

Toward a World of Dignity for All: The Triumph of the Creative Life

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At the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century, I would like to share some thoughts on the issues facing contemporary society and the most effective means of achieving a more peaceful world.

The devaluation of language

Last year, Japan was shaken by a series of shocking incidents that seemed to epitomize the pitfalls of an aging society. In late July, the mummified corpse of a man, believed to be one of Japan's oldest citizens at 111 years old, was found lying in bed in his Tokyo home where he had died some thirty years earlier. Alarmed, local governments checked on elderly residents and found that many centenarians were indeed unaccounted for. In some cases, elderly residents were still listed as alive in official records, their families having concealed their deaths in order to collect their pension payments.

The unexpected realities of a society famed for its longevity deeply disturbed the public. The phrase *muen shakai*, or "fragmented society," has been coined to describe the disintegration of social relationships that results in these incidents, which constitute a bone-chilling psychological landscape.

As the Buddhist concept of dependent origination explains, the fabric of daily life is made up of bonds that connect us with each other as well as with our environment. These incidents, however, painfully remind us of the fragility of these connections. With family and community bonds growing weaker and people becoming alienated, an increasing number of young people and older adults harbor a bleak outlook on the future.

The fragmentation of society is inextricably linked to a failure of communication, a breakdown of language. Economic hardship and the erosion of the traditional extended family are among the elements that underlie these trends, though it cannot be denied that the rapid advance of information technology has also been a major factor. The negative aspects of the information age--words becoming devalued and degraded, losing their original weight and depth, being reduced to empty signs and ciphers--are in ironic contrast to the soaring volume of information. This inevitably leads to the decay of our capacity for dialogue, the hallmark of being human.

In his well-rounded evaluation of information technology, the French scientist and essayist Albert Jacquard observes, "Information science... supplies only communication canned or frozen. It is incapable of evoking the bursts of creativity that come naturally in the course of a dialogue comprising moments of silence as well as words." [\[1\]](#)

It is true that the development of information technology presents opportunities for people to forge new connections. However, relations formed online will have no human face if they are limited to anonymous, depersonalized exchanges. Such interactions can only be inorganic and neutral, far removed from the refreshing wonder, tangible response and satisfaction that come from the effort to realize face-to-face, soul-to-soul communication.

In contrast to these developments, I would like to note the significance to the human spirit of efforts to engage in dialogue made by Soka Gakkai International (SGI) members on a global scale, particularly through the local discussion meetings that have been at the heart of our activities since the organization's inception. These interactive exchanges, conducted in thousands of locations each day, precisely mirror Jacquard's concept of "dialogue comprising moments of silence as well as words." As participants, we experience a sense of joy and fulfillment when our words reach the heart of another, and feel confused and frustrated when they fail to do so. In silence, we patiently struggle in search of better words, and are rewarded with an even greater sense of contentment when they are finally heard and evoke a response.

The multihued tapestry woven of such tireless striving for dialogue enables us to develop and enrich our minds and souls. It is a furnace tempering and training the inner life. It is the exact opposite of "frozen communication."

It is only when immersed in words and dialogue that human beings can become truly human; one cannot mature into a complete and full-fledged human being without such experiences. It is for this reason that Socrates declared in his *Phaedo* that misogyny (hatred of language) and misanthropy (hatred of human beings) spring from the same source.

I am currently conducting a serialized dialogue with Dr. Larry Hickman and Dr. Jim Garrison, both former presidents of the John Dewey Society, on the theme of Dewey and Soka Education. Dr. Hickman described SGI community centers as "the kinds of institutions that strengthen the bonds of society" and as a cradle where mature citizens, or what Dewey called "publics," are fostered. [\[2\]](#)

The SGI's efforts to engage in dialogue may represent a gradual and inconspicuous approach. But we are proud that, precisely for this reason, they have the potential to revitalize the devalued, degraded language that dominates today's world.

I am reminded here of one attempt to revitalize language and discourse. Professor Michael Sandel offers a political philosophy course at Harvard University that has become one of the most popular in the school's history. These are not one-way lectures; he addresses familiar contemporary issues by asking the students' opinions about the right course of action. The lectures are thus in the form of an impassioned and interactive exchange of ideas.

The format, which has been likened to a Socratic dialogue, became widely known in Japan, and has been repeatedly taken up by the media. Professor Sandel visited Japan last year to bring "Justice with Michael Sandel" to Japanese audiences, attracting great public attention. His book *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* remains a best seller, an unusual phenomenon for a book of its kind.

The question of justice is indeed a vexing one. I explored this question in last year's peace proposal with reference to an episode from Victor Hugo's (1802-85) *Les Misérables*, in which Bishop Myriel and a dying Jacobinist are engaged in a heated argument over their respective understandings of justice.

Such questions must always be treated with great respect and care. Otherwise, competing claims of justice will escalate without cease, causing the very concept of justice to become void of meaning. It was largely because of unrestrained competition among different theories of justice that the twentieth century was an age of massive bloodshed, warfare and violent revolution. The enormous popularity of an attempt like Professor Sandel's course is perhaps a reflection of an acutely felt need for self-examination.

Primordial questions

I would like now to refer to the works of the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), which I loved in my youth, in an attempt to further clarify Buddhist humanism as envisioned by the SGI.

There are few who have analyzed the devaluation of words--the vulnerability of language to abuse--as incisively as Bergson. And few have sounded such a pioneering and comprehensive alarm against Western philosophy's unbalanced tendency to view everything through the lens of language and logic. Bergson's philosophy remained always focused on the fundamental principle that it must serve the needs of people. As the French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903-85) put it: "Bergson restored philosophy, which had been turned on its head." [\[3\]](#)

I remember fondly when I was invited to my first Soka Gakkai discussion meeting in the summer of 1947. I was nineteen, and when my friend told me it was a meeting about "the philosophy of life," my first reaction was, "Is it about Bergson?"

Bergson was guided by the axiom *primum vivere* (first, live!) and described his motivation for philosophy as follows:

Whence are we? What are we? Whither tend we? These are the vital questions, which immediately present themselves when we give ourselves up to philosophical reflexion without regard to philosophical systems. [\[4\]](#)

Indeed, these are the primordial questions that we all have to face at some point if we strive to live better lives. In contrast, many philosophical systems have focused on the minutiae of argumentation to a degree that they lose sight of these most fundamental questions. This is the lesson taught in the Buddhist parable of the man shot by a poisonous arrow.

Bergson always maintained a humanistic stance regarding the purpose philosophy should serve. I think that the same attitude must also be applied to science and religion.

At that first discussion meeting, I met the man who was to become my mentor in life, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900-58). As the evening progressed, the emotions inspired in me by this encounter took the form of an impromptu poem:

Traveler,
From whence do you come?
And whither do you go?

The moon has set,
But the sun has not yet risen.
In the chaos of darkness before the dawn
Seeking the light,
I advance
To dispel the dark clouds from my mind
To find a great tree unbowed by the tempest
I emerge from the earth.

At the time, I was not consciously referencing Bergson. But Bergson's philosophy returns again and again to the primordial questions of direction and purpose, seeing this as a necessary condition for being human, and I was perhaps more influenced by him than I knew.

Bergson's philosophy is not stereotypically "philosophical," and we see this most clearly in his views on religion, which are remarkably resonant with Buddhist humanism. (This is to some degree serendipitous, as careful examination reveals Bergson's understanding of Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism in particular, to have been incomplete.)

The humanism upheld by the SGI is rooted in the teachings of the thirteenth-century Japanese Buddhist priest Nichiren (1222-82), who wrote: "The Law does not spread by itself: because people propagate it, both people and the Law are respectable." [5] Thus, while we seek "to rely on the Law, not on the person," [6] it is through the character and example of people that the Law is taught and spreads. In Buddhism, the Law (Dharma) is not something static. It is people, practicing and embodying it in their lives, who enable it to vigorously pulsate in reality.

The parable of the poisonous arrow

One day, a new follower of the Buddha asked him a series of metaphysical questions. The Buddha replied in the form of a parable about a man who had been shot by a poisonous arrow. Although the man's friends and relatives tried to get a surgeon to heal him, he refused to have the arrow pulled out until he knew who had shot it, his caste, name, height, where he came from, what kind of bow had been used, what it was made of, who feathered the arrow and with what kind of feather. Before all these answers could be found, the man had died. The Buddha employed this parable to demonstrate the meaninglessness of being obsessed with abstract speculation.

Likewise, Bergson's perspective on time and life describes a dynamism whose movements are inextricable from the human will. He called this dynamism, in the order of his writings, "duration" (*Time and Free Will*), "contraction" (*Matter and Memory*), "vital impulse" (*Creative Evolution*) and, finally, "the impetus of love" within what he termed "dynamic religion" (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*).

In the first three of these formulations, he was tracing the evolution of people as biological beings. But "the impetus of love" represents a leap to a higher plane, that of a genuinely human character. Bergson argues that what is needed is the emergence of an individual who is inspired by a mystic experience that has been fully integrated into the core of his or her being. Such an individual makes it possible for the human spirit to emerge from the confines of a closed and private world and soar into a love of humanity, a sense of community embracing the whole of humankind.

The mystic experience he refers to is quite different from the frenzy of ecstatic possession. Rather, it indicates emotions that are unleashed when the workings of intellect have run their full course. It is "the emotion which drives the intelligence forward in spite of obstacles," [7] "an affective stirring of the soul ... an upheaval of the depths...." [8]

Bergson describes a person who embodies this as a religious creator or moral hero--a spiritual giant "whose action, itself intense, is also capable of intensifying the action of other men, and, itself generous, can kindle fires on the hearths of generosity." [9] The task of this spiritual giant is "to effect a radical transformation of humanity by setting an example. The object could only be attained if there existed in the end what should theoretically have existed in the beginning, a divine humanity." [10]

Such a person exerts a powerful, magnetic appeal, which attracts and draws to it the souls of those who are inspired to emulate; through their interaction, magnificent new horizons of the spirit open up. This process is the most effective form--indeed, it may be the only effective form--of spiritual transmission or heritage, whether of religious teachings or

in the realm of ideas. Thus Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) stated that Gandhi's (1869-1948) arrival stripped the "black pall of fear" from the hearts of the Indian people and "upset many things but most of all the working of people's minds." [11]

To me, my mentor Josei Toda was such a spiritual giant and unmatched exemplar. While in prison during World War II for his opposition to the Japanese militarist government, he came to the profound realization that what the scriptures refer to as a Buddha is nothing other than life itself. This realization became for Toda what Bergson describes as the "creative impetus," [12] and following his release from prison he devoted his remaining years to sharing the teachings of Buddhism. It is my pride and incomparable treasure to have met him and devoted myself to supporting his goals, inheriting his spirit as a disciple.

This is why I continue to stress the crucial importance of the relationship between mentor and disciple. And it is because I am convinced of the power of that spiritual transmission that the serialized novel *The Human Revolution*, which I have been working on for more than four decades, revolves around the theme: "A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and, further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind."

Creative life

Bergson was wary of the kind of casual, unthinking faith in words that has caused the devaluation and degradation of language we see today: "My initiation into the true philosophical method began the moment I threw overboard verbal solutions, having found in the inner life an important field of experiment." [13]

The Treatise on the Middle Way by Nagarjuna

Nagarjuna was a Mahayana Buddhist thinker from southern India who wrote many important treatises on Mahayana sutras and laid a theoretical foundation of Mahayana philosophy. In *The Treatise on the Middle Way*, he explained that phenomena have no fixed or independent nature and cannot be defined by either existence or nonexistence. This true nature of things is known as non-substantiality, also translated as latency. The concept of non-substantiality originated in connection to that of dependent origination, which clarifies that no beings or phenomena exist on their own; they exist or occur because of their relationship with other beings and phenomena, and nothing can exist independent of other things or arise in isolation.

This statement is reminiscent of the Buddhist concept of *muki*, which refers to the resonant silence the Buddha consistently maintained regarding abstract metaphysical questions. This stance is recapitulated in a passage from *The Treatise on the Middle Way* by Nagarjuna, the great Buddhist thinker of the second or third century who described the key concept of dependent origination, the mutual interdependence by which all things come into being and are sustained, in these terms: "it transcends the vanity of words and is the ultimate bliss." [14]

To Bergson, the field of experiment or genuine reality is "mobile, or rather movement itself." [15] The flow of ceaseless change that characterizes the creative life continues without end or pause. To perceive that movement, it is essential to maintain what Japanese literary critic Hideo Kobayashi (1902-83) termed the "suppleness of spirit" [16] that allows us to "exercise caution with regard to applying known words when describing the unknown." [17] Kobayashi was deeply versed in Bergson's philosophy and we had a wide-ranging discussion when we met in 1971.

Words often interrupt the flow of ceaseless change, imposing rigidity and leading us to confuse what are "but snapshots of change" [18] for existence itself. This tendency to misapprehend time as if it had the same qualities as

space is the target of Bergson's criticism. Thus, he insistently refuted the paradoxes of Zeno (such as the arrow paradox and the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise).

When fluid realities are immobilized in language, this leads to the twin traps of overconfidence and credulity, which are in turn the breeding grounds for intellectual lethargy, stereotyping, prejudice and dogma. And this can lure people toward facile conclusions, spiritual weakness and indolence. The triumphalist conceptions of justice that I mentioned earlier, whether ideological, religious or nationalistic, are symptomatic of this.

Many years ago, meeting with students, I pointed out that ideological ways of thinking will always entail a degree of rigid categorization. In contrast, the Buddhist philosophy of the Soka Gakkai does not require uniformity. Rather, it focuses on understanding the actual conditions of the times and, from there, extrapolating the optimal choices. Rigid categorization is synonymous with stereotyping, a misconception of the mobile as static space.

Bergson's philosophy, or rather disposition, is diametrically opposed to any kind of passive acceptance of human weakness or inertia. "Tension, concentration, these are the words by which I characterized a method

Paradoxes of Zeno

Zeno of Elea (ca 430 BCE – ca 490 BCE) was a Greek philosopher best known for his paradoxes. In the paradox of the arrow, Zeno argues that time is merely composed of moments, and an arrow in flight occupies an equal space in any one moment and therefore cannot be moving because each moment is nothing but a snapshot of the entire period of its motion. In the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, the two are in a race, and the former allows the latter a head start of a certain distance. Zeno states that it is impossible for Achilles to overtake the tortoise since he must first reach the point where the tortoise started, and in the time he takes to do so the tortoise will have moved a little forward; in this manner, the tortoise will always hold a lead. These paradoxes were devised to show that motion is nothing but an illusion.

which required of the mind, for each new problem, a completely new effort." [19] Eschewing indolence and stagnation, Bergson continues to inspire us to look forward and to live better and stronger lives: "Thus I repudiate facility. I recommend a certain manner of thinking which courts difficulty; I value effort above everything." [20]

Tension, concentration, effort--such mental tautness is essential in developing the dynamic vision that enables us to reject rigid thinking and grasp the constantly changing conditions of the times. Bergson defines this tautness as "deep-rooted mental healthiness" expressed in "a bent for action, the faculty of adapting and re-adapting oneself to circumstances, in firmness combined with suppleness, in the prophetic discernment of what is possible and what is not, in a spirit of simplicity which triumphs over complications." [21]

Goethe's *Faust*

The best-known work by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), *Faust* is a tragic play considered to be one of the pinnacles of German literature. Its protagonist, Heinrich Faust, is a scholar with an inexhaustible thirst for knowledge, for learning everything that can be known. He is eventually frustrated with the vanity of scientific, literary and religious learning and ponders suicide. The devil (Mephistopheles) then appears, and they make a pact: The devil will grant all Faust desires in this world, in return for which Faust must serve the devil in Hell. *Faust* was written during the Industrial Revolution, and Goethe was one of the earliest thinkers to explore its profound implications for the lives and minds of people.

These qualities deeply resonate with the spirit of striving to strengthen and brace oneself found in a person of courage, to which I referred in my proposal last year. People of courage with the spirit of ceaseless striving know no limits. The essence of Buddhist humanism lies in the insistence that human beings exercise their spiritual capacities to the limit, or more accurately, without limit, coupled with an unshakable belief in their ability to do this. In this way, faith in humanity is absolutely central to Buddhism.

The knowledge that one is practicing the fundamental Law that encompasses the universe is a source of enduring pride and self-confidence. As such, it should never be confused with the arrogance and unrestrained desire of modern man portrayed, for example, by Goethe's Faust.

Such pride and self-confidence are tempered by a sense of responsibility and self-discipline, the determination to uphold the principle that religion--which is vital in the formation of human character--must always serve the needs of real people, never those of religious institutions. As Jules Michelet (1798-1874) maintained: "Religion is comprised within the realm of spiritual activity; spiritual

activity is not contained within religion." [22]

This distinction--between religion that serves the needs of people and that which demands people serve its needs--is crucial. When this line is crossed, religion can descend into passive compliance, leaving us vulnerable to the impulses of human weakness, ugliness, stupidity and lethargy.

The members of the SGI will always remain committed to serving people's needs by inspiring them to challenge themselves and tap the infinite potential they innately possess. This process of developing and applying our spiritual capacities and always treating the current moment as a new opportunity for growth is open-ended. It is a forward-looking orientation that exhorts us always to put humanism into action. It takes concrete form as the practice of the bodhisattva way--the quest to create joy that is shared by oneself and others amid the realities of everyday life.

An expansive future imbued with boundless energy, hope, courage and wisdom opens before us when we respond to the call to develop our infinite human potential. A courageous person who insists on advancing despite adversity and setbacks will never fail to unleash the essential creativity of life, the triumphant inner state that Buddhism describes as "the supreme joy of all joys." [23]

The inexhaustible hope expressed in Buddhist humanism and Bergson's "empirical optimism" [24] arise from the same root. Bergson's confidence in the limitless possibilities of the world of the spirit is expressed in this passage: "[T]hanks to it [effort], one has drawn out from the self more than it had already," and, as a result, "we are raised above ourselves." [25]

Such effort will ultimately arrive at joy, which he describes as follows: "[J]oy always announces that life has succeeded, gained ground, conquered. All great joy has a triumphant note. ... [W]e find that wherever there is joy, there is creation; the richer the creation, the deeper the joy." [26]

A new humanity

With his gaze directed at the infinite, Bergson addressed with boldness and care the ultimate problem of death, which has from the primeval past awakened people to their finitude and the need for religion. His viewpoint differed from the traditional Christian worldview, which saw the afterlife as God's domain: "If there be a beyond for conscious beings, I cannot see why we should not be able to discover the means to explore it." [27] This statement may also be read as pointing to the limitless expanse of the spirit that Jankélévitch referred to as "deification of the human." [28]

Bergson saw this pursuit not as the privilege of a special few, but as the path toward self-perfection accessible to all people through the guidance of a spiritual giant. To him, the goal of human life lies in the work of creation, something

to which anyone can aspire at any moment: "creation of self by self, the growing of the personality by an effort which draws much from little, something from nothing, and adds unceasingly to whatever wealth the world contains." [29] This is remarkably consonant with the Buddhist emphasis on striving for perfection and the underlying faith that the potential for ultimate enlightenment and wisdom is possessed equally by all people: "all living beings can attain the Buddha way." [30]

The pursuit of this infinite potential, however, is an empirical quest that must be undertaken with utmost circumspection if one is to avoid the self-obsessed arrogance of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's (1821-81) "man-god." As Bergson states: "[I]f there really is a problem of the soul, in terms of experience it must be posited, and in terms of experience it must be progressively, and always partially, solved." [31]

This is comparable to the Buddhist emphasis on the world of experience, the need to substantiate any assertion of religious truth with documentary, theoretical and actual proof. I am reminded of the words of my mentor, who was deeply versed in mathematics: "The more science advances, the more it proves the validity of the teachings of Buddhism."

Even as he strove to catch glimpses of the eternity of life, Bergson refused to formulate this in dogmatic terms. Buddhism, for its part, approaches life as an unbroken continuity from the present life to a future one, seeing no separation between life and that which precedes birth, nor that which follows death. The Chinese Buddhist teacher T'ien-t'ai (538-97) described this as the "arising" and "extinction" of an intrinsic nature (Jpn. *hossho*). In other words, Buddhism sees life as the manifest form of this intrinsic nature and death as its withdrawal into latency within the constant flux of dependent origination. I referred to this principle in a lecture I delivered at Harvard University in September 1993, where I spoke of the Buddhist ideal of being able to experience both life and death with equal delight, to be equally "happy and at ease" with both.

It is for this reason that I feel a strong affinity with Bergson's optimism and understanding of the nature of life. It is essential to maintain an empirical approach such as Bergson's in order to prevent religion from falling into the trap of dogma. This was something I sensed intensely in the discussions I conducted in the early 1970s with the British historian Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975).

Bergsonian optimism, with its faith in and pursuit of the infinite potential of the spirit, aims for openness--of the soul, society, morality and of an open and dynamic religion--culminating in a love of humanity. In stark contrast, the contemporary world is a confined and closed-off spiritual space. Weighed down upon by a stifling pessimism, the human spirit shrinks and atrophies toward insignificance; in this oppressive atmosphere, the goal of raising oneself above oneself becomes ever more distant.

It is precisely because it stands in polar opposition to contemporary trends, whose signs and symptoms are everywhere, that Bergson's approach is of such significance. His optimism can supply a catalyzing vision of a hopeful future, redirecting the course of modern civilization from its present drift. This is the aim shared by all those who uphold the ideals of humanism; whether it can be achieved depends ultimately upon the depth of our awareness and sense of responsibility.

Bergson concludes *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* as follows:

Mankind lies groaning, half-crushed beneath the weight of its own progress. Men do not sufficiently realize that their future is in their own hands. Theirs is the task of determining first of all whether they want to go on living or not. Theirs the responsibility, then, for deciding if they want merely to live, or intend to make just the extra effort required for fulfilling, even on their refractory planet, the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods. [32]

The somewhat puzzling identification of the universe as a machine for the making of gods points to the full blossoming of the creative life, of which, in the process of evolution, only humans have become capable. The impetus of love expands to embrace the whole of humanity. People who have undergone a radical transformation, inspired and empowered by a spiritual giant whose soul has been stirred to its depths by a mystic experience, can testify to the power of this process.

It was with such thoughts in mind that Rector Victor Antonovich Sadovnichy of Moscow State University and I decided to entitle our dialogue *Toward a New Humanity and a New World*. For only a new humanity is capable of taking the

Dostoyevsky's man-god

Russian writer Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky (1821-81) is known for his literary exploration of human psychology. His 1872 novel *The Devils* is set against the backdrop of the political chaos of Imperial Russia. Kirilov, an atheist, is one of the five primary ideological characters. He asserts that God does not exist and therefore all is good and possible. He believes that by killing himself without reason he will be able to demonstrate his self-will over life and death, becoming a "man-god." He thinks that his suicide will become an example of human freedom transcending religion, and convince everyone of their self-will and potential as new gods.

lead in this great endeavor. These are individuals who refuse to be reduced to mere components of social mechanisms or institutions, creative people firmly confident of their limitless potential, people guided by their free will as they ceaselessly extend their personal horizons through effort and perseverance.

To the extent that we become obsessively focused on external factors such as social systems and structures, people will be driven from their rightful role as the shapers and protagonists of history. The twentieth century bears bitter witness to this truth.

In calling for us not only to choose to live but to choose to live well, Bergson is urging the birth of a new humanity. His words resonate with those of another great man of wisdom, C. G. Jung (1875-1961): "[I]f the individual is not truly regenerated in spirit, society cannot be either ... the salvation of the world consists in the salvation of the individual soul." [\[33\]](#)

Determined to walk the authentic path of justice mapped out by the world's great philosophers and thinkers, we of the SGI have made constant efforts to build a movement of humanism on a global scale. This is an achievement without parallel in the history of Buddhism. I am confident that our movement will continue to develop, shining with ever greater brilliance and drawing support from people of good will, as we together work to change the course of civilization.

The power of civil society

On the basis of this faith in the unlimited creative capacities of human beings, I would like next to explore some of the concrete issues that we must tackle for the sake of the future we will share on this planet.

Following the end of the Cold War, advancing global economic integration brought such issues as poverty and environmental destruction to the fore and heightened demand for international responses. But in the first years of the twenty-first century, the world has experienced a number of profound shocks--from the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, to the recent financial crisis--and attempts to engage with these issues have not only slowed, but at times appear to have regressed.

The degree of achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2000 is symbolic of this. Every year, more than eight million people die as a direct or indirect result of extreme poverty, and the lives and dignity of more than a billion are subject to daily threats and affronts. [\[34\]](#)

The MDGs were adopted as a means of ameliorating such conditions. But with the deceleration of the global economy, the pace of international assistance has slowed. With the important exception of the goal of halving the number of people living in extreme poverty, the prospects for achieving the other MDGs by 2015 are highly questionable.

In a similar way, efforts to slow global warming would appear to have hit a wall. The sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Mexico in December of last year ended without adopting a framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions beyond 2012, the end of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

The response to both these pressing issues is clearly inadequate, and this would appear to reflect inherent limitations in intergovernmental negotiation and deliberative processes. Even when there is widespread recognition of a problem, until it is seen as threatening the vital interests of a society, it is hard to muster the political will to introduce concrete measures either independently or in coordination with other states.

If we remember that the policy responses and aid that are so frequently postponed and delayed in fact represent a lifeline for many people, a necessary safety net for future generations, such a lack of action cannot be justified. It is therefore vital to ensure that responses to global challenges are not overshadowed by the clash of national interests. We must keep a clear focus on those whose lives are directly impacted by these threats.

It is no longer enough simply to sound the warning: the time has come for action and solidarity.

In achieving this reorientation, the United Nations can play a pivotal role, an awareness reflected in the theme chosen for the 2010 General Assembly debate: the central role of the UN in global governance.

This echoes the approach of Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-61), the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, who sought ways to enable the UN to take the initiative in response to crises not limited to its role as a site for reconciling competing national interests. In doing so, Hammarskjöld referenced Bergson's concept of creative evolution and urged that the UN as "a living organism" [\[35\]](#) needed to be able to grow continuously to respond to the changing demands placed on it. His vision remains valid to this day.

Fulfilling Hammarskjöld's vision requires, I believe, a strengthening and solidifying of the UN's collaborative endeavors with civil society, and in particular with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This is because the vital energy of the UN as an institution resides, to quote the Preamble of its Charter, in "We, the peoples...", and most particularly in each individual inhabitant of Earth.

In this regard, I think it is worth citing the new vision of leadership that was at the heart of the proposals put forward in the Final Report of the Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood*, on the UN's fiftieth anniversary in 1995: "By leadership we do not mean only people at the highest national and international levels. We mean enlightenment at every level." [\[36\]](#)

The commission called for "courageous, long-term leadership" [\[37\]](#) from NGOs, small-scale community groups, the private sector and business, scientists and specialists, the worlds of education, the media and religion.

Where there is an absence of international political leadership, civil society should step in to fill the gap, providing the energy and vision needed to move the world in a new and better direction. I believe that we need a paradigm shift, a recognition that the essence of leadership is found in ordinary individuals--whoever and wherever they may be--fulfilling the role that is theirs alone to play. This in turn is the fulcrum which, in the words of Archimedes, enables us to move the world.

When each of us makes our irreplaceable contribution and we develop multiple overlapping networks of solidarity, only then will we have truly learned the bitter lessons of the twentieth century, an age deeply stained by violence and war. Only then can we begin to construct a new era founded on respect for the inherent value and dignity of life.

Based on this conviction, I would like to explore the means by which the enlightened actions and solidarity of ordinary people can, through initiatives centered on the United Nations, work for the realization of two pressing challenges of the second decade of this century: prohibiting and abolishing nuclear weapons and building a culture of human rights.

Toward a world free of nuclear weapons

The 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), held last May, was propelled by an urgent determination not to repeat the experience of the 2005 Review Conference, which was deeply divided and ended without reaching any substantive agreement.

The Final Document issued by the 2010 Conference contained three points that I consider to be of particular importance. It reaffirmed that the only absolute guarantee against the threat posed by nuclear weapons is their total elimination; it sought compliance with international humanitarian law in light of the catastrophic consequences of any use of nuclear weapons; and it called for special efforts to establish the necessary framework to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons, making reference in this regard to a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC).

These are all ideas that have long been stressed by the survivors of the atomic bombings and by NGOs. It is thus genuinely significant that they should be so clearly stated in an official document issued by the parties to the NPT, which embraces the largest number of signatories of any treaty concerning nuclear weapons. It is crucial that we make the consensus reflected in this document a foundation for collaborative initiatives toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

Here I would like to propose three challenges to be undertaken in the name of "We, the peoples...."

1. Recognizing that abolition is the only absolute guarantee against the threat of nuclear weapons, we will establish the structures through which states possessing nuclear weapons can rapidly advance disarmament toward the goal of complete elimination.
2. Finding impermissible any action on the part of any country that runs counter to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, we will establish the means to prohibit and prevent all nuclear weapons development or modernization.
3. Based on the awareness that nuclear weapons are the ultimate inhumane weapon capable of bringing catastrophic consequences to humankind, we will establish at an early date a Nuclear Weapons Convention comprehensively prohibiting them.

Each of these three challenges requires a change in attitude on the part of states. Even more crucially, they require the passionate commitment and action of awakened citizens who alone can create a new direction and current in history.

Regarding the first, the promotion of nuclear disarmament toward the goal of complete elimination, it is necessary to establish an ongoing framework for dialogue and negotiation at the UN with the participation of all states possessing nuclear weapons.

The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) that was signed by Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev last April has now been ratified by the legislatures of both countries and awaits only the formal exchange of the instruments of ratification. While this treaty only effects a limited reduction for specific types of weapons, the fact is that between them the United States and Russia possess more than 90 percent of the world's stockpiles of nuclear weapons, and such actions to fulfill their disarmament responsibilities should be applauded. The Obama Administration's stated intention to follow this up with negotiations for the reduction of short-range tactical nuclear weapons is a welcome development.

I would further hope that, in line with the view expressed in the Preamble to the New START, this process will be expanded into a multilateral approach that will include all states possessing nuclear weapons. At the same time, I urge a fundamental revision of the framework for nuclear disarmament, such that the goal of the multilateral negotiations is not confined to arms control but aims toward a clear vision of nuclear weapons abolition.

In order to create an environment for such negotiations, it is necessary to thoroughly challenge the theory of deterrence upon which nuclear weapons possession is predicated: the assumption that the maintenance of security is realized through a balance of terror. To this end, it is necessary to disentangle the association of nuclear weapons possession and security, and to reaffirm the simple truth that the real desire of states and their citizens is security, not nuclear weapons.

When he visited Hiroshima last August, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon praised the success of the 2009 UN Security Council Summit on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. He called for the regular convening of such summits, starting this year, as a means of generating political momentum toward a world without nuclear weapons.

States that have relinquished their nuclear weapons

Four countries have possessed nuclear weapons but have chosen to relinquish them. South Africa had accumulated six nuclear weapons by the 1980s, but then disassembled them in 1989, the first nation in the world to voluntarily give up its nuclear weapons. In 1991, South Africa signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and the government banned any further development, manufacture, marketing, import or export of nuclear weapons or explosives, as required by the NPT.

Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus together had more than 4,000 nuclear weapons on their territories when the Soviet Union dissolved. The weapons were all transferred back to Russia by 1996. Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus have since signed the NPT. In addition, Libya, Argentina and Brazil all had programs to develop nuclear weapons which they abandoned before completion.

Over the years, I have also called for the regular holding of such summits and therefore offer my full support to the Secretary-General's proposal. In addition, I would like to propose that these summits not be limited to the members of the Security Council, but that participation be opened to states that have chosen to relinquish their nuclear weapons or programs, and that specialists in the field and representatives of NGOs should have the opportunity to voice their opinions.

The judges participating in the 1996 International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons unanimously concurred that Article VI of the NPT obligates nuclear-weapon states not only to engage in nuclear disarmament negotiations in good faith, but to achieve nuclear disarmament as a result of such negotiations.

Former President of the ICJ Mohammed Bedjaoui, who presided over the deliberations for the Advisory Opinion, has emphasized that all states parties to the NPT have the right to demand that the nuclear-weapon states fulfill their obligations and may invoke Article VI of the NPT in the event such obligations are not fulfilled.

During the proceedings, the ICJ was presented with some four million "declarations of public conscience" as affirmation of the general public's condemnation of nuclear weapons. As this shows, any process or deliberation that deals directly with the fate of humankind must be earnestly attentive to the

voices of civil society.

I would urge that the elements I have discussed here be incorporated into regularized Security Council summits, and that such summits work to develop concrete means and paths toward a world free of nuclear weapons, with the year 2015 as the immediate goal. I advocate consideration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the host cities for the 2015 NPT Review Conference. This conference should bring together national leaders as well as representatives of global civil society in order to have the character of a nuclear abolition summit marking the effective end of the nuclear era.

In April last year, a meeting of the InterAction Council of former heads of state and government was held in Hiroshima. Participants visited the Peace Memorial Museum and heard the testimony of A-bomb survivors. They issued a communiqué that stressed the importance of world leaders, especially those of nuclear-weapon states, visiting Hiroshima. This is an idea that I have been stressing for many years: if government leaders together witnessed the realities of the atomic bombings, this would most certainly solidify their resolve to free the world of nuclear weapons.

Ending nuclear tests

Regarding the second challenge, prohibiting and preventing nuclear weapons development, the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which prohibits all nuclear test explosions, is the prime focus. Since the CTBT was adopted in 1996, it has been signed by 182 countries and ratified by 153. The conditions for it to become legally binding as international law, however, are stringent: all 44 countries that possess nuclear technology must ratify, and this has yet to happen.

I believe that non-nuclear-weapon states and civil society organizations should work together to encourage those countries that have yet to do so to ratify. In addition to the prohibition of nuclear testing, the entry into force of the CTBT will be significant in the following three contexts:

1. By covering those countries that are not states parties to the NPT regime, it will effectively be universal;
2. It will express the will of international society to prohibit nuclear testing in perpetuity, thus strengthening the psychological foundations for nuclear weapons abolition; and
3. The existence of a global system of compliance monitoring, verification and inspection, administered by a treaty organization (the CTBTO), will provide an institutional model for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. It will thus help make an NWC a more realistic prospect in people's minds.

Following Indonesia's indication of its readiness to ratify the CTBT, eight "Annex 2" countries have yet to sign and/or ratify. In order to secure the necessary assent of these remaining states, the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in New York in 2009 unanimously adopted a declaration encouraging bilateral, regional and multilateral initiatives. Building on this, I would like to propose that interlocking agreements of mutual obligation be established to secure the signing and/or ratification of the outstanding states within a fixed period. The UN could play an important role in mediating such agreements.

This could take the form, for example, of a bilateral commitment to sign by India and Pakistan and a tripartite agreement for mutual ratification by Egypt, Iran and Israel. In Northeast Asia, negotiations could be pursued through the Six-Party Talks for an agreement by which the United States and China ratify the CTBT, a zone is established in which all parties pledge the non-use of nuclear weapons, and North Korea abandons its nuclear weapons programs and signs and ratifies the CTBT.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula heightened greatly last year with the sinking of the South Korean warship *Cheonan* and the North Korean shelling of Yeonpyeong Island. There is an urgent need to use all available diplomatic means to defuse the situation. But the long-term peace and stability of the region clearly hinges on an early resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue.

In a similar manner, enduring regional stability in the Middle East is unthinkable without denuclearization. It is, however, far from certain that the international conference on establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East agreed to by last year's NPT Review Conference will in fact be held as scheduled in 2012, much less that it will produce a successful outcome. This underlines the need for further efforts to create the conditions for dialogue.

One preparatory step for this conference could be informal talks, for example toward a moratorium on any expansion of stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction including nuclear weapons. The important thing is to sit at the same table and begin discussions, because this will provide the opportunity to develop a greater awareness of how one's own policies present or are perceived by others as a threat.

Recent tensions on the Korean Peninsula

On March 26, 2010, the *Cheonan*, a 1,200-ton South Korean warship with 104 crew members onboard, sank in waters off the west coast of the Korean Peninsula killing 46 seamen, after an explosion that destroyed the rear part of the ship. Although the cause of the explosion remains unknown, a multinational team of investigators reported that there was a high possibility the *Cheonan* was sunk by a North Korean torpedo. North Korea denied responsibility for the attack.

On November 23, four South Koreans were killed and 19 injured when the North fired artillery shells onto the South Korean-held island of Yeonpyeong near the two countries' maritime border off the west coast of the peninsula. South Korea retaliated with artillery fire, making it the first artillery battle between the two countries since the 1970s.

The obstacles on the path to a Middle East conference make the support of the international community all the more vital. I would particularly hope that Japan, as a country that has experienced the use of nuclear weapons in war and which has actively worked for the entry into force of the CTBT, will push for the denuclearization of Northeast Asia and toward creating conditions propitious to negotiations for a Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction including nuclear weapons.

For its part, the SGI will continue to organize showings of our exhibition "From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit" in different venues around the world, including the Middle East, in order to build international public opinion for the early entry into force of the CTBT and the expansion of nuclear-weapon-free zones.

In this context, I call for the adoption of agreements prohibiting the development of new nuclear weapons or their qualitative enhancement. This issue was initially brought up as a focus of debate at last year's NPT Review Conference, but then shunted aside because of opposition by the nuclear-weapon states. The refusal to address this issue, however, threatens to undermine the fundamentals of both the NPT and CTBT regimes.

The United States has expanded its budget for the modernization of nuclear weapons and facilities and in September 2010 resumed subcritical nuclear testing. Such actions not only complicate prospects for the CTBT, but run counter to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

In this connection, I would urge that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council follow up on their 2008 joint declaration to maintain their moratorium on nuclear testing by declaring the cessation of any and all modernization of nuclear weapons.

Outlawing nuclear weapons

The third undertaking I would like to discuss is the establishment of a Nuclear Weapons Convention comprehensively outlawing these weapons of indiscriminate slaughter. This would in fact be a kind of world law--drawing its ultimate authority and legitimacy from the expressed will of the world's peoples.

The Final Declaration of last year's NPT Review Conference "expresses ... deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and reaffirms the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law." [\[38\]](#)

This statement builds on the points made in the 1996 ICJ Advisory Opinion, and is groundbreaking in that it suggests the ultimate illegality of nuclear weapons. This is because the uncompromising application of the principle that inhumane weapons may never be used will eliminate the possibility of considering nuclear weapons as somehow equivalent to other weapons, to be used as circumstances require. This exceptional nature of nuclear weapons was also stressed by the ICJ, whose Advisory Opinion requires that we "take account of the unique characteristics of nuclear weapons, and in particular their destructive capacity, their capacity to cause untold human suffering, and their ability to cause damage to generations to come." [\[39\]](#)

These weapons are fundamentally incompatible with the principles of international humanitarian law, whoever possesses them or whatever reasons they give for doing so. This is the awareness we must foster and spread.

More than half a century ago, in 1957, my mentor and second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda made a declaration in which he condemned nuclear weapons as an absolute evil and called for their prohibition. In doing so, he was seeking to undermine the logic of any argument that would justify their possession or use. Toda recognized that it is ordinary people who are the ultimate victims of war, and in this sense the distinction between friend and enemy nation is meaningless.

As noted, Toda had fearlessly resisted Japanese militarism during World War II. He stated that his deepest desire was "to see the word 'misery' no longer used to describe the world, any country, any individual." [\[40\]](#) He understood that war waged using nuclear weapons would inevitably wreak unspeakable havoc and misery on the citizens of every country, everywhere in the world.

He made his declaration at the height of the Cold War, a time when the world was sharply divided into East/West blocs. At the time, any critique of nuclear weapons tended to be focused solely on those in the possession of the opposing bloc. Toda, however, saw beyond these differences of ideology and political system. As a Buddhist, he remained unflinchingly committed to the universal value of the dignity of life and condemned nuclear weapons as an affront to humanity's inalienable right to live.

Today we stand at a watershed moment. We have before us the potential to bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end through a treaty that comprehensively bans them. We must not allow this historic opportunity to pass.

It is truly significant that in its Final Statement the NPT Review Conference made a reference, albeit indirect, to an NWC. This creates an opening that should be pursued in order to create a world free from nuclear weapons. To that end, I would like to propose the early convening of an NWC preparatory conference through the joint initiative of states and NGOs that seek the prohibition of nuclear weapons. Even if governmental participation is limited at first, priority should be given to creating a venue for treaty negotiations. The work of the conference should focus on developing a clear prohibitory norm that acknowledges no exceptions and a clear timeline for implementation. Through repeated convening of this conference and as more governments and NGOs join in, the way will be opened for the early start of official negotiations.

Last year, Malaysia and Costa Rica put forward a resolution in the UN General Assembly seeking the start of negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention. This passed with the support of more than 130 states, including China, India, Pakistan and North Korea. These signs of an emerging consensus, however, are not in themselves enough to bring an NWC to fruition and realize the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

If global civil society can raise its voice and increase its presence, bringing about a tectonic shift in international public opinion, this would be a force that no government could ignore. It is necessary to begin a process that will crystallize the will of the world's people in a concrete and binding legal form. This is the clear goal toward which we should move.

The law that would emerge from such a process would carry the mandate of each of the world's citizens both in terms of its establishment and of ensuring compliance. In this sense an NWC would represent a qualitative transformation in international law, which traditionally regulates relations among states, and would in fact be a kind of world or global law.

To date, those calling for nuclear weapons prohibition or abolition have approached the issue from two distinct perspectives. The first focuses on the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons, the second on the practical dangers they pose, particularly through new forms of proliferation and buildup.

The NPT Review Conference incorporated both perspectives, and we should acknowledge the legitimacy of both sets of concerns as we seek to expand momentum toward a world without nuclear weapons.

But what is important now is that more and more people awaken to a sense of personal outrage at the continued existence of nuclear weapons and thus become moved to exercise proactive and transformative leadership. I would therefore like to propose the following as a focus for popular solidarity in the rejection of nuclear weapons:

1. No country and no leader has the right to use nuclear weapons, which can instantly rob untold numbers of citizens of their lives and futures.
2. Security arrangements cannot be based on the foundation of nuclear weapons. Even if they are not used, nuclear weapons have through their development and testing caused grave damage to people's health and the natural environment and, by their very existence, act as a continual spur to military escalation and proliferation.
3. We reject, as undermining the ability of humankind to coexist in peace, the mind-set that places no limits on the actions that can be taken in the name of protecting one's own security and interests and those of one's country--a way of thinking embodied in the possession of nuclear weapons.

These three statements express the humanitarian principle in its broadest sense--that is, the refusal to seek one's own happiness at the expense of others--as well as the goal of human security, which is to protect the dignity of life in all circumstances.

In light of these principles, it is clear that nuclear weapons represent an absolute evil. This is the message that the SGI has been striving to bring to as wide an audience as possible, most recently through the exhibition "From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit."

The threat posed by nuclear weapons is neither immediately visible nor consistently palpable within the realities of daily life, and there is a tendency to consider this threat as merely a relic of the tragic past.

In order to break down the walls of apathy, it is not enough simply to make people aware of the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons or the threat they pose. We need to recognize the irrationality and inhumanity of living in a world overshadowed by nuclear weapons, wrenched and distorted by the structural violence they embody.

In this sense, I am in full agreement with the sentiment expressed by President of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs and former UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs Jayantha Dhanapala:

Disarmament is preeminently a humanitarian endeavour for the protection of the human rights of people and their survival. We have to see the campaign for nuclear disarmament as analogous to the campaigns such as those against slavery, for gender equality and for the abolition of child labour. [\[41\]](#)

The crucial thing is to arouse the awareness that, as a matter of human conscience, we can never permit the people of any country to fall victim to nuclear weapons, and for each individual to express their refusal to continue living in the shadow of the threat they pose. We must each make a personal decision and determination to build a new world free of nuclear weapons. The accumulated weight of such choices made by individual citizens can be the basis and foundation for a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

For our part, the SGI initiated the People's Decade of Action for Nuclear Abolition in 2007, the fiftieth anniversary of Josei Toda's call for nuclear abolition mentioned earlier. To promote the Decade, we have organized exhibitions and seminars and have collaborated with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) organized by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW). We have also initiated a joint project with the Inter Press Service (IPS) news agency to support in-depth coverage of nuclear issues.

In 2010, the youth members of the Soka Gakkai in Japan collected more than 2.2 million signatures calling for an NWC, presenting these to representatives of the President of the NPT Review Conference and the UN Secretary-General, while youth and student members of the SGI in eight countries conducted a survey of the views of their peers regarding nuclear weapons. Both of these undertakings have reaffirmed to UN officials and disarmament experts how engaged young people are with these issues.

The time is indeed ripe for global civil society to take united action. The SGI will continue to promote the People's Decade, with a particular focus on efforts to bring a Nuclear Weapons Convention into being. With our youth members in the lead, we are determined to build momentum toward 2015, the seventieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

Building a culture of human rights

I would next like to discuss the challenge of building a culture of human rights.

The term "a culture of human rights" was popularized in part through the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), and it refers to an ethos inculcated throughout society that encourages people to take the initiative to respect and protect the full spectrum of human rights and the dignity of life. This UN framework was realized largely through the work of NGOs. It has, at its foundation, the awareness that, alongside legal guarantees of human rights--and remedies in the event they are violated--it is necessary to foster a culture that prevents violations from occurring in the first place.

I am currently engaged in a serialized dialogue with the American historian Dr. Vincent Harding, who was a close friend of American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and has dedicated himself to the struggle for human rights for many years. I was struck by his observation, which I believe is highly germane in this context, that the term "civil rights movement" is inadequate to describe the movement that he, Dr. King and others had been involved in. He expressed his concern that subsequent generations might consider it simply a matter of past history, seeing the process as completed with the adoption of various laws banning discrimination. He asserted:

If, instead of referring to the movement as the "civil rights movement," we spoke in terms of "the expansion of democracy," then each new generation would recognize that they have a responsibility to expand democracy beyond the way they found it. This duty is an ongoing task that each new generation must accept. [\[42\]](#)

Here it is necessary to emphasize that it is not because they have been codified into law that human rights have value. The spiritual wellspring that supports the law is found in the struggle to gain and realize our rights. The

brilliance of human rights lies in the endless succession of courageous individuals who arise to take up the challenge of extending and expanding them as heirs to that spirit. This serves as a guideline for efforts to instill a respect for the dignity of life throughout society and resonates with the insight of Buddhism to which I referred earlier: "The Law does not spread by itself: because people propagate it, both people and the Law are respectable."

Buddhism views all people as fundamentally equal, as they all possess life, which has ultimate value and dignity. It is through our actions that this dignity is made manifest. As Shakyamuni admonished:

Judge not by birth, but life.
As any chips feed fire,
mean birth may breed a sage
noble and staunch and true. [\[43\]](#)

Buddhism is also a teaching that seeks to realize happiness and security for both oneself and others, as encapsulated by Shakyamuni's famous words:

May all be well and secure,
May all beings be happy! [\[44\]](#)

The SGI's focus on education as the means to promote human rights arises from Buddhism's emphasis on inner transformation. In April 1993, in the lead-up to the World Conference on Human Rights that was held in Vienna in June of that year, we organized the exhibition "Toward a Century of Humanity: An Overview of Human Rights in Today's World" at the United Nations University in Tokyo. By the end of 2004, the last year of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education, the exhibition had been viewed in forty cities around the world, contributing to awareness raising on the popular level.

In my message to the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa, in August 2001, and on other occasions, I have called for the continuation of a global framework for human rights education by the UN. I was therefore deeply gratified that the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which was launched in 2005 as the successor to the UN Decade, stressed at the outset the importance of "building a universal culture of human rights." [\[45\]](#) It is also significant that the promotion of human rights education and learning was established as one of the principal duties of the Human Rights Council (HRC), which began functioning in June 2006 in place of the earlier Commission on Human Rights.

In September 2007, in response to a proposal made by the governments of Switzerland and Morocco, the HRC determined to begin drafting a UN declaration on human rights education and training. Work is continuing on this now with the aim of adoption by the UN General Assembly that will convene in September. This will be the first time that international standards for human rights education will be officially proclaimed by the UN, and I hope that the adoption of the declaration will be an opportunity for all stakeholders to work together to encourage a more conscious and robust culture of human rights in all countries.

A new institutional framework

To strengthen the foundations for this, I would like to offer three concrete proposals.

The first regards the establishment of UN and civil society bodies that will promote human rights education. As mentioned, drafting work continues on the UN declaration on human rights education and training. In order to gain the support of as many states as possible in the UN General Assembly, and to ensure that the declaration is implemented worldwide, the consistent backing of civil society is indispensable. Likewise, because there is no specialized international agency for the World Programme for Human Rights Education, here also the active engagement of NGOs is required.

The NGO Working Group on Human Rights Education and Learning in Geneva, which is part of the network of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO), has been striving to ensure that the voices of civil society are fully reflected in UN policies related to human rights education. In March 2009, the Working Group, in collaboration with the international network Human Rights Education Associates (HREA), presented a substantive proposal to the HRC cosigned by 365 NGOs and national human rights institutions. The SGI's representative is currently the Chair of the NGO Working Group, and the SGI, in collaboration with HREA, is working to produce a DVD, scheduled for release during 2011, that will introduce case studies of successful outcomes generated through human rights education.

Here, I would like to propose the formation of an international coalition of NGOs for human rights education. Bringing together NGOs and NGO networks, this coalition would work in close consultation with the HRC and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to promote human rights education on an international scale.

As collaborative relations between the UN and civil society in this field develop, the formation of a standing specialized UN agency to promote human rights education would also be worthy of consideration. In addition to securing a more adequate operational and financial basis, such an agency could be a venue for the UN, governments and civil society to deliberate on the best means of implementing the World Programme and the UN declaration within each national context, in this way bringing a culture of human rights to flower around the world.

The role of youth

My second proposal is for strengthening coordinated regional efforts for human rights education with a special focus on youth. At the United Nations, the year commencing on August 12, 2010, has been designated the International Year of Youth to encourage young people to "devote their energy, enthusiasm and creativity" [\[46\]](#) to the resolution of the problems confronting humankind.

As seen in the examples of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who both became active in their twenties, many human rights struggles have been initiated and sustained through the power and passion of youth. The importance of the role of youth in challenging seemingly intractable social realities and creating a new era cannot be overstated.

Near the end of his life, Dr. King addressed these words to young people: "When an individual is no longer a true participant, when he no longer feels a sense of responsibility to his society, the content of democracy is emptied." [\[47\]](#)

The same principle applies to the work of building a culture of human rights. As Dr. Harding stressed in our dialogue, a strong and unbroken intergenerational succession of people dedicated to human rights is essential. In view of the ongoing processes of globalization, it is vital that in addition to national efforts there also be strengthened and expanded endeavors for human rights education on a regional basis, including various opportunities for direct exchange.

Presently, the Council of Europe is promoting Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights. Defining a citizen as "a person co-existing in a society," [\[48\]](#) this campaign seeks to foster actively engaged young citizens. I believe that similar forms of transnational solidarity for human rights education could be effectively undertaken in other regions with the proactive involvement of civil society.

In my 1987 peace proposal, I called for a UN decade of education for global citizenship, focused on the four themes of environment, development, peace and human rights, to encourage awareness among young people of the challenges and responsibilities of global citizenship for the twenty-first century. In line with this, the SGI has conducted activities in support of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) and also of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-10).

Further, together with other NGOs, we called for the establishment of a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and have been actively engaged in efforts to support the Decade (2005-14) since it was launched. We are committed to activities to ensure that a culture of peace takes root throughout the world and to finding paths to a sustainable future. We will continue to conduct multifaceted activities to foster in young people an enduring awareness of and commitment to human rights, specifically through providing opportunities for direct personal encounters and exchanges across national borders. Such exchanges can promote the spirit of recognizing human commonalities and respecting diversity as a source of creativity and vitality.

Interfaith dialogue

My third proposal regards interfaith dialogue toward the construction of a culture of human rights.

A commitment to human rights cannot be fostered simply through the transmission of knowledge. This is reflected in the guidebook *ABC, Teaching Human Rights. Practical activities for primary and secondary schools* produced by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

However, even taught with the greatest skill and care, documents and history alone cannot bring human rights to life in the classroom. ... For these documents to have more than intellectual significance, students

need to approach them from the perspective of their real-life experience and grapple with them in terms of their own understanding of justice, freedom and equity. [\[49\]](#)

When children confront, for example, a situation of bullying among their peers, how can they be empowered not only to refuse to participate but to be part of the effort to stop it? It is only through such real-life daily struggles and challenges that a genuine sensitivity to human rights can be inculcated. This is a truth that is not limited to school education: it applies to all of us.

The foundation for this must, I believe, be the workings of conscience, in particular an empathetic openness to the sufferings of others. It must also grow from the determination to bring out one's "best self," to behave at all times and in all situations in a manner that one can proudly affirm. And it is the original mission of religion, I am convinced, to encourage the growth and development of such an ethos.

However thoroughly the legal guarantees for human rights may be promulgated, so long as these are seen as externally imposed, the full positive impact on people's lives will not be realized.

As Gandhi said: "Nonviolence is not like a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our very being." [\[50\]](#)

It is only when the norms of human rights are elevated to a personal vow--the sense that unless I hold to this I can no longer be myself--that they become a source of inexhaustible energy for social transformation. This is not to suggest, of course, that only religion can provide an ethical foundation. There are many other sources, such as the Hippocratic Oath that guides the actions of medical practitioners, that encourage people in the fulfillment of their responsibilities, and these will only increase in their importance going forward.

But as the theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) pointed out, religion has in its depths an orientation toward the pursuit of meaning framed by such soul-shaking questions as, "To what end do we as human beings live?" In this sense, religions have a great contribution to make. It is through the effort to identify a more noble state of life that religion can unleash the vitality that, in Tillich's words, "is the power of creating beyond oneself without losing oneself." [\[51\]](#)

As mentioned, the SGI movement seeks to make manifest, in both oneself and others, such a state of life through an inner transformation within each individual. This has shaped our efforts in the field of human rights education toward a focus on promoting civil society initiatives that enable individuals to embody the ideals of human rights amidst the realities of their daily lives.

The Lotus Sutra, which expounds the essence of Buddhist teachings, portrays the example of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. Based on the conviction that the lives of all people are endowed with incomparable dignity, this bodhisattva engaged in the practice of bowing to each person he met and reciting the following words: "I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance." [\[52\]](#)

The age in which this bodhisattva lived was a benighted one, and he was subject not only to ridicule and unbridled verbal abuse but was at times attacked with staves and stones. But he refused to abandon his practice of offering obeisance to all he encountered.

Kumarajiva

Kumarajiva (344-413) was a Buddhist scholar and a translator of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. Born in the Central Asian kingdom of Kucha, he traveled at the age of seven with his mother to India and other countries to study Buddhism. In 382, Fu Chien, ruler of the Former Ch'in dynasty, ordered his army to bring Kumarajiva to Ch'ang-an, the dynastic capital. However, the dynasty fell and Kumarajiva was held captive in a neighboring kingdom for sixteen years. Finally, he made his way to Ch'ang-an in 401 at the invitation of Yao Hsing, ruler of the Later Ch'in dynasty. There he was given the position of teacher of the nation and dedicated himself to the translation of Buddhist scriptures. Working with a team of Chinese Buddhist scholars, he translated some thirty-five works in 294 volumes, accomplishing this in just over ten years. Prominent among his translations was that of the Lotus Sutra, and his work profoundly influenced the subsequent development of Buddhism in China and Japan.

When the Lotus Sutra was transmitted to China, the name of this bodhisattva was translated by Kumarajiva (344-413) into Chinese characters that mean "the bodhisattva who never belittled or made light of others." The spirit that was expressed in this name is at the heart of the human rights struggle undertaken by the Soka Gakkai since its founding some eighty years ago. In its early years, the Soka Gakkai was dismissed in Japan as a gathering of the sick and the poor. But the members, taking this as a badge of the highest honor and filled with a burning conviction that striving for the sake of those who suffer constitutes the very essence of Buddhism, undertook the patient work of engaging in dialogue with people one at a time, in order to encourage and spark in them the flame of hope.

The Lotus Sutra also describes the actions of a number of other bodhisattvas, including Universal Worthy, Medicine King, Wonderful Sound and Perceiver of the World's Sounds, each of whom strives for the happiness of others on the basis of their unique characteristics. Transposing this spirit into contemporary society, we have stressed that each person must develop her or his special capacities to the highest degree. This is the basis for mutual growth, for realizing the values of humanism and human rights.

One current focus of the UN's activities is to encourage new generations to take action under the theme "Speak Up, Stop Discrimination." I believe that the world's religions should begin discussions regarding the contributions each can make, and this theme provides an excellent starting point. When I spoke at Harvard University in 1993, I posed the following questions, from which, of course, I consider the SGI in no way exempt: Does religion make people stronger, or does it weaken them? Does it encourage what is good or what is evil in them? Are they made better and more wise--or less--by religion? These, I believe, are the criteria we must keep firmly in view.

I believe it would be valuable for the world's religions to engage in what the founding president of our organization, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), termed "humanitarian competition"--that we conduct dialogue toward the shared goal of constructing a culture of human rights and, reflecting on our respective origins and histories, mutually strive to foster in people the capacity to take the lead in this endeavor.

The power of awakened citizens

In this proposal I have focused on the themes of the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons and the construction of a culture of human rights. I believe that we must always take pride in the knowledge that the actions we take, based on our decisions and choices as individual citizens, link directly to the magnificent challenge of transforming human history.

On this point, I am reminded of the words of Jeffrey Sachs, the head of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. In his book *The End of Poverty*, he reflects on the history of the past two centuries, analyzing the elements that made it possible to bring an end to such pernicious systems as slavery, colonialism and apartheid. "Other generations have been triumphant in expanding the reach of human freedom and well-being through a combination of struggle, persuasion, patience, and the profound benefit of being on the right side of history." [\[53\]](#)

The confidence and joy of knowing that our daily action, dialogue and engagement are moving the world in a better direction--this unleashes hitherto unimagined energy and power from within people's lives. We are moved by the knowledge that each of the world's seemingly ordinary individuals can be a protagonist in the creation of a new era. No force can match that of a fundamental transformation in the human spirit. Members of the SGI are determined to continue working in solidarity and partnership with those who share our aspirations for a new global society of peace and coexistence.

Notes

- 1 (trans. from) Jacquard, *Petite philosophie à l'usage des non-philosophes*, 18.
- 2 (trans. from) Ikeda, Hickman, and Garrison. *Ningen kyoiku eno atarashiki choryu*, 50.
- 3 (trans. from) Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*, 244.
- 4 Bergson, *Mind-Energy*, 2.
- 5 (trans. from) *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu*, 856.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 67.
- 7 Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 34.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 9 Bergson, *Mind-Energy*, 25.
- 10 Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 205.
- 11 Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 361.
- 12 Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 192.
- 13 Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 105-06.
- 14 (qtd. in and trans. from) Kajiyama, *Ku no shiso*, 57.
- 15 Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 208.
- 16 (trans. from) Kobayashi, *Kobayashi Hideo zenshu*, 9:160.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 9:158.
- 18 Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 209.
- 19 Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 105.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 21 Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 195.
- 22 (trans. from) Michelet, *Bible de l'humanité*, IV.
- 23 (trans. from) *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu*, 788.
- 24 Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 224.
- 25 Bergson, *Mind-Energy*, 22.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 28 (trans. from) Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*, 248.
- 29 Bergson, *Mind-Energy*, 24.
- 30 Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1:888.
- 31 Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 226.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 275.
- 33 Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, 68-69.
- 34 UN, "Everyone's a Delegate."
- 35 Hammarskjöld, "Introduction to the Fourteenth Annual Report," 448-49.
- 36 UN, *Our Global Neighborhood*, 355.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 356.
- 38 UN General Assembly, "2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," 19.
- 39 ICJ, *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons*, 244.
- 40 (trans. from) *Toda Josei zenshu*, 3:290.
- 41 Global Security Institute, "Annual Report," 22.
- 42 (trans. from) Ikeda and Harding, *Kibo no kyoiku, heiwa no koshin*, 53-54.
- 43 Chalmers, trans., *Buddha's Teachings*, 109.
- 44 Buddhārakkhita, trans., *Karaniya Metta Sutta*.
- 45 UN General Assembly, "Revised draft plan of action for the first phase (2005-2007) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education," 3.
- 46 UN General Assembly, "Proclamation of 2010 as the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding," 1.
- 47 King, *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 44.
- 48 O'Shea, "Education for Democratic Citizenship 2001-2004," 8.
- 49 OHCHR, *ABC, Teaching Human Rights*, 20.
- 50 Gandhi, *My Non-violence*, 36.
- 51 Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 81.
- 52 Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra*, 266-67.
- 53 Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*, 360-61.

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