

## Human Security and Sustainability: Sharing Reverence for the Dignity of Life

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Motivated by the quest for a global society of peace and coexistence, I have, every year since 1983, issued a peace proposal commemorating January 26, the day that the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was founded in 1975. The present proposal will thus be the thirtieth such proposal.

The members of the SGI throughout the world are committed to the work of constructing--through a movement for peace, education and culture--a global society in which the dignity of each person shines and all people can live in security. The spiritual foundations for this effort are found in the philosophy of Buddhism which reverences the inherent value and dignity of life. Specifically, we are inspired by the fervent desire expressed by second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900-58): "I wish to see the word 'misery' no longer used to describe the world, any country, any individual." [\[1\]](#)

Sadly, the planet continues to be wracked by violent conflict and civil unrest; people around the world face unacceptable threats to their lives and dignity in the form of poverty, hunger and environmental destruction, while the suffering caused by human rights violations and discrimination remains widespread. Further, there has been the wrenching spectacle of natural disasters that instantly rob people of their lives, disrupting and undermining the foundations of entire societies.

Recent years have seen a series of major natural disasters, from the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in 2004 to the massive earthquake in Haiti in 2010, exacting a horrific toll in human life. Japan was struck by a devastating earthquake and tsunami in March last year, while earthquakes also hit New Zealand and Turkey; Thailand and the Philippines experienced deadly flooding; and severe drought afflicted Somalia and much of East Africa.

I offer my heartfelt sympathies to all those affected by these disasters, my prayers for the repose of the deceased and moral support to those who are struggling to reconstruct their lives and communities.

There is also the fact, noted by the Japanese physicist Torahiko Terada (1878-1935) who issued repeated calls for more effective measures against earthquakes and tsunami, that the more civilization advances, the more intense the impact of nature's violent forces becomes.

The partial meltdown at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant provoked by the March 11, 2011, Tohoku earthquake and tsunami is symbolic of this. The resulting release of radiation contaminated a broad area not limited to Japanese national territory, forcing large numbers of people from their homes. It is not known when people will be able to return, and there are concerns about the impact on children's health as well as on food and agricultural products.

The compound impact of this natural and human disaster has been without precedent. It calls into question contemporary society's reliance on nuclear energy and, more broadly, the scale and pace of scientific-technological development.

### The human security perspective

The economist Amartya Sen has long been vocal in his warnings about the threats that can descend on communities without warning. His experience, as a young boy, of the severe famine that struck his native Bengal was formative and has inspired a lifetime of socioeconomic research driven by a strong concern about the issues of poverty and inequality. He has called for the promotion, on a global scale, of the methods and approaches of "human security" that focus on protecting the lives, livelihoods and dignity of people. In particular, he singles out "the dangers of sudden deprivation":

The insecurities that threaten human survival or the safety of daily life, or imperil the natural dignity of men and women, or expose human beings to the uncertainty of disease and pestilence, or subject vulnerable

people to abrupt penury related to economic downturns demand that special attention be paid to the dangers of sudden deprivation. [2]

Professor Sen calls attention to the fact that a genuinely secure and stable society cannot be realized without alleviating and, to the degree possible, eliminating sources of threat and insecurity to "the vital core of all human lives." [3]

Natural disaster is not the only form unanticipated threats can take: they can also arise from economic crises that create widening insecurity in people's lives and rapid environmental degradation brought about by climate change. All of these have the potential to impact both developed and developing countries.

The 2003 report of the Commission on Human Security, which Professor Sen cochaired with Dr. Sadako Ogata, states:

When people experience repeated crises and unpreventable disasters that cause them to fall--whether from extreme poverty, personal injury or bankruptcy, or society-wide shocks or disasters--the human security perspective is that there should be hands to catch them. [4]

In September of last year, World Bank President Robert Zoellick warned that the world had entered a new phase of economic danger, and there is indeed concern that the chain reaction of economic crises will continue to spread from one country to the next. The global economy, which has been stagnant since the financial crisis of 2008, has more recently been struck by a widening sovereign debt crisis in Europe that first surfaced in Greece. Last summer, the credit rating for the United States' sovereign debt was downgraded for the first time ever. Together, these events have contributed to increasingly unstable financial markets and a further slowing of economic activity.

According to a recent International Labour Organization (ILO) report, global unemployment stands at nearly 200 million worldwide. [5] In many countries, people's living standards are under increasing threat. The impact of unemployment has been particularly severe on younger workers who, in some countries, may be two to three times more likely to be unemployed than the members of other age groups. [6] Even when they are able to find work, it is often part-time or irregular and thus poorly paid. Such insecurity is becoming a fact of life for young people around the world.

In past proposals, I have sought to address the distortions in global society that have resulted in a "living gap" and a "dignity gap." By this I mean the impermissible inequality in the value accorded to people's life and dignity based on nothing more than the society into which they were born and the circumstances in which they were raised.

In addition to these structural issues, people's lives, livelihoods and dignity can also be grievously undermined by the "dangers of sudden deprivation" such as those brought about by natural disasters or economic crises, and it is also crucial that we confront these. This is the area I would like to focus on and explore in this proposal.

## The agony of loss

It is the nature of disastrous events to destroy in an instant those things that are most precious, necessary and irreplaceable to human life. Nothing is more devastating than the loss of people who have been an integral part of our lives--the parent who raised us, the partner who shared our joys and sorrows, the treasured child or grandchild, the close friend or neighbor.

Buddhism refers to this as the inevitable suffering of being parted from those we love. No one is exempt from the stabbing pain that this provokes.

I am reminded of the following episode from the life of the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), whose works I have loved since I was young. In his journal, Emerson recorded the death of his five-year-old son with these simple words: "Yesterday night at 15 minutes after eight my little Waldo ended his life." [7]

It had been Emerson's constant practice since his youth to keep a journal for philosophical and literary reflection. This poignant recording of the painful fact would seem to be all that he was able to muster in that moment.

The perhaps even more telling indicator of the depth of Emerson's grief is to be found in the subsequent two-day silence--the four blank pages--that is finally broken by this entry:

The sun went up in the morning sky with all his light, but the landscape was dishonored by this loss. For this boy in whose remembrance I have both slept & awaked so oft, decorated for me the morning star, & the evening cloud. . . [8]

Buddhism has always been centrally concerned with the mysteries of life and death. In 1276, Nichiren (1222-82), the founder of the school of Buddhism practiced by the members of the SGI, addressed a letter to a female believer who, after the death of her husband, had also lost her son in an unforeseen tragedy.

In it, he expresses the feelings that he imagines must fill the heart of this grieving mother, knowing that she must be wondering why her son had died, not her. "Why did they not take you instead of your son? Why did they let you survive only to be tormented by such grief?" [\[9\]](#) Through his words, he seeks to enter into and share her suffering.

I am certain you must feel that you would not hesitate to plunge into fire yourself, or to smash your own skull if, by so doing, you could see your son again. In imagining your grief, my tears do not cease. [\[10\]](#)

Disasters inflict on large numbers of people the suffering of the loss of friends and family members, unexpectedly and without warning. Society as a whole must be prepared to offer the kind of long-term support that is essential in such cases.

Tragically, disasters may also result in the destruction of the homes that were the basis for people's daily lives and the shredding of the bonds of community. A home is much more than simply a vessel containing the processes of life; it is inscribed with the history of a family, filled with the emotions and sensations of daily living. It encloses a special kind of time linking past to present and present to future; its loss ruptures the history of our lives.

Further, when entire communities are devastated, as in the case of the tsunami that accompanied the massive earthquake that struck Japan last March, there is an instantaneous severing of connections to people and place. The intensity of this loss grows in proportion to our affection for and attachment to the community. Even when people are able to find new places to live, they are forced to adjust to life in a new environment often without the support of the human connections and relationships developed over the years.

When I think of the agonies suffered by the evacuees, I am reminded of the words of the French author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-44):

For nothing, in truth, can replace that companion. Old friends cannot be created out of hand. Nothing can match the treasure of common memories, of trials endured together, of quarrels and reconciliations and generous emotions. It is idle, having planted an acorn in the morning, to expect that afternoon to sit in the shade of the oak. [\[11\]](#)

The sense expressed here of the precious bonds of friendship and the sadness provoked by their loss pertains equally, I believe, to the loss of one's accustomed home, hometown or community. This is a reality we should always bear in mind.

Likewise, the sudden destruction of places of employment robs people of their livelihoods and thus the sense of purpose and dignity that so many derive from work.

I am currently engaged in a dialogue with Professor Stuart Rees of the Sydney Peace Foundation in Australia on the theme of peace with justice. One facet of this theme is the problem of unemployment and the unacceptable threat it poses to human dignity.

As Professor Rees has written:

[Unemployed] people are being denied the profound human sense of self-worth that comes from work; either in the sense of earning one's keep, having the satisfaction of achieving something, or making a contribution to society. [\[12\]](#)

The globally renowned immunologist Tomio Tada (1934-2010), who, at the age of sixty-seven, suffered a debilitating stroke, later described the shock he experienced when he realized he would have to abandon the work he had been engaged in.

From that day, everything changed: my life, my goal in living, my joys, my sadness--everything was different from before. [\[13\]](#)

As I thought about it, I was overwhelmed by an unbearable sense of loss, which gnawed at me mercilessly. I had to abandon everything. [\[14\]](#)

Work and employment serve as a form of proof that one is necessary to society. Even if it does not bring particular recognition or fame, work can be a source of fulfillment and pride, realized through the steady pursuit of the role that is ours and ours alone to play. For people who have lost their homes and possessions in a disaster and are dealing with the strains of life as evacuees, the loss of work not only represents a severing of the economic lifeline but can further undermine the spiritual grounding necessary to move forward.

For this reason I believe that we all share the responsibility to support people in rebuilding their lives, enabling them to regain a sense of hope, and in particular, for those who have been compelled to change their place of residence or work, to rediscover places where they can feel a sense of belonging.

## The lessons of history

What do we do to contain tragedy, whether it arises from natural disasters or from the complex of global issues? Clearly, we need to develop new sources of vision and concrete responses if we are to prevent a widening scope of suffering and see the word "misery" no longer used to describe the world.

Here, I think the words of Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975), one of the great historians of the twentieth century, are relevant: "Our experience in the past gives us the only light on the future that is accessible to us." [\[15\]](#)

This year will mark forty years since I visited Dr. Toynbee's home in London at his invitation, engaging in extensive dialogue. One theme to which he continued to return in both our conversations and his writings was the "lessons of history." Fundamental to Dr. Toynbee's view of history is what he described as "the philosophical contemporaneity of all civilizations." [\[16\]](#)

His thinking on this point was importantly shaped by an experience he had shortly after the outbreak of World War I, while lecturing on Thucydides' account of the fifth-century BCE Peloponnesian War. Toynbee describes this as follows:

I suddenly realized that the experiences we had just had were like those of Thucydides at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. I felt that his being separated from us by twenty-three centuries was really irrelevant. His total experience lay in our future. [\[17\]](#)

With this penetrating understanding, Toynbee was able to read lessons from the millennia of human history that are directly relevant to the aporia of our present-day world. In the published record of our dialogue, he states: "We must not be defeatist, passive or aloof in our reaction to the current evils that threaten mankind's survival." [\[18\]](#) I will never forget the impression these words made on me.

In the same way, I feel it is relevant to reference the treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" (Jpn: *Rissho ankoku ron*), authored by Nichiren, as a framework for thinking about contemporary conditions. Nichiren addressed this treatise to Hojo Tokiyori (1227-63), who wielded ultimate political authority within the Kamakura shogunate, in 1260.

The work opens with this lamentation:

In recent years, there have been unusual disturbances in the heavens, strange occurrences on earth, famine and pestilence, all affecting every corner of the empire and spreading throughout the land. Oxen and horses lie dead in the streets, and the bones of the stricken crowd the highways. [\[19\]](#)

Indeed, the Japan of his day had been hit by a succession of disasters that had taken the lives of great numbers of people, giving rise to unimaginable misery. Nichiren was motivated to pen this work by the unquenchable urge to find some way of alleviating the people's suffering.

## The role of the state

Rereading this text in light of present-day conditions and the imperatives of human security, there are three aspects that strike me as being especially relevant.

The first is the philosophical stance that the highest priority of the state must be the well-being and security of ordinary people.

The ideas set out in "On Establishing" form the core of Nichiren's Buddhist philosophy, as attested to by the fact that over the course of his life he hand-copied the text again and again. When we review the extant texts copied in Nichiren's own hand, an important fact comes to light. In addition to the standard Chinese characters for "land" or "country," which consist of a framing square--representing walls or borders--enclosing either the symbol for the king or a weapon, Nichiren uses a character in which the symbol for the common people is enclosed by the surrounding borders or walls. He uses this character--expressive of the idea that it is the people and their lives, not political authority or military force, that form the basis of the state--in the vast majority of cases. It could be said Nichiren's philosophy is condensed into this choice and use of Chinese characters.

On another occasion, he wrote that those in power must be "the hands and feet of the people." [20] That is, they must serve the interests of the common people, protecting their livelihoods and happiness.

By authoring and presenting "On Establishing" to the de facto political leader of his time, Nichiren sought to remonstrate with that leader based on his conviction that a correct understanding of Buddhist philosophy could dispel the darkness and confusion enveloping society. This was, needless to say, an extremely dangerous undertaking, and Nichiren was in fact subjected to two exiles and numerous attempts on his life despite having committed no secular crime.

Some 750 years after this text was written, it remains strikingly relevant, especially in terms of the human security concerns that now attract such attention. On this point, it is appropriate to quote the report of the Commission on Human Security again:

The state remains the fundamental purveyor of security. Yet it often fails to fulfill security obligations--and at times has even become a source of threat to its own people. That is why attention must now shift from the security of the state to the security of the people--to human security.

[21]

In this regard, we need to ask what is the purpose of a state's existence, however successful it may be in economic or military terms, if it fails to make efforts to alleviate the suffering of its citizens and support their pursuit of a life with dignity.

Disasters and crises bring to the surface the fault lines in society that might otherwise remain hidden. They reveal the particular vulnerabilities of the aged, women, children, people with disabilities and those marginalized by economic disparities.

This has certainly been the case in the aftermath of the earthquake that struck Japan last March. When we consider the terrible burden of suffering borne by all people in the afflicted regions, but most especially by these vulnerable populations, it is impossible not to be dismayed by the very slow political response.

## Recognizing our interconnectedness

The second aspect of Nichiren's treatise that I would like to consider is his call for the establishment of a worldview rooted in a vital sense of our interconnectedness. To quote a key passage: "If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?" [22] This is how he expresses the idea that just as we cannot experience happiness and security in isolation--enjoying them even as others suffer from their want--we likewise cannot live insulated against the miseries and threats that afflict others.

As the problem of climate change demonstrates, in an increasingly interdependent world what may now appear as only a localized, if dire, impact in fact contains the potential to pose threats on a global scale. Likewise those threats whose effects may seem relatively small now can, if not dealt with, develop into problems of intractable gravity for future generations.

The importance of considering the temporal and spatial dimensions of threats was touched on in a report submitted to the United Nations General Assembly by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2010:

[B]y understanding how particular constellations of threats to individuals and communities translate into broader intra- and inter-State security breaches, human security seeks to prevent and mitigate the occurrence of future threats. [23]

Herein lies the significance of the Buddhist view that unless there is peace and security in "the four quarters of the land"--society as a whole--our individual or personal security will prove illusory.

This way of thinking is rooted in the Buddhist teaching of "dependent origination" (deep or existential interdependence). The words of Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) that I have referenced on numerous occasions in these proposals, "I am myself plus my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I cannot save myself," address the same point, as does his admonition to "save . . . the phenomena; that is to say to look for the meaning of what surrounds us." [24]

Whenever tragedies occur, people from throughout the world typically respond with earnest expressions of concern and material support. Such manifestations of empathy and solidarity are an incalculable source of courage, a bright light of hope for the victims of the disaster.

Nichiren is also recorded as saying: "the varied sufferings that all living beings undergo--all these are Nichiren's own sufferings." [25] And in "On Establishing" he describes a way of life in which we resonate viscerally with the pain of others and work tirelessly for its alleviation.

While Nichiren speaks of "the four quarters of the land" and "the nation," the scope of his concern is expansive in terms of space and time. This can be seen in his repeated use of such terms as "Jambudvipa" (a word from traditional Buddhist cosmology meaning the entire world) and his references to "the boundless future."

Today, these two vectors might be expressed as the determination not to ignore tragedy wherever it occurs and to prevent the negative legacies of the present from being visited on future generations. The former could also be thought of as awareness of our responsibilities as global citizens and the latter as a commitment to sustainability.

As people, we share this one planet which we will eventually pass on to our children. A clear and vital awareness of the full dimensions of life's interconnectedness must be the basis for all our actions.

## A focus on empowerment

The third aspect of Nichiren's treatise that I would like to touch on is his focus on what today would be termed empowerment, specifically his insight that the greatest empowerment is realized when, through dialogue, we advance from a shared awareness and concern about a difficult situation to a shared pledge or vow to achieve its resolution.

Like many Buddhist texts or scriptures, "On Establishing" takes the form of dialogue--an exchange of questions and responses--in this case between a visitor representing secular authority and a host representing the perspectives of Buddhism. At the opening of the text, a traveler stops at the abode of the host where they discuss and express their deep distress at the unbroken succession of disasters that has struck the land. It is this sharing of concern and the determination somehow to bring the situation under control that enables them to see beyond the differences of their respective positions and commence the dialogue.

As the dialogue develops, the host and the guest both present their views based on their earnestly held convictions. The host, responding to the anger and confusion expressed at points by the guest, scrupulously explains and resolves each of his doubts. Through the dramatic encounter and confrontation of soul with soul, the guest is finally and fully convinced of the correctness of the host's assertions. He gives voice to the shared vow that has emerged from their initial sharing of concern: "But it is not enough that I alone should accept and have faith in your words--we must see to it that others as well are warned of their errors." [26]

The conclusion finally reached through this process of dialogue is a powerful recognition of the need to believe in the limitless possibilities of the individual human being--the message of the Lotus Sutra which constitutes the essence of Buddhist teachings. It is faith in the proposition that all people possess infinite potential, the capacity to bring forth their unique and essential dignity.

An awakening to this dignity can spark the flame of hope in a person sunk in the depths of anguish. That person in turn can ignite hope in another, and the resulting momentum of human renewal has the power to drive away the dark confusion that shrouds society.

Here again, the words of the Commission on Human Security resonate with the ideas expressed in this ancient text. For example, human security must "build on people's strengths and aspirations" [27]; one key is "People's ability to act on their own behalf--and on behalf of others." [28]

The primary question of every human security activity should not be:  
What can we do? It should be: How does this activity build on the  
efforts and capabilities of those directly affected? [29]

Describing the chaos and confusion of his time, Nichiren deplored the fact that the people had become disempowered. Repeated calamities had taken their toll on people's morale, and many indeed seemed to have lost the will to live. Further,

the prevailing ethos of society was one that encouraged people to avoid confronting realities and to seek tranquillity solely in the realm of the inner life.

Nichiren considered teachings that encourage resignation or escapism as a path to salvation to be the "one evil" that clouds people's vision, blinding them to the limitless potential they in fact possess. For Nichiren, the only viable path through the deadlock facing society is for people to believe in each other's possibilities and to work together to bring forth those capabilities.

In this connection, I am reminded of an episode recounted by the Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich (1926-2002), who urged that we must never fear being a "candle in the dark." [30] He describes his friendship with a Catholic bishop, Hélder Câmara (1909-99), who was struggling against the inhumane brutalities of the Brazilian military junta in the early 1960s. Câmara attempted to engage in dialogue with a general who would later become known as one of Brazil's cruelest torturers. This ended in failure, and after the general left, Câmara fell into a lengthy silence. Finally, he turned to Illich and said:

You must *never* give up. As long as a person is alive, somewhere beneath the ashes there is a little bit of remaining fire, and all our task is. . . You must blow. . . carefully, very carefully blow. . . and blow. . . you'll see if it lights up. You mustn't worry whether it takes fire again or not. All you have to do is blow. [31]

On one level, Câmara's words "You must *never* give up" represent his attempt to restore his own determination; at the same time, they reverberate with the importance of offering wholehearted encouragement to those who stand at the precipice of despair.

The spirit of empowerment is found in the act of carefully fanning the "little bit of remaining fire" in the human soul of both those who support us and oppose us. I believe that this patient faith and effort is the driving force behind the human rights struggles of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-68), as well as those who led the popular revolutions of Eastern Europe that brought the Cold War to an end, and, more recently, the movement for democracy widely referred to as the "Arab Spring."

During the dark years of Cold War confrontation, I visited communist countries such as the USSR and China to promote exchanges aimed at relaxing tensions and fostering mutual understanding. I have also striven to engage in dialogue with political and intellectual leaders from the world's various cultures and religions. These efforts to foster friendship across borders have been driven by the conviction that the only lasting basis for building a global society of peaceful coexistence lies in the transformation of each individual heart. This can be achieved only through the kind of dialogue and interaction that stirs each of us to the depths of our being.

## The recovery of the heart

Of the three aspects of Nichiren's treatise that I have discussed, I believe that this last, empowerment, is of particular relevance to the restoration of people's sense of mental equilibrium and health, "the recovery of the heart." This kind of mental and spiritual reconstruction is among the most difficult and time-consuming challenges we face.

Earlier I made reference to the Commission on Human Security's assertion that human security must "build on people's strengths and aspirations." This challenge is difficult, if not impossible, for individuals to initiate in isolation, much less to sustain to the point where one's entire life is illuminated by the light of hope. This is why, to speak metaphorically, people need the safety ropes of heart-to-heart connections and the pitons of encouragement if they are to continue their ascent up life's precipitous cliffs.

This is illustrated by the lives of three historical figures I referenced earlier, Emerson, Saint-Exupéry and Tada.

Emerson's life was marked not only by the tragedy of the loss of his son but also the earlier deaths of his first wife and two of his siblings. He was later able to reflect that these many losses had come to assume "the aspect of a guide or genius," [32] providing him with the impetus to make positive changes to his way of living.

In like manner, Saint-Exupéry would later write: "What saves a man is to take a step. Then another step. It is always the same step, but you have to take it. . . Only the unknown frightens men. But once a man has faced the unknown, that terror becomes the known." [33]

The immunologist Tomio Tada eventually was able to return to writing and, echoing Dante's *Divine Comedy*, penned these words: "If I am in a hellish condition, then let me write my Inferno." He also said, "I do not know what awaits me, but I know it will represent proof that I have lived." [34] In this way, he was able to regain a sense of purpose in life.

Underlying each of these dramas of recovery from tragedy, there was undoubtedly the support and assistance of others.

When the philosopher William James (1842-1910) undertook an investigation of the survivors of the earthquake that devastated San Francisco in 1906, he noted that when people were able to share their experiences, there was a perceptible difference in their sense of suffering and loss. Even if such sharing does not immediately translate into the ability to move forward, it can encourage people steeped in pain to look to the future.

To this end, we must learn to attend to the words that flow from another's soul, to allow our heart to shudder with another's grief and to patiently blow the breath of life on the small ember that lies hidden in another's heart.

As the German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) noted, the vast body of teachings left by Shakyamuni--the sutras that are known as the storehouse of 80,000 teachings--is for the most part the record of words spoken to individuals and small groups. For Shakyamuni believed that "to speak to all is to speak to each individual." [35] His teachings were thus expounded in response to the specific worries and sufferings of individuals.

Calling out to others as "friend," Shakyamuni strove to enter into their hearts and minds, to clarify the essential nature of their suffering and to help them awaken to the means to overcome it. As the parable of the man shot by a poisonous arrow demonstrates, the wisdom of Buddhism does not expend itself on metaphysical concepts or abstract, philosophical debates. Rather, it issues inexhaustibly from the deep desire to alleviate the suffering of each unique individual.

This can also be seen in Nichiren's teachings. In the letters he addressed to his followers he embraces each of them, lamenting their difficulties as if they were his own. His words speak to us today, offering us important guidelines for living, precisely because they are the crystallization of his compassionate prayer and determination to help his followers live their lives undefeated by such trials.

## With the people

Today, members of the SGI throughout the world continue the work of fostering heart-to-heart bonds with their fellow citizens through the practice of one-to-one dialogue, constructing networks of mutual encouragement. In times of emergency, such as natural disasters, we have made our facilities available to evacuees, transported and distributed relief supplies, assisted in cleanup efforts and engaged in various other relief activities. Individual members have continued to support and encourage their neighbors even as they themselves endure the impacts of these disasters.

Such acts are a spontaneous expression of concern and the irrepressible desire to help. They are a natural extension of day-to-day religious activities that are based on the sharing of others' joys and sorrows, and the deep commitment to the kind of happiness that is only experienced when shared by self and others.

During the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) annual consultations with NGOs in Geneva in June 2011, a session was devoted to the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs). This demonstrates the growing focus on the contribution made by FBOs to help those impacted by the threats arising in society.

Drawing on the experience of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, an SGI representative addressed the session as follows: "Even in a complex and insecure environment, it is empowerment of the surviving victims that makes humanitarian relief effective and sustainable with their self-help and participation, and FBOs are in a strong position to contribute in this way." [36]

As an example of this kind of empowerment, I am reminded of an episode described by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., of one elderly woman participating in the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-56), refusing to ride the racially segregated buses. A man in a car who was also supporting the boycott stopped beside her and invited her to ride with him. But she refused, stating: "I'm not walking for myself. I'm walking for my children and my grandchildren." [37]

In the aftermath of disasters, there are countless people who, despite being physically and emotionally wounded themselves, are prompted to take action out of their desire to do whatever they can to help friends, loved ones and people they see in distress.

Buddhism teaches that whatever our individual circumstances, we can always discover the capacity to help others; it also assures us that those who have suffered the most have the right to the greatest happiness.

### 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.

## The Treasure Tower

In the Lotus Sutra, the scripture which is recognized in the Nichiren tradition as the highest, most complete teaching of Shakyamuni, the image of a massive bejeweled treasure tower is used to illustrate the beauty, dignity and preciousness of life. The treasure tower appears in the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra. An immense tower emerges from beneath the earth and hovers in midair. It is adorned with seven kinds of treasures: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, seashell, agate, pearl and carnelian. These treasures correspond to various aspects of the human capacity to work for self-perfection.

The Buddhist scriptures state, "The treasure towers are none other than all living beings." [38] This means that the magnificent treasure tower of cosmic scale that is described in the Lotus Sutra is nothing other than the original essence of each individual human being. A person who has awakened to this primordial dignity gains possession of an indestructible state of mind. This is a sense of dignity that cannot be undermined by any threat or tribulation. As the sutras state, "a mad elephant can only destroy your body; it cannot destroy your mind." [39]

As more and more people develop this conviction, extending a helping hand to those mired in suffering and together taking the first steps in the process of recovery, countless treasure towers rise up, setting in full motion the reconstruction of the community. This principle lies at the heart of our beliefs in the SGI, and forms the foundation for our activities.

As we have seen following the disasters of recent years, there are many examples throughout the world of networks of mutual support in the community and voluntary activities, involving individuals from every walk of life, springing up when local authorities have been overwhelmed. I believe this same impulse underlies the outpouring of aid and encouragement offered by people in other countries.

The actions of people at such times of disaster demonstrate the importance of constantly nourishing bonds of support and of instilling an ethos of mutual aid. This is the best way to strengthen the capacity of societies to respond to the "dangers of sudden deprivation."

Dr. Wangari Maathai (1940-2011), the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate who passed away last year, developed the Green Belt Movement in Kenya and other parts of Africa as a means of empowering people in the face of the threat of environmental destruction. The movement repeatedly met with obstruction and harassment, with many of the newly planted trees being damaged and destroyed. "Yet the trees, like us, survived," Dr. Maathai wrote. "The rains would come and the sun would shine and before you knew it the trees would be throwing new leaves and shoots into the air." [40] The encouragement to be gleaned from her words is unforgettable.

She maintained that the Green Belt Movement succeeded in bringing out the energies of people because it was "structured to avoid the urge to work *for* rather than *with* them." [41]

I believe that this spirit of working with rather than for others is the key to generating the kind of self-reinforcing cycles of empowerment of which I have been speaking. This process, driven and directed by the people themselves, can dispel the darkness of despair and cause a sun burnished with hope for the future to climb above the horizon.

## A clear future vision

Next, I would like to discuss concrete proposals to tackle various threats that seriously impact people's lives, livelihoods and dignity.

But first, it is useful to note two perspectives stressed by Dr. Elise Boulding (1920-2010), one of the earliest proponents of cultures of peace. The first is the importance of taking action with a clear vision of the future one wants to see. The second is the value of thinking in terms of a time frame she called the "two-hundred-year present." [42]

Concerning the first point, Dr. Boulding shared the following episode with me. In the 1960s, at a meeting of academics studying the economic aspects of disarmament, she asked what a totally disarmed world would look like. To her surprise, their response was that they had no idea and thought that their job was to just explain and convince others that disarmament was possible. "How could they give themselves wholeheartedly to a movement the outcome of which they could not imagine?" [43]

I think this is an essential question. No matter how important peace and disarmament might be, if the movement to achieve them does not have a clearly defined vision pulsing at its depths, it will not generate the power needed to surmount the barriers and obstacles that reality presents. Dr. Boulding understood that a shared vision brings people together and enables them to "give themselves wholeheartedly."

## Green Belt Movement

The Green Belt Movement is a civil society organization which was established in 1977 by Dr. Wangari Maathai. While active in the National Council of Women of Kenya, she introduced the idea of a grassroots tree-planting program to address the problems of deforestation, soil erosion and lack of water in rural Kenya. Advocacy and empowerment for women, just forms of economic development and ecotourism have since been incorporated into the movement. More than 40 million trees have been planted across Africa, and over 30,000 women have been trained in forestry, food processing, bee-keeping and other skills. In 2004, Dr. Maathai became the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for "her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace." The Green Belt Movement aims to plant one billion trees worldwide in the next decade.

[www.greenbeltmovement.org](http://www.greenbeltmovement.org)

Her other perspective, the concept of a 200-year present, means to live our lives conscious of a time frame spanning 100 years before today and another 100 years after today. Dr. Boulding stressed, "We do not live in the present only. If the present moment were all, its occurrences would crush us." [44] But if we think of ourselves as existing in a greater time frame, we can participate in the lifetimes of a multitude of people, from infants born this year to elderly people celebrating their 100th birthday. In this way, Dr. Boulding emphasized the importance of living with a vision of the larger community of which we are part.

This idea enables us to turn our thoughts to those who have experienced various forms of suffering and, at the same time, inspires in us a sense of responsibility to create a future in which these same sufferings will not be visited upon generations to come.

Bearing in mind these perspectives offered by Dr. Boulding, I would propose the values of humanitarianism, human rights and sustainability as the core elements of any future vision to be shared by humankind. Concretely this is a vision of:

- A world that, refusing to overlook human tragedy wherever it occurs, unites in solidarity to overcome threats;
- A world that, based on the empowerment of individuals, gives priority to securing the dignity and right of all people to live in peace;
- A world that, remembering the lessons of the past, does not allow unborn generations to inherit the negative legacies of human history and directs all its energies to transforming those legacies.

This vision has underpinned my peace proposals since 1983.

In dealing with any kind of intractable problem, the approach of working back from a clear vision constitutes a kind of Ariadne's thread to help us find our way out of the maze, and also serves as the source of alternative approaches that will generate change.

On this basis, I will focus here on three major challenges--natural disasters, environmental degradation and poverty, and nuclear weapons--each of which presents future generations with threats and burdens that will only become greater the more we delay our response.

## A rights-based approach

Regarding disaster risk reduction, I propose the strengthening of international frameworks to support disaster-affected populations, specifically by applying a rights-based approach and regularizing the involvement of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

At present, UN efforts to promote international cooperation to reduce the damage caused by disasters from a preventive perspective are centered on the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR). At the same time, however, given the unforeseeable nature of disasters, it is essential to be prepared to support those whose lives are impacted when they do occur.

Here I would like to advocate that, together with the humanitarian imperative, human rights be given a central stress in all relief efforts. This approach should focus on the right of those affected by disasters to live with dignity.

Specifically, I propose that relief activities for people impacted or displaced by disasters, which until now have been handled on a case-by-case basis by UNHCR, be officially included in UNHCR's mandate.

Throughout its history, UNHCR has expanded the range of beneficiaries and scope of its activities: In addition to its original mandate of refugee protection, it is now responsible for relief aid to internally displaced persons and war-affected populations, as well as the protection of asylum seekers and stateless persons. Article Nine of the UNHCR Mandate stipulates that it will engage in additional activities as the General Assembly may determine; subsequent UN General Assembly resolutions have provided the legal basis for these activities.

It is reported that the lives of approximately 160 million people are impacted by natural disasters in the world today, with 100,000 losing their lives every year. Compared to the 1970s, both the incidence of disaster and the number of people affected have approximately tripled. Most of the casualties are concentrated in developing countries, and the vicious cycle of disaster and poverty is a challenge we must respond to. [45]

### Ariadne's thread

The story of Ariadne's thread appears in the ancient Greek legend of Theseus and the Minotaur. According to one version, the Athenians were required to sacrifice seven young men and seven young women every nine years to the Minotaur, a creature with the head of a bull and the body of a man that lived at the center of an elaborate maze. One year, the hero, Theseus, volunteered to slay the Minotaur. On his arrival in Crete, the king's daughter Ariadne fell in love with him and gave him a ball of thread to allow him to navigate the labyrinth. Theseus killed the Minotaur and was able to retrace his path and thus lead the others out of the labyrinth.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres has observed: "Any new approach must be rights-based, since experience during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and other recent disasters have confirmed that such emergencies generate new threats to the human rights of affected populations." [46]

As this indicates, there is an increasing focus on the protection of the dignity of those affected by disaster throughout the relief and recovery process. There remains, however, a tendency to regard a certain degree of deterioration in health and living conditions as inevitable. But the importance to victims of fully protecting each of their rights--including the implications for survival--is only accentuated in a disaster situation.

Steps should be taken to enable UNHCR to be consistently involved in disaster relief assistance. A structure should be established that allows UNHCR to conduct relief activities along with other international organizations, rooted in the principles of humanitarianism and a culture of human rights, and to make every effort to protect people's lives and dignity. We need to create a culture of human rights that champions the dignity of those afflicted by disasters, threats and social injustice.

The UN General Assembly adopted in December 2011 a historic new Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training that sets out the principles and goals by which international society should foster a culture of human rights. The Declaration, the drafting of which began in 2007 following a decision of the UN Human Rights Council, reflects the voices of civil society through the contributions of the NGO Working Group on Human Rights Education & Learning of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations and other civil society organizations.

As the chair of the NGO Working Group and in order to implement the spirit of the Declaration, the SGI is collaborating with Human Rights Education Associates (HREA) to coproduce an educational DVD in partnership with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Ensuring that the spirit of the Declaration becomes widely accepted on a global scale will result in the relief activities conducted by national and local governments having a consistent focus on human rights. The central challenge of the international community in the twenty-first century is to create a culture of human rights, and the SGI is committed to working to strengthen civil society's contribution to this process.

In this regard, I would also like to propose a greater emphasis on the role women play in all the processes from disaster risk reduction to relief and reconstruction as a priority objective of international society.

## The gender perspective

In responding to disasters and other dangers of sudden deprivation, it is essential to pay close attention to the situation of each individual. At the same time, it is absolutely vital that people be empowered to transform their own circumstances, and it is here that a focus on women is indispensable.

Studies suggest that women are more likely than men to die in natural disasters, and this tendency increases with the scale of the disaster. [47] When disaster strikes, not only do women bear a disproportionate burden of the resulting deprivations, but their human rights and dignity are often exposed to grievous threats. Clearly there is a need to afford greater recognition to women's special capacities to contribute to disaster mitigation and reconstruction, and reflect this in disaster response plans.

The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005 contained the following statement: "A gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes." [48] Unfortunately, as the 2011 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction pointed out, progress in this regard remains inadequate. This needs to change, and to this end I think we need an unambiguous and legally binding mandate.

Here we can look to the example of Resolution 1325, adopted by the UN Security Council in October 2000, which reaffirms the importance of the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. This conveyed a powerful message to the international community.

Today, more than ten years after its adoption, full implementation still remains a challenge, and further support is required. But the existence of Resolution 1325 is of great significance because it has become a point of reference in the promotion of various initiatives throughout the world.

### Human Rights Educational DVD

The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is partnering with the international NGO Human Rights Education Associates (HREA) to produce a DVD that raises awareness about the positive role human rights education (HRE) can play in empowering people and fostering a culture of human rights. It will introduce examples from India, Australia and Turkey, illustrating how HRE has helped protect and empower individuals whose human rights were threatened, and also highlight international developments in HRE such as the recent adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training.

[www.hrea.org](http://www.hrea.org)

Former UN Under-Secretary-General Anwarul K. Chowdhury, who played an indispensable role in the adoption of Resolution 1325, emphasized in our dialogue: "A culture of peace can take stronger root with the involvement of women. . . We must not forget that there is no peaceful world in the true sense of the word when women are left behind." [\[49\]](#) Likewise, women can play a crucially important role in the areas of disaster reduction and recovery.

In the wake of the devastation caused by the Haiti earthquake in January 2010, there is growing acknowledgment within the UN system of the need to extend the scope of Resolution 1325 to natural disasters.

Thus, I would like to propose either that the concept of peacebuilding in Resolution 1325 be explicitly expanded to include disaster risk reduction and recovery, or that a new resolution be adopted with a focus on the role women play in these areas.

### UN Women

UN Women, or the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, was created through UN General Assembly Resolution 64/289 in July 2010 to work for the empowerment of women and girls. Former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet is the inaugural Executive Director. Merging four previously distinct parts of the UN system, UN Women aims to counter the inequalities faced by women in terms of work, education and health care, and ensure that they are fairly represented in political and economic decision-making processes. It supports intergovernmental organizations in the formulation of policies and standards and helps governments in implementation, as well as monitoring the UN system's adherence with its own commitments on gender equality.

[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)

I urge that Japan, which served as the host country when the Hyogo Framework for Action was adopted and has experienced major earthquakes in Kobe, Tohoku and other areas in the recent past, take the initiative and strive to act as a model for other countries by promptly improving the domestic environment for gender-conscious disaster prevention efforts.

Michelle Bachelet, the former Chilean president and the first executive director of UN Women, which was created two years ago, has stressed the resilience and potential of women: "I have seen myself what women, often in the toughest circumstances, can achieve for their families and societies if they are given the opportunity. The strength, industry and wisdom of women remain humanity's greatest untapped resource. We simply cannot afford to wait another 100 years to unlock this potential." [\[50\]](#)

Indeed, women must be empowered as effective change agents in the fields of disaster risk reduction, recovery and reconstruction, in line with similar recognition of their potential roles in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. It is intolerable to allow them to continue to bear the brunt of disaster situations.

The SGI has consistently engaged in efforts to raise awareness about the centrality of women to a culture of peace, and is committed to fostering a greater consciousness at the grassroots level regarding women's potential contributions in disaster-related issues.

## For a global sustainable society

The next areas of concern I would like to discuss are the environment and sustainable development.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) (Rio+20) is slated to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, this June. Commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the 1992 Earth Summit, it will review developments over the past two decades and focus on two themes: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

There is still considerable fluidity and debate concerning the definition of a "green economy." I think, however, that it is important that we avoid a too-narrow definition of this concept, for example as simply representing a compromise between competing concerns of economic growth and environmental protection, or as nothing more than a new tool for the generation of employment opportunities.

Last October, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) organized a conference of young people in Bandung, Indonesia, which adopted a declaration positioning the green economy as: "The only integrated framework that is truly sustainable, placing human well-being, social equity and environmental protection on equal footing." [\[51\]](#) I am deeply inspired by the expansive vision and powerful sense of responsibility toward the future expressed by these young people.

Here I would like to call for the adoption of a set of common goals for a sustainable future as a follow-up to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which cover the period until 2015. The "zero draft" of the Rio+20 Conference, a condensed compilation of the many statements and views submitted to the conference organizers, refers to the necessity of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I hope that all parties will engage in in-depth deliberation on this topic based on a comprehensive view of the interlinked challenges facing humankind.

To date, international society has worked toward the achievement of the MDGs, which include such targets as reducing the number of people suffering the effects of poverty and hunger. The MDGs have helped drive efforts from various perspectives and disciplines to ameliorate the living gap and dignity gap that I referred to earlier. Presently, there are many calls for a new set of goals for the period from 2015 onward.

I welcome the attempt to establish such goals and would hope to see them inherit the spirit of the MDGs of alleviating the distortions in our global society generated by poverty and income disparities. They should also address the full range of human security issues that no country can avoid and in this way would bring people together in a shared enterprise of humanity in the twenty-first century.

To this end, I propose that the Rio+20 Conference establish a working group to consider such goals and to initiate the process of dialogue. In pursuing this work, the two key concepts are human security and sustainability.

How, then, are we to understand sustainability? In simplest terms, I think it could be described as follows: a way of life in which we refrain from seeking our own happiness at the expense of others; a determination not to pass on our local community and the planet as a whole to the next generation in a more dirty or damaged condition than it was when we entered it; a society in which the future is not sacrificed to the passing needs of the present, but where optimal choices and decisions are pursued with the interests of our children and grandchildren in mind.

The pursuit of these ideals need not be accompanied by a sense of obligation to obey externally imposed rules, or as a stifling burden of responsibility. Rather, it can be a natural sharing of the desire expressed by the economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1908-2006) in our written dialogue to create "a century in which people can say, 'I enjoy living in this world.'" [\[52\]](#)

I was motivated by very similar sentiments when I wrote in my 2008 proposal that the effort to achieve the MDGs must be focused on not only meeting targets but also restoring the smiles to the faces of those who presently suffer.

We should remember that there is no need to create from scratch the ethics necessary for the realization of this vision. They are expressed in many religious and cultural traditions that voice truths that contemporary society has all but lost sight of. The indigenous Iroquois people of North America, for example, exhort us: "Have always in view not only the present but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground. . ." [\[53\]](#)

Likewise, in the Buddhist scriptures we find Shakyamuni's famous words:

The seen and the unseen,  
Those living near and far away,  
Those born and those to-be-born--  
May all beings be at ease. [\[54\]](#)

In clarifying the underlying ethos for any new set of goals to be adopted, we should work consciously through educational and awareness-raising efforts to ensure that they are not heteronomous rules but take on the character of a vow rooted in the kind of appreciation of life expressed in these statements.

It will further be necessary to carefully consider such concrete issues as poverty and income disparities, dealing with a variety of unforeseen threats such as natural disasters, halting the destruction of human and natural environments and protecting biodiversity.

In pursuing these deliberations we must bring together the world's full resources of wisdom on the question of the kind of lifestyles and society that will most effectively protect the lives, livelihoods and dignity of people living on Earth today and into the future.

## A new energy future

The United Nations has designated this year as the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All, highlighting the importance of sustainability as an essential focus for thinking about energy issues. In this context, we must consider the present and future prospects for nuclear power generation.

The accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant that accompanied the devastating earthquake and tsunami which struck Japan last March ranks with the 1979 Three Mile Island accident and the 1986 Chernobyl disaster in terms of scope and severity. The situation has yet to be brought fully under control, and there are no clear plans or prospects regarding how and where to store the soil and waste products that have been exposed to radioactive contamination. This represents an ongoing threat that continues to disrupt many people's lives.

There are estimates that it will take as much as forty years to remove all of the fuel and other radioactive materials from the reactor and fully disassemble and safely decommission the facility. There are also outstanding questions regarding the most feasible means of restoring the environment around the stricken nuclear facility in those areas heavily contaminated by radioactive pollutants. The long-term effects on human health are also unclear, and together these impose an irremediable burden on present and future generations.

For more than three decades, I have been expressing great concern about the truly imponderable implications of a major accident at a nuclear power plant. The negative legacy even from the normal and accident-free operation of such facilities--in the form of the necessary disposal of radioactive waste materials--could last hundreds or even thousands of years. Even today, no real solution to the problem of how to store these highly radioactive waste products has yet been found.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has aptly pointed out, "As we are painfully learning once again, nuclear accidents respect no borders. They pose a direct threat to human health and the environment. . . . Because the impact is transnational, these issues must be debated globally." [\[55\]](#)

Indeed, the problems posed by nuclear power generation are of such a scale that they cannot be effectively addressed within the confines of any one country's national energy policy. For Japan--located in a geographic zone that typically experiences about 10 percent of the world's earthquakes and where tsunami and the devastation they wreak are an undeniable aspect of our historical experience--it seems impossible to be sanguine about the prospects for effective accident prevention.

I therefore urge a rapid transition to an energy policy that is not reliant on nuclear power. Japan should collaborate with other countries that are at the forefront of efforts to introduce renewable energy sources and undertake joint development projects to achieve substantial cost reductions in these technologies. Japan should also take on, as its mission, efforts to promote the kind of technological innovation that will facilitate the introduction of new energy sources in developing countries that currently struggle with this issue.

In effecting this transition, it is necessary that adequate measures be taken to foster alternative industrial bases in communities that have been economically dependent on nuclear power generating facilities and have contributed to the national power supply.

Nuclear power presents many challenges to international society, and it is urgent that all states collaborate toward their resolution. Last April, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon wrote an opinion piece in which he stated: "Henceforth, we must treat the issue of nuclear safety as seriously as we do nuclear weapons." [\[56\]](#)

In point of fact, the damage to both human health and the natural environment from exposure to radioactivity is exactly the same for an equivalent dose whatever the source--the actual use of nuclear weapons, the release of radioactivity accompanying the development, production and testing of these weapons, or an accident at a nuclear power plant.

In the more than half-century since the first nuclear power station began operating in the Soviet Union in 1954, not only have many reactors reached the end of their projected lifespan, but the total volume of radioactive waste products continues to increase without cease and at a pace directly proportional to the number of operational nuclear power plants.

To date, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been at the heart of efforts in the fields of research and development for the "peaceful" use of nuclear energy, providing assistance in the operation of nuclear power plants and facilitating the exchange of scientific and technological know-how, as well as preventing the diversion of materials and technologies to military purposes. The global situation surrounding nuclear power generation--brought into sharper focus by the Fukushima accident--makes it imperative that, in addition to these responsibilities, the IAEA take the lead in promoting international cooperation regarding the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle.

In addition to the further strengthening of international cooperation for the management of radioactive waste products, the IAEA must play a central role in developing more effective responses to nuclear power plant accidents and for the decommissioning of obsolescent nuclear reactors.

## Outlawing nuclear weapons

I would now like to suggest concrete ideas for achieving the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons.

The Fukushima nuclear accident in certain senses was reminiscent of the radioactive pollution unleashed by the nuclear weapons tests conducted by the nuclear-weapon states starting in the 1950s. This year marks the fifty-fifth anniversary of the declaration issued by second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda calling for the prohibition of nuclear weapons. This declaration had as its background the increasingly fierce competition among nuclear-weapon states to develop ever larger and more powerful nuclear weapons.

President Toda stated, "Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons has arisen around the world, it is my wish to go further, to attack the problem at its root. I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons." [\[57\]](#)

Here, he was expressing his conviction that, while the prohibition of nuclear weapons testing was of course essential, a deeper and more fundamental resolution of the issue would not be realized so long as national security doctrines that take for granted the suffering and sacrifice of large numbers of ordinary citizens remain unchallenged.

Prior to this declaration, President Toda had already proposed the idea of *chikyu minzokushugi*, which could be translated as "global nationalism" or the "underlying unity of the world's peoples" and corresponds to what today we would call "global citizenship." This embodied his rejection of the idea that it was acceptable for any country, nation or people to be sacrificed to war. He sought, through the solidarity of ordinary citizens, to achieve the abolition of war.

This was the motivation behind his declaration, which was made in September 1957--just six months before his passing. By focusing on nuclear weapons, exposing and ripping out the "claws" that lie hidden within them, he sought to remove what he considered to be the "one evil" that served as the crucial impediment to progress on this front. Further, he declared his hope that this would be carried out by members of the younger generation.

Even when nuclear weapons are not used in an actual attack, the processes by which they are produced, tested and maintained result in grievous damage and suffering to both humans and the natural environment. This was demonstrated by the enormous harm wreaked by the US test of a hydrogen bomb at Bikini Atoll in March 1954, three years before Toda made his declaration. Even the cessation of testing would not fully resolve these issues. This is because the decision to possess nuclear weapons in itself manifests the readiness to sacrifice the lives of large numbers of people and the health of the global environment in the name of national security. In this way of thinking, anything can be justified in the name of military necessity.

Nuclear weapons represent the quintessential embodiment of this mindset. Buddhism uses the term "fundamental darkness of life" to describe the ultimate source of such deluded impulses as greed, anger and foolishness, from which war and other calamities spring. It is from this benighted aspect of human nature that contempt and hatred of others as well as a cruel and callous attitude toward life arises. Unless this impulse to disrespect and disregard life is overcome, the underlying human psychology that gives rise to the misery and suffering of war will remain unchanged, even if the actual use of nuclear weapons is somehow avoided.

This is the issue that President Toda sought to address: nuclear weapons can never be accepted as a necessary evil but must be rejected, prohibited and extirpated as an absolute evil.

In point of fact, the perspective of military necessity was one that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was unable to resolve in its groundbreaking Advisory Opinion on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons, issued in 1996. While finding that threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be seen as illegal under International Humanitarian Law, the ICJ decided that it was unable to render a definitive judgment "in an extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake." [\[58\]](#)

The agreement reached by unanimous consent by the parties to the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference can be understood as filling this legal lacuna and reinforcing the argument for the illegality of nuclear weapons.

To quote the final outcome document of the conference:

The Conference expresses its deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, and affirms the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law. [\[59\]](#)

The phrase "all States at all times" indicates a legal obligation to which no exceptions are countenanced.

In my proposal for nuclear weapons abolition issued in September 2009, I called for a movement that would manifest the will of the world's people for the outlawing of nuclear weapons. This, I argued, would establish and clarify by 2015 the international norm that will serve as the foundation for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) formally banning these weapons of mass destruction.

The agreement reached by the 2010 NPT Review Conference provides a critical opening for this effort. We must with all haste begin the work of making this legally binding in the form of a treaty.

### US Nuclear Weapon Test, Bikini Atoll, 1954

On March 1, 1954, the most powerful nuclear device ever detonated by the US was tested at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. This hydrogen bomb was approximately a thousand times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in terms of TNT tonnage equivalence. More than 7,000 square miles of the surrounding Pacific Ocean, including inhabited islands, were contaminated with radioactive fallout, leading to serious short- and long-term health effects among those exposed. The 23-man crew of the *No. 5 Lucky Dragon*, a Japanese fishing vessel operating in the vicinity, were among those contaminated, sparking global protests against nuclear weapons testing. Bikini Atoll has yet to be resettled due to the residual levels of radionuclides in locally produced food.

In general, the process by which new international norms come into being proceeds along the following three stages:

- 1) The limitations of the current norm become clear, and calls are made for a new approach.
- 2) Recognition of this necessity spreads, and momentum develops into a cascade of governments supporting the new norm.
- 3) The new norm is widely accepted within international society, formalized and given institutional expression as a legally binding instrument.

I believe that with regard to the prohibition of nuclear weapons we are now positioned at a tipping point, the beginning of the second stage, just before the start of the cascade. I am encouraged to take this view by the following recent developments:

- The civil society initiative to draft a model NWC in 1997 has been followed up by a revised draft issued in 2007, demonstrating that the process of reviewing the legal measures necessary to achieve the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons is well under way.
- Since 1996, Malaysia and other countries have annually proposed a UN General Assembly resolution calling for the start of negotiations on an NWC. Support for this resolution has continued to grow; last year 130 member states supported it, including China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Iran.
- In 2008, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon proposed negotiations on an NWC or a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments.
- The 2010 NPT Review Conference noted this proposal in the final outcome document that it adopted with the unanimous consent of all participants.
- The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), to which 159 countries, including Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China, belong, has also unanimously expressed its support for this proposal.
- Mayors for Peace, with a membership of more than 5,100 cities and municipalities around the world, is actively seeking the early start of negotiations toward an NWC. Likewise, the InterAction Council, a group composed of former heads of state and government, has called for the conclusion of an NWC.
- In September 2009, the United Nations Security Council held a special summit session in which it adopted Security Council Resolution 1887 pledging efforts to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.
- The worsening budgetary situation in different countries as a result of the ongoing economic crisis has prompted a serious rethinking of military expenditures, including in nuclear-weapon states where the costs of these armaments are finally being debated.

While it is clear that none of these developments, in itself, represents a decisive breakthrough, I believe that collectively they constitute a consistent and irreversible momentum toward the goal of a world finally free of nuclear weapons. The leading role played by civil society in developing a draft Nuclear Weapons Convention and in actively seeking the start of negotiations through petition drives and other activities clearly demonstrates that the spiritual wellspring and normative source for such a treaty exist as a vital presence in the hearts and minds of the world's ordinary citizens.

What is required now is to take this living, breathing awareness--the determination that the tragedy wrought by nuclear weapons must never be repeated and that humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist--and give it concrete form as a binding legal agreement expressing the shared conscience of humankind.

## Expanding the antinuclear constituency

Efforts are needed to initiate the cascade toward the realization of an NWC. To this end, I am convinced that, in addition to the spirit of International Humanitarian Law, the perspectives and motivations of human rights and sustainability must be enlisted to focus and bring to bear the attention and will of the world's people--young people above all--toward the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. This is because a focus on human rights and sustainability makes clear the unacceptable burden placed on both present and future generations by the maintenance of security policies based on nuclear weapons, whether or not they are actually used.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) is one of the foundational documents guaranteeing human rights globally. In 1984, the Human Rights Committee--mandated with oversight of the implementation of the Covenant--issued a General Comment which included the following statement:

It is evident that the designing, testing, manufacture, possession and deployment of nuclear weapons are among the greatest threats to the right to life which confront mankind today. . .

Furthermore, the very existence and gravity of this threat generates a climate of suspicion and fear between States, which is in itself antagonistic to the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the International Covenant on Human Rights. [\[60\]](#)

So long as nuclear weapons continue to exist, so will the temptation to threaten others with overwhelming military force. This generates a vicious cycle in which threat gives rise to insecurity, propelling further expansion of military capacity and in fact encouraging the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The destabilizing impact on our world has been incalculable.

We are forced to consider just how much enhancement and expansion of educational opportunities and human welfare would have been made possible if the vast expenditures of material and human resources on nuclear and conventional weapons systems had been directed to purposes that protect human lives, livelihoods and dignity.

The nature of the world in which we live was incisively critiqued by Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), the philosopher renowned among other things for his collaboration with Albert Einstein (1879-1955) on a 1955 statement calling for the abolition of war and the elimination of nuclear weapons:

Our world has sprouted a weird concept of security and a warped sense of morality. Weapons are sheltered like treasures while children are exposed to incineration. [\[61\]](#)

In the proposal I wrote in 2010, I called for the pursuit of disarmament as a humanitarian imperative, in order to implement the spirit of Article 26 of the UN Charter. In doing so, I was motivated by the urgent desire to reverse the kind of cruelties and absurdities Russell denounced.

In addition, Jakob Kellenberger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, issued this warning from the perspective of sustainability in April 2010:

Nuclear weapons are unique in their destructive power, in the unspeakable human suffering they cause, in the impossibility of controlling their effects in space and time, in the risks of escalation they create, and in the threat they pose to the environment, to future generations, and indeed to the survival of humanity. [\[62\]](#)

This is an urgent warning about the inhumanity of nuclear weapons and the threat they pose to sustainability. Together with the resolution adopted by the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in November 2011 calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons, it is a message that the nuclear-weapon states must heed.

Our world continues to be threatened by more than 20,000 nuclear warheads. This represents the capacity to kill or grievously injure all people living on Earth as well as their progeny, and to destroy the global ecosystem many times over. We are impelled to ask what it is, exactly, that is being protected by this unimaginable destructive capacity. If even some small portion of the population of one of the combatant nations were to survive, what would await them could hardly be termed a future.

By adding the perspectives of human rights and sustainability--universal issues affecting every living person--to already established concerns framed by International Humanitarian Law, we can greatly expand the active constituencies working for the realization of a world without nuclear weapons.

In particular, I hope that such a focus will spark a shift in thinking in the nuclear-weapon states and in countries whose populations have lived under the "extended deterrence" proffered by those states. It is critical that the citizens of these states come to understand how the continuation of the policies of nuclear weapons possession and deterrence represents a grave violation of their human rights and a threat to the prospects for a sustainable future.

We must take action to initiate concrete negotiations that will culminate in the realization of an NWC. One way to do this would be to present it as a basic treaty establishing the legal framework of a world without nuclear weapons with a set of associated protocols. The basic treaty would allow signatory states to clearly commit to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons in light of the imperatives of International Humanitarian Law, human rights and sustainability, and to pledge to refrain from any action that would run counter to the achievement of this goal or undermine this principle. Separate protocols could enumerate prohibited activities such as development and production, use or threat of use, and establish procedures for decommissioning and verification.

The key point of this proposal is to establish a framework within which all countries can work toward this shared global enterprise of humanity--the abolition of nuclear weapons--in conditions of physical and psychological security.

I believe that this formula could open a path for states to look beyond their current nuclear status and advance toward a common goal of a world without nuclear weapons. This treaty would make it easier for the states that are party to it to reduce confrontation and take concrete steps toward mutual threat reduction with a view toward achieving their agreed-upon goal.

The framework I am proposing would provide a road map for a structural transition from mutual threat to mutual assurance. Even in the event that the protocols moving the treaty to the next stage of implementation are not ratified immediately, it would be possible to avert the kind of situation that prevails in the world today, marked by a severe lack of transparency and the threat of virtually unrestrained proliferation. In its place would be established a nuclear weapons moratorium based on a clear overall forward vision and legal norm.

It is vital that preparations for this begin as soon as possible. NGOs and forward-looking governments should establish a group that I would provisionally call the "Action Group for a Nuclear Weapons Convention" to embark on this venture. The SGI is ready to take an active role in this.

While moving forward with the drafting process for this framework treaty and developing the plans for the protocols, it will be crucially important to move global public opinion--propelled by the power and passion of young people--in order to garner the support of an expanding number of governments.

I would like to see either the release--or better yet, the signing--of an agreed-upon draft of the basic framework treaty for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons by 2015, and I propose Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the venue for this.

I have for some time urged that a nuclear abolition summit to mark the effective end of the nuclear era be convened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the seventieth anniversary of the bombings of those cities, with the participation of national leaders and the representatives of global civil society. And I have noted that the NPT Review Conference, scheduled to be held in 2015, provides a good opportunity for such a summit.

To date, the NPT Review Conferences have all been held in New York or Geneva, and there are logistical and other difficulties involved in such a change of venue. But whether it takes the form of a nuclear abolition summit or of the holding of the NPT Review Conference, I am convinced that the effect of organizing such a meeting at the sites of the actual atomic bombings would help renew the pledge of all participants--starting with the attending heads of state and government--to achieve a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons and would solidify and make irreversible momentum toward that goal.

In recent years, former US Secretary of Defense William J. Perry has, along with former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and other leaders, made repeated calls for a world without nuclear weapons. He has described the impact of his visit to the Atomic Bomb Dome and Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum as follows:

The horrific images of the aftermath of the atomic bombings are now seared in my mind. I believed, of course, that I fully understood the horrors of nuclear weapons. But to see and to in fact feel the misery created by these weapons through these images intensified my understanding of the enormous power and tragedy that can be unleashed by these weapons. The experience strengthened my resolve that these weapons must never be used again anywhere on Earth. [63]

Everyone who visits Hiroshima will react differently, but I have no doubt that everyone will be moved in some significant way.

In the final analysis the only way that we can move past the present impasse in which proliferation continues unabated and the nightmare scenario of actual use remains a possibility is for large numbers of people throughout the world to understand that this is an issue that impinges directly on their own lives and dignity and that of their children and grandchildren.

In 2007, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons by my mentor Josei Toda, the SGI launched a "People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition" with the aim of gathering and focusing the voices of the world's people. The antinuclear weapons exhibition "From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit," which was created as part of this campaign, has to date been held in more than 220 cities throughout the world.

In addition, the SGI is collaborating with the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) organized by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) to generate global popular solidarity for the adoption of an NWC, as well as working with Inter Press Service (IPS) on a joint international media project to promote the search for proposals and ideas toward a world without nuclear weapons.

The Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, which I founded in 1996, will be initiating a new research project in support of the global movement for the expansion of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZs) as a regional approach toward the realization of a world without nuclear weapons.

The words of my mentor, spoken more than half a century ago, continue to reverberate in my heart: "I ask those who consider themselves to be my students and disciples to be heirs to the spirit of the declaration I have made today, and to make its meaning known throughout the entire world." [\[64\]](#)

Working alongside the youth of the SGI, I am determined to fulfill my vow to my mentor to enable the world's people to achieve, through their own efforts, a world without nuclear weapons. To this end, in taking on this unprecedented challenge, we are committed to working with all those who share this goal and aspiration.

## A shared vow

In this proposal, I have examined such challenges as disaster prevention and mitigation, protection of the integrity of the global environment and poverty alleviation, as well as abolition of nuclear weapons, and have offered concrete ideas for their resolution. None of these problems will be solved overnight or without great effort, but I am convinced that, if we focus and bring to bear the energy and attention of the world's "ordinary citizens"--each of whom harbors within themselves truly limitless potential--a path forward is certain to open.

Sixty years ago my mentor issued a call for all the world's inhabitants to regard themselves as global citizens; five years later, he issued the declaration I have referenced here, insisting on the prohibition and abolition of all nuclear weapons. It was his consistent conviction that we must act today in ways that will serve the interests of humanity living 100 or 200 years from now.

His impassioned words, shared with and entrusted to me as his disciple, have served as a source of inexhaustible inspiration, as a vow that I share and remain determined to fulfill.

You need not only to make concrete proposals for the peace of humankind, but to take the lead in working toward their implementation. Even when such proposals are not fully or immediately accepted, they can serve as a 'spark' from which a movement for peace will eventually spread like wildfire. Theorizing that is not grounded in reality will always remain a futile exercise. Concrete proposals provide a framework for the transformation of reality and can serve to protect the interests of humanity.

The peace proposals I have continued to author every year for the past thirty years represent my efforts to fulfill my personal vow to my mentor.

I am convinced that there is no greater force for the resolution of the difficult issues grappled with in this and all my proposals than a deepening sense of solidarity among the people of the world. To this end, I and my fellow SGI members in 192 countries and territories are engaged, day in and day out, in efforts to spark, through dialogue, the light and flame of courage and hope.

The struggle for peace, like the struggle for human rights and humanity, is not one in which, having reached the peak of the mountain, the final goal comes into view. Rather, it should be thought of as the work of generating an uninterrupted and unstoppable flow of commitment connecting and passed on from one generation to the next. This is the conviction that has supported our efforts to help build a better future for all.

Burning with this conviction, we will continue to promote a movement of empowerment that is of, for and by the people, laying the foundations for a global society of peace and harmonious coexistence.

## Notes

- 1 (trans. from) Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu*, 3:290.
- 2 CHS, "Human Security Now," 8.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 78.
- 5 ILO, "Global Employment Trends 2012."
- 6 ILO, "Global Employment Trends for Youth."
- 7 Emerson, *The Journals*, 8:163.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 8:163.
- 9 Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1:662.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 1:662.
- 11 Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, 27.
- 12 Rees, Rodley and Stilwell, *Beyond the Market*, 222.
- 13 (trans. from) Tada, *Kamokunaru kyojin*, 10.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 15 Toynbee, *Change and Habit*, 3.
- 16 Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, 19.
- 17 Toynbee, *Comparing Notes*, 19.
- 18 Ikeda and Toynbee, *Choose Life*, 45.
- 19 Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1:6.
- 20 (trans. from) Nichiren, *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu*, 171.
- 21 CHS, "Human Security Now," 2.
- 22 Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1:24.
- 23 UN General Assembly, "Human Security: Report of the Secretary-General," 7.
- 24 Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote*, 45.
- 25 Nichiren, *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, 138.
- 26 Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1:26.
- 27 CHS, "Human Security Now," 4.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 11-12.
- 30 Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, 147.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 148.
- 32 Emerson, *The Collected Works*, 2:73.
- 33 Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, 38-39.
- 34 (trans. from) Tada, *Kamokunaru kyojin*, 48.
- 35 Jaspers, *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus*, 35.
- 36 SGI, "Soka Gakkai's Relief and Post-Disaster Recovery Support."
- 37 King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 63-64.
- 38 Nichiren, *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, 230.
- 39 Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 2:135.
- 40 Maathai, *Unbowed*, 207.
- 41 Maathai, *The Green Belt Movement*, 72.
- 42 Ikeda and Boulding, *Into Full Flower*, 113.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 113.
- 45 Japan, Cabinet Office, "Disaster Management in Japan," 41.
- 46 Guterres, "Climate Change," 7.
- 47 Neumayer and Plümper, "The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters," 552.
- 48 ISDR, "Hyogo Framework for Action," 4.
- 49 Ikeda and Chowdhury, *Atarashiki chikyu shakai no sozo e*, 340-41.
- 50 Bachelet, "International Women's Day 2011."
- 51 UNEP, "Young People Representing Half the Planet."
- 52 Ikeda and Galbraith, *Ningenshugi no dai seiki o*, 67.
- 53 Dekanawida, "Gayanashagowa."
- 54 The Amaravati Sangha, trans., *Karaniya Metta Sutta*.
- 55 Ban, "A Visit to Chernobyl."
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 (trans. from) Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu*, 4:565.
- 58 ICJ, *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons*, 266.
- 59 UN General Assembly, "2010 Review Conference," 19.
- 60 UNHRC, "General Comment No. 14."
- 61 (qtd. in) Abrams, *The Words of Peace*, 81.
- 62 Kellenberger, "Bringing the Era of Nuclear Weapons to an End."

- 63 Perry, *Kakunaki sekai o motomete*, 175.  
64 (trans. from) Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu*, 4:565.

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