2013 ACTIVITY REPORT

An Engaged Buddhist Community
2013 Growth

Founded in 1960, the SGI-USA is an American Buddhist association that promotes individual happiness and world peace through the practical application of the humanistic principles of Nichiren Buddhism. As lay believers and engaged Buddhists, the Soka Gakkai International’s 12 million members worldwide strive to improve their lives and their communities by creating value and contributing to the well-being of others.

In 2013, the SGI-USA continued to focus on the importance of the neighborhood discussion meeting where people from all walks of life come together to convey the joys of their practice and share this practice with family and friends. By the end of 2013, the SGI-USA had 2,852 districts and 550 chapters.

SGI-USA Buddhist Centers Opened

There are about 100 Buddhist centers throughout the United States and its territories (see the back cover for a complete list). The following centers had openings in 2013:

- January  Cherry Hill, N.J.
- February  Anchorage, Alas.
- May      Colorado Springs, Colo.
- June     Torrance, Calif.
- November Spokane, Wash.

Social Media

- Website: Find us at www.sgi-usa.org
- Facebook: Find us (and like us) at www.facebook.com/sgiusa.info
- Bookstore: Shop online at http://bookstore.sgi-usa.org
- YouTube: Search the “SGI-USA Channel” for several videos, especially the series “Buddhist in America,” a documentary series that features youth applying Buddhism to their daily lives, and “Composing Hope,” which profiles youth who discuss how their Buddhist practice has informed their work as artists, at www.youtube.com/SGIUUSAmmedia
- Twitter: Find us at #OfficialSGIUSA
- Victory Over Violence revamped (the SGI-USA youth-led program aimed at building a culture of peace): Go to www.vov.com
- Create Magazine (the SGI-USA youth-led online magazine): Go to www.createmag.org
Creating Human Harmony in Our Communities

“Creating harmony amidst diversity is a fundamental issue of the 21st century. While celebrating the unique characteristics of different peoples and cultures, we have to create solidarity on the level of our common humanity, our common life.”
—Daisaku Ikeda

The Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA) continues to contribute to American society in significant ways, as it has for five decades. Areas of focus span culture, peace activism, disaster relief, sustainability, and education. Whatever the arena, the starting point remains the same: to help each person become truly happy and fulfilled, whether at home, at work, at school, or in society, based on the humanistic teachings of Nichiren Buddhism.

The SGI Buddhist community continues to be led by its founding president Daisaku Ikeda. The significance of his leadership as a Buddhist philosopher can most readily be gauged in the dramatic growth of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) organization and in the broad diversity that characterizes its movement for promoting a philosophy of character development and social engagement for peace. Indeed, the SGI is perhaps the largest, fastest-growing, and most diverse association of lay Buddhists in the world today.

Mr. Ikeda’s example is an enduring source of inspiration for the SGI’s global grass-roots activities in such areas as human rights protection, nuclear abolition, disarmament, sustainable development, and cultural exchange. In the 50-plus years since becoming president of the Soka Gakkai lay Buddhist association at the age of 32, Mr. Ikeda has pursued a diverse range of activities in the pursuit of global peace including personal diplomacy during the Cold War and ongoing dialogues with a broad range of individuals from around the world including Mikhail Gorbachev, Elise Boulding, Joseph Rotblat, and André Malraux. He has published numerous books and proposals totaling more than 100 works and founded various peace-related institutions such as the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue, the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy. He has also founded The Min-On Concert Association and the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum to promote mutual understanding and friendship between different national cultures through the arts. Mr. Ikeda is also the founder of the Soka (value creation) schools, a nondenominational school system based on an ideal of fostering each student’s unique creative potential and cultivating an ethic of peace, social contribution, and global consciousness. The Soka schools span kindergarten through graduate study and include a university in Tokyo, Japan, and another in Aliso Viejo, California, USA.

Mr. Ikeda’s cosmopolitan ethic of peace is rooted in a deep respect for the dignity inherent in each individual life. This virtue permeates the culture of the SGI-USA Buddhist community that today represents a wide variety of ethnicities and circumstances. As we engage with one another, we create microcosms of society in which we learn to respect differences while treasuring our commonalities. In 2013, this cosmopolitan microcosm was experienced each month in more than 3,000 homes and Buddhist centers across the United States through the SGI-USA’s small-group dialogue movement. Strengthening this informal neighborhood activity continues to be a primary focus, as it constitutes the core religious gathering for SGI-USA Buddhists to cultivate positive human potentialities for hope, courage, and altruistic action through the study and practice of Buddhist philosophy.

Recognizing that young people are the future of our communities, SGI-USA organizes activities to nurture their growth and development. In 2013, The Year of Victory for a Youthful SGI, the youth of the SGI-USA, along with youth from eight other countries (Japan, United Kingdom, Italy, Australia, South Korea, Brazil, Malaysia, and Mexico) conducted a survey that was completed in February 2013 that covered understanding of the humanitarian consequences of the detonation of a nuclear weapon as well as basic knowledge and attitudes. This survey occurred at a time when the international community was starting to focus on the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons as a key factor in efforts to ban them. Please see further information inside this Activity Report (see pages 11 and 12).

SGI-USA youth also organized a “Humanistic Awakening Summit for Peace” at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo. The peace summit, open to high school students and the public, featured workshops aimed at empowering people to become agents of peace and change in their local communities (see page 11).

The SGI-USA’s Culture of Peace Distinguished Speaker Series also continued to support community initiatives for peace, culture, and education, and engaged scholars and peace activists in non-sectarian, public dialogues on topics such as how to establish peace incentives to overcome racial divide, the importance of interfaith dialogue, and the role of women in building peace. Speakers included filmmaker, philanthropist, and activist Abigail Disney, and former editor of Ebony magazine Lerone Bennett Jr., an African American social historian, journalist, and author.

The following pages highlight some of the many ways in which SGI-USA Buddhists improve their daily lives and make a difference in their communities. If you are interested in additional information about the SGI-USA’s movement for peace, culture, and education, we welcome your inquiries.

Daniel Nagashima
General Director
Soka Gakkai International-USA
Exhibitions Hosted by the SGI-USA


**Building a Culture of Peace for the Children of the World** • Jan. 6–21, Atlanta, Ga. • Jan. 21–25, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colo. • Jan. 28–Feb. 2, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind. • Feb. 2–3, San Francisco, Calif. • Feb. 21–25, Indiana University Northwest, Gary, Ind. • Feb. 27–Mar. 11 and Apr. 11, Alabama State University, Montgomery, Ala. • Mar. 16, Columbine High School, Littleton, Colo. • Apr. 20, Garden Grove, Calif. • May 8, Los Angeles, Calif. • Jul. 20, Torrance, Calif. • Sept. 27–Oct. 4, Burbank Early Childhood School, Upper Arlington, Ohio • Sept. 28, Irvine, Calif. • Dec. 28, Chesapeake Bay, Md.


**Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons** • Sept. 8, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill. • Sept. 9–Oct. 12, Chicago Culture Center, Chicago, Ill. • Oct. 17–Nov. 15, New York City, N.Y.

**From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit** • Feb. 1–15, Washington Square South, New York City, N.Y. • Apr. 10, Oakland, Calif. • Apr. 22–26, John Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md. • Apr. 23, California State University, Northridge, Calif. • May 8, UCLA, Westwood, Calif. • Sept. 18–25, UN Peace Day and Love Festival, Norfolk, Va. • Sept. 28, Irvine, Calif. • Oct. 2, Tuskegee University School of Veterinary Medicine, Tuskegee, Ala.

**Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter and Human Potential** • Jan. 3, L.A. Valley College, Valley Glen, Calif. • Mar. 8, Plaza de la Raza, Los Angeles, Calif. • Mar. 16, East Orange, N.J. • Apr. 5–21, Daniel A. Reed Library, The State University of New York, Fredonia, N.Y. • Apr. 8, University of Maryland, College Park, Md. • Apr. 19–21, Santa Monica, Calif.

**Victory Over Violence** • Jan. 5–6, Nutley High School, Nutley, N.J. • Jan. 31, Authority and Department of Design and Construction, Long Island City, N.Y. • Mar. 2–8, Sturgis Charter Public School, Hyannis, Mass. • Mar. 7, L.A. Valley College, Valley Glen, Calif. • Mar. 14, Columbia University, New York City, N.Y. • Mar. 14–18, Saratoga, Calif. • Mar. 16, Columbine High School, Littleton, Colo. • Mar. 17, North Zone Cultural Festival, Worcester, Mass. • Apr. 7–May 12, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. • Apr. 8, College of San Mateo, Calif. • Apr. 8, University of Maryland, College Park, Md. • Apr. 17–May 3, The University of Connecticut, Storrs, Conn. • Apr. 20, Garden Grove, Calif. • Apr. 29, Boys and Girls Club, Orlando, Fla. • May 7–8, University of Riverside, Calif. • May 11, Los Angeles, Calif. • May 14, Innovate Manhattan Charter School, Manhattan, N.Y. • May 27–Jun. 4, Alburg Elementary School, Alburg, Ver. • May 27, Kenwood Academy, Chicago, Ill. • Jun. 22, Dover African American Festival, Houston, Del. • Jul. 20, Granada Hills, Calif. • Jul. 20, Torrance, Calif. • Aug. 17, Montclaire Jazz Festival, Nishuane Park, Montclaire, N.J. • Aug. 17, Fountain Valley, Calif. • Sept. 7, Spokane, Wash. • Sept. 24–25, Prosser Career Academy, Chicago, Ill. • Sept. 28, Burtonsville Day Celebration, Burtonsville, Md. • Sept. 28, Irvine, Calif. • Sept. 28, San Diego, Calif. • Oct. 13, Stockton College, Galloway, N.J. • Oct. 27, Valley Center, Calif. • Nov. 16–22, Little Elm Public Library, Little Elm, Tex.
“I perceive in Shakyamuni’s compassion—elaborated and extolled in the Mahayana tradition as the Bodhisattva Way—a profound and unshakable humanism. The SGI is a body committed to developing activities in the areas of peace, culture, and education based on this Buddhist humanism.”

— Daisaku Ikeda

Gov. Eddie Baza Calvo recognized the SGI’s work to advance peace, based on the commitment of its president, Daisaku Ikeda, and then declared January 2013 “Guam Peace Month.”

African American Heritage Association President Jermaine Smith, who served as the keynote speaker for the event, spoke of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whom he referred to as “one of the world’s formidable pioneers of peace, culture, and education.”

Cultural performances throughout the afternoon included several dance groups representing Polynesian, Micronesian, and Marianas islands, including native Chamorro music.

SGI-USA Celebrates Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Promotes Nonviolence

Jan. 19–20, Santa Monica, Calif.— Together with the City of Santa Monica and the West Side Coalition, the SGI-USA co-sponsored two Martin Luther King Jr. Day events in Santa Monica, Calif., Jan. 19.
events at the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium, commemorating the birth of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his nonviolent activism for racial equality that spearheaded the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.

The first event, held January 19, titled “Redeem the Dream,” also celebrated the 50th anniversary of Dr. King’s landmark “I Have a Dream” speech in which he made an impassioned call for an end to racism, and equal rights for all (on August 28, 1963).

The second MLK Day event, a musical tribute by the Santa Monica Symphony Orchestra, took place on January 20 and was attended by some 900 people.

2013 Peace Proposal Released


In this proposal, the SGI president stresses the centrality of the dignity of life and calls for action toward abolition of nuclear weapons, the need to address poverty as a human rights issue, and ways of improving relations between China and Japan.

Noting that this year marks the 65th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Mr. Ikeda calls for urgent attention to poverty as a human rights issue. He also calls for human rights education and training on a global scale.

SGI Participates in Events on Eliminating Violence Against Women

Mar. 7, New York — Supporting the efforts of the United Nations in eliminating and preventing all forms of violence against women and girls, the SGI co-organized a panel discussion titled “Victory Over Violence: Women Leading Through Education.” Held at the Armenian Convention Center in New York, the panel included Deniz Kaynak, publication officer of Women for Women’s Human Rights—New Ways; Jessica Greer Morris, executive director of Girl Be Heard; Iatamze Verulashvili, founder and director of the Women’s Center in Tbilisi, Georgia; and Hiro Sakurai of the SGI UN Liaison Office in New York who introduced SGI-USA’s youth campaign Victory Over Violence.

Panelists emphasized the key importance of education to increase awareness of the rights among women, and the need for grass-roots support networks for victims of violence outside major cities and for forums where victims of sexual violence could connect within their communities.

Closing remarks were made by former UN Under-Secretary-General Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury. He emphasized that promoting the equality of women and men must be the focus in efforts to address violence against women.

Deniz Kaynak, publication officer of Women for Women’s Human Rights, speaking at the “Victory Over Violence” event, New York, Mar. 7.
Engaged Buddhism

Exploring the Power of Transformative Dialogues

Apr. 6, Cambridge, Mass. — We must embrace multiple modes of dialogue if we are to achieve fulfilling lives and the peaceful global community that is desired by diverse peoples of good will worldwide. Such was the overarching message of an energetic and wide-ranging discussion that took place at the SGI-affiliated Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue.

Jim Garrison and Larry Hickman, both past presidents of the John Dewey Society and dialogue partners with Ikeda Center founder Daisaku Ikeda, engaged in discussions with national and Boston-area university students. The first topic during the two-hour seminar was how to transform our lesser self and come to recognize and foster our greater self. In Buddhism, the former is associated with selfish, limited desires, and the latter with compassion and empathy.

Cherry Trees Grace Paterson

Apr. 14, Paterson, N.J. — On a sunny spring morning, more than 40 SGI-USA representatives, town dignitaries, and residents turned out for the fourth cherry-tree planting ceremony at Eastside Park’s Daisaku and Kaneko Ikeda Peace Grove.

The annual tradition began in 2010, following the planting of three cherry trees—one for each of the founding Soka Gakkai presidents—the year before.

Paterson Mayor Jeffrey Jones expressed his appreciation to the SGI-USA for its cherry-tree donation, and added, “There is no greater moment than the birth of a child and a tree, because both represent growth, vulnerability, and a purposeful existence.”
SGI-USA Chicago sponsored the nuclear abolition event to commemorate the origins of the SGI’s own nuclear-abolition movement: September 8 marked the 56th anniversary of second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda’s call to abolish nuclear weapons before some 50,000 youth at Mitsuzawa Stadium in Yokohama, Japan.

**Peacemakers Join Hiroshima Candlelight Vigil**

**Aug. 6, Santa Monica, Calif.** — More than 100 community leaders and peace activists, including representatives from the SGI-USA, gathered around the “Chain Reaction” peace sculpture located at Santa Monica’s Civic Center for a public candlelight vigil marking the 68th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Humanistic messages of nonviolence and a nuclear-free world were discussed and a heartfelt moment of silence was observed.

**A Solid Step Toward a World Without Nuclear Weapons**

**Sept. 8, Chicago** — Clifton Truman Daniel, the eldest grandson of U.S. President Harry S. Truman (who ordered the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945), spoke at “A Way Out of the Burning House: A World Free From Nuclear Weapons,” a forum held at the University of Chicago’s International House, before an audience of 500. The SGI exhibition “Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons” held its U.S. premiere at the University of Chicago International House, Sept. 8.
Engaged Buddhism

The SGI exhibition “Everything You Treasure — For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons” made its U.S. premiere at this event.

The forum featured a host of speakers with diverse backgrounds and experiences related to the atomic bomb, many of them deeply personal — among them, Mary Nelson, executive director of the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions, Yuki Miyamoto, associate professor of Religious Studies, DePaul University, and Gregoire Mallard, assistant professor of Sociology at Northwestern University (whose letter was read at the event).

World Peace Festival Honors the Aloha Spirit

Oct. 5, Hilo, Hawaii — In partnership with the Hilo Downtown Improvement Association, the SGI-USA, and the International Committee of Artists for Peace, the County of Hawaii hosted its fourth World Peace Festival promoting “cultural diversity contributing to the creation of a peaceful world.” More than 1,500 people enjoyed cultural displays and performances, arts and crafts, and delicious treats.

Local SGI-USA youth perform traditional hula at the fourth World Peace Festival, Hilo, Hawaii, Oct. 5.
Hilo Downtown Association Executive Director Alice Moon noted that “it was time to bring together all people, to gather in peace, and to celebrate our diversity. We can offer a free, family-fun festival, where everyone feels safe and welcome on this one special day.”

Mayor Billy Kenoi, in his official welcome, emphasized that the festival was an occasion to promote the spirit of Aloha, the universal language of love.

with Mr. Pearl’s parents, Dr. Judea and Ruth Pearl, to promote the ideals for which Daniel Pearl stood: uniting humanity through the power of words and the universal language of music.

“Music of the Americas” Honors Daniel Pearl
Oct. 20, Santa Monica, Calif. — The SGI-USA and the International Committee of Artists for Peace sponsored the American Victory Orchestra’s Daniel Pearl World Music Days concert themed “Music of the Americas,” part of a worldwide network of music celebrations honoring the life of the Wall Street Journal correspondent who was killed in 2002 while on assignment in Pakistan. Some 700 people gathered at the SGI-USA World Peace Ikeda Auditorium.

The County of Hawaii hosts the fourth World Peace Festival commemorating Oct. 2 or “World Peace Day” as the day in 1960 when SGI President Ikeda began his worldwide travels for peace, starting from the Aloha State, Hilo, Hawaii, Oct. 5.

Tony Vazquez, Santa Monica council member (center), presents Ruth and Judea Pearl a proclamation declaring Oct. 20 as Daniel Pearl World Music Day, Santa Monica, Calif.

The Ikeda Kings Orchestra performs at the annual “Music for Peace” concert, Santa Monica, Calif., Apr. 21.
New York Zone members, family, and friends gathered for their Summer Fun Festival that included performances, games, and picnicking in Prospect Park, a 585-acre public treasure in the heart of Brooklyn, N.Y., Jun. 30.

SGI-USA members marching boldly and cheerfully in PRIDE parades in Chicago (top left), New York (top right), and Cincinnati.
Buddhists for Peace, the University of Arizona’s SGI-USA student campus club, hosts a series of Victory Over Violence events at the school to take a stand against violence, Tucson, Ariz., Jan. 19.

VOV Revamps Its Website

Visitors can sign the VOV nonviolence pledge, and find information on the latest developments and best practices for achieving victory over violence in their daily lives, communities, and society. The VOV movement was launched in 1999 by the SGI-USA youth in response to the growing concern over youth-related violence, including the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colo. VOV focuses on helping young people identify and counteract root causes of violence in their daily lives.

The Future Is Youth

“Each young person possesses a precious inner treasure of infinite worth…. A person fully awakened to the jewel-like dignity of their own life is capable of truly respecting that treasure in others.”
—Daisaku Ikeda

Tucson Campus Club Promotes Peace
Jan. 19–22, Tucson, Ariz.— Members of Buddhists for Peace, the University of Arizona’s SGI-USA student campus club, hosted a series of events centered on the Victory Over Violence movement at the school’s Student Union Memorial Center. The four-day event drew more than 500 people, including Tucson Vice Mayor Regina Romero and Arizona State Senator Steve Farley. In praise of the SGI-USA youth for this timely and important opportunity for community dialogue and action, Tucson Mayor Jonathan Rothschild sent a message urging everyone to engage in the VOV movement and become “an ambassador of peace wherever your life may take you.”
SGI-USA Youth Organize Peace Summit at Columbine High School

Mar. 16, Littleton, Colo.—SGI-USA youth organized a "Humanistic Awakening Summit for Peace" at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo. The peace summit, open to high school students and the public, was attended by some 350 people and featured various workshops aimed at empowering people to become agents of peace and change in their local communities, including a session on SGI-USA’s Victory Over Violence movement that was initiated in response to the Columbine shootings. In April 1999, the Littleton community was devastated by shootings at Columbine High School that cost the lives of 14 students and a teacher. Reflecting the title and spirit of the summit, SGI’s exhibition “Building a Culture of Peace for the Children of the World” was on display. The exhibition stresses the potential of ordinary individuals to contribute to peace. Frank DeAngelis, principal of Columbine High School, recognized SGI President Ikeda’s lifelong commitment to education and his vision for world peace and nonviolence.

A Discussion on Human Security Held at CSUN

Apr. 23, Northridge, Calif.—California State University Northridge’s SGI-USA student campus group, Buddhist for World Peace Club, hosted a panel discussion centering around the question: What can we do to promote human security around the world? Among the CSUN participants were Dr. Thomas Hatfield, chair of the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health; Dr. Ken Chapman, professor of economics; Dr. Doug Kaback, a professor of theatre in the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communications.

SGI Youth Survey Attitudes on Nuclear Weapons

Apr. 23, Geneva—SGI youth conducted an international survey on attitudes toward nuclear weapons and presented the results to Ambassador Cornel Feruta at the United Nations Office at Geneva during the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. Ambassador Feruta, chair of the Second Session, welcomed the data and stated his expectation that the SGI youth will continue to work on this issue. At a time when the international community was honing in on the inhumane nature
of nuclear weapons as a key factor in efforts to ban them, the survey covered participants’ awareness of the humanitarian consequences of detonating a nuclear weapon as well as their basic knowledge and attitudes.

SGI youth in nine countries collected 2,840 responses between December 2012 and February 2013 from citizens in Australia, Brazil, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, South Korea, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Respondents were ages 15 to 45.

At the same Second Session, the antinuclear exhibition “Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons,” a joint initiative by Soka Gakkai International and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, opened at the United Nations Office at Geneva. The exhibition consists of forty panels covering nuclear weapons issues from twelve perspectives: humanitarian, environmental, medical, economic, human rights, energy, scientific, political, spiritual, gender, generational, and security.

Youth March in Seattle Seafair Torchlight Parade

Jul. 27, Seattle — Approximately 1 million spectators live and on TV viewed the Seattle Seafair Torchlight Parade, an annual Seattle tradition that extends back 64 years. The Pacific Northwest Zone members have been involved in the parade since the 1970s. The SGI-USA performing groups included Tall Flags, Dance, Fife and Drum Corps, and Brass Band.
Putting Beliefs into Action

Valuing People First and Foremost

Feb. 6, New York — More than 350 participants explored how to create a peace incentive that opens the path for people to overcome the deeply rooted racial divide in the United States with Dr. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, director of the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, at the SGI-USA New York Culture of Peace Resource Center.

Among those in attendance were Dr. Betty Reardon, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee who is considered the mother of peace education, and Dr. Muhammad’s father, Ozier Muhammad, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer for the New York Times.

Khalil Gibran Muhammad, director of the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, shares his views that the path to peace is fostered through education and learning, New York, Feb. 6.

“The SGI aims to apply a philosophy of humanism, rooted in respect for the sanctity of life, in the fields of peace, culture, and education. In this way, we seek to foster a robust and universal culture of peace. These three fields correspond to the Buddhist concept of the “three virtues,” those qualities inherent in humankind identified by Nichiren as most worthy of respect: a sense of responsibility, compassion, and wisdom.”

— Daisaku Ikeda

The Culture of Peace Distinguished Speaker Series provides a forum for experts in a broad range of topics, all ultimately addressing global issues of peace to foster a culture that rejects violence and addresses the root causes of conflict through dialogue. This series commenced in 2007, with lecturers focusing on one or more of the eight action areas defined by the 1999 United Nations Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of peace.

The eight action items are:

1) Fostering a culture of peace through education,
2) Promoting sustainable economic and social development,
3) Promoting respect for all human rights,
4) Ensuring equality between women and men,
5) Fostering democratic participation,
6) Advancing understanding, tolerance, and solidarity,
7) Supporting participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge, and
8) Promoting international peace and security.

Some of the events held nationwide in 2013 include:

Valuing People First and Foremost

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Among those in attendance were Dr. Betty Reardon, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee who is considered the mother of peace education, and Dr. Muhammad’s father, Ozier Muhammad, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer for the New York Times.
As a national research library devoted to the preservation of materials related to the global African diaspora, the Schomburg Center sponsors programs and events that illuminate the richness of black history and culture.

Using the analogy of an oncologist who researches the origin of cancer and treats it, Dr. Muhammad proposed the concept of a “race oncologist” to thoroughly study the origins of racism and to battle against today’s anti-intellectual culture. Dr. Muhammad said that as long as society values profit over people, humanity would not be able to advance. In the development of our modern culture, technological advances—whether the cotton gin, turn-of-the-century factories, or today’s gun culture—have sacrificed people for profit.

At the heart of Dr. Muhammad’s work is his belief that society must embrace the truth of our history to create new social contracts, and that the path to peace is fostered through “education and learning, instead of punditry.” Dr. Muhammad later outlined three actions citizens can take to establish peace incentives and embrace a modern compassionate progressivism for the betterment of all: Education, Listening, and Philanthropy.

Education: Pay attention to scholarship, not punditry; study history to better understand our contemporary culture. Listening: Be willing to see the truth of the past with honest and open understanding. Philanthropy: Invest in organizations that are working to transform society.

On Women and Human Security

May 21, Washington, D.C.—Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, a senior fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, spoke about the role women play in the peace process. She emphasized the importance of women's participation in decision-making processes and highlighted the need for gender-sensitive approaches in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, co-founder and executive director of the International Civil Society Action Network, speaks at the SGI-USA Washington, D.C. Culture Center about the role women play in the peace process, May 21.
To Develop a Culture of Peace

Abigail Disney, filmmaker, philanthropist, and activist, encourages SGI-USA youth on ways they can contribute to a culture of peace in their daily lives, New York, Jun. 3.

Ms. Disney, the granddaughter of Walt Disney Company co-founder Roy O. Disney, is known for her wide-ranging efforts toward the empowerment of women—from producing media on women’s experiences of war, to grass-roots activism that supports women in contributing to their communities. Ms. Disney offered several concrete solutions to the violence we witness on a daily basis. Prior to the lecture, Ms. Disney engaged in an hour-long dialogue with representative SGI-USA youth, who shared their personal aspirations with her and asked questions about how they, as young men and young women, can contribute to a culture of peace.

Chicago Reaffirms the Dream
Aug. 28, Chicago — Lerone Bennett Jr., the

Lerone Bennett Jr., the preeminent African American social historian, journalist, and author, delivers a talk at the SGI-USA Chicago Culture Center, Aug. 28.
preeminent African American social historian, journalist, and author, and the longtime executive editor of *Ebony* magazine and biographer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., spoke at the SGI-USA Chicago Culture Center on the 50th anniversary of the August 28, 1963, March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. As one of the country’s largest political rallies for human rights, this historic event is best known for Dr. King’s transcendent call for equality and harmony—“I Have a Dream.”

Dr. Bennett, who, incidentally, attended that peace rally, returned to the same site—this time, addressing an audience of some 500 people. Mr. Bennett noted that everywhere Dr. King went, he would tell young people to be the best that they can be. Dr. Bennett also shared that the miracle of Dr. King was that he was there, ready to respond, and that if King were here today, he would find progression and retrogression, equal parts rising hopes and despair. “King said everywhere that every man, women, and child is responsible for his or her own dream,” he said. “One day, he said America would recognize its true leaders.”

City of Santa Monica Honors International Day of Peace

Sept. 21, Santa Monica, Calif.—Commemorating the International Day of Peace, more than 200 people gathered at the SGI-USA Culture of Peace Resource Center in Santa Monica to attend Peace L.A., a lecture organized jointly by the SGI-USA and The Peace Alliance. U.S. Rep. Tony Cardenas greeted attendees and additional congratulatory messages were sent by U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman, California State Sen. Ted Lieu, and Santa Monica Mayor Pam O’Connor,
who issued a proclamation declaring September 21, 2013, International Day of Peace in the city.

The Peace L.A. event meanwhile brought together an inspirational group of speakers, including Marianne Williamson, internationally acclaimed spiritual author and lecturer; Azim Khamisa, who chose the path of forgiveness and compassion rather than revenge following the murder of his only son in a senseless, gang-related incident; Rich and Yvonne Dutra St. John, co-founders of the Challenge Day program, which aims to help youth build connection and empathy; and Bob Baskin, president of The Peace Alliance, a network of organizations focused on empowering civic engagement toward a culture of peace.

Humanizing Religion, Creating Peace

Oct. 26, Santa Monica, Calif.— One hundred people gathered at the SGI-USA Culture of Peace Resource Center in Santa Monica, Calif., to attend “Humans Humanize Religion,” a lecture organized by the Rev. Ruth Broyde Sharone, an award-winning filmmaker, journalist, and interfaith activist. Ms. Sharone explored the role of interfaith activity in building the culture of peace, with an emphasis on SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s philosophy of peace and example of interfaith leadership toward that end. Ms. Broyde Sharone has more than 30 years of experience promoting interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural education. As part of the program, Ms. Broyde Sharone facilitated a series of small-group brainstorming sessions with audience members, encouraging them to share their own ideas for building the culture of peace.

To Develop a Culture of Peace

Ruth Broyde Sharone, an award-winning filmmaker, journalist, and interfaith activist, explores the role of interfaith activity in building the culture of peace, Santa Monica, Calif., Oct. 26.
“Peace is not some abstract concept far removed from our everyday lives. It is a question of how each one of us plants and cultivates the seeds of peace in the reality of daily living, in the depths of our being, throughout our lives. I am certain that herein lies the most reliable path to lasting peace.”

—Daisaku Ikeda

Myrna Nieves (center) with her daughter, Zaadia, and granddaughter, Sofia, in Manhattan, N.Y. Ms. Nieves accomplishes her dream to author books representing successful women writers.

The Jewel of My Life
Myrna Nieves
New York

I am a teacher and a writer. Over a 10-year period, I had been trying to complete three projects. The most important was an anthology of the poetry and fiction, in both English and Spanish, of 46 Puerto Rican women writers from New York. The second book was an anthology, in Spanish, of award-winning women poets from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. The third book examined the literary work of two well-known Caribbean male writers and the role of intellectuals in Caribbean societies.

I made up my mind to persevere and to create beautiful books, but I struggled for years to find a publisher.

Meanwhile, my daily commute to work was three hours by train and bus, made more difficult by my rheumatoid arthritis. Despite great efforts, I could not find a place to live close to my job.

SGI President Ikeda had declared the 21st century the century of women, and I so wanted to contribute positively to society and be part of making that come about, especially for my daughter and granddaughter.

I realized that I needed to be grateful for a job that allowed me to teach and earn a living, and that since my rent had been low, I’d been able to save money. I understood that my environment, along with what was happening to me, was a reflection of my life. I resolved to take on my challenges with even greater energy and to develop a strong fighting spirit to win.

As I strengthened myself through my practice of Nichiren Buddhism, my environment began to change. I found a new home close to my job and, that since my rent had been low, I’d been able to save money. I understood that my environment, along with what was happening to me, was a reflection of my life. I resolved to take on my challenges with even greater energy and to develop a strong fighting spirit to win.

As I strengthened myself through my practice of Nichiren Buddhism, my environment began to change. I found a new home close to my job and, in 2012, publishers from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and New York offered to publish the three books. In addition, the school I worked for decided to financially support the publication of the anthology of Puerto Rican women writers in New York! Then, in early 2012, the International Book Fair of La Havana in Cuba invited me to the debut of the poetry book by Caribbean women writers. I didn’t think I could afford to attend, but my job decided to pay for the airfare, hotel, and all other expenses!

The SGI is an amazing organization and my practice of Nichiren Buddhism is the jewel of my life.
Growing up, Oakland Children's Hospital was my second home. As a baby, I experienced the first of 22 ear infections, which required multiple surgeries. At age 2, I developed seizures after my mom and I were broadsided in a car accident. I took seizure medication for seven years, which is difficult for a child. I eventually overcame my ear infections among other obstacles.

When my body began showing signs that I could no longer tolerate the medication, doctors recommended that I quit taking the medication or control the seizures through a lobotomy. My parents encouraged me to win over my illness. Even from a young age, I challenged myself to continue my daily practice of Nichiren Buddhism, imagining myself to be one of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, who were popular at the time, walking down a hallway and fending off hundreds of ninjas, which represented my illness. At the same time, I was being weaned off medication. Within a month, I had stopped taking it altogether and remained seizure-free.

I developed big dreams for the future, which took shape when I entered high school. I had attended public schools in Oakland until my parents enrolled me in a private school. To get there, I got up at 5 a.m., did my daily prayers, and then rode two trains, a bus, and walked a mile. It was the first time I noticed the wide disparity in resources among students. I couldn’t see a justification for that, and it became my root interest in improving the lives of others through education.

I determined to become a person who could work for social justice, and I resolved to attend a university that would enable me to create a just and peaceful society. I have learned so much from SGI President Ikeda about the true value of education, and I owe so much to my parents for always supporting me. I wanted to show my appreciation and deep gratitude to them by receiving a great education and doing my best to help others.

In 2001, I was accepted to Princeton University. Through a series of scholarships and grants, my education was fully funded for four years. Although it was a challenging academic environment, nothing seemed as daunting as the illnesses I had faced as a child.

After earning a public policy degree from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, I was accepted into University of California–Berkeley's doctoral program in education policy, where I received a master's and a doctorate in 2010. Again, my education was fully covered.

Currently, I am working as a social scientist at a third-party research and evaluation firm, which conducts research for organizations, including government institutions, foundations, and nonprofits. What’s more, I am completely healthy and now enjoy a wonderful life with my wife, Rachel.
Realizing My Lifelong Dream

Callie Lions
Culver City, Calif.

I never met my dad growing up, and I spoke to him only once by phone. He told me that he loved me, was always thinking about me, and was praying for my happiness. He told me to take care of my mom. I was 8.

My mother remarried, but it was not long before we were forced to escape from my stepfather, a drug dealer. For several years, we moved to a different state every six months to make sure he could not find us.

The chaos of my childhood left me with a sense of abandonment that made it difficult to connect with people, and I learned to deal with challenges by running away or giving up. That’s why, when I turned 17, I moved to Los Angeles, thinking that the farther I was from my family, the happier I would be. Instead, unhappiness followed me. I dropped out of high school and numbed my pain with drugs.

By age 22, I had held countless jobs and survived a succession of unhealthy relationships. Around this time, I met a woman who invited me to a Buddhist meeting, and I agreed to go. I started my practice of Nichiren Buddhism that day.

I began accomplishing many of my dreams, including getting my GED, going to college, getting married. But one dream seemed impossible—meeting my father, who had returned to Iran, his home country, following the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

I reconnected with my Persian family and asked my uncle to give my father my contact information. My father called me; afterward, I made a determination to build a relationship with him, brick by brick.

When I married Jason Lions in April 2011, we invited my Persian family, including my father. I was thrilled to think that he would walk me down the aisle, so I was crushed when his visa was denied.

I remembered the words of Nichiren Daishonin that “winter always turns to spring” and I resolved to not give up my dream of meeting my father. Jason encouraged me: If my dad could not come to America, we would go to meet him. My dad works part of each year in China, and so traveling to Shanghai became my goal.

I realized that dedicating myself to the happiness of others would be the cause for my own personal victories, so I made every effort I could to reach out to help others. Based on my Buddhist practice, I understood that transforming my own life helped me stop the negative cycle of suffering and unhappiness I had experienced growing up and allowed me to unlock limitless possibilities. I wanted to help others do the same.

In April 2012, Jason and I arrived in Shanghai to meet my father. I will never forget walking into the hotel lobby at 2 a.m. I saw a man with his back to the entrance and instantly knew it was my dad. I dropped my luggage, ran to him, and we wrapped our arms around each other. He called me his beautiful daughter. That was my victory, after 32 years, to meet my father.

Today, my dad and I often text each other and talk at least once a week. I am also closer than ever with my mother. Without her love and care, her sacrifice, I wouldn’t be here. I understand this point deeply now.
On the Stage of My Mission

Josh Joffee
New York

In 2001, I became a first-grade teacher at a New York City public school. A senior teacher told me that I could expect a “honeymoon period,” where students are on their best behavior for the first week or so of class. Instead, I lost control of my classroom on the first day by lunch.

From there, things only got worse. I couldn’t get the kids to listen to me or even to stay seated in class. I became wrapped up in worries about what other teachers and parents thought. The first week was so painful that I wanted to quit. But I realized that if I quit without challenging my situation, I would leave with regrets. I decided that, despite my limited experience, I would give it everything I had and teach until the end of the year.

I knew from my Buddhist practice that when my determination changes, everything else would begin to move in the direction I needed. I was encouraged that if I resolved to be victorious, that every nerve and fiber in my being would immediately orient itself toward my success, so I determined to win over my weaknesses.

I continued to struggle. Toward the end of the school year, the principal informed me that I would face a review from my peers and might not be asked to return. During my review, I shared enthusiastically about all that I had learned. I said that I would absolutely teach again next year, regardless of where. Surprised by my fighting spirit, the principal responded, “That’s what I wanted to hear,” and she gave me one more year to prove myself.

When the school year started, I took the initiative and went door to door, saying to other teachers with all the enthusiasm I could muster: “Hello! How are you?” Immediately, my environment began to change.

I also determined to become the best music teacher, thinking, “What can I do for the school and the students?” I came up with the idea to compose and teach children’s songs that would help them learn their multiplication tables, which often takes months or even years for some children to memorize. Other teachers have even adopted my songs in their classrooms.

I truly enjoy working and am determined to contribute meaningfully to the field of education. I know this starts with fostering as many happy children as possible.
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