technique has been used for a variety of objectives, both "good" and "bad" ones. It has been used both to change governments and to support governments against attacks.

Nonviolent struggle provides realistic alternatives to violence by which people can lift oppression and confront and defeat violence against themselves. Nonviolent struggle is not magical and does not easily produce miracles. However, if used wisely with understanding and good judgement, it can be of great benefit to humanity, in ways compatible with freedom and justice.

The Albert Einstein Institution receives no funding from any government, including the United States. The Albert Einstein Institution has no government funders or masters. I have never worked for NATO. I have never worked for the CIA or received money from it. When writing my doctoral dissertation for Oxford University in the 1960s I did indirectly receive partial financial support from the Department of Defense through a grant to a Harvard University professor, as acknowledged in my Preface to *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

The Albert Einstein Institution neither creates conflicts, nor becomes a participant in a conflict once one exists, nor does it take ideological sides in conflicts. It simply conducts research, generic policy studies, and education.

The term “soft coups” is erroneous and distorting. More accurate are the terms “nonviolent action,” “nonviolent struggle,” or “people power.” “Soft coup” links this type of action to the very different anti-democratic coups d’état by military, political, or intelligence groups. Coups are one of the main ways dictatorships are established.

I have studied Mohandas K. Gandhi in depth, and have written two books about his work. The first, printed finally in 1960, was completed when I lived in Brooklyn in February 1953. It carries a Foreword by Albert Einstein, who wrote it in 1953 at my invitation before I was imprisoned as a conscientious objector to military conscription. This is documented in *Einstein on Peace*, edited by Otto Nathan and Heinz Norden.

I did study Henry David Thoreau and wrote an Introduction to his essay on civil disobedience. However, that was a very minor part of my studies.

Many of the sources of my doctoral studies in political theory at Oxford University are footnoted in my 1973 book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, that was based on my 1968 doctoral thesis. However, the references to political theorists do not include additional important studies that I did on dictatorships, totalitarianism, coups d’état and other forms of conflict.

I did hold research appointments for nearly thirty years at Harvard University, primarily in the Center for International Affairs. and for several years directed a Program on Nonviolent Sanctions in Conflict and Defense. I also founded the independent Albert Einstein Institution in 1983. I am Professor Emeritus of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. I also taught at the

Institute of Philosophy and the History of Ideas of the University of Oslo in Norway.

I have by invitation met with a variety of groups facing acute conflicts to share with them information about the nature of nonviolent action, and to explore its significance and potential as an alternative to violence in struggles for greater freedom and justice.

However, as Albert Einstein Institution policy, we never tell people facing conflicts in another country what they should do. We can provide knowledge and understanding when requested. We stress the importance of careful study, independent thinking, and self-determination. We do not know other countries in depth and therefore, by offering detailed advice, we could make serious errors. What people in other countries decide to do is their responsibility and prerogative.

In this educational and consultative work we have never had the backing of any agency of the United States government and have not conducted courses in any US embassy.

We did go to Beijing in 1989, but the purpose was only to learn why the students were employing nonviolent protests. We gave no advice to anyone about what the students should do. We were not expelled, but left voluntarily after the massacre when we could no longer conduct interviews.

Your article attributes opinions and activities to several other persons that are not accurate or relevant.

Your statements on my contacts with Sweden and the three Baltic countries are not accurate. Our main influence in the Baltic countries was through page proofs of the then forthcoming Princeton University Press book *Civilian-Based Defense: A Post-Military Weapons System*. We did meet with defense officials of the pro-independence Baltic governments, but did not tell them what they should do.

I have never met members of the Iraqi National Council and never “trained” them anywhere. The Albert Einstein Institution did not advise opposition to the Shevardnadze government in Georgia. They did have access to my booklet “From Dictatorship to Democracy,” in Georgia but we only learned this after the struggle was complete. This essay is also available in twenty-seven translations, on web sites or in print, including the languages of Eritrea, the Maldives, Nepal, and other countries, always at the request of people in those countries and even though we had almost no money to facilitate this. The subtitle of that booklet is generic, “A Conceptual Framework for Liberation.

I do not know your motivation for attacking me and the Albert Einstein Institution. You may find my publication list and biographical notes on our website: www.aeinsteinst.org When you include falsehoods in your comments, you lose credibility. If you offer corrections to errors in earlier writings your stature will grow.

Regretfully,

Gene Sharp