

Compassion, Wisdom and Courage: Building a Global Society of Peace and Creative Coexistence

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Commemorating the anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), I would like to explore the prospects for constructing a global society of peace and creative coexistence looking toward the year 2030.

It has been sixty-five years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since its founding, the United Nations has, through this and other resolutions of the General Assembly and various world conferences, clarified key themes that should guide and propel international cooperation. These include the following concepts: "sustainable development" as a response to the challenges of poverty, environmental degradation and economic instability; a "culture of peace" as a response to the challenges of conflict and structural violence; and "human security," the subject of a resolution adopted by the General Assembly in September of last year.

Together, these efforts to establish conceptual frameworks highlight both the issues in our present-day world that we cannot afford to ignore and the areas demanding priority action.

A concrete illustration of this is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), established in the year 2000 by the United Nations. The objective of reducing by half the proportion of the world's population suffering from extreme poverty has been realized well ahead of the target date of 2015; the goal of halving the proportion of people without constant access to improved drinking water has been achieved; and that of eliminating gender disparity in primary education is close to realization.

At the same time, there are a number of targets whose achievement by 2015 is in question at the present pace of progress. And of course, even the attainment of all the targets will still leave far too many people in conditions that threaten their lives and dignity. Clearly, further acceleration of efforts will be required.

This record of achievement nonetheless demonstrates that we can indeed change the world when people share a common awareness of the issues at hand and we set clear target dates for progress, giving focus and direction to people's efforts.

Following the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012, efforts are now under way to define a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a follow-up to the MDGs, and in December 2012 a working group was established to carry out this task. The debate about these goals should serve as an opportunity to bring together diverse perspectives from which to consider what needs to be achieved toward the anticipated target date of 2030 and draw the outlines of a new global society.

Sustainable Development Goals

One of the main outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in 2012, was the agreement to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These will build upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)--international development goals aimed at improving social and economic conditions in the world's poorest countries--which will expire in 2015.

The participants agreed that the SDGs should address the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development and their interlinkages. The overarching aims are poverty eradication, environmental sustainability and sustainable consumption and production. It was also agreed that the process will be open to all stakeholders and will be coordinated with the processes of the post-2015 development agenda.

A Faustian Quest

[E]verything, dear Friend, nowadays is *ultra*, everything perpetually transcendent in thought as in action. . . . Young people are excited much too early, and then carried away in the whirl of the time. *Wealth*

and *rapidity* are what the world admires, and what everyone strives to attain. [1]

While these might sound like the words of a contemporary intellectual, this incisive critique of civilization is in fact that of the German literary master Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832).

I am currently engaged in a dialogue with Dr. Manfred Osten of the Goethe Society, headquartered in Weimar, Germany, about the life and thought of the great German writer. Dr. Osten focuses on the way that Goethe examines this pathology of civilization in his masterpiece *Faust*, where he portrays the human folly that drives us in a ceaseless quest for the "magic mantle" (the fastest means of transportation), the "quick dagger" (the quickest weapons) and "fast money," which are deployed to fulfill a succession of desires but lead ultimately to our downfall. [2]

Dr. Osten refers to these items, which Mephistopheles supplies to Faust in response to his requests, as "the tools of demonic rapidity." [3] Their names and forms, he says, differ from those of the beginning of the twenty-first century but their content is the same. He goes on to ask whether we have the capacity to recognize ourselves as contemporaries of Dr. Faust, and indeed I think we cannot afford to ignore the similarities between our age and that which Goethe described. Without calling on the assistance of any Mephistopheles, we have created a tragic situation where that which should be valued and treasured is ground underfoot with hardly a thought. The pathology that Goethe exposed has reached a crescendo in our present age.

We see it in nuclear weapons, whose use would "defend" the possessor nation at the price of humanity's extinction; in a society where free market competition is glorified at the cost of widening disparities and the conscious neglect of its most vulnerable members; in the unabated pace of ecological destruction driven by the prioritization of economic growth; in a global food crisis brought about by commodity speculation

The MDGs were established with the aim of reducing suffering to the greatest degree possible. But unless we face head-on the underlying ailments of human civilization, we may find that any progress will be short-lived and could be wiped out as new challenges arise. This makes it all the more important that we heed Goethe's admonition: "It is not enough to take steps which may some day lead to a goal; each step must be itself a goal and a step likewise." [4]

In other words, our efforts to improve the human condition must be more than mere stopgap measures; they must enable people struggling in the face of dire threats to recover the hope and strength needed to lead lives of dignity. Steadily bringing such efforts to fruition, we must take on the larger challenge of transforming the currents of history from destruction to construction, from confrontation to coexistence, from divisiveness to solidarity.

We need a new spiritual framework that will bring into greater clarity those things we cannot afford to ignore, while ensuring that all that we do contributes to the larger objective of a global society of peace and creative coexistence. This will also facilitate the process of establishing the new Sustainable Development Goals.

I would like to propose that respect for life's inherent dignity provides just such a framework.

The determination to share the joys and sufferings of others

If we picture a global society of peace and creative coexistence as an edifice, the ideals of human rights and human security are key pillars that hold it up, while the foundation on which these rest is respect for the dignity of life. If this foundation remains no more than an abstract conceptualization, the entire structure will be unstable and could collapse in the event of a severe challenge or crisis.

To ensure that respect for life's dignity is a meaningful and robust support for other endeavors, individuals throughout the world must feel and experience it clearly and palpably as a way of life. To this end, I would like to propose the following three commitments as guidelines for action:

- The determination to share the joys and sufferings of others
- Faith in the limitless possibilities of life
- The vow to defend and celebrate diversity

Regarding the first of these--the importance of sharing the joys and sufferings of others--I am reminded of the dialogue I conducted with the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975) some forty years ago on humanity's prospects in the twenty-first century. In the final stages of this dialogue, we discussed the dignity of life. "Dignity," Dr. Toynbee stressed, "is irreplaceable." [5] It is the unique and irreplaceable nature of each being that gives such immense weight and value to the dignity of life.

He went on to say, "A human being . . . also loses his own dignity if he does not respect the dignity of other people." [6] This perspective, which places the dignity of life within the context of human connections and interrelatedness, is key.

One pressing threat to the dignity of far too many people in our world today--and one that urgently demands a cooperative response on the part of the international community--is poverty.

As I noted earlier, a number of the MDG targets have already been met. But the fact that many of these targets are expressed as a reduction of the proportion of people living in conditions of misery means that, unless the pace of progress is accelerated, there will still be approximately 1 billion people in extreme poverty and more than 600 million without access to safe drinking water in 2015, the MDG target date. Further, there are regional disparities in the pace of poverty reduction, with progress in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, lagging behind other regions such as South Asia or Latin America, which are also yet to reduce by half the number of people living in extreme poverty in line with the MDG targets.

In June of this year, the 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V) will be held in Yokohama, Japan. One underlying theme of the conference is inclusive and resilient societies. I hope that it will motivate greater international solidarity toward the creation of an "African century," spreading the values of peace and coexistence from Africa to the world so that all people may live lives of dignity.

Poverty is not a problem limited to the developing world. Even affluent societies contain both poverty and social and economic disparities.

British researchers Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett have been studying the effects of inequality, noting that when compounded with economic deprivation it has a corrosive effect on both individual relationships and society as a whole.

In their work *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, they note that not only do economic disparities aggravate health and social problems but that "[w]ith greater inequality, people are less caring of one another, there is less mutuality in relationships, people have to fend for themselves and get what they can--so, inevitably, there is less trust." [7] Further, because "[i]nequality seems to make countries socially dysfunctional across a wide range of outcomes," [8] it is not just the poor but people at almost all income levels who fare badly in more unequal societies.

Economic deprivation makes virtually all the events of daily life into potential sources of distress. This is compounded when people feel that their very existence is disregarded, that they are alienated and deprived of a meaningful role and place within society. For people who are struggling to improve their lives in the midst of such difficult conditions, cold and unfeeling reactions--whether from within their immediate surroundings or from society as a whole--deepen the sense of isolation and self-doubt, deeply wounding their dignity.

This is why in recent years, in addition to economic measures to deal with the problem of poverty, there has been a growing emphasis on the need for a socially inclusive approach focused on the restoration of a sense of connection with others and of purpose in life.

Buddhism as a response to human suffering

In ancient India, Buddhism arose in response to the universal question of how to confront the realities of human suffering and engage with people ensnared in that suffering.

The founder of Buddhism, Gautama Buddha or Shakyamuni, was of royal birth, which guaranteed him a life of earthly comforts. Tradition has it that his determination as a young man to abandon those comforts and seek truth through monastic practice was inspired by the "four encounters" with people afflicted by the pains of aging, illness and death.

But his purpose was never simply to reflect passively on life's evanescence and the inevitability of suffering. Later in life, he described his feelings at that time in this way: "In their foolishness, common mortals--even though they themselves will age and cannot avoid aging--when they see others aging and falling into decline, ponder it, are distressed by it, and feel shame and

hate--all without ever thinking of it as their own problem," [\[9\]](#) and he noted that the same holds true in our attitudes toward illness and death as well.

Shakyamuni's concern was always with the inner arrogance that allows us to objectify and isolate people confronting such sufferings as aging and illness. He was thus incapable of turning a blind eye to people suffering alone from illness or the aged cut off from the world.

There is an episode from his life that illustrates this.

One day, Shakyamuni encountered a monk who was stricken by illness. He asked him, "Why are you suffering, and why are you alone?" The monk replied that he was lazy by nature and unable to endure the hardships associated with providing medical care to others. Thus there was no one to tend to him. At which Shakyamuni responded, "Good man, I will look after you." Shakyamuni took the stricken monk outdoors, changed his soiled bedding, washed him and dressed him in new clothes. He then firmly encouraged him to always be diligent in his religious practice. The monk was immediately restored to a state of physical and mental well-being and joy.

In my view, it was not just Shakyamuni's unexpected and devoted care that affected the monk in this way. Rather, the fact that Shakyamuni encouraged him using the same strict yet warm language that he used with other disciples in good health revived the flame of dignity that was so close to being extinguished in this man's life.

This story as I have outlined it so far is based on an account in *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*. [\[10\]](#) However, when we compare this to the version transmitted in other sutras, a further aspect of Shakyamuni's motivation comes to light.

After having tended to the sick monk, Shakyamuni is said to have gathered together the other monks and asked them what they knew about his condition. As it turned out, they had been aware of his illness and the gravity of his condition, and yet none among them had made any effort to provide care.

The Buddha's disciples explained themselves in terms almost identical to those of the ailing monk: he had never attended to any of them in their time of illness.

This corresponds to the logic of personal responsibility as it is often used in contemporary settings to negate the need to care for others. For the ailing monk, this attitude fostered feelings of resignation, and for the other disciples it manifested itself as an arrogant justification of their disinterest. This logic atrophied his spirit and clouded theirs.

"Whoever would tend to me, should tend to the sick." With these words, Shakyamuni sought to dispel the delusions clouding the minds of his disciples and spur them to a correct understanding.

In other words, practicing the Buddha's way means to actively share the joys and sufferings of others--never turning one's back on those who are troubled and in distress, being moved by others' experiences as if they were one's own. Through such efforts, not only do those directly afflicted by suffering regain their sense of dignity, but so too do those who empathetically embrace that suffering.

The inherent dignity of life does not manifest in isolation. Rather, it is through our active engagement with others that their unique and irreplaceable nature becomes evident. At the same time, the determination to protect that dignity against all incursions adorns and brings forth the luster of our own lives.

By asserting an essential equality between himself and an ailing monk, the Buddha sought to awaken people to the fact that the value of human life is undiminished by illness or age: he refused to acknowledge such distinctions and discriminations. In this sense, to regard the sufferings of others due to illness or age as evidence of defeat or failure in life is not only an error in judgment but undermines the dignity of all concerned.

The philosophical foundation of the Soka Gakkai International is the teachings of Nichiren (1222-82), who emphasized the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra which, he stated, marks the epitome of Shakyamuni's enlightenment. In the Lotus Sutra, a massive jeweled tower arises from within the earth to symbolize the dignity and value of life. Nichiren compared the four sides of the treasure tower to the "four aspects" of birth, aging, sickness and death, [\[11\]](#) asserting that we can confront the stark realities of aging, illness and even death in such a way that we remain undefeated by the suffering that accompanies them. We can make these experiences--normally only seen in a negative light--the impetus for a more richly dignified and valuable way of living.

The dignity of life is not something separate from the inevitable trials of human existence, and we must engage actively with others, sharing their suffering and exerting ourselves to the last measure of our strength, if we are to open a path toward authentic happiness for both ourselves and others. Inspired by these teachings, SGI members--often derided in our early years in Japan as "a gathering of the sick and poor"--have advanced with pride in our tradition of mutual support and encouragement among people afflicted by various forms of suffering.

Today, this spirit is particularly relevant as so many people around the world are being impacted by the experience of sudden deprivation, exemplified by the devastation wrought by natural disasters and economic crises. These can rob people of all that they treasure in just moments, saddling them with an unbearable burden of pain. This makes it particularly important that they not be left isolated and forgotten.

As can be seen in the massive earthquakes that struck Haiti (2010) and northeastern Japan (2011), reconstruction efforts in the wake of disaster are long-term and often lag far behind expectations. The struggles of individuals to rebuild their lives and regain some sense of inner wholeness are difficult and ongoing. This is why it is so important that we not forget these suffering people, and that society as a whole support reconstruction, fostering the kinds of overlapping connections and bonds that enable people to live with hope.

The determination to continue to encourage people until smiles return to their faces--never abandoning them and sharing every trial and joy--empowers us to meet and overcome life's successive challenges and guides us through the seemingly capricious obstacles life throws at us.

It is through persistent efforts to defend that which is irreplaceable and to bring forth our own and others' dignity that the inequalities of society can be rectified and the unshakable basis of social inclusion be established.

Faith in the limitless possibilities of life

The second commitment and guideline for action I would like to discuss is faith in the limitless possibilities of life.

In September of last year, the SGI, Human Rights Education Associates (HREA) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) launched a jointly produced DVD, *A Path to Dignity: The Power of Human Rights Education*, in order to promote among a wider public the ideals and principles of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2011.

The documentary, which is also available for online viewing, portrays human rights education in practice in three different settings. While the specific issues in each case differ, together they convey the message that it is possible to change society and that change starts with the inner transformation of individual human beings.

As a nongovernmental organization (NGO) accredited to the United Nations, the SGI has long promoted human rights education as one of our core activities. Underlying these initiatives is a conviction rooted in Buddhist philosophy. When Shakyamuni insisted, "Do not ask about descent, but ask about conduct," he was critiquing the worldview of his time that held that the circumstances of our birth in the present life are determined by karma accumulated in past lives. At the same time, through the analogy "from [any] wood, it is true, fire is born . . ." [\[12\]](#) he was asserting that all people inherently possess a life-state of ultimate dignity and that they are in this sense fundamentally equal and endowed with limitless possibilities.

A fatalistic outlook on life deprives those who discriminate against others of all opportunity to reflect on or question their actions, much less to actually be moved by the promptings of conscience. It creates the conditions in which a tragic disregard for human rights can pervade society: disempowering the victims of discrimination, blunting their awareness of their own irreplaceable worth and feeding resignation and a sense of futility.

The view that present circumstances are irrevocably determined by past causes undermines respect for life's dignity, both for perpetrators and victims of discrimination. Thus Shakyamuni could not leave it unchallenged.

In saying that we must focus on people's conduct rather than their birth, Shakyamuni was explaining that the relationship between cause and effect is not immutable but that our actions and attitudes in the present moment become new causes that can give rise to entirely new outcomes. It is for this reason that the true worth of a person is seen in their actions in this moment.

Further, the Buddhist teaching of "dependent origination" emphasizes our interdependence, the fact that all things exist within a fabric of mutual influence. The moment-by-moment flux of overlapping causes and effects propagates through this web of interdependence, influencing others and our surroundings. Thus our actions in this moment have the power not only to transform ourselves but to create a new and cascading series of positive reactions and outcomes. It is this magnificent capacity of life--existing within all people regardless of their condition--that Shakyamuni was trying to convey with the phrase "from [any] wood, it is true, fire is born"

This same principle is expressed in the Lotus Sutra through a number of skillfully woven parables, and what is of particular note is that these are told not by Shakyamuni himself but in the voices of various disciples. Examples of these include the parable of the wealthy man and his poor son told by voice-hearers such as Subhuti and the parable of the jewel in the robe by arhats such as Kaundinya.

The first of these describes a man who after a life of wandering and great misfortune unknowingly returns to the home of his wealthy father where he finds work. In the latter, a man lives out his life in ignorance of the jewel of immense value that has been sewn into the hem of his robe by a friend.

These parables are told by the Buddha's disciples to express the overflowing joy and determination they feel on encountering the core of Shakyamuni's teachings, which is that all people equally possess the Buddha nature and are thus capable of manifesting the profound and boundless wisdom of the Buddha. The Lotus Sutra portrays this drama of the inner life both in its depiction of the disciples' transformation from awakening to joyful determination and through the parables they themselves employ to describe the experience.

Voice-hearers and arhats

"Voice-hearers" is a name given to disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha who heard his preaching and strove to attain enlightenment. The term was also applied to monks who heard the voice of the Buddha preach the four noble truths and sought to attain emancipation by eradicating earthly desires. Subhuti was one of Shakyamuni's major voice-hearer disciples.

"Arhat"--meaning one worthy of respect--referred to a person who had attained the highest of the four stages of enlightenment that voice-hearers aimed to achieve. Kaundinya was one of the ascetics who heard Shakyamuni's first sermon and converted to his teachings.

Buddhism thus stresses that humanity can advance one step at a time through our ceaseless efforts to inspire each other and to understand that, just as Shakyamuni's awakening sparked an awakening in his disciples, what is possible for one is possible for all. This is the philosophical basis underlying the SGI's efforts in human rights education, which emphasize the process by which individual empowerment develops into leadership for the sake of others.

One of the case studies introduced in the DVD *A Path to Dignity* is that of a Turkish woman who was compelled to marry against her wishes when she was young and became the victim of her husband's violence. When she determined to divorce her husband, she found herself physically threatened not only by him but also by members of her own family. She was able to seek refuge with a women's organization where her awareness of her rights was awakened. She determined to start living a new life, declaring: "I feel strong . . . very much so. If I could help other women, then I would be even happier. That's what I want, to be an example."

This is truly an invaluable instance of human rights education in practice. In the smile of this woman who has regained the strength to live, we see the warmth of hope and the power of self-confidence that arise from becoming fully aware of one's own dignity.

Few people have expressed this idea of the warmth of hope more aptly than the American philosopher Milton Mayeroff (1925-79). Mayeroff was the proponent of the theory of caring, which like empowerment is based on a focused attentiveness to others.

There is hope that the other will grow through my caring [I]t is akin, in some ways, to the hope that accompanies the coming of spring. . . . Such hope is not an expression of the insufficiency of the present in comparison with the sufficiency of a hoped-for future; it is rather an expression of the plenitude of the present, a present alive with a sense of the possible. [\[13\]](#)

What is important here is that hope is not relegated to the status of a kind of promissory note for the future. Rather, we find hope within the sense of plenitude and sufficiency of life in this moment.

What matters is not how our lives have been to this point: the instant that we awaken to our original worth and determine to change present realities, we start to shine with the light of hope.

Throughout his life, Nichiren took pride in the fact that he was "born poor and lowly to a chandala family," [14] and always stood with people who were victimized by various social evils. He described the dynamic and transformative functioning of life as analogous to "fire being produced by a stone taken from the bottom of a river, or a lantern lighting up a place that has been dark for a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand years." [15]

Visions that can only be realized in the far-distant future--however grand and lofty--will not propel the kind of ceaseless spiritual struggle that is required to nurture possibilities and bring them to fruition. Nor do they provide concrete opportunities for people to change their surroundings through the transformation they achieve in their own lives. Only when hope is experienced on an immediate day-to-day level as "the coming of spring" can we succeed in patiently cultivating with joy and with pride the seeds of possibility. Only then can we have a positive impact on those around us through our own inner transformation and work in a sustained way for the betterment of society.

Such a perspective is, I believe, valuable not only for the challenges of constructing a culture of human rights, but also for realizing a sustainable society. We need to generate the kind of upward spiral by which we improve current conditions while working toward a better future. This is a point I stressed in the proposal I submitted to the Rio+20 Summit last June. [16] The success of our efforts toward the year 2030 will depend on how deeply the movement to empower people--and, beyond empowerment, to enable them to exercise leadership--takes root in communities around the world. More than anything, it is vital that our lives in this moment be filled with the warmth of hope. For it is then that each step we take to make the world a better place will, as Goethe urged, "be itself a goal and a step."

The vow to defend and celebrate diversity

The third commitment and guideline for action is the vow to defend and celebrate diversity.

For many years, I have conducted dialogues with people from a wide range of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Through this experience, I have grown ever more deeply convinced that diversity is not simply something that must be respected: it presents us all with an opportunity to engage in self-reflection in a way that can make our lives more richly meaningful.

Today, the twin trends of globalization and the increasing penetration of information and communications technology have expanded the opportunities for people of different backgrounds to interact, communicating their thoughts and ideas instantaneously. At the same time, however, we see a flattening or homogenization driven primarily by economic processes that erodes the uniqueness of individual cultures. Further, greater cross-border movement of people has often resulted in cultural frictions that may be exacerbated by the deliberate incitement of hatred and mistrust. Differences and distinctions that could enrich our lives instead become the target of attack or are seen as a barrier that separates people. All too often this escalates into violent conflict or gives rise to other conditions that threaten people's lives and dignity.

Seville Statement on Violence

The Seville Statement on Violence is a statement designed to refute the notion that organized human violence is biologically determined. It was written by an international team of scientists at a meeting in Seville, Spain, in 1986, at the request of the Spanish National Commission for UNESCO. The statement, which was subsequently adopted by UNESCO in 1989, refutes the idea that humans have inherited a tendency to make war from their ancestors, that war or any other violent behavior is genetically programmed into human nature, that in the course of human evolution there has been a selection for aggressive behavior more than for other kinds of behavior, that humans have a "violent brain," and that war is caused by "instinct" or any single motivation.

The Seville Statement on Violence, written by a group of international scientists and adopted by UNESCO in 1989, affirmed: "It is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature . . . [or] that war is caused by 'instinct' or any single motivation."

I completely agree with this statement. And yet, the fact remains that numerous impediments must be overcome if we are to break the cycles of conflict and violence. To this end we need to start by asking ourselves what it is that drives people to war and destruction.

Shakyamuni believed that conflict arises from the fundamental darkness or delusion that prevents us from recognizing in the lives of others the same irreplaceable value that we sense in our own. Living in ancient India, Shakyamuni often witnessed such violent confrontations as tribal conflicts over water and other resources and power struggles between states.

He identified what he considered to be the essence of the problem: "I perceived a single, invisible arrow piercing the hearts of the people." [17] That is, because people's hearts are penetrated by the unseen arrow of fundamental delusion, they cannot free themselves from attachment to an egocentric worldview.

For example, Shakyamuni saw that two tribal groups in conflict were afflicted by the same desperation, "like fish, writhing in shallow water." [18] And yet their minds were clouded, and they could not recognize that the other group shared their concerns over the lack of water or the constant fear of being attacked and overrun.

It was to overcome this that Shakyamuni declared: "All tremble at violence; life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill." [19]

There are two key points here. The first is that Shakyamuni always focused on a process of inner reflection by which we attempt to put ourselves in the place of others and feel their anguish as our own, rather than obedience to external rules as the basis for self-control. The second point is that he did not consider it enough that we ourselves refrain from the taking of life, but insisted that we should also not cause others to kill. In this, he is urging us to cultivate, through wholehearted dialogue, the goodness that exists within the lives of others and to join with them in a mutual vow against violence and the taking of life.

The Buddhist scriptures contain the following episode in which the demoness Kishimojin (Skt. Hariti) was spurred to transform her way of life as a result of Shakyamuni entering into dialogue with her and encouraging her to reflect on her actions.

Kishimojin is portrayed as a demoness with a huge number of children--several hundred or even several thousand--and was said to kill other people's babies to feed her own children. The people appealed to Shakyamuni, asking him to put an end to her evil deeds. In response, Shakyamuni found Kishimojin's youngest child, whom she particularly treasured, and hid him. For seven days, Kishimojin searched desperately for her child. Finally, at her wits' end, she asked Shakyamuni for help, having heard that he had the capacity to know all things.

Shakyamuni responded to her pleas by saying, "I've heard you have an uncountable number of children. So why are you so distressed to lose just one of them? Most families have only one, three, or perhaps five children. You have been robbing those children of life." [20]

Hearing his words, Kishimojin realized that she had inflicted the pain she now felt on untold numbers of other parents. After promising Shakyamuni she would give up her evil ways, she was reunited with her youngest child. From that point on, Kishimojin made the protection of all children her mission; in the Lotus Sutra, she pledges, along with a number of other fierce deities, to protect those who work for the happiness of all people. Nichiren states that whereas she had been an evil demon, she came to act as a benevolent demon. [21]

What is important in this story is that while retaining her distinctive form as a demon, Kishimojin was able to completely transform her way of life. Shifting the center of gravity of her self-awareness to her identity as a mother, she was able to put herself in the place of another, and for the first time she keenly felt the suffering of her victims. As a result, she determined that she would neither cause nor permit them to experience the kind of anguish she had felt.

The plurality of our identities

The economist Amartya Sen has been a leading advocate of the idea that "the plurality of our identities" can play a key role in helping people resist the tug of mass psychology and the incitements to violence that provoke conflict. In his early years, Dr. Sen witnessed many people lose their lives (during the communal strife that accompanied the end of British rule in India) simply because of religious difference. This pained him deeply and inspired him to research ways to prevent such tragedies. He warns us that:

The insistence, if only implicitly, on a choiceless singularity of human identity not only diminishes us all, it also makes the world much more flammable. . . . Rather, the main hope of harmony in our troubled world lies in the plurality of our identities, which cut across each other and work against sharp divisions around one single hardened line of vehement division that allegedly cannot be resisted. [22]

The members of any ethnic group or faith tradition are, of course, not monolithic in their identity: the environments in which they were raised and their occupations and interests as individuals differ, as do their convictions and ways of life. It is because of this diversity of identity that, while very real differences in ethnicity or religion may exist, there is always the possibility of finding in one-to-one human interchanges points of confluence and mutual resonance. As Dr. Sen points out, this can enable us to cross over hardened lines of vehement division and establish multiple overlapping bonds of empathy and friendship.

This is why, when engaging in dialogues with partners who hail from different cultural and religious backgrounds, in addition to entering into wide-ranging explorations of possible responses to global issues and the prospects for the human future, I make a point of asking about that person's family, their memories of youth, or the events that motivated them to pursue their present path. I try to bring into view the individual convictions and motivations--the richness of character--that can be obscured behind the labels of ethnicity or creed. It is always my hope that the interaction of our lives will generate melodies that will lead us in the direction of a more genuinely humane world. As those harmonies develop, our differences become the leitmotifs that prompt each of us toward the revelation of our best self.

In a manner that is consonant with Dr. Sen's concern with human plurality, the German-American political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-75) wrote the following words expressing a central aspect of her thinking: "However much we are affected by the things of the world, however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us only when we can discuss them with our fellows." [23] Arendt goes on to clarify that she is using the word "fellows" to indicate "friendship" rather than "fraternity"--in particular, friendship between people whose views of the truth differ. It is precisely because of such differences that the world is humanized through dialogue and the rich diversity of human life shines with its greatest glory.

This, above all, is the kind of friendship, predicated on heart-to-heart exchange, that forestalls the further fissuring of societies in which difference all too often functions as a marker for exclusion. We must strive to uphold this friendship as the very mark of our humanity, if we are to prevent the sense of empathetic connection with others from being swept away by a culture of war, a maelstrom of hatred and violence.

With the Seville Statement as one core source of inspiration, the United Nations has been promoting a culture of peace as a way of transforming humankind's deep-rooted proclivity to war. One aspect of this was the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-10), in support of which the SGI organized various exhibitions and other programs promoting public education and dialogue, efforts that continue to this day.

To help a culture of peace take root the world over, it is necessary to patiently counteract any incidence of hatred and confrontation that may arise. We are, by virtue of being human, endowed with the tools that we need for this pursuit: the tuning fork of self-reflection with which to imagine the pain of others as if it were our own; the bridge of dialogue over which to reach out to anyone, anywhere; and the shovel and hoe of friendship with which to cultivate even the most barren and desolate of wastelands.

A friendship with the power to develop a vibrant culture of peace will have at its heart the ability to take mutual joy in our existence as people living together on this planet, as well as a vow to protect, at all costs and despite whatever differences, the dignity that is inherent in each of our lives. As Nichiren put it, "Joy means delight shared by oneself and others." [24]

Here I have considered three commitments or guidelines for action for constructing a civilization founded upon respect for the dignity of life. These can also be thought of in terms of three qualities that I suggested should be essential elements of global citizenship in a lecture I delivered at Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1996 [25]:

- The compassion that never abandons others to suffer alone
- The wisdom to perceive the equality and possibilities of life
- The courage to make our differences the impetus for the elevation of our humanity

I believe that the challenge of constructing a global society of peace and creative coexistence begins with the recognition that all people inherently possess these qualities. I also believe that the social mission of religion in the twenty-first century must be to encourage the flowering of these capacities. It must bring people together in an ethos of reverence for life's dignity and worth.

Nuclear weapons: the ultimate negation of the dignity of life

I would now like to address and offer concrete proposals on two particular challenges facing our world: the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons and the establishment of a culture of human rights.

Regarding the first of these, nuclear weapons are the contemporary embodiment of Goethe's "quick dagger."

The French philosopher Paul Virilio has explored the question of speed in relation to the different problems of contemporary civilization in a manner similar to that of Goethe's probing of the human psychology that drives the quest for a quick dagger. In *Speed and Politics* he writes: "The danger of the nuclear weapon, and of the arms system it implies, is . . . not so much that it will explode, but that it exists and is imploding in our minds." [26]

The destruction wrought by a nuclear explosion would of course be massive and irreparable, but Virilio's point is to stress the abnormality of living under the threat of nuclear confrontation, and the spiritual impact of this even when these weapons are not used. This is an important perspective. Without it, essential aspects of our situation will be obscured. For example, as Virilio points out, "as a continuation of total war by other means, nuclear deterrence marked the end of the distinction between wartime and peacetime" [27]

More than half a century ago, as Cold War competition to develop ever more destructive nuclear weapons was intensifying, my mentor second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda (1900-58) issued a declaration calling for their abolition. In it, he stressed that possession of nuclear weapons represents an outright negation of the dignity of life and declared that this was impermissible under any circumstances. He called for a thoroughgoing repudiation of such ways of thinking:

Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of atomic or nuclear weapons has arisen around the world, it is my wish to go further, to attack the problem at its root. I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons. [28]

In other words, while acknowledging the importance of efforts to ban nuclear testing, he stressed that the fundamental answer to this problem requires that we challenge the root thinking that enables and justifies possession of these weapons of mass destruction.

Nuclear weapons do not distinguish between combatants and noncombatants; they destroy whole cities, killing vast numbers of people instantaneously. Their impact on the natural environment is severe, and the aftereffects of radiation exposure inflict long-term suffering on people. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki made evident the indescribably inhumane nature of these weapons.

What is it, then, that is used to justify their continued possession?

It is, I believe, the same psychology that brought humanity to the point of total war. To restate this using the frameworks I explored earlier in this proposal, it is the way of thinking that monolithically identifies everyone on the opposing side, regardless of individual differences, as the enemy. This denies the possibility of any other way of relating to them, leaving only the option of a violent severing of all ties. Is this not an ultimate disavowal of the dignity of life?

Nothing here is mediated by what Arendt termed "the readiness to share the world with other men," which she contrasted with the cruel coldness of the misanthrope who "regards nobody as worthy of rejoicing with him in the world and nature and the cosmos." [29] This is a life-state dominated by the impulse to dismiss and destroy the lives of others--what Buddhism refers to as our fundamental darkness.

It is for this reason that Toda's determination to "rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons" and to protect the right of the world's people to live was expressed in these striking terms: "I propose that humankind applies, in every case, the death penalty to anyone responsible for using nuclear weapons, even if that person is on the winning side." [30]

Toda had, as a Buddhist, often declared his opposition to the death penalty, so his seeming call for this ultimate punishment must be understood as an expression of his sense of the absolute unacceptability of the use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances. Further, this was a clear refutation of the logic of nuclear weapons possession, under which states pursue their security interests by in effect holding the world's peoples hostage.

When Toda made this declaration in 1957, the world was divided into the opposing camps of East and West, with both sides trading diatribes about the arsenal possessed by the other. In contrast, Toda denounced nuclear weapons as the central evil of contemporary civilization, and he did so in the name of the world's peoples, unswayed by the distortions of ideology or national interest.

Since that time, the number of countries possessing nuclear weapons has continued to increase, and the work of preventing their further proliferation has naturally been seen as an urgent task. Nonetheless, I think it is crucial that we attend to the core problem of nuclear weapons--their underlying inhumanity--that my mentor so starkly exposed.

As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has pointed out: "The possession of nuclear weapons by some encourages their acquisition by others. This leads to nuclear proliferation and the spread of the contagious doctrine of nuclear deterrence." [31] Unless we confront the fundamental source of that contagion, moves to prevent proliferation will be neither convincing nor effective.

Outlawing nuclear weapons as inhumane

Since the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), there has been a growing, if still nascent, movement to outlaw nuclear weapons based on the premise that they are inhumane.

The Final Document of the Review Conference notes a "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." [32]

This groundbreaking statement was followed by a resolution by the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in November 2011, strongly appealing to all states "to pursue in good faith and conclude with urgency and determination negotiations to prohibit the use of and completely eliminate nuclear weapons through a legally binding international agreement." [33]

Then, at the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference held in May 2012, sixteen countries led by Norway and Switzerland issued a joint statement on the humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament, stating that "it is of great concern that, even after the end of the Cold War, the threat of nuclear annihilation remains part of the 21st century international security environment," and stressing that "it is of utmost importance that these weapons never be used again, under any circumstances. . . . All States must intensify their efforts to outlaw nuclear weapons and achieve a world free of nuclear weapons." [34] In October 2012, this statement, with minor revisions, was presented to the First Committee of the UN General Assembly by thirty-five member and observer states.

In March of this year, an international conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons will be held in Oslo, Norway. Its purpose is to examine from a scientific standpoint the immediate and long-term effects of any use of nuclear weapons and the difficulty of humanitarian relief efforts in response to such use. Finally, in September of this year, the General Assembly will hold a high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament.

In my proposal last year, I called for the establishment of an action group for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC), composed of NGOs and forward-looking governments. It is my strong hope that, through these conferences, a growing core of NGOs and governments supporting the above-mentioned statements will develop, and that they will, if at all possible before year's end, initiate the process of drafting a treaty to outlaw nuclear weapons on the basis of their inhumane nature.

A key factor here will be the stance taken by those countries which have relied on the extended deterrence of nuclear-weapon states, the so-called nuclear umbrella.

The signatories to the statements referenced above include not only countries belonging to Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZs) and neutral countries, but also Norway and Denmark, which are members of NATO and thus come under that organization's nuclear umbrella. And yet these two countries have not only signed these statements but have played a key role in their drafting.

Japan, which likewise comes under the extended deterrence of its ally, the United States of America, should join with other countries seeking the prohibition of nuclear weapons as inhumane and work for the earliest realization of a world free from the threat of these weapons.

Rather than accepting that the continuing existence of nuclear weapons makes reliance on extended deterrence inevitable, Japan, as a country that has experienced nuclear attack, should promote the idea that there is no distinguishing between "good" and "bad" nuclear weapons depending on who possesses them, and should play a leading role in achieving an NWC.

Earlier, I referred to Shakyamuni's admonition: "Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill." The survivors of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki have continued to give voice to the dual pledge that no country be victimized by nuclear attack and that no country engage in one. In like manner, Japan should stand at the forefront of efforts to forever prevent the tragedy brought about by the use of nuclear weapons.

Further, having made clear its determination to shift toward security arrangements that are not reliant on nuclear weapons, Japan should undertake the kind of confidence-building measures that are a necessary predicate to the establishment of a Northeast Asian NWFZ. In particular, Japan should make proactive contributions to the reduction of regional tensions and to shrinking the role of nuclear weapons so as to create the conditions for their global abolition.

For an expanded nuclear summit in 2015

There have recently been signs, even within the nuclear-weapon states, of changing attitudes regarding the utility of these weapons.

In a speech at Hankuk University in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on March 26, 2012, US President Barack Obama stated: "My administration's nuclear posture recognizes that the massive nuclear arsenal we inherited from the Cold War is poorly suited to today's threats, including nuclear terrorism." [\[35\]](#)

A statement adopted at the NATO Summit in May 2012 noted: "The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote." [\[36\]](#)

Both of these statements assume the continuance of a policy of deterrence so long as nuclear weapons exist. And yet they both point to the lessened centrality of nuclear weapons in national security thinking.

The logic of nuclear weapons possession is also being challenged from a number of other perspectives. In numerous countries around the world, more and more voices question the wisdom of the continued possession of nuclear weapons in light of the enormous financial burdens entailed. For example, in the United Kingdom, which is still feeling the effects of the global economic crisis, the planned update of the aging submarine-launched Trident nuclear weapons system has become a focus of fiscal policy debate.

It is estimated that annual aggregate expenditure on nuclear weapons globally is around US\$105 billion. [\[37\]](#) This makes clear the enormity of the burden placed on societies simply by the continued possession of these weapons. If these financial resources were redirected domestically to health, social welfare and education programs or to development aid for other countries, the positive impact on people's lives and dignity would be incalculable.

In April of 2012, important new research on the effects of nuclear war on the environment was announced in the report "Nuclear Famine." Issued by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), this report predicts that even a relatively small-scale nuclear exchange could cause major climate change and that the impact on countries far-distant from the combatant nations would result in famine affecting more than a billion people. [\[38\]](#)

Originally inspired by second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda's 1957 antinuclear weapons declaration, the SGI has for decades consistently worked for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons. Most recently, in collaboration with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), we have developed a new exhibition entitled "Everything You Treasure--For a World Free from Nuclear Weapons."

Initiatives to resolve the nuclear weapons issue from a political or military perspective remain deadlocked, so this exhibition, which premiered in Hiroshima last August, seeks to reexamine the issue from multiple perspectives including, of course, the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons as well as human security, environmental protection, economic development, human rights, gender equity and the social responsibility of science.

One aim of this exhibition is to engage the interests of individual viewers to help them draw the connection between nuclear weapons and their personal concerns, and in this way expand and extend solidarity for a world free from nuclear weapons.

The SGI's efforts to grapple with the nuclear weapons issue are based on the recognition that the very existence of these weapons represents the ultimate negation of the dignity of life. It is necessary to challenge the underlying inhumanity of the idea that the needs of states can justify the sacrifice of untold numbers of human lives and disruption of the global ecology. At the same time, we feel that nuclear weapons serve as a prism through which to bring into sharper focus ecological integrity, economic development and human rights--issues that our contemporary world cannot afford to ignore. This in turn helps us identify the elements that will shape the contours of a new, sustainable society, one in which all people can live in dignity.

Toward this end, I would like to make three concrete proposals.

First, to make disarmament a key theme of the Sustainable Development Goals: Specifically, I propose that halving world military expenditures relative to 2010 levels and abolishing nuclear weapons and all other weapons judged inhumane under international law be included as targets for achievement by the year 2030. In the proposal I issued on the occasion of the Rio+20 Conference in June last year, I urged that targets related to the green economy, renewable energy and disaster prevention and mitigation be included in the SDGs, and I believe that disarmament targets should also be taken into consideration.

The International Peace Bureau (IPB), the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) and other civil society organizations are currently advocating the global reduction of military spending, and the SGI supports this out of the awareness that disarmament is humanitarian action.

Second, to initiate the negotiation process for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, with the goal of agreement on an initial draft by 2015: To this end, we must engage in active and multifaceted debate--centered on the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons--to broadly shape international public opinion.

Third, to hold an expanded summit for a nuclear-weapon-free world: The G8 Summit in 2015, the seventieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, would be an appropriate opportunity for such a summit, which should include the additional participation of representatives of the United Nations and non-G8 states in possession of nuclear weapons, as well as members of the five existing NWFZs and those states which have taken a lead in calling for nuclear abolition. If possible, Germany and Japan, which are the scheduled G8 host countries for 2015 and 2016 respectively, should agree to reverse that order, enabling the convening of this meeting in Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

In past peace proposals, I have urged that the 2015 NPT Review Conference be held in Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a vehicle for realizing a nuclear abolition summit. I still hope that such a meeting can be held. Nevertheless, the logistical issues involved in bringing together the representatives of almost 190 countries may dictate that the meeting be held at the UN Headquarters in New York as is customary. In that event, the G8 Summit scheduled to be held several months after the NPT Review Conference would provide an excellent opportunity for an expanded group of world leaders to grapple with this critical issue.

In this regard, I am encouraged by the following words from President Obama's speech in Korea that I referenced earlier:

But I believe the United States has a unique responsibility to act-- indeed, we have a moral obligation. I say this as President of the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons.

This, of course, restates the conviction he first expressed in his April 2009 Prague speech. President Obama then went on to say:

Most of all, I say it as a father, who wants my two young daughters to grow up in a world where everything they know and love can't be instantly wiped out. [\[39\]](#)

These words express a yearning for the world as it should be, a yearning that cannot be subsumed even after all political elements and security requirements have been taken fully into consideration. It is the statement of a single human being rising above the differences of national interest or ideological stance. Such a way of thinking can help us "untie" the Gordian Knot that has too long bound together the ideas of national security and nuclear weapons possession.

There is no place more conducive to considering the full significance of life in the nuclear age than Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was seen when the G8 Summit of Lower House Speakers was convened in Hiroshima in 2008. The kind of expanded summit I am calling for would inherit that spirit and solidify momentum toward a world free from nuclear weapons. It would become the launching point for a larger effort for global disarmament aiming toward the year 2030.

Fostering a culture of human rights

Next, I would like to discuss the challenge of fostering a culture of human rights.

Just as the first resolution to be adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 dealt with the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons, the protection of human rights has been one of the major objectives of the UN since its founding.

In view of the fact that there were only very limited references to human rights in the initial draft of the UN Charter, many participants at the United Nations Conference on International Organization held in San Francisco in 1945--including NGOs--called for the inclusion of clear provisions regarding human rights. As a result, "promoting and encouraging respect for human rights" was defined in Article 1 of the Charter as one of the principal purposes of the new organization, and this became the sole theme for which the establishment of a specialized commission was stipulated.

The following year, in 1946, the Commission on Human Rights, the predecessor of the current Human Rights Council, was established; two years later, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), the first chair of the Commission who played a crucial role in its drafting and adoption, stated, "This Universal Declaration of Human Rights may well become the international Magna Carta of all men everywhere." [\[40\]](#) As she anticipated, the Declaration has influenced the domestic human rights provisions of many countries, as well as serving as the philosophical basis for various international human rights treaties, and has continued to inspire human rights activists to this day.

In the sixty-five years since the adoption of the Declaration, progress has been made in defining human rights standards, in developing institutions to guarantee them and in providing remedies for human rights violations. Today, building on these achievements, there is a growing emphasis within the international community on fostering a culture of human rights.

The concept of a culture of human rights aims to promote an ethos throughout society in which people mutually treasure human dignity. In this way, it seeks to encourage each individual to make conscious efforts to strengthen the guarantees of human rights.

This accords with the principles I have stressed throughout this proposal. In order to create a society that upholds the dignity of life, a sense of the irreplaceable value of each individual must live in the heart of every one of us; at the same time, this must be the foundation of the human bonds that sustain society.

The UN has been promoting a culture of human rights through its World Programme for Human Rights Education launched in 2005. To further enhance such efforts, I would like to propose that promotion of human rights be a central element of the Sustainable Development Goals for the year 2030, alongside disarmament as discussed above. Regarding this point, I fully support the statement of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay reflecting on the outcome of the Rio+20 Summit: ". . . we must ensure that . . . the SDG framework is a human rights framework." [\[41\]](#)

With this in mind, I would like to propose the inclusion of the following two specific targets. The first is implementing a Social Protection Floor (SPF) in every country to ensure that those who are suffering from extreme poverty are able to regain a sense of dignity.

Although the right to an adequate standard of living is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an unacceptably large proportion of the world's population lacks access to the minimum social protections needed to live in a humane way. To address the impact of the global economic crisis on employment, health care and education, the United Nations launched the Global Initiative for a Universal Social Protection Floor (SPF-1) in 2009.

Government policy has traditionally focused on the provision of social safety nets, but there will always be people who slip through such nets. In response, the concept has emerged of a floor that catches all people and supports them so they are able to lead dignified lives.

Providing a Social Protection Floor for people throughout the world would be a significant challenge. However, according to estimates made by the relevant UN agencies, it should be possible for countries at every stage of economic development to cover the necessary costs for a basic framework of minimum income and livelihood guarantees. In fact, some thirty developing countries have already started implementing such plans.

The Human Rights Council has taken up the issue of extreme poverty and human rights, and in September of last year it adopted a series of principles to act as guidelines for the international community. These include "agency and autonomy" and "participation and empowerment." The Council calls for states to "adopt a comprehensive national strategy to reduce poverty and social exclusion" and to "ensure that public policies accord due priority to persons living in extreme poverty." [\[42\]](#)

In the words of the Bangladeshi economist and founder of the Grameen Bank Muhammad Yunus, "Because poverty denies people any semblance of control over their destiny, it is the ultimate denial of human rights." [\[43\]](#) Poverty must be addressed with a sense of urgency as something that undermines the very foundation of human rights and dignity.

Of particular concern is the situation of young people. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), some 12 percent of global youth are unemployed, [\[44\]](#) and even among those with employment, over 200 million young people find

themselves compelled to work for less than US\$2 a day. The ILO warns, "Unless immediate and vigorous action is taken, the global community confronts the grim legacy of a lost generation." [\[45\]](#)

A society that deprives young people of hope cannot expect to achieve sustainability or build a culture of human rights. The effort to secure a Social Protection Floor should be undertaken with this awareness firmly in mind.

The second target I propose for inclusion in the SDGs regards the promotion of human rights education and training.

Throughout this proposal, I have stressed that interactions with other people and the support of society as a whole can provide a sense of connection and help people regain hope and dignity, no matter how challenging their present circumstances may be. In the context of human rights, efforts to raise awareness through human rights education and training could serve as such a catalyst, alongside legal systems of guarantees and remedies.

The documentary *A Path to Dignity* which I mentioned earlier illustrates how human rights education catalyzed both those impacted by human rights violations and potential perpetrators.

One case study introduces the story of a boy who himself had suffered discrimination. Through a human rights education program at his school, he was empowered to speak out against things he felt were not right. One day, he learned that a girl in his neighborhood had been engaged to marry against her will. Her parents claimed they had to arrange the wedding because they were poor, but he insisted that it was wrong and that she should be allowed to get an education. As a result of the boy's determined insistence, the wedding was called off and the girl was able to remain in school.

In Australia, all echelons of the Victoria Police Force received training in human rights, leading to a variety of reforms in their procedures for investigation, arrest and custody. As a result, complaints about human rights violations decreased, and police officers were able to gain greater trust from local citizens.

The examples in this documentary demonstrate how a personal awakening to the dignity of life--both one's own and others'--instills a palpable sense of human rights in the mind of the individual and thus lays the foundation for a broader culture of human rights.

Some years ago, I conducted a dialogue with the American historian Dr. Vincent Harding, who fought alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-68) in the US Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. He emphasized that the goal of Dr. King's struggle was not simply to eliminate injustice and oppression but to create a new reality. [\[46\]](#) I believe this is also an essential element in building a culture of human rights.

To this end, I would like to propose that regional centers for human rights education and training be established along the lines of the Regional Centres of Expertise operating in collaboration with the United Nations University to promote the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Worldwide, there are currently 101 such centers, bringing together stakeholders such as universities, NGOs, local community groups and individuals.

A similar system for human rights education could involve not only communities with demonstrated best practices in human rights, but also those that are striving to improve conditions despite severely problematic histories of human rights abuse. Communities that have endured great pain and suffering have a unique potential to convey a powerful message, serving as a source of hope and encouragement to other communities struggling with similar problems. They can also facilitate the creation of a culture of human rights, as people come to perceive human rights as a tangible reality.

The rights of the child

Today's children will inevitably play a crucial role in the work of building a culture of human rights. To protect them and improve the conditions under which they live, it is crucial that all countries ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and pass the domestic legislation needed to fulfill the treaty obligations.

This Convention was adopted in 1989 and is today the most universal of all human rights conventions adopted by the United Nations, having been ratified by 193 countries so far. In order to prevent serious violations, two Optional Protocols--on the involvement of children under the age of eighteen in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography--were adopted in 2000, and a third Optional Protocol permitting children to submit complaints regarding violations of their rights was adopted in December 2011.

In reality, however, it is not uncommon for the rights spelled out in this Convention to be ignored and violated due to inadequate enactment of related domestic legislation, failure to ratify the Optional Protocols and a lack of public awareness.

I am particularly struck by the words of Ishmael Beah, who, having survived the traumatic experience of life as a child soldier during civil conflict in his home country of Sierra Leone, is now a powerful advocate for children's rights.

At the age of sixteen, Mr. Beah attended a conference at the United Nations where, for the first time, he learned about the Convention on the Rights of the Child. He describes this eye-opening experience as follows: "I remember how this knowledge--particularly for those of us from war-torn countries--rekindled the value of our lives and our humanity." [47]

He goes on to emphasize:

My life has also been enriched by articles 12 and 13, which guarantee children and youth the right to express their views fully in matters affecting them, and "to seek, receive and impart important information" of all kinds and by all media. These articles have helped many children become active participants in finding solutions to problems that affect them. [48]

I urge that all countries uphold the Convention, always prioritizing the best interest of the child. The Convention can serve as an inspiration for the members of the younger generation to awaken to their own dignity and, as epitomized by Mr. Beah's experience, as a source of the hope needed to live.

A generation brought up in a society imbued with this ethos will be a transformative presence in that society and will surely foster this spirit in subsequent generations. The Preamble of the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924, a key historical precedent and inspiration for the Convention, states, "mankind owes to the Child the best that it has to give." [49]

Ensuring that this noble vow is passed on from one generation to the next will make a culture of human rights the central axis around which human society revolves.

Lasting friendship between China and Japan

Lastly, I would like to share, from both a short- and a long-term perspective, some thoughts on ways to improve the currently strained relations between China and Japan. I am motivated by my conviction that this is indispensable to building a global society of peace and coexistence.

Last year marked the significant juncture of the fortieth anniversary of the restoration of Sino-Japanese diplomatic ties. However, a number of events and exchange programs celebrating the anniversary were canceled or postponed due to escalating tensions and frictions. Relations between the two countries have deteriorated to a post-World War II low, and economic relations have also chilled significantly.

I, however, am not at all pessimistic about the future of Sino-Japanese relations. In the words of the traditional Chinese maxim, "drops of water can pierce even a rock." In just this way, friendship between Japan and China has been nurtured in the postwar period by the devoted efforts of pioneers who, even before the normalization of diplomatic relations, worked tenaciously to break through the obstacles that stood between the two countries. These bonds of friendship have been steadily cultivated and strengthened through countless exchanges over the years, and they will not be easily broken.

When I called for the normalization of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations in September 1968, it was almost unthinkable in Japan to even mention the possibility of friendship with China. In that sense, the situation was even more severe than it is today. But it was my belief that Japan had no future without friendly relations with its neighbors, and that stable and harmonious ties with China were essential for Asia and the world to advance along the great path to peace.

Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child is a document that recognized and affirmed the existence of rights specific to children and the responsibility of adults toward children. It was drafted by Save the Children founder Eglantyne Jebb (1876-1928) and adopted at the International Save the Children Union in Geneva in 1923.

The fundamental needs of children were summarized in five points, covering the well-being of children and their right to development, assistance, relief and protection. The League of Nations adopted the Declaration in 1924 and titled it the Geneva Declaration. It was the first international human rights document to specifically address children's rights. The United Nations General Assembly adopted a much-expanded version in 1959 as its own Declaration of the Rights of the Child, but this was not legally binding. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and came into force in 1990.

In 1972, diplomatic relations were finally normalized. Six years after I made that initial call, in December 1974, I was able to visit Beijing and meet with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping (1904-97). Through these discussions, I learned that they viewed both the Japanese and the Chinese people as victims of the Japanese militarist regime. This further deepened my determination to develop an indestructible friendship between our two peoples in order to prevent war between us from ever happening again.

Ever since, I have been passionately devoted to promoting friendship exchanges, with a special focus on members of the younger generation. In 1975, I served as personal guarantor when Soka University welcomed the first six government-financed exchange students from the People's Republic of China to study in Japan. Now, nearly forty years later, 100,000 Chinese students are studying here, and 15,000 Japanese students are pursuing their studies in China.

Over the years, China and Japan have created a history of exchanges in cultural, educational and many other fields, including, for example, a total of 349 sister-city arrangements. We have also developed a tradition of mutual support in times of hardship such as the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan and the 2011 earthquake in northeastern Japan. Despite occasional periods of tension, the currents of friendship between the two countries have grown steadily stronger over the years.

This current is the accumulation of friendships developed through innumerable face-to-face interactions and exchanges, each of which makes its own small yet invaluable contribution. For this reason, it will not easily run dry no matter what trial or obstacle it encounters. And we must ensure that never happens.

In a lecture I delivered at Peking University in May 1990, I urged, "No matter what issues might come between us, the bonds of friendship must never be broken." [\[50\]](#) Now more than ever we need to reaffirm that conviction.

Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China (1978)

The Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China was a peace treaty concluded between the two countries on August 12, 1978, more than thirty years after the end of World War II. The treaty had its origin in the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China in 1972.

The treaty stipulates that the two countries develop relations of perpetual peace and friendship, settle all disputes by peaceful means and refrain from the use or threat of force. It also stipulates that neither country seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region or in any other region, and that they endeavor to develop economic and cultural relations and to promote exchanges.

The political and economic arenas are always impacted by the ebb and flow of the times. Indeed, times of tranquillity are perhaps the exception rather than the rule. This is why, when faced with a crisis, it is important to adamantly uphold the two central pledges in the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China (1978): To refrain from the use or threat of force, and not to seek regional hegemony.

So long as we uphold these principles, we will without fail find ways to overcome the present crisis. Even more than when things are going well, it is times of adversity that present opportunities to deepen understanding and strengthen ties. I strongly encourage Japan and China to reconfirm their commitment to uphold the two pledges of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship and promptly set up a high-level forum for dialogue aimed at preventing any further deterioration of relations.

The first order of business for such a forum should be to institute a moratorium on all actions that could be construed as provocative. This should be followed by a scrupulous analysis of the steps by which the confrontation evolved--how actions were perceived and what reactions were provoked. This would facilitate the development of guidelines for more effective responses to future crises. Doubtless, some sharp differences of opinion would be expressed, but unless we are prepared to face each other on those terms, hopes for the restoration of friendly relations between the two countries--for greater stability in Asia and for a peaceful world--will continue to elude us.

Immediately after the end of the Cold War, I met for the first time with then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, in July 1990. I opened our conversation by saying: "I have come to have an argument with you. Let's make sparks fly, and talk about everything honestly and openly, for the sake of humanity and for the sake of Japan-Soviet relations!" I expressed myself in this way to convey my hopes of having a real and frank discussion instead of a merely formal meeting, at a time when the prospects for Japan-Soviet relations were uncertain.

The more difficult the situation appears to be, the more important it is to engage in dialogue based on a commitment to peace and creative coexistence. Heated and earnest dialogue can reveal the emotions--the fears, concerns and aspirations--that underlie the positions and assertions of each side.

In this context, I propose that China and Japan institute the practice of holding regular summit meetings.

This month marks the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Élysée Treaty by France and Germany. The treaty helped the two countries overcome their history of war and bloodshed, with relations becoming significantly closer due to the provisions for regular meetings of Heads of State and Government at least twice a year and for ministerial-level meetings at least once every three months in the fields of foreign affairs, defense and education. I believe that the current crisis between Japan and China presents a unique opportunity to establish a similar framework, creating an environment that enables their leaders to conduct face-to-face dialogue under any circumstances.

Further, I suggest that Japan and China together launch an organization for environmental cooperation in East Asia. This could be an interim goal to be achieved by 2015 and would lay the foundations of a new partnership focused on peace and creative coexistence and joint action for the sake of humanity.

Amelioration of environmental conditions would benefit both countries. This new organization would create opportunities for young people from China and Japan to work together toward a common goal. It would also establish a pattern of contributing together to the peace and stability of East Asia and the creation of a sustainable global society.

When I called for the normalization of diplomatic relations back in September 1968, I urged the young people of both countries to come together in friendship to build a better world. The foundation for this, I believe, has now been laid in a quiet, uncelebrated way through the exchanges and interactions that have been conducted to date.

Now, I believe, the focus should turn to something more visible and durable. The time has come to take a medium- to long-term perspective and develop more concrete models of cooperation across a range of new fields. I am convinced that it is through such sustained and determined efforts that the bonds of friendship between China and Japan will develop into something indestructible, something that will be passed down with pride from generation to generation.

A robust solidarity

In this proposal, I have shared my vision and some suggestions for action that I see as vital toward building a global society of peace and coexistence in the years leading to 2030. The key to realizing these goals ultimately lies in the solidarity of ordinary citizens.

In *The System of Value-Creating Education*, the first president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), made the following observation regarding why, with rare exceptions, the efforts of people who take a stand to correct social ills end in failure:

Throughout history, people of goodwill have met with severe persecutions. Other good-hearted people may secretly sympathize with their plight but, lacking the capacity to do anything about it, remain bystanders while the former go down to defeat. Because narrow self-preservation is at the heart of these bystanders' way of life, they remain mere constituent elements of society. They cannot serve as its binding power or prevent its disintegration. [\[51\]](#)

Makiguchi founded the Soka Gakkai together with my mentor, Josei Toda, in order to break this tragic pattern of human history. Transcending the narrow imperatives of self-preservation, they stood up to create a robust solidarity of people who take action to protect the dignity of all people's lives. Today, this solidarity has spread to 192 countries and territories around the globe.

The year 2030 will be a major milestone in the effort to promote international cooperation for sustainable development. At the same time, it will mark the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai. Looking ahead to that significant year, we will continue to strengthen and deepen solidarity among the world's people, working with all those who share the vision of a global society of peace and creative coexistence.

Élysée Treaty

The Élysée Treaty is a treaty of friendship that laid a foundation for cooperation between France and Germany, ending centuries of conflict between them. It was signed on January 22, 1963, by French President Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970) and German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967).

The treaty provides a framework for consultation and cooperation between French and German authorities in the areas of foreign affairs, defense, education and youth. It calls for regular summit meetings between high-level officials and sets up various bilateral projects. The creation of a French-German Fund for exchanges between students of the two countries is one of the most important achievements of the treaty, enabling more than eight million cross-border youth exchanges to date.

Notes

- 1 Goethe and Zelter, *Goethe's Letters to Zelter*, 246.
- 2 Cf. Osten, "Kasoku suru jikan," 165.
- 3 (trans. from) Osten, "*Alles veloziferisch*" oder *Goethes Entdeckung*, 31.
- 4 Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*, 18.
- 5 Ikeda and Toynebee, *Choose Life*, 341.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Wilkinson and Pickett, *The Spirit Level*, 56.
- 8 Ibid., 174.
- 9 (trans. from) Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha 1*, 156.
- 10 Cf. Xuanzang, *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*.
- 11 Cf. Nichiren, *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu*, 740.
- 12 Müller, trans., *The Sutta-nipata*, 4:9:462.
- 13 Mayeroff, *On Caring*, 18-19.
- 14 Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1:303.
- 15 Ibid., 1:923.
- 16 Cf. Ikeda, "The Challenge of Global Empowerment."
- 17 (trans. from) Nakamura, *Budda no kotoba*, 203.
- 18 Saddhatissa, trans., *The Sutta-nipāta*, 4:2:936.
- 19 Buddharakkhita, trans., *The Dhammapada*, 10:130:2.
- 20 (trans. from) Iwano, ed., *Kokuyaku issaikyo*, 29/30:162.
- 21 Cf. Nichiren, *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu*, 778.
- 22 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 16.
- 23 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 24-25.
- 24 (trans. from) Nichiren, *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu*, 761.
- 25 Ikeda, *A New Humanism*, 52-61.
- 26 Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, 166.
- 27 Virilio, *Ground Zero*, 52.
- 28 Toda, "Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons."
- 29 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 25.
- 30 Toda, "Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons."
- 31 Ban, "Remarks at Dialogue with Waseda University Students."
- 32 UN General Assembly, "2010 Review Conference," 19.
- 33 ICRC, "Council of Delegates 2011: Resolution 1."
- 34 UNODA, "Joint Statement."
- 35 Obama, "Remarks by President Obama at Hankuk University."
- 36 NATO, "Deterrence and Defence Posture Review."
- 37 Rizvi, "Govts Boost Nukes While Cutting Aid, Social Services."
- 38 IPPNW, "Nuclear Famine: A Billion People at Risk."
- 39 Obama, "Remarks by President Obama at Hankuk University."
- 40 Roosevelt, "Address to the United Nations General Assembly."
- 41 UN OHCHR, "Rio+20 Outcome."
- 42 UN General Assembly, "Final Draft of the Guiding Principles," 10.
- 43 Yunus, *Creating a World Without Poverty*, 104.
- 44 ILO, "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2012," 43.
- 45 ILO, "The Youth Employment Crisis," 3.
- 46 (trans. from) Ikeda and Harding, *Kibo no kyoiku*, 172.
- 47 UNICEF, "The State of the World's Children," 46.
- 48 Ibid., 47.
- 49 UN, "Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child."
- 50 Ikeda, *A New Humanism*, 17.
- 51 (trans. from) Makiguchi, *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu*, 6:68.

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