

The First Official Trip of Barack Obama to Canada

by Koozma J. Tarasoff, February 19, 2009



Centre Block Tower in Ottawa



Vantage point from snowman

OTTAWA, February 19, 2009 — my 77th birthday. 'The biggest present for you on this day will be the visit of Barack Obama to Ottawa', said my wife. She was right!

On this cold, windy morning, equipped with a digital camera, I went to Parliament Hill to witness history in the making — the visit of the new President of the USA Barack Obama to Ottawa on his first official trip abroad. Being a charismatic leader, he has portrayed himself as a unifier not as divider, as an open person with a positive message, who likes to listen to others and give honest answers. 'He likes to bring people together', writes Mary Lou Finlay, a fellow at the Centre for the Study of Democracy at Queen's University and former host of CBC Radio's *As It Happens* (*Ottawa Citizen*, November 7, 2008: A15).

On Parliament Hill, the ambiance of 2,500 well-wishers was most amicable and jovial! Ordinary people were there with signs of Welcome, with smiles and with messages to the new President. In fact they seem to recognize Obama in the tradition of Lincoln, Roosevelt and Washington.

Although I was not close enough to see the President clearly, I took one photo of him (my last one) with his familiar hand wave when he stopped briefly behind a bullet-proof glass in Centre Block, accompanied by Stephen Harper, Canada's Prime Minister. It was a moment when there were cries of joy with words such as 'We love you President'.



Stop the War sign



End Blockade Against Cuba



Nunavut welcomes Obama

This day reminds me of another historical moment. On February 19, 1861 Russian Tsar Alexander II abolished serfdom, liberating 20 million peasants. It stays in history as a Day of Liberation.

The January 20, 2009 inauguration of Barack Obama as the first 'black' President in the USA goes a long ways towards eliminating racial discrimination in the USA. The liberation of his ancestor's from slavery began back in 1834. Later in 1968, his famous countryman Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lost his life fighting for equality of the races in America.



Large poster of Obama

The President's achievement confirms the human need to be liberated without being hindered by the colour of ones skin or by the nature of ones beliefs. In essence, we are neither black nor white, liberal nor conservative, but are equal human beings, as Barack Obama pointed out. For this we have reason to celebrate a major historical achievement in the recent USA election.

If I as a Canadian citizen had the opportunity of personally meeting the President, I would tell him the following:

Dear Mr. Obama,

I welcome you to our country as a friend, a straight-speaking politician, the leader of an important neighbour. You are the hope of many! We Canadians wish you success in the rebuilding and recovery of the US economy, the fight with global warming and a dramatic push to develop alternative sources of energy. Especially, we support your vow to use 'non-military' means of solving some of the international problems of violence.

Rebuilding of Afghanistan and Iraq and helping these countries to economically get back on their feet would be consistent with the call for liberation that you and your ancestors



Proudly wearing Obama shirt



Toronto peace activist in Ottawa



Obama enthusiasts



Windsor District Black Coalition banner

have worked for over the centuries. Mr. President, it is time to turn a new page in history so that the USA can become a peace builder.

Let us remember that the UN is a global non-partisan organization of 192 member states, whose Charter's preamble states that war shall be abolished, and it is mandated to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. If the huge amount of moneys that we currently pour into the institution of mass murder (war and militarism) is used for the real human needs of shelter, food, health, education, and culture, we and our children will live much better and our planet will be saved from environmental disaster. In supporting the UN, the world society could then move to dismantle NATO so that we can work together to transform the culture of militarism into a culture of nonkilling, nonviolence and peace. The World Health Organization says that violence is a preventable disease, and the Seville Statement assures us we are not born violent.

With your declared platform for 'truly meaningful change' and your childhood experiences in Hawaii, maybe you will take a direct interest in some of the most innovative developments in creating a culture of world peace. The recently established [Center for Global Nonkilling](#) in Hawaii with its commitment to promote change toward the measurable goal of a killing-free world is a historic first. The giant figures of Tolstoy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and other wisdom people are encapsulated in this research and action centre.

Setting up Ministries of Peace in every Government and in every country would help transform our mindset towards finding alternatives to war and weapons. All of these peace-building ventures can provide a model for

making this world a better and safer place to live.

As a responsible President of a proud nation with a 'Yes, we can' attitude, you have a great opportunity of making a mark on the world stage as a bridge-building statesman, as a leader who dared to present a new vision/blueprint not only for America, but the world.

My best wishes to you in your awesome post of President of the USA.

Koozma J. Tarasoff, Ottawa, Canada.

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