

The Global Solidarity of Youth: Ushering In a New Era of Hope

by Daisaku Ikeda
President, Soka Gakkai International

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Sixty years have passed since my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900-58), issued his declaration calling for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons.

Toda fought alongside founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) for the cause of peace and humanity. At the core of his thinking was a vision of global citizenship rooted in the philosophy of respect for life's inherent dignity as taught in Buddhism.

This is the conviction that no one, wherever they may have been born or whatever group they belong to, should be subjected to discrimination, exploited or have their interests sacrificed for the benefit of others. This is a way of thinking that resonates strongly with the United Nations' appeal to the international community to create a world in which "no one will be left behind."
[\[1\]](#)

The same strongly felt sentiment impelled Toda to denounce nuclear weapons as an absolute evil, a fundamental threat to the right of the world's people to live, and to call for a broad-based popular movement for their prohibition. On September 8, 1957, under the clear blue skies that follow after a typhoon has passed, he addressed some 50,000 young people who had gathered at the Mitsuzawa Stadium in Yokohama: "I hope that, as my disciples, you will inherit the declaration I am about to make today and, to the best of your ability, spread its intent throughout the world."
[\[2\]](#) Even to this day, the sound of his voice echoes within me.

Since then, Soka Gakkai members in Japan and around the world have worked with like-minded individuals and organizations to develop activities seeking the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons.

Last December, against a backdrop of growing recognition within international society of the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons, the UN General Assembly adopted a historic resolution calling for the start of negotiations toward a treaty for their prohibition. The first negotiating conference is slated to be held at UN Headquarters in New York in March, and it is crucial that this succeed in opening a path to a world free from nuclear weapons.

In addition to nuclear weapons, our world today is confronted by numerous grave challenges including a seemingly unending succession of armed conflicts and the sufferings of the rapidly growing refugee population. I am not, however, pessimistic about humanity's future. My reason is the faith I place in our world's young people, each of whom embodies hope and the possibility of a better future.

This is not to deny the fact that millions of young people live in severely challenging conditions of poverty and inequality, as evidenced by the fact that children and youth top the list of groups requiring special attention according to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were launched last year.

But we must also remember the potential of youth, highlighted for example in Security Council Resolution 2250, which stressed the necessary role of youth in peacebuilding.

In *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the General Assembly Resolution that sets out the SDGs, young people are identified as "critical agents of change," [\[3\]](#) a conviction I share wholeheartedly. Young people and their energetic engagement represent the solution to the global challenges we face; they hold the key to achieving the goals set by the UN toward 2030.

In this proposal, I would like to put a special focus on the role of youth as I offer thoughts on how to build the kind of peaceful, just and inclusive societies envisaged in the SDGs.

Building solidarity: The role of young people

The first challenge I would like to address is creating solidarity toward respectful coexistence on the one planet that we all share. In this, the role of young people is central.

Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement is an agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that was negotiated by representatives of 195 countries in Paris in December 2015. It entered into force on November 4, 2016, having achieved the required ratification by at least 55 Parties to the Convention accounting in total for at least an estimated 55 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

The Paris Agreement is the world's first comprehensive climate agreement, and has the central aim of strengthening the response to the threat of climate change by keeping the global temperature rise this century well below 2°C compared to preindustrial levels, and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5°C. The agreement also aims to strengthen the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change and provides a mechanism for each country to define its targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions (nationally defined contributions, NDCs). In 2018, signatories will take stock of their progress, with similar stock takes every five years.

The Paris Agreement, a new international framework for combating climate change, entered into force in November of last year. It was adopted in December 2015 and signed by the representatives of 175 countries and territories in April 2016. Its entry into force less than one year after being adopted was unprecedented.

With this, the countries of the world came together to confront a common threat in a way that had previously appeared impossible. This reorientation was the result of a shared awareness that climate change is an urgent issue for all countries, a recognition spurred by extreme weather events, rising sea levels and other tangible manifestations.

If we are to make progress in the alleviation of poverty and toward the achievement of all of the 17 goals and 169 targets that comprise the SDGs, we will need to share a similar awareness and solidarity across all fields.

The broad spectrum of concerns covered by the SDGs has caused some people to wonder if they are in fact achievable. But it is important to remember that the large number of targets speaks to the vast number of people facing gravely challenging conditions, none of which we can afford to overlook. In addition to the direct impacts of conflicts and natural disasters, the victims are often tormented by the sense that they have been forgotten and ignored.

While the urgent nature of the refugee crisis is all too evident and was a central topic of the World Humanitarian Summit held in May of last year and of the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants in September, effective international cooperation has continued to lag.

The new UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, stated in an interview last October soon after his appointment:

I will do everything I can . . . for refugee protection to be assumed as a global responsibility, as it is. And it's not only the refugee convention. It's deeply rooted in all cultures and all religions everywhere in the world. You see in Islam, you see in Christianity, you see in Africa, in different religions, in Buddhism and Hinduism, there is a strong commitment to refugee protection. [\[4\]](#)

Indeed, efforts to respond to the refugee crisis must be strengthened, and the spiritual wellsprings to support this can be found in living traditions throughout the world. The key to dealing with even the most seemingly intractable challenges is to be found when people come together and continue to do all in their power for the sake of others.

The starting point for Buddhism is to work alongside those who are suffering to enable them to overcome that suffering. Shakyamuni's vast body of teachings--sometimes referred to as the eighty thousand teachings--were for the most part expounded in the effort to confront the troubles and sufferings afflicting specific individuals. Shakyamuni refused to limit the audience for his teachings, and sought instead to be "friend to all, comrade to all." [\[5\]](#) Thus he taught the Dharma to all whom he encountered.

In his portrait of Shakyamuni, the German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) states: "The Buddha did not appear as a teacher of knowledge but as the herald of the path to salvation." [\[6\]](#)

Jaspers notes that the phrase "a path to salvation" derives from an ancient Indian medical term. And what underlies all of the Buddha's teachings is encouragement that functions like medicine prescribed for the specific conditions of various ailments.

Shakyamuni called on his disciples and comrades: "Go ye now, O Bhikkhus, and wander, for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many." [7] Thus Shakyamuni and his disciples who continued the practice of traveling to wherever people were in need, without distinction to differences of race or class, were referred to as "the people of the four directions." [8]

Shakyamuni himself embraced a profound conviction in the dignity and preciousness of life. He was convinced that this dignity exists in the lives of all people and that it is always possible to bring forth life's inherent potentialities under even the most trying conditions.

In the society of his time, two currents of thought prevailed. One was a kind of fatalism that our present and our future are entirely determined by karma accumulated in the past. The other held that all things are a matter of chance and that nothing in our lives is the outcome of any particular cause or condition.

The fatalistic view engendered the resignation that no effort on our part can alter our destiny and our only choice is to accept our fate. This worked to rob people's hearts of hope. The other view, by disassociating any action from its outcome, uprooted people's sense of self-control, making them indifferent to the harm they inflicted on others.

Shakyamuni sought to free people from the constraints and harmful influence of these two views when he taught:

Judge not by birth, but life.
As any chips feed fire,
mean birth may breed a sage
noble and staunch and true. [9]

Everything in our lives, far from being immovably determined, can be transformed for the better through our actions in this moment. In this way, Buddhism teaches that a change in our inner determination in this moment can change the present reality of our lives (Jpn: *in*; cause) that produces future outcomes (Jpn: *ka*; effect). At the same time, it emphasizes the critical importance of conditioning context (Jpn: *en*; relation) that can powerfully shape the interplay between cause and effect. In other words, depending on the context of the relations that are formed, the same cause can give rise to widely varying effects.

From this perspective, Buddhism encourages a way of life in which, upholding powerful confidence in the dignity and possibilities of life, we form relations of mutual encouragement and fellowship with those who are on the verge of losing hope.

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the term bodhisattva is used to describe a person dedicated to the realization of happiness for oneself and others, as portrayed allegorically in the following words from the Vimalakīrti Sutra:

During the short aeons of maladies,
They become the best holy medicine;
They make beings well and happy,
And bring about their liberation.

During the short aeons of famine,
They become food and drink.
Having first alleviated thirst and hunger,
They teach the Dharma to living beings.

During the short aeons of swords,
They meditate on love,
Introducing to nonviolence
Hundreds of millions of living beings. [10]

Cause and Effect

Buddhism teaches that everything in the universe embodies the law of cause and effect. Modern science uses a similar framework to account for things that can be seen or measured, but causality in Buddhism also includes the unseen or spiritual aspects of life, such as the experience of happiness or misery, kindness or cruelty. The accumulation of causes made in our past and present is often referred to as "karma," which can also be seen as the patterns of behavior we tend to repeat, the ways we habitually react to certain situations in our lives.

However, this is not a doctrine of passive acceptance or resignation. Rather, it acknowledges that we create our own present and future by the choices we make in each moment. Understood in this light, the law of cause and effect empowers us, as each of our actions can serve as a cause that will contribute to creating a better world, both for ourselves and for everyone around us.

This signifies extending encouragement to people as they confront the inevitable sufferings of life, what Buddhism refers to as the four sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death. And as indicated by the following words from the Vimalakīrti Sutra-- because living beings are ill, I also am ill [11]--to be a bodhisattva means to be motivated by the spirit of empathy to respond to grave social crises, wherever you are and whether or not you are directly impacted.

In the same sutra, the effects of this compassionate action are described as an "inexhaustible lamp" [12]: the light of hope we ignite will not only illuminate the life of the individual with whom we are interacting, but will continue to brightly light the lives of others in our immediate surroundings and in society as a whole.

This spirit of the bodhisattva is the foundation that has sustained the SGI's efforts as a faith-based organization that supports the UN and works for the resolution of global challenges. Over the years, we have engaged in such activities as the relief of refugees and rebuilding in the wake of natural disasters. And our consistent focus has been on promoting empowerment of, by and for the people.

Like the inexhaustible lamp, the inner capacities of people that are unleashed by empowerment serve as an enduring source of energy for transformation, a wellspring of inextinguishable hope.

The Lotus Sutra, which expresses the essence of Shakyamuni's teachings, contains the Parable of the Phantom City and the Treasure Land. [13]

A caravan was crossing a vast desert guided by a leader who was well acquainted with the dangerous terrain. Members of the caravan became exhausted and were ready to abandon their journey. If they were to turn back, however, their efforts would have been in vain, so the leader used his magical powers to conjure up a vision of a magnificent city toward which they could progress and encouraged them to persevere until they reached it. This vision revived the hopes of the members of the caravan, and when they reached the city they were able to rest there. Seeing that they were rested, the leader revealed that the city they were in was in fact a phantom city he had conjured up to encourage them. Their actual destination, the treasure land, was nearby, and he urged them to advance together until they reached it.

The theme that runs through this parable is found in Shakyamuni's words--together you may reach the treasure land. [14] This may be understood as a proud affirmation of the human spirit--to advance together with others in an indefatigable pursuit of shared happiness no matter how painful or desperate that pursuit may at times seem.

If we consider this in terms of the causal relationship touched on earlier, people who had fallen into a state of utter exhaustion (cause) and who might otherwise have been unable to go on (effect) were revitalized and enabled to reach their destination (alternative effect) thanks to words of encouragement (relation).

Nichiren (1222-82), the Japanese Buddhist teacher who developed a unique interpretation of Buddhism rooted in the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, asserted that there was no fundamental difference between the phantom city and the treasure land, but that they were in fact identical. It is not simply the outcome of reaching the treasure land that matters, but the process--together you may reach the treasure land--that is invaluable.

When the cause and relation of people's suffering and the encouragement to overcome it are harmoniously fused, each step forward becomes a "moment of life in the phantom city" and shines with the ultimate dignity of life--a "moment of life in the treasure land." [15]

Writing about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which preceded the SDGs in the period up to 2015, I noted that the effort to achieve them must be focused on not only meeting targets but also restoring the well-being of the individual who is suffering. [16] When too much attention is paid to numerical outcomes, there can be a failure to pay adequate attention to the needs of real people; this can undermine the motivation necessary to achieve the objectives.

Here I am reminded of the words of the Argentinian human rights activist Adolfo Pérez Esquivel: "When people aim for a shared human goal, when they aspire to peace and freedom, they unleash extraordinary capabilities." [17]

Dr. Esquivel developed this conviction through deepening solidarity with the people of Latin America who refused to relinquish hope for the future even in the midst of the most difficult social conditions. He expressed his admiration for the actions of the common people with this striking image:

When we enter more deeply into the lives of ordinary people, we see that man or woman, young or old--with no pretense at heroics--optimistically look daily for a miracle to occur and a bud to blossom.

Such a flower can bloom in the midst of the struggles of daily life, in a child's smile, in the creation of hope and in the illumination of our path showing us that our exertions are our liberation. [18]

None of the SDGs will be easy to achieve. But through maintaining empathetic connections with those who struggle and dedicating ourselves to the work of empowerment, each of us should be able to cause a flower to bloom in our immediate surroundings.

No one has a more crucial role to play in this than youth.

Security Council Resolution 2250, which I mentioned earlier, stresses the importance of youth participation in peacebuilding. As this affirms, young people have the power to create new breakthroughs in any field where they are given the chance to be actively engaged.

People throughout the world were moved last summer when a team composed of refugees took the field at the Olympic Games for the first time. The words they shared on that occasion continue to resonate in many hearts. One expressed the desire to use the opportunity of running at the Olympics to send to fellow refugees the message that life can be changed for the better, while another looked back on his life experiences and said he drew strength from them and was running with the hope that refugees would be able to lead better lives. [\[19\]](#)

Their words convey the fact that the true essence of youth is not to be found in the past, nor in the future, but rather in the desire to do something for the benefit of the other people living with us in the present moment.

Likewise, for young people, the vision of the SDGs--to leave no one behind--is not something to be achieved in a distant place or a goal for some time in the future. The SDGs point to the present realities of living together on this one planet with our fellow human beings, a way of life dedicated to the daily effort of building a society in which the joy of living is shared by all.

When youth make the determination to illuminate the corner of the world they inhabit now, it brings into being a space of security in which people can regain hope and the power to live. The determination to live together that is ignited in this space of security shines as an embodiment of the global society in which no one is left behind, inspiring courage in people living in other communities who confront similar challenges.

In my proposal three years ago, I stressed that today's youth are the generation that will most powerfully shape the work of achieving the SDGs. I also proposed that the UN and civil society should work together to promote the kind of education for global citizenship that unleashes the limitless potential of youth.

I was thus very gratified when last year's conference of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) affiliated with the UN's Department of Public Information (DPI/NGO Conference) was held in South Korea under the theme "Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together." Attended by many young people, the conference adopted the Gyeongju Action Plan committing participants to promoting education for global citizenship.

The true value of any state or society lies in what it does for those who are most afflicted by suffering, not in its military or economic prowess.

Education gives rise to the actions and activities that shape the direction of society over time. Education for global citizenship, in particular, can provide the conditioning context (relation) that enables people to reframe events, wherever they may occur, through a shared human perspective, and to foster action and solidarity. It can encourage people to consider global issues in terms of their own lives and lifestyles, thus bringing forth the inner capacities we each possess.

Through education for global citizenship, learners have the opportunity to: (1) gain the experience of seeing the world through the eyes of others; (2) discover and clarify what is necessary in order to build a society where we can all live together; and (3) collaborate to give birth to spaces of security in their immediate surroundings.

I am convinced that this kind of education can serve as a catalyzing context (relation) that enables young people to bring forth their full potential, increasing the momentum for global change.

Overcoming division and xenophobia

The second challenge is to lay the foundations for societies in which division and inequality are overcome.

With the rapid advance of globalization, more and more people find themselves living in countries other than their place of birth. Since the start of the twenty-first century, there has been a 40 percent increase in the number of such people, which today stands at 244 million. [\[20\]](#)

With the continuing stagnation of the global economy, xenophobic impulses have strengthened, creating increasingly difficult conditions for migrants and their families.

Former Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky addressed this question when he spoke at an interfaith conference in Vienna three years ago. Noting that as globalization and integration trend up, solidarity trends down, he stated:

In most European countries, solidarity descends when it comes to migrants, asylum seekers, what have you. I think it's also necessary to say that most political leaders, when it comes to their own chances in campaigns, sadly say 'Farewell to solidarity with the poor, those who come from abroad.' [\[21\]](#)

In recent years, there is growing concern, not only in Europe but around the world, about the prominence of hate speech that incites discrimination and about xenophobic political discourse.

In conjunction with last September's UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, a new campaign was launched to respond to and transform the anxieties associated with the increasing international movement of people. It is clear that any attempt to resolve these issues must take into account the legitimate concerns of people living in countries receiving migrants and refugees. As the UN points out in this campaign, it is crucial to search for means to counteract the drift toward xenophobia and to rehumanize the discourse around migrant and refugee populations while addressing these concerns.

When I met with former Chancellor Vranitzky in October 1989, we discussed the importance of cultural and youth exchanges, and he emphasized that "It is the distance of the heart that matters most, more than the distance measured in the number of hours of airplane travel." [\[22\]](#)

He also shared with me the story of how his parents sheltered a Jewish couple fleeing persecution during World War II. His parents acted in a time of great duress in a consistently humane manner and without making any distinction on the basis of religion or ethnicity. Reflecting on this wartime experience, the former Chancellor concluded:

There is a Latin aphorism "If you want peace, prepare for war." But I have replaced it with the following as the basis for my action: "If you want peace, prepare for peace." [\[23\]](#)

Our meeting took place just one month before the fall of the Berlin Wall. In February of that year, Chancellor Vranitzky had agreed to have the barbed wire along the border between Austria and Hungary removed, officially opening the way for the movement of people from the Eastern to the Western Bloc that began in September and led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in November.

Richard von Weizsäcker (1920-2015), the first President of reunified Germany, described the Berlin Wall as the politics that deny humanity made into stone. [\[24\]](#) We must not permit this kind of grievous division to be repeated in the twenty-first century.

Even if there is a sense of comfort felt by people when they are surrounded by others who share the same culture or ethnic group, we must remain vigilant against the danger that this group consciousness will metamorphose into violent discrimination or antagonism directed at other groups at times of heightened social tension. Earlier, I referred to Shakyamuni's exhortation to judge not by birth, but by conduct. To categorize and discriminate against individuals on the basis of a single attribute is wrong; it is a source of division that undermines society as a whole.

Looking at our world today, there is another issue that could be said to arise from the same deep force as xenophobia. This is the increasing tendency to prioritize market-based economic rationality above all else. We see this in many countries that are struggling with economic stagnation. The negative impacts of this fall hardest on the most vulnerable sectors of society, whose circumstances grow increasingly desperate.

It is certainly a fact that the pursuit of economic rationality has unleashed energies that have driven growth. But this is just part of the picture. When the prioritization of economic rationality becomes entrenched, even the weightiest judgments are made in a semi-mechanical fashion, with little consideration given to the desires and well-being of the people actually living in society.

Xenophobic thinking is propelled by a stark division of the world into good and evil. It leaves no room for hesitation or scruple. In the same way, when the pursuit of economic rationality has no counterbalancing consideration of the human element, a psychology is unleashed that is ready to extract even the most extreme sacrifices from others.

The economist Amartya Sen offers some important guideposts for thinking about this issue in his writings on social justice. In developing his analysis, Sen focuses on the distinction between two different words used to convey the idea of justice in ancient Sanskrit literature on ethics and jurisprudence: *niti* and *nyaya*.

According to Sen, *niti* relates to the propriety of institutions, rules and organizations, whereas *nyaya* concerns what emerges and how, and in particular "the lives that people are actually able to lead." [25] He emphasizes that "the roles of institutions, rules and organization, important as they are, have to be assessed in the broader and more inclusive perspective of *nyaya*, which is inescapably linked with the world that actually emerges, not just the institutions or rules we happen to have." [26]

Further, Sen compares the politics of the ancient Indian King Ashoka with those of Kautilya, the principal adviser to Ashoka's grandfather. Kautilya was the author of a celebrated work on political economy, and the focus of his interest was political success and the role of institutions in realizing economic efficiency.

In contrast, Ashoka's politics were always focused on the behavior and actions of individuals. According to Sen, Ashoka's thought included a conviction that "social enrichment could be achieved through the voluntary good behaviour of the citizens themselves, without being compelled through force." [27]

Ashoka's stance developed through his deepening faith in Buddhism, to which he turned after being tormented by regret at seeing the carnage he had wrought through his invasion of another state.

The idea of the Middle Way is foundational to Buddhism. If we think of this in relation to the concept of *nyaya*, it indicates a constant and conscientious attention to the impact of one's actions on others, with the question of human happiness or misery serving as the overarching criterion.

Niti, for its part, occupies an important position within contemporary society. As Sen points out, "Many economists today do, of course, share Kautilya's view of a venal humanity." [28] Here the overwhelming emphasis is numeric: on the growth rate or maximization of profit. The vulnerable in society, because their interests are difficult to quantify, are often neglected or even discarded.

Xenophobia and hate speech divide the world into the binary of us and them, which are made to correspond to good and evil.

What kind of social anchoring is available to resist both the forces of xenophobia that deepen the divisions within society and the pursuit of economic rationality that is indifferent to the sacrifices of the vulnerable? I believe the answer is to be found in strong connections between people, the kind of friendship that brings into view the concrete image of another in our hearts.

To quote the renowned British historian Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975), with whom I conducted an extended dialogue:

In my experience the solvent of traditional prejudice has been personal acquaintance. When one becomes personally acquainted with a fellow human being, of whatever religion, nationality, or race, one cannot fail to recognize that he is human like oneself. [29]

Over the course of my efforts to engage in exchanges and interactions with people from different parts of the world, it has been a palpable sense of the invaluable nature of friendship that has remained with me. Each of the almost eighty dialogues I have published over the years has evidenced a yearning for peace shared across differences of faith and life experience; they are each the crystallization of friendship and a common wish to communicate the lessons of history to the emerging generation.

The conditions facing immigrants came up as a topic in my discussions with two American scholars, Dr. Larry Hickman and Dr. Jim Garrison, both past presidents of the John Dewey Society. This was when we discussed the pioneering social activism carried out by Jane Addams (1860-1935) in the US around the turn of the twentieth century.

After visiting and being impressed by Toynbee Hall, a welfare facility in London named incidentally after Dr. Toynbee's uncle, she decided to establish a similar facility in her home country. Most of the people living around Hull House in Chicago were impoverished immigrants. According to a biography of Addams, Hull House was described as:

. . . a sort of island offering an opportunity of breathing more freely to many immigrants. Here, they can speak their own language, play their music, live their culture . . . [\[30\]](#)

With the help of Addams and her associates, these immigrants were able to establish the foundations of their new life in the United States.

Addams was always motivated by the belief that there is greater value to be realized in bringing people together than in driving them apart. The young people who were inspired by her went on to become the first generation of social scientists and social workers. Through their persistent research and fieldwork, the legal framework of support for immigrants and the impoverished was reformed.

Dr. Hickman noted that Addams' activities offer important lessons to us as we face the challenges of our increasingly globalized world. I wholeheartedly agree.

One of the people who worked with Addams at Hull House said they had no grand hopes of improving the whole world, but always simply wanted to be friends to those who were lonely. [\[31\]](#)

Addams herself appears to have embraced the same credo. She encouraged her colleagues to become friends and neighbors to those in need.

They can teach us what life really is. We can learn where our boasted civilization fails. [\[32\]](#)

One-to-one interactions and friendship can stir people and move them in the depths of their being.

Former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009) warned against being swept away by conceptualizations of conflict that are often loudly bruted in society. For many years, the late president led a large Muslim movement in Indonesia. He denied the inevitability of clashes between civilizations and stressed that the greatest challenge is that of overcoming our misunderstandings and the preconceptions of others. [\[33\]](#)

In our dialogue, he repeatedly voiced his sense of the importance of friendship. He touched on his own experience of studying overseas and expressed his strong hopes for the outcome of such youth exchanges. "My sincere wish is that they will not become individuals who think solely of their self-interest but are concerned about the interests of society and act to promote world peace and harmony." [\[34\]](#)

Based on my own experience of establishing bonds of friendship with individuals of differing religious and cultural backgrounds in an effort to build a greater solidarity for peace, I can deeply appreciate the significance of his words.

In 1996, I founded the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research to perpetuate the legacy of Josei Toda and his vision of global citizenship and of a world free from nuclear weapons. The Iranian-born peace scholar Dr. Majid Tehranian (1937-2012), with whom I had a long-standing friendship, honored us by serving as the institute's first director.

The world is not simply a collection of states, nor is it composed solely of religions and civilizations. Our living, breathing world is woven of the endeavors of countless human beings who may share particular backgrounds but no two of whom are the same.

To view and judge others only through the prism of religion or ethnicity distorts the rich reality we each possess as individuals. In contrast, when we develop a deep appreciation, through our individual friendships, of each other's unique value, differences of ethnicity or religion are illuminated by the dignity and worth of that friend and shine as the value of diversity.

The magnetic field of friendship can enable the functioning of an inner compass when we have lost our sense of direction and help us right society when it seems to be veering off course.

This is the reasoning underlying the SGI's consistent and active efforts to encourage civil society exchanges, particularly among youth, fostering the face-to-face encounters from which genuine friendship grows. The bonds of friendship provide a basis from which to resist the currents of hatred and incitement at times of heightened tensions between countries or deepened conflict between religious traditions. Envisaging the faces of individual friends, determined not to allow society to become a place where they would feel unwelcome, we can work to create a transformation from conflict to coexistence, starting in our immediate environment. We hope to enable the global emergence of a generation of people committed to peace who build bridges of friendship and disrupt the chain reactions of hatred and violence.

More than anything, there is a joy that resides in conversation with a friend. Friendship makes the exchange of words itself a pleasure and a source of encouragement. It supports us and brings forth the courage to confront the most difficult situations.

A rising tide of friendship within the younger generation cannot fail to transform society. It is my confident expectation that friendship among youth will powerfully turn back the sullied currents of divisiveness and give birth to a vibrant culture of peace based on profound respect for diversity.

Engaging youth and women in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The third challenge I'd like to address is that of enhancing the capacity of communities to meet and respond positively to even the most trying events or circumstances.

The SDGs differ from the MDGs in many aspects, but what I consider to be particularly important is the fact that they were adopted with considerable input from civil society.

In the process of developing the SDGs within the UN, there was a concerted effort to engage in dialogue with a range of stakeholders, including women and youth. Surveys were taken regarding priority areas of engagement, in which more than seven million people participated. Some 70 percent of respondents were under thirty years of age. [\[35\]](#) Many areas of concern that ranked high in the surveys, such as education, healthcare and job opportunities, were incorporated in the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development notes the significance of this in the following language:

Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people--and this, we believe, will ensure its success. [\[36\]](#)

In the proposal I wrote on the occasion of the 2012 Rio+20 conference, which was the starting point for the drafting of the SDGs, I expressed my strong hope that they would at their core be this kind of people's agenda. I did this because I felt that it would be difficult to build momentum for the achievement of any of the goals without large numbers of people personally identifying with the issues.

Another distinguishing feature of the SDGs as a people's agenda is that they take a new approach based on the awareness that the issues facing us "are interrelated and call for integrated solutions." [\[37\]](#) This differs somewhat from the MDGs, where themes such as the eradication of poverty or hunger were promoted on a more stand-alone basis.

The SDGs seek to generate virtuous cycles in which progress made toward one goal enables progress on multiple other fronts. For example, if progress is made in securing safe sources of water (Goal 6), this will lead to a reduction in the number of people suffering from infectious or other diseases (Goal 3). It will also reduce the burden on women, who had spent many hours each day providing water for their families, thus opening new employment opportunities for them (Goal 5), making it possible to escape extreme poverty (Goal 1) and enabling their children to attend school (Goal 4).

Known as the Nexus Approach, this was researched at the United Nations University and experimentally implemented in a number of regions before the launch of the SDGs. This approach aims to discover the interconnections among the 169 targets across the 17 areas that comprise the SDGs and to realize simultaneous progress toward their achievement.

The SDGs also include a number of areas that were not covered in the MDGs, such as climate change and income inequality. It is important to remember, however, that all of these problems are ultimately human in origin and must therefore be amenable to resolution through human efforts. If by taking action we can make substantive progress in one area, that progress can be leveraged toward accelerating progress on other challenges.

Within the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the teaching that deluded impulses, or earthly desires and sufferings, are essential to enlightenment suggests the kind of dynamism that is required here. It calls for reorienting our understanding of the nature of human happiness. Happiness is not the outcome of eliminating or distancing ourselves from the desires and impulses that give rise to suffering. It is instead vital that we grasp the reality that enlightenment--the strength and wisdom to forge a path to a better life--continues to exist within us even in the midst of anguish and pain.

The problem is not simply one of suffering but of how we face that suffering and the kinds of action we take in response.

In his commentary on a passage in the Lotus Sutra that reads, "It [the Lotus Sutra] can cause living beings to cast off all distress, all sickness and pain. It can unloose all the bonds of birth and death," [38] Nichiren writes, "we should take the words 'cast off' in the sense of 'becoming enlightened concerning'" [39] (i.e., to clearly see the nature of).

Here Nichiren encourages us not to avert our eyes from the realities that surround us but to confront them head-on. By clearly understanding the nature of our circumstances, we can transform ourselves just as we are, from someone tormented by anguish into someone who creates their own happiness. Further, Buddhism teaches that these waves of transformation propagate through the web of interconnectedness within which we live, potently impacting our immediate surroundings and society as a whole.

The theme of not being entrapped in a situation but rather transforming that situation by proactively creating new connections was used by the philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-75) when discussing the authentically human (*humanitas*). Referencing the concept "venture into the public realm" discussed by Karl Jaspers, who was also her mentor, she argued that the authentically human cannot be attained in isolation, but "only by one who has thrown his life and his person into the 'venture into the public realm.'" [40]

Arendt describes this venture as the act of "weav[ing] our strand into a network of relations." While acknowledging the uncertainty of the result--"What comes of it we never know"--Arendt expresses her strong confidence on the following point:

[T]his venture is only possible when there is trust in people. A trust--which is difficult to formulate but fundamental--in what is human in all people. Otherwise such a venture could not be made. [41]

This trust is, as Arendt stresses, fundamental and is directed not only at ourselves and others in our immediate environment; it is also trust in the sense of facing the world in which we live without ever losing hope.

Last year, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) highlighted examples of women who are promoting the realization of the SDGs by taking action for others, often in very challenging circumstances, under the theme "From where I stand." Among them is a solar engineer active in her village in Tanzania. Despite having a disability, she worked hard to develop her skills and continues to put her knowledge to use for her fellow villagers. At first, very few of the men respected her as an engineer, but when she installed solar equipment in their homes, bringing light to them, and repaired equipment when it was broken, she began to enjoy the respect of more and more men.

Before our village used to be in darkness once the sun had set, but now there is light. Just now two children came to take the solar lantern that I fixed for them. They had big smiles on their faces. Tonight they will be able to do their homework. [42]

I think this is an excellent example of a virtuous cycle advancing the SDGs as the people's agenda. Through the empowerment of one woman, not only was renewable energy made available to the people in a Tanzanian village but there was a discernible change in attitudes toward women, and children gained access to greater opportunities to study.

This woman's work, quiet yet invaluable, demonstrates what Arendt spoke of in "weav[ing] our strand," improving conditions in the place you stand now. Here I see the true brilliance of an authentic humanity.

The ability to solve problems is not something reserved for special people: It is a path that opens before any of us when we face reality head-on, taking up some aspect of its weighty burden and acting with persistence. Our capacity to overcome difficulties is unleashed as we turn anguish and concern into determination and action.

Young people in particular are blessed with a fresh sensitivity and a passionate seeking for ideals. Their energy can catalyze chain reactions of positive change as they forge bonds of trust among people.

Youth have been at the heart of the SGI's peace activities since the days of President Toda and his declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. These young people reject the prevalent sense of powerlessness that afflicts contemporary society and convinces people that their actions cannot bring about change. They are energetically engaged in action rooted in the confidence that their present circumstances are the very conditions that will enable them to fulfill a unique mission.

Three years ago, the youth members in Japan initiated the "SOKA Global Action" peace campaign. They have undertaken activities to assist the spiritual and psychological reconstruction in the regions of Japan impacted by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster. They have also worked to build ties of friendship with their Asian neighbors while seeking to build a culture of peace and promoting the abolition of nuclear weapons.

The Mapping App

The Mapping App ("mapping" and "acting") is an app created to track and map activities that contribute to actualizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that was launched at the United Nations in November 2016. The app was developed jointly by the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and the Earth Charter International (ECI), who have cooperated for over 15 years in the creation of awareness-raising exhibitions that promote education for sustainable development.

The app aims to engage youth in the challenge of making the 17 SDGs a reality by the target date of 2030 by allowing them to post photos or videos of any act, project or idea that promotes achievement of the SDGs and share these on a world map. The app acts as an educational tool and a vehicle for inspiring users to take action and share solutions, thus changing the focus from the problems we are facing to the solutions that exist.

To participate, visit: www.mapping.org

SGI youth around the world are taking on the challenge of transforming reality in such fields as ecological integrity, human rights education and nonviolence. Some activities have specific linkages with the SDGs. For example, in November of last year, the SGI cosponsored an event titled "Youth Boosting the Promotion and the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" at UN Headquarters. Dr. David Nabarro, the UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, told participants:

[W]e have to make sure there's space for young people everywhere to be part of this movement for sustainable development. . . [Y]oung people want to work together with joy, they want to trust each other. [43]

His words resonate with our commitment to achieving the SDGs. To imagine that young people are only moved to respond to immediate threats is to do them a grave disservice. They advance in the confidence that there is joy and hope to be shared in rising to meet and surmount each challenge.

Although there is no legal obligation to achieve the SDGs, they are imbued with the hope of transforming our world. When a growing number of young people make the realization of that hope their personal vow and take action based on it, efforts to achieve all of the goals will be greatly energized.

Members of the SGI, with a focus on young people, will continue to strive to catalyze chain reactions of positive change in order to resolve the full spectrum of issues--from those found in local communities to the threats facing our planet.

Abolishing nuclear weapons: Moving past deterrence

Next, I would like to offer concrete proposals regarding three priority areas crucial to the realization of the peaceful, just and inclusive societies that are the aim of the SDGs:

1. Prohibiting and abolishing nuclear weapons;
2. Responding to the refugee crisis; and
3. Building a culture of human rights.

With regard to the first of these, in December 2016 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a historic resolution calling for the start of negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons. The resolution calls for a first conference to be convened at the end of March and a second from mid-June to early July, both at UN Headquarters, and encourages participating governments to exert their best efforts for the early conclusion of a treaty.

In our world today, there are still more than 15,000 nuclear warheads. [44] Progress toward nuclear disarmament has stalled, while plans for modernization of nuclear arsenals have progressed. The threat posed by nuclear weapons is, if anything, growing.

US President John F. Kennedy (1917-63) used an anecdote set in ancient Greece to warn us of this danger. The sword of Damocles, in the form of the threat of unimaginable destruction wrought on humanity and the global environment, remains suspended above our heads. It is not a thing of the past. Rather, as the General Assembly resolution emphasizes, the need to solve the nuclear issue is "all the more urgent." [45]

In this regard, I would like to make several proposals.

The first is for the earliest possible holding of a US-Russia summit in order to reinvigorate the nuclear disarmament process. A truly weighty responsibility bears down on the shoulders of these two leaders, whose countries possess massive nuclear arsenals that threaten the lives of everyone living on Earth with the potential to reduce to ash the civilizations humanity has forged over the millennia.

Ever since tensions dramatically heightened between the two countries over the situation in Ukraine three years ago, the chill in bilateral relations has been such that it has been compared to a new Cold War. Since the 2011 entry into force of the New START Treaty, nuclear disarmament negotiations have been at a standstill, and there are questions regarding the status of the treaty from 2018 on, when the present round of reductions is slated to be completed.

Donald J. Trump, who was inaugurated as US President on January 20, called Russian President Vladimir Putin after his election victory, and in their conversation they agreed to aim for an improvement in bilateral relations. I strongly hope that the leaders of these two countries, which between them possess more than 90 percent of the world's nuclear stockpiles, will engage in earnest discussions about the nuclear weapons issue and work toward an easing of tensions.

More than twenty-five years since the end of the Cold War, the policy of nuclear deterrence is still in effect, and approximately 1,800 nuclear weapons are on high alert, meaning they can be launched at an instant's notice. [46]

Let us consider the significance of this fact.

In a recent speech, former US Secretary of Defense William J. Perry recounted an episode from his time as Under Secretary of Defense in the Carter Administration. He spoke of the shock of receiving a late-night emergency communication from the watch officer at the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) indicating that 200 Soviet missiles were in flight heading toward the US. Although this was quickly understood to be a false alarm, had this information been accurate, the President of the United States would have had only minutes to make the momentous decision whether or not to launch a counterstrike. [47]

The logic of deterrence requires that even if one in no way desires nuclear war, one must be able to demonstrate the readiness to retaliate at any time as a means of forestalling an enemy strike. Further, in order to prove that this is not just a matter of words, the capacity for an immediate counterstrike must be maintained. Under these conditions, one's guard cannot be let down even for a moment, and the threat of imminent nuclear war becomes a constant and unavoidable burden. This, I think, describes the reality of nuclear deterrence that started in the Cold War era and continues to this day.

Looking back, when second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda made his declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons in 1957, the contours of the nuclear deterrent posture were taking definitive shape. Both the US and the Soviet Union were testing hydrogen bombs in an escalating competition to create ever more powerful weapons, and there was a shift in the focus of delivery systems from bombers to ballistic missiles.

In August 1957, one month before President Toda made his declaration, the Soviet Union successfully tested an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), giving it the capacity to launch and direct a nuclear weapon strike against any location on Earth. Further, on September 6, just two days before his declaration, disarmament negotiations focused on the reduction and prohibition of nuclear weapons that had been conducted under UN auspices for nearly six months collapsed. Intensive deliberations involving the US, the United Kingdom, France, the Soviet Union and also Canada had failed to produce agreement, and the negotiations were indefinitely suspended.

Toda's call for nuclear abolition

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda made his historic declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons on September 8, 1957, at a meeting of 50,000 members of the Soka Gakkai youth division at Mitsuzawa Stadium in Yokohama, Japan. In his address he declared: "Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons has arisen around the world, it is my wish to go further, to attack the problem at its root. I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons." Toda denounced nuclear weapons as the embodiment of absolute evil and believed that their use must be condemned, not from the standpoint of ideology, nationality or ethnic identity but from the universal dimension of humanity and our inalienable right to live. His appeal to young people to take up this challenge stands today as the starting point for the global peace activities of the SGI.

To read the declaration, visit:
www.joseitoda.org/vision/declaration/

President Toda identified the deterrence doctrine as the underlying reason for the ceaseless race to build more of these weapons that can wreak catastrophe on humankind. He saw that justifications for the possession of nuclear weapons--that they represented a deterrence force that maintained peace--focused solely on protecting the countries possessing them, while remaining coldly indifferent to the immense sacrifices that would be exacted from the greater part of humankind.

This is why he stated that his goal was "to expose and rip out the claws" [\[48\]](#) --that is, to confront and overcome the underlying thinking that justifies the possession of nuclear weapons.

The US-Soviet nuclear confrontation was compared at the time to "two scorpions in a bottle." [\[49\]](#) What was largely forgotten was that many countries other than the nuclear-weapon states were also in the same bottle, along with their several billion inhabitants. Likewise, the sting-or-be-stung confrontation has obscured the critical reality of the apocalyptic nature of nuclear weapons, which makes them fundamentally different from all others.

By stating that "we, the citizens of the world, have an inviolable right to live," [\[50\]](#) Toda sought to dispel the illusions surrounding nuclear deterrence theory. He declared that it was impermissible for any country to threaten this right and that the use of nuclear weapons can never be justified.

Deterrence theory truncates people's range of thought. Proponents believe simply in the efficacy of deterrence and refuse to consider the catastrophic outcome should deterrence fail. Likewise, they refuse to face the reality that, irrespective of deterrence, a nuclear detonation through accident or malfunction is always a possibility.

This failure to think things through to their logical conclusion equally affects those under the extended deterrence of the so-called nuclear umbrella.

The reality is that each of the ribs that compose this nuclear umbrella is in fact a sword of Damocles. This inhumane doctrine of national security is premised on the willingness to inflict the misery of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the people of another country. Should the launch button ever be pushed and a nuclear exchange begin, irreparable damage would be suffered not only by the parties to the conflict but by neighboring countries and Earth as a whole.

The logic of deterrence places the security of one's own country on one side of the scales of justice, on the other side of which are the lives of vast numbers of ordinary citizens and the living ecology of the entire planet.

If we consider this in the context of Amartya Sen's discussion of justice which I touched on earlier, security policies that seek to prevent a nuclear attack from another country could be said to correspond to the *niti* form of justice with its emphasis on the legitimacy of the objective. In light of the *nyaya* conception of justice focused on the legitimacy of the outcome--that is, what actually happens to people and their lives--it becomes clear that there is no way to justify nuclear weapons-based security doctrines premised on the loss of millions of lives and the destruction of the global ecology.

The right of self-defense against military attack is recognized in the UN Charter, and the validity of a *niti* perspective on security cannot, in light of international law, be dismissed out of hand. But I would like to challenge the thinking that accepts nuclear weapons as a continuing necessity.

Throughout human history, the idea of deterrence has been used to justify the possession and development of ever newer and more lethal weapons. But as humankind's history of nearly ceaseless war demonstrates, deterrence has broken down and conflict has been the result on innumerable occasions. How can we be confident that deterrence, which has failed so often in the past, will prove infallible in the case of nuclear weapons?

In his recent work *Five Myths About Nuclear Weapons*, Ward Wilson has pursued this question. Wilson reviews humanity's 6,000-year history of war and group violence. To look at just the sixty years after the end of World War II is, in his words, to claim to have detected a trend based on 1 percent of the data. He comments, "Particularly when one is dealing with a phenomenon that is apparently deeply rooted in human nature, this seems incautious." [\[51\]](#) He asserts that proper consideration of this question requires the kind of millennial perspective developed by Arnold J. Toynbee that takes in the rise and fall of multiple civilizations.

Indeed, it is precisely because deterrence is something deeply rooted in human nature that we need to confront head-on the great risks that lie hidden in its depths.

The idea of the inherent dignity of life has been developed in Buddhism through just such an in-depth exploration of human nature, and I believe it is pertinent in this regard. I would like to quote the following words of Shakyamuni, attributed to him when he was mediating a conflict between two tribes over water rights.

Look at those who fight, ready to kill! Fear arises from taking up arms and preparing to strike. [52]

It is noteworthy how Shakyamuni observes the workings of the hearts of those facing a hostile confrontation: They did not take up arms in fear of the opponent, but rather were filled with fear the moment they took up arms. While they might have felt rage toward an adversary that was trying to take their water, they were not possessed by fear. But the moment they were armed, prepared to strike deadly blows against their adversaries, their hearts were filled with dread.

Longtime contributing editor to the *Washington Post* David Emanuel Hoffman eloquently depicted how such fear-driven psychology almost produced a particularly nightmarish scenario during the Cold War. [53]

In the early 1980s, Soviet leaders began to draw up plans for a system that would function even after a nuclear attack had destroyed the country's political leadership as well as the normal military chain of command. More than anything, they feared losing the ability to retaliate. They envisioned a fully automatic, computer-driven system that would guarantee a retaliatory strike under any circumstance. The project was eventually modified, however, because the military rejected the idea of launching a nuclear strike without the involvement of any human element. Instead, the decision-making authority was to be transferred to surviving officers in deep bunkers.

In other words, a nuclear retaliatory system that could not be stopped by human agency was actually being planned in the final years of the Cold War. Although this never went beyond the conceptual stage, this ultimate form of deterrence embodies the deep-seated fear that arises from the possession of nuclear arms.

Last October marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Reykjavík Summit, a milestone that initiated the process that brought the Cold War to an end.

When General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union proposed a meeting with US President Ronald Reagan (1911-2004) in Iceland's capital, the halfway point between Washington and Moscow, he bore in mind the Chernobyl disaster that had taken place six months previously and which had left him deeply concerned about the risks of nuclear war. Similarly, President Reagan is said to have found the idea of maintaining peace through the threat of mass slaughter by nuclear war intolerable.

Because both leaders harbored grave concerns about nuclear weapons, their discussions advanced to the point that they were on the brink of agreeing to their complete elimination. Although in the end they could not reach that agreement, the following year they concluded the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, setting in motion the process of nuclear disarmament.

Now is the time for the United States and Russia to return to the spirit of Reykjavík and find common ground toward global peace.

The UN conference that will negotiate a treaty for the prohibition and eventual abolition of nuclear weapons, scheduled to start in March, includes in its agenda measures to reduce and eliminate the risk of nuclear weapon detonation resulting from accident or mistake. [54] The United States and Russia have repeatedly experienced such risks throughout and even following the Cold War. I urge the leaders of these two countries to engage in dialogue toward taking their weapons off high alert and to make significant new progress in nuclear arms reduction.

Prohibiting nuclear weapons: The legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

My next proposal regarding the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons is that Japan, recognizing its historical responsibility and mission as the only country in the world to have experienced a nuclear attack in wartime, should work assiduously to achieve the broadest possible participation in the upcoming negotiations, including that of states that possess or rely on nuclear weapons.

In recent years, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have contributed to keeping the nuclear weapons issue in the public eye by hosting a series of diplomatic meetings and welcoming the visits of foreign dignitaries.

During the eighth Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) Ministerial Meeting held in Hiroshima in April 2014, foreign ministers of nuclear-dependent countries including Australia, Germany and the Netherlands were able to hear the testimony of hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors). The meeting issued a Joint Statement which stressed that the ongoing

discussion on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons should be "a catalyst for a united global action towards the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons." [55]

Then, in April 2016, the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Hiroshima. On that occasion, the foreign ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom and France--nuclear-weapon states--and Germany, Italy, Canada and Japan--nuclear-dependent states--visited the Atomic Bomb Dome. The meeting adopted the Hiroshima Declaration on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, which concludes, "We share the deep desire of the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that nuclear weapons never be used again." [56]

Finally, in May 2016, US President Barack Obama visited Hiroshima, the first incumbent American president to do so. He stated, "[A]mong those nations like my own that hold nuclear stockpiles, we must have the courage to escape the logic of fear, and pursue a world without them." [57]

Japan should encourage the states that have participated in these discussions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and as many others as possible to take part in the upcoming multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

It can be anticipated that the negotiations will face the kind of obstacles encountered by the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) where failure to bridge the divide between the nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states made the adoption of a consensus outcome document impossible.

However, all states certainly share a fundamental appreciation of the importance of the NPT and concern about the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons. This provides the basis on which states can find common ground and reframe the nuclear weapons debate.

In this connection, there are important lessons to be learned from the negotiations leading up to the Paris Agreement, which marked a turning point in the effort to combat climate change. The breakthrough that made the agreement possible was the result of focusing on the shared goal of a low-carbon future, a desirable outcome for all states, rather than on the question of responsibility for having caused climate change or for responding to it.

A similar approach could be taken for nuclear weapons. The work of establishing a treaty prohibiting the production, transfer, threat of use or use of these weapons should be viewed as a global enterprise with the goal of preventing the horrors of nuclear war from ever again being experienced by any country. Earnest efforts must be made to find a way to reach a consensus based on this vision.

Non-Proliferation Treaty and Article VI

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is a landmark international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament. The treaty represents the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to the goal of disarmament by the nuclear-weapon states. It entered into force in 1970 and was extended indefinitely in 1995. Currently, a total of 191 states have joined the NPT, including five nuclear-weapon states, which means that more countries have ratified the NPT than any other arms limitation and disarmament agreement.

Article VI of the treaty states that "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

As stated in its preamble, the adoption of the NPT was motivated by an awareness of "the devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war" and of the need to "safeguard the security of peoples." [58]

The fundamental stance of the upcoming conferences is thus fully congruent with the NPT. A treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons would not supplant the NPT, but rather reinforce it as an implementation of Article VI, which requires the pursuit of good faith negotiations leading to complete nuclear disarmament.

What is crucial here is to ensure the participation of as many states as possible in order to identify points of confluence between national security and defense concerns and the quest for a world without nuclear weapons.

The first Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference is scheduled to meet in Vienna in May. Along with a focus on the obligation to realize nuclear disarmament stipulated in Article VI, there should be an effort to mutually acknowledge the security concerns of all states and to exchange views on the steps required by all parties to address those concerns. If these deliberations were to feed into the negotiations on a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons to be convened in June in New York, this would be beneficial to all states. Ensuring linkages with the NPT Review Conference deliberations and bridging the gap between different perspectives will help make the negotiations truly constructive.

The issue of nuclear weapons is a crucial one that has confronted the UN since its founding more than seventy years ago. The complexities surrounding the upcoming negotiations on their prohibition should not be underestimated. However, I am confident

that if states continue to earnestly pursue dialogue, it will be possible to build irreversible momentum toward a world without nuclear weapons.

A high-level UN conference on disarmament is slated to be held no later than 2018. The adoption of a treaty outlawing nuclear weapons would enhance conditions for initiating a process of major reductions in current nuclear stockpiles, leading to their eventual elimination.

A people's declaration for a world without nuclear weapons

My third proposal on prohibiting and abolishing nuclear weapons is for the full spectrum of civil society actors to generate statements directed toward the upcoming negotiations. Together, these would constitute a people's declaration for a world without nuclear weapons and serve as a popular basis for a treaty prohibiting them.

Civil society can play a vital role in clarifying and giving a human face to problems that are deeply relevant to all people across national borders but would otherwise only be addressed within the context of national policy. This in turn can encourage concerted action on a global scale.

The Russell-Einstein Manifesto, issued by a group of the world's leading scientists on July 9, 1955, to highlight the dangers of nuclear weapons, set a pioneering example:

We shall try to say no single word which should appeal to one group rather than to another. . .

We appeal as human beings to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest. [\[59\]](#)

As these words demonstrate, the Manifesto is an expression of shared human sentiment rather than the logic of nations or states. In this way, readers are encouraged to view nuclear weapons as a danger "to themselves and their children and their grandchildren," [\[60\]](#) rather than in a national context.

The landmark advisory opinion regarding the threat or use of nuclear weapons delivered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in July 1996 was the outcome of a powerful campaign waged by civil society in the form of the World Court Project. "Declarations of public conscience" by some four million people in forty languages were presented to the ICJ at the outset of the hearings.

The ICJ found that the threat or use of nuclear weapons is generally incompatible with international law and clearly affirmed that states have an obligation to pursue and conclude negotiations leading to complete nuclear disarmament.

Now, more than two decades later, a UN conference to negotiate a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons will soon be convened. Now is the time for civil society to express strong support for the conference and build momentum to establish the treaty as a form of people-driven international law.

This conference became a reality through not only the diplomatic efforts of countries seeking the resolution of the nuclear weapons issue but also the committed work of individuals and groups from various fields, including hibakusha from Hiroshima, Nagasaki and throughout the world, as well as scientists, doctors, lawyers, educators and people of faith.

Individuals and groups can take action in many forms, such as issuing statements that would be part of a people's call for a world without nuclear weapons or holding grassroots events on the significance of the treaty in order to broaden public support. Each of these actions will ensure "the participation and contribution of international organizations and civil society representatives," [\[61\]](#) as called for in the UN resolution that mandated the conference, in this way serving to underpin the eventual treaty. This will provide invaluable support that enhances the efficacy and universality of the treaty by demonstrating in tangible form the deeply committed nature of popular sentiment, including in the nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states.

There are a multitude of voices calling for such action. For example, more than 7,200 cities in 162 countries and territories--including nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states--are members of Mayors for Peace, an international body that calls for the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

Here I am again reminded of the words of Dr. Pérez Esquivel, who once presented a bronze sculpture of his own making to the city of Hiroshima. He emphasized in our dialogue that "peace is the dynamic that gives meaning and life to humanity." [62]

Can a security regime that depends on nuclear weapons for its maintenance exhibit that kind of dynamic? I am convinced that the answer is no; it requires, rather, the peace that is realized when people come together across all differences in a shared commitment to the dignity of life.

The SGI launched the People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition in 2007 as part of our peace movement rooted in President Toda's 1957 declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

"Everything You Treasure--For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons," an exhibition launched in collaboration with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), has been shown around the world. We also gathered more than five million signatures in 2014 in support of Nuclear Zero, a global campaign calling for good faith efforts for nuclear disarmament.

International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition / Amplify

The International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition took place in Hiroshima on August 28–30, 2015, attended by 30 youth activists from more than 20 countries, including both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states, to discuss future strategies aimed at eradicating nuclear weapons. The summit resulted in the declaration of a Youth Pledge, which was presented to the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Youth. Steering committee members included representatives of International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Mines Action Canada, the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, PAX, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the SGI.

The Amplify Network was subsequently created as an international network of young leaders in the field of nuclear abolition. The network's principal aim is to amplify the call for complete nuclear abolition by raising awareness and encouraging action in communities and countries around the world. It supports members' efforts by providing information and resources about the issues and by enabling young people to connect with other youth taking action around the world.

To find out more, visit:
www.amplifyyouth.org

We took part in drafting joint statements under the aegis of Faith Communities Concerned about the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons, which were submitted to the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) on nuclear disarmament and the UN General Assembly First Committee, which deals with disarmament and international security, last year.

In August 2015, the SGI co-facilitated an International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition in Hiroshima. Amplify, an international network of youth dedicated to the abolition of nuclear weapons, was established in 2016 to carry forward the work of the summit.

This summer, the SGI will hold a youth summit for the renunciation of war in Kanagawa Prefecture, the site of Toda's antinuclear declaration, to commemorate its sixtieth anniversary.

The conviction underpinning our efforts over the past decade was expressed in a working paper we submitted to the OEWG in May 2016, which is on record as an official UN document:

[Nuclear weapons] erode the meaning of human life and impede our ability to look to the future with hope. . . At the heart of the nuclear weapons issue is the radical negation of others--of their humanity and their equal right to happiness and life. . . The challenge of nuclear disarmament is not something that concerns only the nuclear-weapon States; it must be a truly global enterprise involving all States and fully engaging civil society. [63]

In order to make the UN negotiations starting in March a forum for this kind of truly global enterprise, we are determined to do our utmost, working with like-minded individuals and groups, to bring together and amplify the voices of civil society.

Restoring hope in the lives of refugees

The second priority area that I would like to focus on is the need to implement relief programs designed to enable refugees to live with hope.

It is estimated that the number of people who have been forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict or fear of persecution has grown rapidly, to approximately 65.3 million. [64] In particular, as the civil war in Syria continues into its sixth year, the resulting humanitarian crisis has become extremely grave. To date, more than 300,000 Syrians have been killed and more than half the population displaced out of fear and want; some 4.8 million people have fled the country to seek asylum. [65]

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, after his official appointment at the General Assembly in October 2016, stated that his first priority in office would be related to peace. He noted, "a surge in diplomacy for peace is the best way to . . . help us limit human suffering in all dimensions." [66]

On December 30 last year, a cease-fire agreement came into effect, and the UN Security Council adopted a resolution supporting the cease-fire and calling on all parties to observe it. It is still too early, however, to say whether the civil war can be brought to an end.

New peace talks are scheduled for February under the auspices of the UN. I fervently wish that under the leadership of Secretary-General Guterres, who for many years served as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the international organization and relevant nations will together work out a way to bring an end to the conflict as soon as possible.

In parallel with these diplomatic efforts, another pressing priority Mr. Guterres identifies is that all countries assume "full solidarity with those in need of protection that are fleeing those horrible conflicts." [67]

Such solidarity was a key focus of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Turkey, in May last year. As was highlighted at the Opening Ceremony, it is essential that we try to put ourselves in the place of people whose lives have been abruptly uprooted by conflict and who, day after day, find themselves facing impossible choices: Under the constant threat of airstrikes, do you choose to stay where you live or do you flee from danger and take your family great distances in search of refuge? Aware of the potentially lethal dangers of an attempted sea crossing, holding onto the faintest of hopes for a better life, do you go in search of a boat or do you stay where you are? When your children get sick as you flee, do you use your limited funds for medicine or for food for the whole family?

We must remind ourselves that these people who are living with extreme uncertainty in desperate circumstances are our fellow human beings, no different from us. It is just that they were born in different countries and have different backgrounds and life stories.

At the summit, which brought together a large number of participants from all sectors including civil society, the importance of pursuing humanitarian and development agendas in a coordinated and comprehensive manner as well as enhancing the resilience of refugee and host communities was affirmed.

Enhancing resilience is a focal point of the exhibition "Restoring Our Humanity," produced for and first shown at the Istanbul Summit. In co-organizing this exhibition, the SGI sought to convey the message that strengthening resilience is a key element in the work of building a world where no one is left behind.

"Restoring Our Humanity"

The "Restoring Our Humanity" exhibition was jointly created by the SGI and the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network, and produced in response to the first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) held in Istanbul, Turkey, in May 2016. The summit was organized to address current humanitarian crises that result mainly from conflicts and disasters. Grounded in the belief that each individual's actions and awareness can make a difference, the 20-panel exhibition was created to encourage viewers to think about what they can do at individual, community and even global levels to address the collective humanitarian challenges the world faces. It calls on viewers to reaffirm their commitment to humanity and work together toward humanistic solutions, starting from their immediate surroundings. It reflects input from people on the front lines of humanitarian crises such as aid workers, disaster-affected communities and refugees.

As an approach to realize that goal, I would like to propose that the United Nations take the initiative in developing a new aid architecture that would be a partnership for resolving humanitarian challenges and protecting human dignity. This would enable forcibly displaced persons to work in fields that contribute to enhancing resilience and promoting the achievement of the SDGs in host communities.

The most recent survey shows that 86 percent of the refugees receiving support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are being hosted in developing countries located near conflict zones. [68] These countries, which are already confronting various SDG-related challenges such as poverty, health and sanitation, now find themselves having to respond to the inflow of refugees. As was confirmed at the Humanitarian Summit last year, what is needed here is to provide integrated support in the fields of development and humanitarian assistance.

A project that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is implementing in Ethiopia provides a good model. Since last year, Ethiopia, which has accepted more than 730,000 war-affected people from neighboring countries, has been suffering from its worst drought in more than thirty years. [69] While helping enhance local management of natural resources and supporting rehabilitation of community infrastructure, the project has been able to reduce tensions between refugees and local populations through efforts to promote peaceful coexistence.

Faced with the seemingly ceaseless growth in the size of refugee populations, it is clear that the stability and development of host societies is essential if displaced persons are to enjoy any stability in their lives.

In terms of confronting SDG-related challenges, developed and developing countries have much in common. In both cases, efforts to promote sustainable agriculture and prevent food shortages, to implement renewable energy infrastructure and to provide medical, healthcare and sanitation services will create new work opportunities for large numbers of people.

Last year, International Labour Organization (ILO) Director-General Guy Ryder called for a "New Deal" for refugees as he reiterated the importance of providing employment opportunities for forcibly displaced persons. [70] One form of this could bring together humanitarian and development initiatives, with the UN and member states actively cooperating to create vocational training and skill acquisition programs related to the SDGs for refugees and asylum-seekers.

Work is of course a crucial means of sustaining one's livelihood; at the same time, it gives meaning to life and is an endeavor to inscribe positive proof of one's existence in society.

Former Chair of the Sydney Peace Foundation Dr. Stuart Rees, with whom I have recently published a dialogue, maintains that securing employment is an imperative in realizing social justice. In our dialogue, he shared his conviction that as a growing number of people are losing work, they are "being denied the profound human sense of self-worth that comes from work; either in the sense of earning one's keep, having the satisfaction of achieving something, or making a contribution to society." [71] He further stated that this represents a fundamental threat to human dignity.

In our discussion, we reviewed the impact of the New Deal programs that US President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945) launched in response to the massive unemployment triggered by the Great Depression, which started in 1929. Under the New Deal, in addition to the building of dams and other infrastructure projects, the Civilian Conservation Corps was established to maintain and improve national parks and forests. More than three million young people participated in the program, and over two billion trees were planted. Through these activities, participants were able to regain their self-esteem and the sense of being useful to and contributing to other people and society. Further, to this day these national parks and forests continue to function to preserve biological diversity and ecological integrity while serving an important function in absorbing greenhouse gases.

Learning from such successful examples, I believe that it is time to devise a framework that will expand employment opportunities for refugees while serving to concretely advance the achievement of the SDGs.

Having experienced great difficulties and suffering, forcibly dislocated persons should have the capacity to relate to and encourage people in a variety of adverse and challenging circumstances. By having the chance to engage in work that advances SDG projects in the countries that hosted them, refugees will be able to contribute to reconstruction efforts in their countries of origin when they return after the cessation of armed conflict.

At the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants held in September last year, it was declared that global compacts on refugees and migrants should be adopted in 2018. Without a solution to the refugee issue, which represents a humanitarian crisis of the gravest historical proportions, world peace and stability will remain unattainable, as will real progress toward the achievement of the SDGs with their vision of a world in which no one is left behind.

The Japanese government has provided financial support to the UNDP project in Ethiopia that I mentioned earlier, and it would therefore be fitting for Japan to accelerate its support for activities that integrate the humanitarian and development sectors, as the UN is advocating.

At the Leaders' Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis hosted by US President Barack Obama the day after the UN Summit last September, the Japanese government committed to providing educational assistance and vocational training to approximately one million people affected by conflict. Further, Japan will accept up to 150 Syrian students in the next five years. It is my sincere hope that, within the framework of these relief efforts, Japan will take the lead in promoting a partnership for providing humanitarian assistance and protecting human dignity. And I would like to restate that one approach to facilitating such initiatives is to provide forcibly dislocated persons with opportunities to acquire technical skills and work training related to the SDGs.

The UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants

The United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants took place on September 19, 2016, at UN Headquarters in New York. A high-level summit to address mass movements of people, it was a watershed moment to strengthen governance and a unique opportunity to create a more responsible, predictable system for responding to large movements of refugees and migrants.

At the summit, 193 member states signed the New York Declaration, which includes commitments to protect the human rights of all refugees and migrants, regardless of status, and to improve the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance to those countries most affected.

The Declaration also established two processes that will culminate in 2018 in the formation of two global compacts, on refugees and migration, respectively. UNHCR has been tasked to initiate consultations with refugee host countries, donors, NGOs and the private sector, applying the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) toward the compact on refugees. A separate process will create global standards for safe, orderly and regular migration, led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

In this regard, I would like to call for further support of programs by which the UN and the world's universities work together to create educational opportunities for refugee youth.

The UN Academic Impact, which was launched seven years ago with the goal of linking the world's universities with the UN, has now become established as a network of more than 1,000 institutions of higher learning in over 120 countries. Collectively, these universities research issues covering almost the entire spectrum of global concerns and represent a crucial resource that can be deployed for the benefit of humankind.

The activities of Toynbee Hall that brought relief to people struggling with poverty and the educational activities of Hull House that sought to restore dignity to impoverished immigrants--to which I referred earlier--were conducted by the members of university communities.

As these examples testify, universities have the potential to serve as havens of hope and security in society. In that sense, it is of profound significance that universities and colleges across the world are contributing to the resolution of global challenges through their research activities. They could further this contribution through providing expanded educational opportunities for refugee youth including through such means as extension courses and distance learning.

Soka University in Japan joined the UNHCR Refugee Higher Education Program last May. As the university's founder, it is my pleasure to extend a hand of welcome to those who will be attending, starting with the 2017 academic year.

Yusra Mardini, a Syrian swimmer and a member of the Refugee Olympic Team that participated in the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games, offered the following words of encouragement to her fellow refugees:

I want to represent all the refugees because I want to show everyone that, after the pain, after the storm, comes calm days. . . I want everyone not to give up on their dreams and do what they feel in their hearts. [\[72\]](#)

For those who have been driven from their homes by conflict and are living in an unfamiliar environment, meaningful work and education are means to recover a sense of human dignity, gaining hope for the future and a purpose in life.

Therefore, I think it is critical that specific measures in securing work and educational opportunities for dislocated persons should be incorporated in the UN global compacts on refugees and migrants when they are adopted. In the final analysis, resolution of the refugee crisis hinges on our ability to enable forcibly dislocated persons to regain a sense of security, hope and dignity.

Human rights education

The third priority area I would like to discuss is the building of a culture of human rights.

In addition to protracted armed conflict and civil war, another serious threat currently confronting global society is the frequent occurrence of terrorist attacks and the rise of violent extremism. There are far too many cases where young people, struggling to find meaning in life, bereft of hope for the future, are lured into violent extremism.

Last November, the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research cosponsored a two-day conference at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia to discuss approaches to prevent the spread of violent extremism.

With an increasing number of states accepting the idea that punitive measures are the most effective way of preventing violence, participants interrogated the actual effectiveness of this approach and related issues through an analysis of case studies in different regions of the world. Further, they explored ways of advancing peacebuilding efforts in areas of continuing tension.

The meeting also focused on identifying factors that drive violent extremism as well as means for its prevention, particularly the importance of comprehensive efforts to encourage ways of addressing problems and differences without resorting to violence.

I believe that the key element here must be the promotion of human rights education.

Last year marked the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training. The SGI, as a civil society organization, has supported from its drafting stage this important UN Declaration, in which UN member states for the first time agreed to international standards for human rights education.

To commemorate the fifth anniversary of its adoption, an intergovernmental panel was held during the Human Rights Council session in September, with representatives of the SGI in attendance. In her remarks, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kate Gilmore noted that while we have seen hatred and violence spread in parts of the world, we have also witnessed the launch of initiatives in human rights education which are inspiring people to positive action. She also stated:

Human rights education fosters our common humanity beyond our individual diversities. It is not an "optional extra" or just another routine obligation. It teaches fundamental lessons. [73]

These words underscore the true significance of human rights education.

Examples of the impact of human rights education, such as the transformation of one young schoolgirl, were introduced during the meeting. Through a human rights education program in her school, she began to deeply consider the nature of her own dignity. This awakening to her innate value allowed her to find strength and confidence in the future, learning to stand up to the circumstances surrounding her. She was transformed; no longer a victim, she felt compelled to defend the human rights of others.

Ms. Gilmore described this young girl's story as an example of the "extraordinary power of human rights consciousness" and stressed that "education is the accelerant of that transformation." [74] Indeed, it attests to the immeasurable power and potential that human rights education holds.

In order to spark this kind of chain reaction of positive transformation, I would like to encourage efforts to adopt a convention on human rights education and training based on the Declaration that would strengthen measures ensuring its implementation.

Next year is the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). I would like to propose that the occasion be marked by the holding of a UN and civil society forum on human rights education that would review achievements to date and deepen deliberations toward the adoption of such a convention.

It is estimated that there are currently 1.8 billion young people between the ages of ten and twenty-four living in our world today. [75] If these young people, rather than resorting to conflict and violence, can come to uphold and protect the core values of human rights, I am positive that a path toward a "pluralist and inclusive society" [76] --as articulated in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training--can be brought into being.

Human rights education can be the driving force for achieving this. In order for states to promote such education in a consistent and sustained manner, legal frameworks and educational programs need to be created. Mechanisms for the periodic monitoring and review of these systems will also be necessary.

This is one of the points that the SGI--speaking on behalf of Human Rights Education 2020 (HRE 2020), a global coalition of civil society organizations--stressed at the intergovernmental panel referred to earlier.

International efforts to ensure human rights, which draw from wellsprings in the UDHR, were initially focused on standard setting, defining the rights to be protected and then providing access to remedy in case of violations. Today the focus has shifted to establishing and firmly rooting in society a culture of human rights, where there is a mutual appreciation of diversity and a shared undertaking to protect the dignity of all.

The SGI, with the cooperation of UN agencies and other partner organizations, has developed a new human rights education exhibition that will be launched from the end of February in conjunction with the convening of the Human Rights Council. Through initiatives such as this, we aim to inspire renewed commitment within civil society to generate a constantly expanding solidarity in favor of a culture of human rights. And further, in collaboration with other NGOs, we hope to move global public opinion toward the adoption of a legally binding convention on human rights education and training.

Gender equality

The final theme I would like to discuss is the importance of gender equality, something that is deeply relevant to constructing a culture of human rights. Gender equality is the assurance of the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys, without discrimination.

The goal is, as UN Women emphasizes, to create a society in which the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are valued, and the diversity of different groups is recognized. One of the SDGs is the achievement of gender equality everywhere on Earth and the elimination of all forms of discrimination by 2030.

A record number of more than 80 government ministers and 4,100 representatives of international civil society attended last year's session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW60) held from March 14-24, providing further evidence of the growing recognition of the importance of this task. In addition to taking part in the sessions, the SGI held a parallel event under the theme "Women's Leadership Paving the Way to Achieving the SDGs."

At this event, it was reaffirmed that gender inequality is a major human rights challenge and that progress in this regard will contribute to the achievement of all the other SDGs.

Gender equality can play an essential role in the Nexus Approach, which I discussed earlier, for promoting all of the SDGs in an integrated fashion.

Recognition by the world's governments of the importance of gender equality dates back at least to the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. A further turning point was the adoption of Resolution 1325 on women and peace and security by the UN Security Council in October 2000. This resolution urges the equal participation and full involvement of women in all aspects of the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and calls for the adoption of concrete measures to that end.

Former UN Under-Secretary-General Anwarul K. Chowdhury, who played a pivotal role in the adoption of Resolution 1325, told me over the course of our dialogue of the "conceptual and political breakthrough" [\[77\]](#) that made this possible.

He explained that this breakthrough took the form of a statement issued by the UN Security Council on March 8, 2000, International Women's Day. The statement noted the inextricable link between peace and gender equality, transforming the impression of women as helpless victims of wars and conflicts into a recognition that they are "essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security." [\[78\]](#) This paradigm shift led to the adoption of Resolution 1325, opening a sure path for the greater participation of women in peace processes.

A review into the implementation status of the resolution that issued its report in October 2015 concluded that the participation of women enhances the likelihood of the success and durability of peace processes. It also noted the key role of women in gaining the trust of the local population in the course of UN peacekeeping activities.

Governments have begun developing and implementing policies toward the achievement of the gender equality goal of the SDGs. It is important now to recall the conceptual breakthrough that initially led to the adoption of Resolution 1325: in other words, to reconfigure societies based on the recognition that women are not helpless victims but that their strengths and contributions are essential.

In this regard, Dr. Sarah Wider, former president of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society and Women's Studies scholar, shared the following with me during one of our exchanges.

No one should be taking a back seat to anyone. We should all be sitting together, listening, talking, and respecting the contributing work each person has to offer. [\[79\]](#)

Recent research has highlighted the contribution of a group of female delegates at the 1945 San Francisco conference where the UN Charter was drafted in inscribing "the equal rights of men and women" in the Preamble. [\[80\]](#)

Many of the participants at the conference called for the inclusion of clear provisions regarding human rights. A number of women from Latin American countries, however, brought to the conference's attention the inadequacy of the reference to "equal rights of individuals," the term initially used during the drafting process.

They were successful not only in enshrining the equal rights of women and men in the Preamble, but also in including language promoting and encouraging respect for human rights without distinction as to sex (Article 1) and the equal eligibility of men and women to participate throughout the UN system (Article 8).

This episode brings to mind a story from the Lotus Sutra. The sutra, which teaches the supreme dignity and worth of all people, uses the concrete example of a young woman fully manifesting her inherent dignity to illustrate this.

After Shakyamuni finishes expounding the principle that all people possess an incomparable inner worth, Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated, feeling that this important teaching is over, seeks to return home. However, he is prompted by Shakyamuni to stay behind to debate and discuss the teachings he has heard with a bodhisattva named Manjushri.

Wisdom Accumulated is told by Manjushri that the eight-year-old daughter of the dragon king had manifested a life state of ultimate dignity (enlightenment) and was filled with a profound compassion for other people. Wisdom Accumulated finds this impossible to believe. It is then that the dragon king's daughter appears before him. Upon seeing the young dragon girl, it is Shakyamuni's disciple Shariputra who is next in voicing his doubts.

The dragon girl takes up a jewel that the sutra explains is proof of this ultimately dignified state of life, and offers it to Shakyamuni. She then turns and exhorts Shariputra to witness the true brilliance of her life. Seeing her dedicate herself to helping others, Wisdom Accumulated and Shariputra are finally convinced that Manjushri's words had indeed been true.

I believe that this story illustrates how a merely abstract understanding cannot bring about the realization of the dignity and worth of all people.

Nichiren comments on the dragon girl's exhortation to Shariputra to witness her enlightenment as follows:

When the dragon girl says, "Watch me attain Buddhahood," Shariputra thinks she is referring only to her own attainment of Buddhahood, but this is an error. She is rebuking him by saying, "Watch how one attains Buddhahood." [\[81\]](#)

In this way, Nichiren stresses the inseparable connection between the dragon girl realizing the full dignity of her life and Shariputra doing the same. Through acknowledging and coming to respect the supreme dignity and worth of the dragon girl, who represents all women, Shariputra, who represents all men, comes to fully realize his inner dignity in its fullness.

This concrete portrayal of the inherent dignity of women gives substance to and fully authenticates the principle of the dignity of all people. In the same way, the fact that the rights of women were inscribed in the Charter enabled the spirit of human rights to take particularly clear form at the UN.

I am sure that the group of women who spoke out at the San Francisco conference in 1945 were acting on the conviction that building a society that truly upholds the rights of all people would only be possible if women's rights were given explicit recognition.

UN Women has initiated the HeForShe Movement, a global effort to incorporate the involvement of men and boys in the struggle to achieve gender equality. It is unacceptable for anyone to be deprived of their rights and freedoms, and we must work to ensure that all people in all their diversity are free to enjoy their rights.

The goal of gender equality is to open the path for all people, irrespective of gender, to bring forth the light of their inner dignity and humanity in a way that is true to their own unique self.

The SGI, with youth at the center of our movement, will further strive to expand the solidarity of people united in the cause of building a culture of human rights. Sounding the bell of hope for humanity, we will continue to work toward creating a society where no one is left behind.

Notes

- [1](#) UN General Assembly, "Transforming Our World," 1.
- [2](#) Toda, "Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons."
- [3](#) UN General Assembly, "Transforming Our World," 12.
- [4](#) UN News Centre, "Interview."
- [5](#) Norman, trans., *Theragāthā*, 65.
- [6](#) (trans. from) Jaspers, *Die grossen Philosophen*, 142.
- [7](#) Müller, trans., *The Sutta-nipata*, 1:11:1.
- [8](#) (trans. from) Nakamura, *Genshi butten o yomu*, 273.
- [9](#) Chalmers, trans., *Buddha's Teachings*, 109.
- [10](#) Thurman, trans., *Vimalakīrti Nirdesa Sutra*, 70.
- [11](#) See Watson, trans., *The Vimalakīrti Sutra*, 65.
- [12](#) *Ibid.*, 59.
- [13](#) See Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra*, 154.
- [14](#) See Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra*, 180.
- [15](#) Nichiren, *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, 72.
- [16](#) Ikeda, *A Forum for Peace*, 195.
- [17](#) (trans. from) Ikeda and Esquivel, *La fuerza de la esperanza*, 30.
- [18](#) *Ibid.*, 80.
- [19](#) See UNHCR, "These 10 Refugees Will Compete at the 2016 Olympics in Rio."
- [20](#) UN Department of Public Information, "244 Million International Migrants Living Abroad Worldwide"
- [21](#) InterAction Council, "Global Ethics," session chaired by H.E. Dr. Franz Vranitzky.
- [22](#) (trans. from) Ikeda, *Sekai no shidosha to kataru*, 72.
- [23](#) *Ibid.*, 67.
- [24](#) See Kato, *Buaitసుzekka*, 59.
- [25](#) Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, xv.
- [26](#) *Ibid.*, 20.
- [27](#) *Ibid.*, 76.
- [28](#) *Ibid.*
- [29](#) Toynbee, *Acquaintances*, 248-49.
- [30](#) Reutter and Ruffer, *Peace Women*, 49.
- [31](#) See Judson, *Jien Adamusu no shogai*, 4.
- [32](#) Judson, *City Neighbor*, 80.
- [33](#) See Ikeda and Wahid, *The Wisdom of Tolerance*, 105.
- [34](#) *Ibid.*, 20.
- [35](#) United Nations Millennium Campaign, "We the Peoples," 4-13.
- [36](#) UN General Assembly, "Transforming Our World," 12.
- [37](#) *Ibid.*, 5.
- [38](#) Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra*, 328.
- [39](#) Nichiren, *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, 174.
- [40](#) Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 73-74.
- [41](#) Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, 23.
- [42](#) UN Women, "From Where I Stand: Eisha Mohammed."
- [43](#) Nabarro, "On Youth Boosting the Promotion and Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals."
- [44](#) See *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*.
- [45](#) UN General Assembly, "Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations," 2.
- [46](#) See *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*.
- [47](#) See Perry, "My Personal Journey at the Nuclear Brink."
- [48](#) Toda, "Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons."
- [49](#) Oppenheimer, "Atomic Weapons and American Policy," 529.
- [50](#) Toda, "Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons."
- [51](#) Wilson, *Five Myths About Nuclear Weapons*, 96.
- [52](#) (trans. from) Nakamura, *Budda no kotoba*, 203.
- [53](#) See Hoffman, *The Dead Hand*, 152.
- [54](#) See UN General Assembly, "Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations," 3-4.
- [55](#) NPDI, "Joint Statement," 7.

- 56 MOFA, "G7 Foreign Ministers' Hiroshima Declaration," 2.
- 57 Obama, "Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan at Hiroshima Peace Memorial."
- 58 UN General Assembly, "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," 5.
- 59 Pugwash, "The Russell-Einstein Manifesto."
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 UN General Assembly, "Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations," 4.
- 62 (trans. from) Ikeda and Esquivel, *La fuerza de la esperanza*, 198.
- 63 UN General Assembly, "Nuclear Weapons and Human Security," 2-3.
- 64 UNHCR, "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015," 2.
- 65 UN, "Joint United Nations Statement on Syria."
- 66 UN News Centre, "Interview."
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 UNHCR, "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015," 2.
- 69 UNDP, "Building Resilience of Refugee Hosting Communities."
- 70 ILO, "Global Migration Crisis."
- 71 (trans. from) Ikeda and Rees, *Heiwa no tetsugaku to shigokoro o kataru*, 285. See also Rees, Rodley and Stilwell, *Beyond the Market: Alternatives to Economic Rationalism*, 222.
- 72 UNHCR, "Syrian Refugee Eyes Rio Olympics."
- 73 OHCHR, "Opening Statement by Kate Gilmore."
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 UNFPA, "The Power of 1.8 Billion," ii.
- 76 UN General Assembly, "United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training," 3.
- 77 (trans. from) Ikeda and Chowdhury, *Atarashiki chikyu shakai no sozo e*, 335.
- 78 UN Security Council, "Peace Inextricably Linked with Equality between Women and Men."
- 79 Ikeda and Wider, *The Art of True Relations*, 63.
- 80 Associated Press, "Researchers: Latin American Women Got Women into UN Charter."
- 81 Nichiren, *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, 109.

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