

Excerpts from remarks by
AMBASSADOR HEPBURN
 at the Opening Ceremony of the
EUROPEAN PEACE RUN

My dear friends, greetings to all of you who are gathered in Sofia today at the opening of the Sri Chinmoy Oneness-Home Peace Run in Europe.

This Peace Run is one of the most remarkable and far-reaching initiatives. With each step, it is strengthening the cooperative spirit of the international community.

Schools across Europe and throughout the world eagerly participate in the Peace Run. By encouraging young people to express their aspirations for harmony today, the Peace Run is surely building the foundation for a culture of Peace tomorrow.

The founder of this wonderful event, Sri Chinmoy, was a dear friend to me. He was tireless in his work for a 'Oneness-World' travelling to the Americas, to Europe, Australia, Africa and his native Asia. He is inviting us to embrace this world as our common home, a place in which we are a world-family, living and working together as brothers and sisters, with tolerance, kindness and compassion.

I salute the nation of Bulgaria, a land known for its kindness and hospitality, and congratulate you on hosting the opening of the Peace Run in 2018. To the municipality of Sofia, to the citizens of Bulgaria, to all the schoolchildren and athletes gathered for this special occasion, I say, "Run, run, run. May you carry this message of peace to all people and to all nations. May the light of your torch brighten the hearts and the minds of everyone you meet on your journey."

I firmly believe that, as this torch is passed from hand to hand, it will continue to encourage millions of individuals, young and old, to aspire for a world where 'oneness' and 'peace' truly exist.

I am reminded of the message of my dear friend Sri Chinmoy, which can strengthen us on our way forward. He said that world harmony and world peace are "the realities, divine realities and supreme realities."

Go forward and turn the most precious dream of Peace into a living reality. I am with you every step of the way!

The Bulgarians used the video to promote the opening of the Peace Run. It went out to a lot of media and was widely used. We showed it at the opening of the Peace Run and the audience responded very enthusiastically. I dare say that Dr Hepburn is now a semi celebrity in Bulgaria. We are extremely grateful to him for offering his words and support. *DEVASHISHU*



Above: the Mayor of Sofia lights the Peace Torch as Olympic medalist and former world champion gymnast, Yordan Yovchev, (right) and national volleyball star Yevgeny Ivanov (second left) look on.



When we first heard that the start of the Peace Run this year will be in Sofia, the first reaction of the disciples in Bulgaria was: "Fantastic, what a great opportunity for manifestation and service!!!" and the second reaction was: "You know that February 27th is still winter, right?" And sure enough, two days before the opening ceremony, it started snowing and the city was covered with half a meter of snow with temperatures hitting -17°C. Thankfully we had anticipated the weather, and arranged for the ceremony to be inside the National Stadium in Sofia.

The months leading to the eventful day were marked by lots of inspiring discussions, selfless work and fundraising of disciples and friends of the Centre. By the Grace of the Supreme and Guru everything came together perfectly—we had the support of the city, the Ministry of Sports and Youth and the Ministry of Culture. The opening was very well covered in all national media. The torch was lit by the Mayor of Sofia Ms. Yordanka Fandakova who was awarded the Torch Bearer Award along with a few famous and deserving athletes and musicians.

Devashishu said in one interview that sometimes the Run is received on a red carpet, but Sofia welcomed us with a white carpet. The following days were marked with many inspiring ceremonies. We might have started with temperatures of -17°C but when we passed the torch on to Greece it was +17°C, and full-blown spring! *BARIDHI*