

Toward Our Shared Future: Constructing an Era of Human Solidarity

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January 26, 2020

To commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai and the forty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), I would like to offer some proposals on building a sustainable global society in which all people can live with dignity and a sense of security.

The first thing I would like to address is the state of heightened tension between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran that has continued since the start of the year. I strongly urge both sides to maintain their current stance of restraint and to ensure, through adherence to international law and expanded diplomatic efforts, that any worsening of the situation is prevented. I earnestly hope that with the mediation of the United Nations and of other countries, a path toward de-escalation of tensions can be found.

Our world has experienced a series of extreme and destructive weather events. Last year saw record heatwaves in Europe, India and elsewhere, and super typhoons and torrential rains triggered flooding around the world. The havoc wrought by the massive wildfires in Australia continues.

In September last year, the Climate Action Summit was held at the UN against a backdrop of deepening concern about the escalating impact of global warming. On that occasion, one third of UN member states—some sixty-five countries—announced policies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. [\[1\]](#) It is critical that such efforts be expanded to a global scale. Climate change is more than an environmental issue in the conventionally understood sense: It represents a threat to all people living on Earth, both now and in future generations. It is, like nuclear weapons, a fundamental challenge on which the fate of humankind hinges.

Indeed, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said, climate change is “the defining issue of our time.” [\[2\]](#) The impacts of climate change threaten to render meaningless global efforts to eliminate poverty and hunger, as set out in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Our focus, however, should not be limited to halting downward spirals. Because climate change is an issue that will leave no one untouched, it has the potential to catalyze heretofore unseen global solidarity and action. Our success or failure in actualizing this potential is in fact the defining issue of our time.

The Climate Action Summit was marked by widespread youth-led action demanding change, as well as accelerated and ambitious moves to respond to the climate crisis by municipalities, institutions of higher learning and the private sector.

This month, the Paris Agreement, by which the international community seeks to contain the rise in average temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, became fully operational. A critical mission of the UN as it greets its seventy-fifth anniversary is to encourage the creation of positive feedback loops by which the solidarity of efforts to meet the challenge of climate change simultaneously advances the attainment of all the SDGs.

Here, I would like to discuss the elements required to forge such a robust solidarity of action from the perspective of three commitments.

Leave no one behind

The first commitment must be that we never leave behind those struggling in difficult circumstances.

In recent years, the scale of damage wrought by natural disasters has expanded, with much of that the outcome of extreme weather events. These widespread impacts affect both developed and developing countries. Last year in Japan, for example, Typhoons Faxai and Hagibis struck different regions with ferocious wind and rain, causing extensive flooding and leaving broad swathes of the country without power or water, shredding the fabric of daily life.

An issue of growing global concern—and one which the UN has consistently emphasized—is that these impacts tend to be concentrated on and felt by people already afflicted by poverty and those in the more vulnerable sectors of society, such as women, children and the elderly. Such people are more exposed to danger and have greater difficulty rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of a disaster, necessitating appropriate and continuous support.

Ontological security

The concept of ontological security was proposed by Anthony Giddens in 1991. It refers to an individual's sense of order, security and continuity within a rapidly changing environment. For instance, if an event occurs that is not consistent with the meaning of an individual's life, this threatens their sense of belonging and confidence in their identity. In this regard, sociologists and psychiatrists argue that ontological security is threatened by anthropogenic climate change. On a societal level, migration from environments degraded by climate change breaks the continuity of the bond between people and their land, and compromises the material, social and cultural aspects of security.

Another tragic impact of climate change is the increasing number of people forced from their long-accustomed homes. The crisis facing the peoples of the Pacific Island nations is of particularly grave concern. Because it is caused by rising ocean levels and the resulting flooding of their lands, there is a high probability that their displacement will become permanent and they may never be able to return to their homes.

The Toda Peace Institute, which I founded in the hope it would address such issues, initiated a research project two years ago on the effects of climate change on Pacific Island communities. One point highlighted in this research is the special significance of the connection the members of these communities feel toward their land. The loss of the land is equivalent to a fundamental loss of identity. Even if these

people move to another island and are able to achieve material security, they will remain deprived of what the report describes as the “ontological security” they experienced living on their own island. [\[3\]](#) The project concludes that attentiveness to this kind of irreparable pain must be part of any effort to tackle climate change.

Loss of connection to the land and the associated feelings of grief have been an inescapable aspect of major disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis. The pain, compounded by the sudden loss of friends and family, can be truly unbearable, and responding to this depth of anguish is an imperative for society as a whole. This is something I stressed in the proposal I issued the year after the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami here in Japan. The irreplaceable nature of a place engraved with the record of one's life, a home permeated with the sense and flavors of daily living, is expressed in these allusive words of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–44): “It is idle, having planted an acorn in the morning, to expect that afternoon to sit in the shade of the oak.” [\[4\]](#)

When discussing the impacts of climate change, there is a tendency to focus on the scale of economic loss or other quantifiable indicators. But I think it is important that we attend to the actual suffering of the many individuals that such macroeconomic indices might obscure, and make this central to our efforts to come together in search of solutions.

Here, there is a structural similarity with trade frictions that have intensified in recent years. The term “beggar-thy-neighbor” refers to policies that seek to restore health to one's own economy by raising tariffs or restricting imports. In our globalized and increasingly interdependent world, however, cycles of economic reprisal often lead to unanticipated outcomes that have been described as “beggar-thyself.”

Trade frictions have a negative impact on the performance of many small and medium-sized enterprises, creating pressure for restructuring and costing people their jobs. Even if we accept that it is important to improve economic indices such as the balance of trade, the continuance of conditions that make life worse for already-vulnerable people both at home and abroad can only increase social instability worldwide.

When he addressed last year's UN General Assembly, Secretary-General Guterres presented sketches of people he had encountered while visiting places facing grave threats—families in the South Pacific whose lives risk being swallowed by rising seas, youthful refugees in the Middle East hoping to return to their homes and schools, Ebola survivors in Africa struggling to rebuild their lives. He warned: “A great many people fear getting trampled, thwarted, left behind.” [\[5\]](#) I share his concern. When we consider global issues, our first and foremost focus must be on the threats presented to the lives, livelihoods and dignity of individual human beings.

Both climate and trade are issues that impinge deeply upon our economies and societies. In this regard, I think that the insights that Soka Gakkai founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) set out in his 1903 work *Jinsei chirigaku* (The Geography of Human Life) merit our attention. Makiguchi contrasted the time-limited nature of military conflict to the constant and enduring nature of economic competition. The former, he said, occurs suddenly and produces horrific suffering of which we cannot but be aware, whereas the latter occurs gradually and in undramatic fashion such that it doesn't draw our attention.

What Makiguchi sought to stress is that because the cruelty of war is clearly apparent people are sharply conscious of it, creating the opportunity to prevent greater harm through, for example, negotiation or mediation. This is not the case for economic competition, which is conducted in a continuous and largely unconscious manner and whose outcome is seen as determined through a process of “natural

selection.” As such it fades into the background of our social life, rendering us liable to overlook the inhumane conditions and suffering that result.

In Makiguchi’s time, the world was ravaged by the forces of imperialism and colonialism, and it was largely considered natural to pursue prosperity at the expense of other societies. But that state of mind implies an acceptance that certain sectors or groups will inevitably be sacrificed and that the privation they suffer is no concern of ours. This acceptance builds up in the depths of society, like a layer of sediment or sludge.

As a result, “survival of the fittest” economic competition tends to accelerate without cease, fulfilling Makiguchi’s forecast that “in the final resort, the suffering it engenders is far more devastating [than even that of war].” [6] In the world of the twenty-first century, where globalization and economic integration have advanced far beyond Makiguchi’s time, these risks are greater than ever.

Makiguchi never denied the value of competition within the workings of society, considering a mutual striving for excellence to be an enriching source of energy and creativity. What he found problematic was our tendency to view the world as solely the site of competition for survival, to base our behavior on the assumption that our lives are independent of all others and to remain in denial regarding the effects of such behavior.

The foundation of Makiguchi’s thinking was an awareness that this world is, more than anything, the site of shared living.

In the introduction to *The Geography of Human Life*, Makiguchi describes the concrete awareness that is at the heart of this worldview. When his wife was unable to produce milk for their newborn, their doctor recommended a powdered milk made in Switzerland after a Japanese domestic product had proven inadequate. Makiguchi expresses his appreciation for the cowherds working in the foothills of the Jura Mountains. Noting also the cotton from which his child’s swaddling clothes are made, he pictures people in India working in the searing heat to produce it. [7] In this way, he describes how, from the moment of birth, a child is connected to the entire world. His appreciation for these people whom he has never met is condensed in the expression “shared living,” which does not describe the world as it should ideally be but how it actually is, however much we tend to overlook that fact.

The world is constituted of the overlapping and interwoven activities of countless people and their vectors of mutual influence. When competition is conducted in disregard for this reality, we lose sight of the existence of those who suffer under grave threats and societal contradictions. It is thus vital that we consciously engage in shared living and work for a society that is based on an approach of “striving to protect and improve not only one’s own life but also the lives of others.” [8] This is the heart of Makiguchi’s assertion.

Turning back to the present, it is not as if economic growth and efforts to prevent global warming are inherently incompatible. For example, during the three-year period from 2014, the global economy expanded at an annual rate of more than 3 percent, [9] while emissions of the key greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO₂) remained flat. [10] Emissions have since begun to grow again, but I believe that by making the bold choice to “protect and improve not only one’s own life but also the lives of others”—through such measures as the introduction of renewable sources of energy and improvements in energy efficiency—we should be able to develop new modes of economic and social life.

The basis for the conscious pursuit of shared living is found in an appreciation that people who live under the shadow of severe threats are essentially no different from ourselves.

This is something stressed in the work of Massachusetts Institute of Technology professors Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, who, in their examination of issues of poverty and the profound relationship these have to economic competition, have considered things not from the macroeconomic perspective so much as from empirical research into the actual conditions in which real people live. Their work was recognized in the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics, which they shared with Prof. Michael Kremer of Harvard University.

In their recent book *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, they write that the very poorest people are essentially no different from anyone else, no less rational for example. [11] People living in wealthy countries are the beneficiaries of access to safe drinking water, medical care and other unseen forms of support “so thoroughly embedded into the system that we hardly notice it.” [12] They note that “not only do the poor lead riskier lives than the less poor, but a bad break of the same magnitude is likely to hurt them more.” [13] Banerjee and Duflo encourage us not to make stereotypical judgments, stressing the need to appreciate the actual conditions in which people live.

Striving to understand the circumstances in which people find themselves—rather than viewing them through the lens of societal or class categories—likewise has a central place in the teachings of Buddhism which SGI members uphold. Shakyamuni is recorded as observing:

Unlike the different distinctions among living beings that have taken bodily form, there are no such distinctions among humans. The distinctions among humans are only those of nomenclature. [14]

The core message of this passage is that while categories have been generated and given names within society, in terms of their humanity there are no distinctions among people.

King Ajātashatru

King Ajātashatru (trans. “Enemy While Still Unborn”), was the son and successor of King Bimbisāra of the state of Magadha in northwestern India. While a prince, Ajātashatru became devoted to the monk Devadatta, who was both the cousin and rival of Shakyamuni Buddha (Siddhārtha Gautama). Ajātashatru was persuaded by Devadatta to murder his father, who was a close disciple and patron of the Buddha, and seize the throne. Ajātashatru also assisted Devadatta in several attempts on the Buddha’s life. Later, in remorse for his evil deeds, Ajātashatru sought the Buddha’s forgiveness, converted to Buddhism and supported the First Buddhist Council that compiled Shakyamuni’s teachings after his death.

Paying no heed to social standing or status, Shakyamuni offered treatment to the ill, extending words of encouragement to them—people ranging from a desperately sick monk-practitioner whom he happened to encounter, to King Ajātashatru, who had previously tried to have him killed. These two did, however, share something in common. Just as the monk had been abandoned by his companions and left to suffer in illness and isolation, King Ajātashatru’s severe sickness caused others to shun him. Shakyamuni washed the sick monk, changing him into clean clothes. And even while sensing the imminence of his own death, Shakyamuni made time to meet with King Ajātashatru and share the teachings of the Dharma with him, encouraging his recovery from illness.

In Shakyamuni's actions—his refusal to allow anyone to suffer in isolation or to leave anyone alone in their confrontation with severe difficulties—I feel we can discern the original source of the Buddhist spirit of compassion. From the perspective of Buddhism, people's capacities are not predetermined; nevertheless there is a strong social tendency to establish a fixed assessment of their abilities and to label them as such.

Even when someone finds themselves in a vulnerable position, if they are surrounded by people who are prepared to share that challenge with them, it becomes possible to find a way forward. The way in which we experience even such conditions as poverty or illness can be profoundly transformed simply by the knowledge that we have the support of others. This is a core tenet of Buddhist philosophy. The approach to life that Makiguchi called for—a conscious engagement with shared living—has its foundation in the determination never to leave behind those struggling with difficulties.

One focus of the dialogue I conducted with former UN Under-Secretary-General Anwarul K. Chowdhury in 2008, at a time when the financial crisis was shaking the world to its core, was the importance of giving highest priority to supporting countries facing dire economic circumstances and to socially vulnerable individuals. Ambassador Chowdhury stressed the need for a global safety net to cushion against such external shocks as the impacts of climate change, dramatic fluctuations in prices and extreme financial retrenchment. [\[15\]](#) I fully share his view. We likewise agreed that a key role of the UN in the twenty-first century must be to stand with the vulnerable segments of society.

When the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States was established in 2001, Ambassador Chowdhury was appointed the first High Representative, giving him firsthand experience working with countries and people that have often been left behind by international society. I remember being deeply moved by his statement that nothing brought him greater joy than seeing significant improvements in the conditions in the most vulnerable countries. [\[16\]](#)

This sentiment resonates with me because the Soka Gakkai in its early years was disparagingly referred to as a gathering of the sick and the poor. Through mutual encouragement, these ordinary people, discarded by society, succeeded in climbing up from the depths of unhappiness—a history of which we are very proud.

Josei Toda (1900–58), in collaboration with first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, founded the Soka Gakkai as a people's movement and went on to become its second president. He expressed the conviction underlying his continued action in the face of cynical reactions as follows:

I will do what I have to do. That is, to save poor people and sick people, the troubled and the suffering. That is why I raise my voice. [\[17\]](#)

Toda's most passionate desire was to eliminate misery from the face of the Earth. This arose from his determination to prevent a repetition of the kind of tragic suffering that had been visited upon the people of so many countries during World War II. This inspired in him strong expectations for the United Nations, which was founded in the wake of and as a response to the two global conflicts of the twentieth century. He called on us to protect and help develop the UN as a fortress of hope in the world.

When I became the third president of the Soka Gakkai, sixty years ago this year, I initiated my concrete actions for world peace by traveling to the United States, where I visited UN Headquarters in New York. In doing this, I was acting as heir to my mentor's vision. Since then, we have made support for the UN a central pillar of our social engagement, strengthening our collaborative relations with like-minded individuals and civil society organizations as we continue to develop initiatives to find solutions to global challenges.

Soon after my visit to New York in 1960, a full performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was held at UN Headquarters as part of that year's UN Day (October 24) celebrations. This was done at the behest of then Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–61). Until then, performances of Beethoven's Ninth had featured only the final, fourth movement with its stirring chorus "Ode to Joy," but on this fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the UN the symphony was performed in its entirety.

Hammarskjöld addressed the audience:

When the Ninth Symphony opens we enter a drama full of harsh conflict and dark threats. But the composer leads us on, and in the beginning of the last movement we hear again the various themes repeated, now as a bridge toward a final synthesis. [18]

Comparing the development of the Ninth Symphony to human history, Hammarskjöld expressed his hope that "we may never lose our faith that the first movements one day will be followed by the fourth movement." [19]

Hammarskjöld's conviction resonates with the progression of historical eras set out by Makiguchi in *The Geography of Human Life*. Modes of military, political and economic competition by which people and societies seek their own security and prosperity at the expense of others greatly concerned Makiguchi at the start of the twentieth century. Regrettably, these realities are still very much part of our world.

But, just as the choral section of the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony opens with the lines "*O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!*" (Oh friend, not these tones!), we are certainly capable of giving birth to new approaches that will transform entrenched modes of competition. Makiguchi proposed that the essence of that transformation must arise from what he called humanitarian or humane modes of competition, in which one benefits oneself while working for the sake of others. By generating a global solidarity of action to confront the challenge of climate change, we can and must effect this kind of paradigm shift, opening new horizons in human history.

I believe that central to this challenge is the commitment never to abandon those who find themselves in dire circumstances. By acting on this commitment wherever we may be, we can transform the unprecedented crisis of climate change into the opportunity to redirect the currents of history.

The challenge of construction

The second commitment I would like to discuss regards the importance of taking joint and constructive action rather than just communicating a shared sense of crisis.

Warnings about human-caused global warming were first sounded in the 1980s, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted in May 1992, just prior to the holding of the UN

Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997 with the goal of reducing emissions of greenhouse gases by developed economies, and in December 2015 the Paris Agreement was adopted as the first global framework to include emerging and developing economies.

The backdrop for the establishment of a fully global framework was a deepening sense of crisis as a series of scientific studies conducted by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) helped create broader awareness of the impacts of warming, while extreme weather events brought the threat home to large numbers of people as a palpable reality.

Although the Paris Agreement has become operational this month, serious challenges loom over its future. According to an IPCC Special Report, if warming continues at its current pace there is a real danger that the rise in average global temperatures will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius as early as 2030. [\[20\]](#) Keeping global warming within this limit is the goal set by the Paris Agreement, and it is crucial that all countries immediately begin to accelerate their efforts to achieve this. To this end, we must go beyond a shared sense of crisis and put forward a clear vision around which we can come together in solidarity, enlisting the active engagement of people everywhere.

If we concentrate solely on the threats we face, we run the risk that people who feel they are not directly impacted will remain indifferent; even those who recognize the gravity of the threat may be overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness, concluding that nothing they could do would change the situation.

This brings to mind something the peace scholar Elise Boulding (1920–2010) shared with me. In the 1960s, while attending a conference on disarmament, Dr. Boulding asked the participating specialists how they envisioned a totally disarmed world would function. To her surprise, they responded that they had no idea—their job was merely to describe how disarmament is possible. [\[21\]](#) Based on this experience, Dr. Boulding came to realize that unless one has a clear and specific vision of what a peaceful society looks like, it will be close to impossible to effectively bring people together in pursuit of peace.

I believe this is a very important perspective. For its part, the SGI has worked to encourage widespread and multifaceted efforts to envisage a peaceful society through the “Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons” exhibition, developed in collaboration with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which has been shown in some ninety cities around the world since 2012.

Precisely because the issue of nuclear weapons is associated with images of destruction on a scale that threatens human survival, there is a strong impulse among people to avert their gaze. In contrast, the opening panels of the exhibition invite viewers to reflect upon what is most important to them. By encouraging them to consider how to build a world that safeguards not only the things they themselves treasure but also what others regard as irreplaceable, it seeks to nurture a shared desire for constructive action.

For many years, the idea of a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons had been considered impossible. However, as concerns about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons intensified, the effort to prohibit these weapons brought into greater focus a vision of a better future,

and this became a key factor behind the momentum and solidarity that led to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017.

The TPNW goes beyond highlighting how nuclear weapons pose a risk to the security of all humanity. As its preamble indicates, at the treaty's heart is a vision of how efforts to advance nuclear disarmament are inextricably linked with and advance the work of creating a world that safeguards human rights and champions gender equality, a world that protects the health of current and future generations, a world that prioritizes ecological integrity.

In a similar way, in our efforts to combat climate change it is crucial that we not only pursue the numerical target of limiting average global temperature increases but that we develop a shared vision of the world we wish to realize through solving the crisis, and further that we collectively take proactive measures toward the construction of that reality.

By engaging in the challenge of construction, we find a third path forward, one by which we can avoid falling prey to either an egocentric indifference to problems that don't directly affect us or a pessimistic paralysis in the face of problems that seem too overwhelming.

To coincide with the 1992 Earth Summit, the SGI established the Soka Institute for Environmental Studies and Research of the Amazon (CEPEAM) in Brazil, which has since carried out activities to restore the rainforest and protect its unique ecology. And it is not by coincidence that our exhibitions originally organized in support of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development were titled "Seeds of Change" and "Seeds of Hope." These titles encapsulate the message that every one of us, starting from where we are now, has the potential to become an architect of change for a sustainable global society, and that our every action is a seed of change, a seed of hope, that will bloom into flowers of dignity throughout the world.

This emphasis on taking a constructive approach in the face of threats has its origins in Buddhist philosophy. In the Lotus Sutra, which embodies the essence of Shakyamuni's teachings, we find the principle that "the saḥā world is in itself the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light." Saḥā is a Sanskrit word meaning "to bear" or "to endure." The term "saḥā world" expresses Shakyamuni's insight that the world we live in is one that is filled with distress and suffering. Even while basing himself on this worldview, Shakyamuni declared, "I set out at the age of twenty-nine in pursuit of the good." [22] As this shows, he was not driven by a sense of pessimism but by an earnest quest to discover how people can avoid drowning in suffering and live in happiness.

The philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), who wrote a study of Shakyamuni's life and thought, was able to grasp the essence of his intent when he asserted: "What Buddha teaches is not a system of knowledge but a path of salvation." [23]

If people primarily view the world as a place filled with suffering, they are at greater risk of interacting with it in an erroneous manner. They may, for example, seek only personal freedom from suffering, feel powerless and resigned in the face of society's harsh realities or fall into passive modes of living, waiting for someone else to solve their problems.

Shakyamuni's true intent was not to say that the saḥā world is a place where we must endure suffering; rather, it was to clarify that it is the very setting in which we can actualize the world of our hopes

and dreams (the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light). This principle is illustrated in greater detail in the “Treasure Tower” (eleventh) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In it, an enormous tower shining with the light of dignity emerges in the saḥā world, the place where large numbers of people have assembled to listen to the Buddha preach. It is thus transformed into the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light before the eyes of all.

In thirteenth-century Japan, the Buddhist teacher Nichiren (1222–82) expounded upon the principle “the saḥā world is in itself the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light,” as follows: “It is not that he [the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra] leaves his present place and goes to some other place.” [24] In other words, this ideal land that the people yearn for does not exist in some other place, far from their reach. The heart of the Lotus Sutra lies in taking ever greater action to enable the place we are in now to shine as the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light.

People living in Japan during Nichiren’s time were mired in what seemed like a never-ending series of hardships. In addition to conflict, they suffered from natural disasters such as earthquakes and typhoons, and also epidemics. Moreover, society was rampant with escapist ideologies leading people to remain within their egoistic shells and turn their backs on reality, as well as systems of thought portraying human beings as powerless. These beliefs further fed into a vicious cycle, robbing people of their vitality.

It is against this backdrop that Nichiren expounds on the scene in the Lotus Sutra where the treasure tower emerges, initiating the process of transforming the land. He stresses that the treasure tower seen by the gathered assembly is in fact their “individual bodies.” [25] In doing so, he teaches us that this process of awakening to the fact that within every one of us is the same brilliant and dignified light as that emitted by the treasure tower—a light capable of illuminating this suffering-filled world—becomes the wellspring for revealing our limitless human potential. Moreover, he advocates the importance of creating by our own hand the world we desire, with each person making efforts to shine like a treasure tower and strive ever harder to brighten society with hope.

In February 2005, I met with the environmental activist Wangari Maathai (1940–2011). We discussed her work of igniting hope toward the creation of a new world starting in her immediate surroundings. Reflecting upon the Green Belt Movement, which began with the planting of just seven saplings, Dr. Maathai asserted: “The future does not exist in the future. Rather, it is born only through our actions in the present, and if we want to realize something in the future, we must take action toward it now.”

I vividly recall Dr. Maathai’s beaming smile and how it swept across her face like a spring breeze as students from Soka University welcomed her with a rousing rendition of the Green Belt Movement song in Kikuyu, her native language.

This is our land.

It is our mission

to plant trees here.

As I watched her mouth the lyrics and move in rhythm with the song, I couldn’t help but feel that I was witnessing the joy that comes from engaging in the challenge of construction. This joy, emanating from her entire being, had served as the driving force that enabled the tree-planting movement to spread throughout Africa from its start in Kenya.

Incidentally, I met Dr. Maathai just two days after the Kyoto Protocol, the first framework aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, entered into force. The movement initiated by Dr. Maathai in Kenya may not have attracted as much limelight as that historic milestone. Yet, with the passage of time, the hope she sparked through her actions would grow and garner support, eventually developing into a campaign in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) that has continued after her passing. Through this initiative, more than 15 billion trees have been planted around the world. [26] In addition, during the Climate Action Summit held last year, countries around the world, from Pakistan to Guatemala, made commitments to plant more than 11 billion trees. [27]

The following words of Dr. Maathai are engraved in my mind to this day:

Even though we think that that particular action at an individual level may be very small, just imagine if it is repeated several million times. It will make a difference. [28]

Her words give a sense of the powerful joy that comes from engaging in the challenge of construction.

The SGI's "Seeds of Hope" exhibition showcases the efforts of individuals like Dr. Maathai who have initiated grassroots movements. Another of the individuals featured is the futurist Dr. Hazel Henderson and her efforts to combat air pollution. What spurred Dr. Maathai to action was witnessing fig trees, long considered sacred to those in her hometown, being cut down in pursuit of economic development. For Dr. Henderson, it was noticing the severe air pollution in New York City, where she lived at the time, and how her young daughter would come home from school with her skin coated with soot.

In both instances, the experience of acute distress made them intensely aware of the things they treasure, things the world cannot afford to lose. But they did not let that pain paralyze them. Dr. Maathai worked to expand her movement based on her commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty and hunger and nurturing peace through the planting of trees. Likewise, Dr. Henderson began working with like-minded individuals out of her desire to enable children to breathe clean air again. In both cases, they transmuted their pain into the energy of construction that would enable them to actualize the world they hoped to see.

After introducing such stories, the "Seeds of Hope" exhibition concludes with a panel depicting a single tree with countless leaves branching out into the open space around it. Here, viewers are invited to consider together the challenges they can undertake, starting from where they are right now, in order to plant seeds of hope in the world.

The UN75 initiative, which started this month, commemorates the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the UN and aims to encourage dialogue and action on how to build a better world in light of the many issues we confront. While creating a variety of opportunities for dialogue, the initiative places a special focus on reaching out to those whose voices are too often overlooked or ignored by international society, to "listen to their hopes and fears" and "learn from their experiences." [29] Through such dialogues, the UN is looking to forge a global vision for the year 2045, its centenary, and to galvanize collaborative action to make that vision a concrete reality.

As climate change is one of the cornerstone issues driving dialogue at the UN, it is crucial that we capitalize on this opportunity to focus on the grave fears and concerns of populations directly impacted by the crisis and use their stories to generate constructive action toward building a better world. The

perspectives of large numbers of people, starting with those directly affected by climate change, are all integral elements of the global vision of the future we want; the key lies in bringing these overlapping pieces together to create a mosaic grounded in the lived experience of actual human beings.

Through the kind of collaborative efforts that will emerge from these dialogues and through the expansion of a vision that people can connect with and share, I am confident that we will be able to accelerate momentum toward combating global warming even as we solidify the groundwork for a sustainable global society.

Youth-led climate action

The third commitment I would like to propose regards efforts to make the next ten years a decade of climate action by young people as an integral element of the recently launched UN Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs by 2030. [\[30\]](#)

The UN Youth Climate Summit that took place ahead of the Climate Action Summit last September can be seen as the emergence of a new kind of United Nations. I say this because it displayed the following characteristics:

1. The young people from more than 140 countries and territories participated not as representatives of their respective states but as representatives of their entire generation;
2. The various discussions at the summit were moderated by the youth and not by UN officials; and
3. Rather than the standard speaker-by-speaker format of UN meetings, there was an emphasis on promoting lively discussion.

More than anything, however, was the fact that UN Secretary-General Guterres served as “keynote listener” [\[31\]](#) at the opening session, intently focusing on each of the statements by the youth representatives.

In 2006, I issued a proposal on United Nations reform. In it, I made the suggestion that every year, in the lead-up to the annual UN General Assembly, it would be good to hold a gathering of youth representatives from around the world to give world leaders an opportunity to listen to the views of the next generation. I can’t help but regard the Youth Climate Summit as a forward-looking model for such a practice.

In addition, the global climate strikes have generated waves of international momentum for climate action. During the week of the UN Climate Action Summit alone, more than 7.6 million people in 185 countries participated in activities calling for urgent action to combat global warming. [\[32\]](#) The movement’s origins can be found in the actions of the Swedish high school student Greta Thunberg, who began a school strike to demand a stronger response to the climate crisis in the summer of 2018. Her actions elicited an immediate response among young people everywhere, and from there the strikes have grown to engage participants of all ages.

Christiana Figueres, who played a key role in the Paris climate conference as executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and who now heads Mission 2020, an initiative aimed at ensuring the Paris Agreement goals are met, has stated:

The outrage and the anger that is on the streets is totally justified, because these people, young people in particular, understand the science, they understand the implications for their life, and they know that it is possible to address it. [33]

She explained that the young people know that change is not impossible and that is why they are expressing outrage at the slow pace of efforts to prevent global warming; and that moving forward, if the outrage is married with optimism, we can expect something even more powerful to emerge.

Ms. Figueres visited the Soka Gakkai headquarters in February of last year. In an article she subsequently contributed to the *Seikyo Shimbun* newspaper, she reflected on the process of bringing the Paris Agreement into being even though many had thought this would be impossible. She stressed: “There is no way you can deliver victory without optimism.” [34] I can’t help but feel that when young people’s will to transform reality merges with an indomitable optimism, the possibilities are limitless.

Young people’s efforts to combat climate change are catalyzing the activities of many individuals and organizations across the world. An example of this can be seen in networks of higher education where currently more than 16,000 institutions have adopted a declaration that commits them to addressing the crisis through their work with students. Their plan of action includes: committing to going carbon neutral; mobilizing more resources for climate-related research; and strengthening environmental and sustainability education, both on campus and through community-based programs. [35]

Another example is the mobilization of cities and local governments worldwide, where the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy has more than 10,000 members in 138 countries. These municipalities are all committed to taking active measures to reduce CO₂ emissions. [36]

“Young climate changemakers are building a new ‘collective consciousness,’” [37] asserted the Argentinian student activist Bruno Rodríguez during the UN Youth Climate Summit; indeed, the energy and enthusiasm of the younger generation is setting off a cycle of positive causation.

As I witness these stirrings of a new age, I recall the words of Dr. Aurelio Peccei (1908–84), co-founder of the Club of Rome, who wrote in 1981: “Even reasons of justice and democracy demand that the voices of youth should be heard.” [38]

The Club of Rome is known for having warned more than a half-century ago about the finite nature of the Earth and its resources, sparking the thinking that gave rise to the concept of sustainability. Dr. Peccei, who played a central role in those efforts, emphasized the importance of affording younger generations more opportunities to take action and exercise their powers of imagination and leadership. I met with Dr. Peccei on five occasions starting in 1975; his stressing of this point remains vivid to this day.

Listening to the voices of young people is neither optional nor merely the “better” choice. It is the only logical path forward, a step we cannot skip, if we are genuinely concerned about the future of our world. This was his unyielding conviction.

Although as an entrepreneur Dr. Peccei had found his work in industry rewarding and stimulating, he eventually decided to close that chapter of his life and was moved to found the Club of Rome as the following realization took root:

I also gradually realized that to concentrate practically all efforts on such individual projects or programmes, while the larger context in which they are embedded—namely, the global world condition—is steadily deteriorating, would risk becoming an exercise in futility. [39]

The Club of Rome, which was founded in 1968 based on this concern, had difficulty achieving any tangible result in its first years. Despite best efforts to call attention to the existential challenges facing the Earth, it was “as if the global problems we were ventilating concerned another planet.” What’s more, even those who did applaud the Club’s efforts did so “provided it did not interfere with their sphere of interests or day-to-day activities.” [40]

The Club of Rome’s report, “The Limits to Growth,” which helped put it on the map, was published four years after its founding, in 1972. The report had a major impact—spreading awareness of the finite nature of the Earth and its natural resources—and yet numerous critics decried its content as far too pessimistic. Yet Dr. Peccei did not lose heart. He remained unwavering in his belief that what is important is to “take first earnest steps quickly in the right direction.” [41] He never relinquished his faith in the limitless potential inherent within each human being.

My first encounter with Dr. Peccei was in May 1975, a few months after the SGI was established. He was one of the individuals introduced to me by the historian Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975) when I visited him in London in May 1973, a year after “The Limits to Growth” had been published. We had just concluded a series of conversations lasting some forty hours over the span of two years, after which Professor Toynbee expressed his hope that I would continue such dialogues with a number of his friends, among whom was Dr. Peccei.

While we were in the process of communicating about the possibility of meeting during my next visit to Europe, Dr. Peccei heard that we would be holding our First World Peace Conference in Guam and sent a congratulatory message.

At that conference, at which the SGI was established on January 26, 1975, I wrote in the guest book under the column for country of origin, “The World.” At this starting point of the SGI, I wished to encapsulate in these two words the spirit of founding president Makiguchi and second president Toda. For his part, Makiguchi had advocated seeing the world as the place where we consciously strive to coexist with one another as its citizens, not merely as members of a particular national community. Toda’s determination was that no people, whatever their nationality, would ever find their rights and interests trampled upon, a vision he termed “global nationalism” (Jpn: *chikyu minzokushugi*).

Four months later, when I met with Dr. Peccei, he had with him a copy of the English translation of *The Human Revolution*, my novelized account of the history of the Soka Gakkai beginning with its founding presidents Makiguchi and Toda. Dr. Peccei shared that he felt a profound resonance with our movement for “human revolution”—a movement aimed at transforming the age through the efforts of each person to fully realize their inherent potential. His support was indeed a great source of encouragement to me at the time.

In our collection of dialogues (published in English as *Before It Is Too Late*), he states: “There exists in each individual a natural endowment of qualities and abilities that have been left dormant but that can be brought out and employed to redress the deteriorating human condition.” [\[42\]](#)

The emergence today of large numbers of youth courageously confronting the climate crisis is indeed a manifestation of the power of young people in which Dr. Peccei had placed his hopes. Unlike such issues as pollution and resource depletion, which were points of concern during the period surrounding the publication of “The Limits to Growth” and whose causes can, for the most part, be disaggregated, the factors causing climate change are integrated into all areas of our daily life and economic activity, making it that much harder to find solutions.

Circular economy

A circular economy is an economic model aimed at keeping resources in use for as long as possible, extracting the maximum value from them while in use, then recovering and regenerating products and materials at the end of each service life. Circular systems employ reuse, sharing, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing and recycling, in which all “waste” becomes input for another process. This regenerative approach is in contrast to the traditional linear economy, which has a “take, make, dispose” model of production.

At the European Parliament last October, current co-president of the Club of Rome Sandrine Dixson-Declève cited from the Club of Rome’s Planetary Emergency Plan ten urgent actions required for a shift to a circular economy, including a transition to low-carbon energy and an expansion of investment in renewable sources of energy. [\[43\]](#)

Precisely because it is so complex and requires a multifaceted approach, we can view the challenge of climate change as presenting a remarkable diversity of opportunities for human beings to give expression to their limitless potential. The breadth of this diversity was demonstrated by the range of forums at the Youth Climate Summit, which was attended by representatives of the SGI. These explored

innovative solutions from the point of view of environmental conservation, business start-ups, finance, technology, the arts, sports, fashion, social media and viral video content, among others.

Here I would like to highlight the political declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit that was adopted at the UN immediately following the Youth Climate Summit. Positioning the period leading up to 2030 as “a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development,” [\[44\]](#) it asserts that we must come together in durable partnerships involving all relevant stakeholders, including youth.

Based on this declaration, UN Secretary-General Guterres launched a new Decade of Action calling for global- and community-level action, along with popular efforts that engage youth. In line with this, I would like to urge that these popular undertakings include the active promotion of youth-led efforts to develop climate solutions.

Greta Thunberg, who is leading efforts to combat climate change, addressed the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25) held in Madrid last month. Stressing the significance of the next decade to 2030, she said:

In fact, every great change throughout history has come from the people. We do not have to wait. We can start the change right now. [\[45\]](#)

In this regard, I propose that the Youth Climate Summit be held every year as a means to create a new trajectory for the UN, and also that the UN work in close coordination with civil society to promote a

wide range of activities in the spirit of making the next ten years a decade where youth everywhere take the lead in combating climate change.

Further, as a measure to solidify this trend, I would like to propose that the Security Council adopt a resolution encouraging the mainstreaming of youth participation in climate-related decision-making. This would follow the model of Security Council Resolution 2250, which urges member states to strengthen the role played by young people in peace and security issues.

A high-level meeting commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the UN's founding is scheduled to take place this September. The world's young people should be invited to participate as key partners. The adoption of a Security Council resolution as outlined above would signal the start of ten years of youth-led action and with it a new chapter in the history of the UN.

The SOKA Global Action program, initiated by our youth membership in Japan in 2014, is being relaunched this year as SOKA Global Action 2030. This seeks to build a united grassroots constituency committed to action and includes the "My 10 Challenges" initiative, by which individuals are encouraged to find ways to reduce their carbon footprint in daily life.

The path to resolving the problem of climate change and achieving the SDGs will not be smooth or easy. However, I am deeply confident that as long as there is solidarity among youth, there is no impasse we cannot surmount.

Building support for the TPNW

Next, I would like to offer concrete proposals in four main areas that will contribute to the creation of a sustainable global society where all can live with dignity and a sense of security.

The first of these pertains to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). I would like to strongly stress the importance of ensuring that it enters into force within this year, which marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This would make 2020 the year that humankind finally began to leave the nuclear age behind us.

Since its adoption in July 2017, the TPNW has been signed by eighty states and ratified by thirty-five. [\[46\]](#) States must sign and ratify it at an accelerated pace in order to reach the fifty-ratification milestone required for its entry into force as soon as possible.

With the expiration of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which has been a cornerstone of nuclear disarmament efforts between the United States and the Russian Federation, the nuclear arms race is threatening to reignite. The world is confronted with conditions where, in the words of Renata Dwan, director of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, "the risks of the use of nuclear weapons . . . are higher now than at any time since World War Two." [\[47\]](#) It is urgent to use the entry into force of the TPNW to generate a powerful countercurrent to this trend.

Presently, no states possessing or dependent on nuclear weapons have joined the TPNW, but the prohibition against the use of nuclear weapons "under any circumstances" [\[48\]](#) that the TPNW establishes is of momentous historic significance. For this embodies above all the vow of the world's

hibakusha—victims of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and of the production and testing of nuclear weapons worldwide—to never allow anyone else to suffer what they have endured.

The adoption of the TPNW followed successive UN resolutions over the decades seeking solutions to the issue of nuclear weapons, starting with the very first resolution adopted by the General Assembly in 1946, which called for the elimination of atomic weapons. As Secretary-General Guterres has stressed: “The total elimination of nuclear weapons is in the DNA of the United Nations.” [\[49\]](#)

The pace at which the TPNW is being signed and ratified is not significantly different from that of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). When that treaty entered into force in March 1970, it had been signed by ninety-seven states and ratified by only forty-seven. However, the prohibitory norm against the proliferation of nuclear arms steadily gained traction through the existence of the NPT. Many states that were considering their nuclear options voluntarily chose the path of non-nuclear-weapon status. South Africa, which had developed and possessed nuclear weapons, ended its nuclear program, eliminating and dismantling its arsenal to join the NPT regime.

Countries that abandoned nuclear weapons programs

Country	Year of Abandoning Nuclear Weapons	NPT status	Explanation
Argentina	1990	1995 (A)	Renounced the manufacture of nuclear weapons
Belarus	1991	1993 (A)	Returned its nuclear weapons
Brazil	1990	1998 (A)	Renounced the manufacture of nuclear weapons
Iraq	1991	1968 (R)	Renounced its nuclear weapons program
Kazakhstan	1991	1994 (A)	Returned its nuclear weapons
Libya	2003	1968 (R)	Renounced its nuclear weapons program
Republic of Korea	mid 70s	1968 (R)	Halted its plutonium program
South Africa	1989	1991 (A)	Dismantled its nuclear arsenal
Sweden	1960s	1968 (A)	Renounced its nuclear weapons program
Ukraine	1991	1994 (A)	Returned its nuclear weapons

A - Accession

R - Ratification

Nuclear nonproliferation had remained a mere ideal before the NPT entered into force. But once it took effect and ratification began to spread, the ideal was transformed into a reality, exerting a powerful shaping influence on the world. As this precedent demonstrates, the entry into force of a treaty can provide a clear new directionality for the world even if the number of States Parties is limited in its initial stages.

I would like to reference an important article by Merav Datan and Jürgen Scheffran on the significance of establishing an international norm. The authors were among the drafters of the Model Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC), a forerunner of the TPNW submitted to the UN as a discussion document in 1997. They write:

If the areas of division between IL [international law] and IR [international relations] represent gaps between the ideal and the real, then the NWC could be said to embody

the ideal while the NPT represents the real. The Ban Treaty [TPNW] embodies both: it represents the ideal, as it has no nuclear weapon State signatories yet; and it represents the real because it exists. [50]

They further stress, “Opposing trends and resistance to disarmament are also a reality, but they do not negate the evolution and value of norms.” [51] I strongly agree.

Thus, the focus going forward must be to give such weight to the prohibition against the use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances—established through the entry into force of the TPNW—that no state can challenge it.

According to the 2019 report of Norwegian People’s Aid, a partner of the International Campaign to Ban Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), 135 countries currently support the TPNW. [52] The number of municipalities expressing support for it is also increasing. The Cities Appeal launched by ICAN in 2018 has been joined by cities and towns in nuclear-weapon states such as the United States, the United Kingdom and France, nuclear-dependent states such as Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, Spain, Norway, Canada, Japan and Australia, and also in Switzerland. Among these are Washington DC and Paris, capitals of nuclear-weapon states, and Berlin, Oslo and Canberra, capitals of nuclear-dependent states. [53]

In October 2019, the “Appeal of the Hibakusha” containing 10.5 million signatures, including many from citizens of nuclear-weapon states and nuclear-dependent states, was submitted to the UN. [54] The petition drive, which calls on all states to join the TPNW and which was supported by the Soka Gakkai Peace Committee, was launched in 2016 by hibakusha from Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The first meeting of States Parties of the TPNW

Within a year of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the first meeting of States Parties of the treaty will take place in order to set deadlines for the destruction of a State Party’s nuclear weapons and for the removal of a foreign state’s nuclear weapons. In order to enter into force, the TPNW must be ratified by at least fifty countries. As of January 26, 2020, the treaty has been signed by eighty countries and ratified by thirty-five. Supporters of the treaty recommend that the first meeting of States Parties consider setting a deadline of ten years for the destruction of all nuclear weapons.

It is vital that we weave together the various strands of global popular will supporting the elimination of nuclear weapons in order to decisively advance the process of solidifying it as a norm in society. To that end, I would like to suggest that a people’s forum for a world without nuclear weapons be held in Hiroshima or Nagasaki to follow up on the first meeting of States Parties of the TPNW, which the treaty requires be held within one year of its entry into force.

The forum would bring together hibakusha from around the world, municipalities that support the TPNW and representatives of civil society. I propose the holding of this forum because I believe that in order for the prohibition of nuclear weapons to take root as a global norm for humanity, the people themselves should instigate debate based on the shared recognition that the horrors of nuclear

weapons must never be visited upon any country.

It is my earnest hope that Japan, as the only country to have suffered a nuclear attack in wartime, will continue to work to deepen international discussion on the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons and serve as a bridge between nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states.

It was the series of three international conferences on the humanitarian impact of the use of nuclear weapons, originating in 2013, that opened the way for the start of negotiations on a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons—a goal that had met with stiff resistance for more than seventy years. This series of conferences clarified the following important points:

1. It is unlikely that any state or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation in an adequate manner and provide sufficient assistance to the victims.
2. The impact of a nuclear weapon detonation would not be constrained by national borders, would cause devastating long-term effects and could even threaten the survival of humankind.
3. The indirect effects of a nuclear weapon detonation would include the hampering of socioeconomic development as well as ecological disruption, with the effects being most concentrated on the impoverished and vulnerable segments of society.

The conferences shifted the perspective of nuclear weapon discussions from national security issues to the human impacts of their use, in this way contributing to a heightened momentum for the start of negotiations on a ban treaty.

In October 2018, following the adoption of the TPNW, the UN Human Rights Committee, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted a general comment stating that the threat or use of nuclear weapons is “incompatible with respect for the right to life.” [\[55\]](#)

The right to life is defined in the ICCPR as being one “from which no derogation is permitted” [\[56\]](#) even in emergency situations, underscoring its uniquely important place within international human rights law. In this way, the problematic nature of the threat or use of nuclear weapons has been clearly pointed out in relation to one of the core rights in international human rights law, a truly significant development. This point was also at the heart of the declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons issued by my mentor, Josei Toda, in September 1957.

A key theme for discussion at the people’s forum for a world without nuclear weapons proposed above should be the right to life—with international human rights law as a lens for bringing into focus the inhumane nature of these weapons. I would also like to suggest that this forum serve as an opportunity for the mutual sharing of visions about what a world built through the prohibition of nuclear weapons would look like.

Within the debate that led to the drafting of the TPNW, it was a woman’s voice highlighting a long-overlooked aspect of the damage caused by nuclear weapons that impelled the mainstreaming of a gender perspective, one that had never previously been addressed as relevant to the nuclear arms problem. At the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in December 2014, Mary Olson of the Nuclear Information and Resource Service gave a presentation outlining the evidence that radiation damage from the use of nuclear weapons could be more serious to women than to men. This stimulated further discussion and ultimately resulted in the inclusion of the following preambular language in the TPNW:

Recognizing that the equal, full and effective participation of both women and men is an essential factor for the promotion and attainment of sustainable peace and security, and committed to supporting and strengthening the effective participation of women in nuclear disarmament. . . [57]

This elucidates from a gender perspective the contours of a vision for the world that would be created by banning nuclear weapons.

The testimonies of hibakusha from Hiroshima and Nagasaki that the Soka Gakkai has collated and published over the years include stories of numerous women. *Joseitachi no Hiroshima* (The Women of Hiroshima), published in 2016, contains the stories of fourteen women depicting the suffering they experienced even after they had survived the bombing: for example, the prejudice and discrimination related to marriage and childbirth they endured while living with constant fear of the aftereffects of radiation. [58] Their message, however, is not limited to their resolve as hibakusha to never allow anyone else to suffer what they have endured. As reflected in the book's subtitle, "For a Brilliant, Smiling Future," their message is animated by a vow to work together to build a peaceful world where mothers and children can live with a sense of security.

In order to establish the universal relevance of and build support for the TPNW, it is vital that greater numbers of people share with one another the hopes and determinations that arise from within the reality of daily life. I am convinced that the efficacy of the TPNW will be enhanced as a global norm for all humanity when people's broad support is brought together, transcending differences of nationality and perspective. It has the power to embrace not only those already engaged with peace and disarmament issues but also those concerned with gender and human rights or with the future of their children and their families.

Multilateral negotiations for nuclear disarmament

The second area in which I would like to offer concrete proposals concerns policies for making substantive progress toward nuclear disarmament. Specifically, I would like to call for two agreements to be included in the final outcome statement of the NPT Review Conference being held at UN Headquarters in New York in April and May. The first regards the start of multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations and the second regards deliberations on the convergence of new technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) and nuclear weapons.

Regarding the first of these, I believe it is crucial to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between the United States and Russia, and then to begin multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The New START framework, which is scheduled to expire in February 2021, stipulates a reduction in the number of both countries' strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 and limits the number of deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and other delivery systems to 700. The treaty can be extended by five years, but negotiations are currently stalled.

The loss of the New START framework, following the demise of the INF Treaty, would create conditions in which, for the first time in half a century, there are no mutual restraints on the nuclear arsenals of

either country. This void invites the risk of a renewed nuclear arms race. In addition, the accelerating development of miniaturized nuclear warheads and supersonic weapons generates the future prospect that the use of nuclear weapons will be considered in geographically limited conflicts. This makes the five-year extension of the New START absolutely essential.

In light of this, the NPT Review Conference should encourage a moratorium on the modernization of nuclear weapons. States Parties should come to an understanding that multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations need to be initiated before the next NPT Review Conference in 2025.

In the fifty-year history of the NPT, the only nuclear disarmament frameworks have been between the United States and Russia, and no actual nuclear disarmament has been realized through multilateral processes. We must make the 2020 Review Conference the occasion for reaffirming that the NPT is the only legally binding treaty in which all the nuclear-weapon states share the goal of nuclear disarmament and pledge to achieve this. Further, it is necessary to take the kind of action that will give this recognition visible form.

Regarding concrete measures to be taken to this end, various approaches are possible, but I would like to propose that, on the basis of a five-year extension of the New START, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China should commence negotiations on a new nuclear disarmament treaty, beginning with dialogues on verification regimes.

Drawing from the verification experience accumulated by the US and Russia and the discourse at the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, which started five years ago with the participation of many countries, these five states should begin deliberations on the impediments to nuclear disarmament. The confidence building achieved through this dialogue can propel progress toward the start of substantive negotiations regarding numerical targets for the reduction of nuclear weapons.

Special Sessions of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament

Throughout the 70s and 80s, peace and anti-nuclear movements gained force, pushing for nuclear disarmament and an end to the Cold War arms race. In this context, the UN General Assembly held three Special Sessions devoted to Disarmament (SSOD): SSOD I in 1978, SSOD II in 1982 and SSOD III in 1988. Daisaku Ikeda released proposals to coincide with SSOD I and SSOD II, before he started issuing his annual peace proposals in 1983, in which, based on Buddhist philosophy, he asserted his stance against nuclear deterrence. In his proposal to SSOD II, he called for the establishment of a “Council of World Citizens for the Protection of the UN,” in which ordinary people—and not only governments—would play a central role.

To create the conditions for multilateral nuclear disarmament, I think it is valuable to reexamine the concept of “common security” that helped promote efforts to bring the Cold War to an end. “Common Security” was the title of a report written by a commission led by Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme (1927–86) and submitted to the Second Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD II) in June 1982. Based on the understanding that there can be no victor in a nuclear war, the report urged the following transformation in consciousness: “States can no longer seek security at each other’s expense; it can be attained only through cooperative undertakings.” [\[59\]](#)

This thinking aligned closely with my own. In the proposal I released on the occasion of the SSOD II, I wrote: “Given the confrontation between enormous nuclear arsenals, it is clear that no further expansion of military might can possibly bring

about authentic peace.” [\[60\]](#)

The previous year, 1981, amidst increasing tensions between the US and the Soviet Union, President Ronald W. Reagan (1911–2004) clarified his stance of confrontation with the USSR and made statements hinting at the possibility of limited nuclear war. Reagan later recorded his feelings at the time: “Our policy was to be one based on strength and realism. I wanted peace through strength, not peace through a piece of paper.” [\[61\]](#)

However, as Reagan witnessed a growing antinuclear movement in the United States and Europe and deepened his awareness of the horrific destruction that would be wrought by the use of nuclear weapons, he came more strongly to feel the need to avoid nuclear conflict. He also began to consider more carefully the actual feelings of the people of the Soviet Union, with which the US was embroiled in nuclear competition. He later reflected on his communications with Soviet General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko (1911–85):

In the letter to Chernenko, I said I believed it would be advantageous for us to communicate directly and confidentially. I tried to use the old actor’s technique of empathy. . . I said it was my understanding that some people in the Soviet Union felt a genuine fear of our country. [\[62\]](#)

Through this exercise, Reagan was able to sense the degree to which the fears felt in his own country were the mirror image of those felt in the Soviet Union. His pursuit of dialogue with leaders of the Soviet Union culminated in the Geneva Summit with General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in November 1985. Gorbachev was equally convinced of the need to resolve the nuclear issue, and their frank dialogue led to the issuance of a joint statement that includes these famous words: “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” [\[63\]](#)

This reflects a mode of thinking similar to the idea of common security; it led to the signing of the INF Treaty in December 1987 and was instrumental in bringing the Cold War to a close. Today, tensions surrounding nuclear weapons are again increasing, and the world faces a situation that has even been referred to as a new Cold War. Now more than ever, it is important to revive the spirit of common security, and it is for this reason that I propose the inclusion of a declaration by the States Parties of the NPT that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” in the Review Conference’s final document.

The Agenda for Disarmament issued by the UN in May 2018 called for “disarmament to save humanity.” [\[64\]](#) In a speech the day after the report’s release, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu, who was involved in its preparation, addressed the relationship between security and disarmament as follows:

Disarmament is a driving force for international peace and security, it is a useful tool for ensuring national security. . .

Disarmament is not a utopian ideal, but a tangible pursuit to prevent conflict and mitigate its impact whenever and wherever it does occur. [\[65\]](#)

By deploying nuclear disarmament negotiations as a useful tool to achieve one’s own security, we can reduce the sense of threat and insecurity felt by other countries, in this way starting to eliminate the sense of threat and insecurity we ourselves feel.

Based on this kind of mutually beneficial win-win approach, now is the time to energetically promote the good-faith pursuit of nuclear disarmament to which Article VI of the NPT commits us.

Another question on which I hope the NPT Review Conference will seek consensus regards the threat posed by cyberattacks on nuclear weapons-related systems and the introduction of AI into the operation of such systems. I hope the conference will develop a deeper shared awareness of these threats and begin deliberations on the development of a prohibition regime.

While new technologies utilizing AI, the Internet and other cyberspaces have positively benefited society in many ways, it is concerning that their application for military purposes is expanding at a rapid pace.

A conference discussing the challenges posed by such emerging technologies was held in Berlin last March. A major focus of the meeting—attended by government representatives from NATO countries, EU member states, Russia, China, India, Japan and Brazil—was lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS), colloquially known as killer robots, as well as the impact new technologies would have on nuclear and other weapons. A political declaration by the foreign ministers of Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden emerged from the conference, in which they agreed that “there is a need to build a shared understanding of how technologically enhanced military capabilities may change the character of warfare and how this will influence global security.” [\[66\]](#)

This concern expressed by nuclear-dependent states is indicative of the alarming speed at which new technologies are being developed; as such, I propose that deliberations commence immediately on this question within the framework of the NPT.

When the decision was made in 1995 to extend the NPT indefinitely, the States Parties agreed that Review Conferences should not only evaluate the results of past undertakings but also identify the areas in which further progress should be sought in the future, as well as the means to achieve this. [\[67\]](#) Considering the urgency of the matter and the scale of the risks, addressing the issue of new technologies and their implications for nuclear weapons must be given top priority.

Cyberattacks, for example, could affect not just the command and control centers of nuclear weapons, but a wide range of related systems including early warning, communications and delivery systems. In the worst-case scenario, a cyberattack on any one of these systems could lead to the launch or detonation of the nuclear weapons themselves.

Regarding this issue, Secretary-General Guterres has expressed the following concern:

There is consensus that international law, including the United Nations Charter, applies to cyberspace. However, there is a lack of consensus about precisely how international law applies, and how States may respond to malicious or hostile acts, within the law. [\[68\]](#)

As a means of setting a precedent in this regard, and as a step toward nuclear risk reduction, immediate action must be taken within the framework of the NPT to prohibit cyberattacks on nuclear-related systems.

There are likewise many dangers associated with the adoption of AI in nuclear arms operations. According to a report issued by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) last May,

the advantages of adopting AI—from the perspective of nuclear-armed states—include the fact that in addition to removing certain limitations such as fatigue or fear that may make human performance deteriorate over time, it grants systems greater reach and access to areas with harsh operating environments for humans, such as deep water and polar regions. [69]

However, the report also warns that greater reliance on AI would lead to an increase in factors that destabilize nuclear weapons operations, thereby steering us in the direction of heightened nuclear risks. Take the example of nuclear deterrence, which is highly psychological in nature and relies on perceptions of the adversary's intentions. [70] The report points out that recent advances in AI would make it no longer possible to perceive the adversary's actual intentions. If AI comes to play a major role in nuclear weapons systems, the opaque nature of these technologies—of which the inner workings are difficult to understand and which thus operate like a black box—would make it increasingly difficult to predict the adversary's intentions, thereby inciting conditions of escalated anxiety and suspicion. [71] The report notes that “the USA and the USSR spent a great deal of time and effort studying each other's strategic systems and behaviour during the cold war and their military representatives met frequently, even if not always productively.” [72]

While we might speak of psychological perception, I believe that what actually enhanced the ability of the parties to predict one another's moves was the accumulation of their experiences of meeting in person. During the Cold War, there were many dangerous instances in which, due to misinformation or malfunctioning, computer systems falsely reported incoming missiles. However, crisis was contained thanks to the presence of mind of the individuals monitoring these systems who exercised reason and trusted their gut instinct in reporting that the information on the monitor was false and recommending against a counterstrike. Today, when we analyze the risks associated with cyberattacks such as hacking and malicious spoofing, the accelerated adoption of AI would make such systems even more vulnerable to both erroneous and deliberately falsified information.

No matter how AI-reliant nuclear weapons systems become, it seems unlikely that the ultimate push of the nuclear button will be delegated to a machine any time soon. Nevertheless, we must still address the fact that the rush to adopt AI in military applications among nuclear-armed states poses a serious predicament for global society. Although the use of AI may lead to additional gains in speed and thus military superiority, it could also give rise to dilemmas such as the one faced by US President John F. Kennedy (1917–63) and Soviet General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971) during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, but with far less opportunity to consider options.

Recalling the lessons learned from this crisis that shook the world to its core, Kennedy once said that “nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war.” [73] These words reflect how closely they had skirted disaster and how much he rued the fact that conditions had deteriorated to that point. Even so, both leaders were afforded a period of thirteen days to conduct deliberations. If the current pursuit of ever-greater speed continues, the increased pressure of being overtaken by one's adversary will leave that much less room for making decisions based on careful deliberation.

The SIPRI report cautions: “The quest for faster, smarter, more accurate and more versatile weapons could lead to destabilizing arms races.” [74] I am of the strong opinion that, far from helping prevent nuclear war, the application of AI to nuclear weapons can only encourage their preemptive use.

I believe, as its preamble indicates, the enduring spirit of the NPT is its commitment to making every effort to avert the danger of nuclear war. Moving forward, it is crucial that all States Parties of the treaty make this their shared foundation, using the debate on cyberattacks and the adoption of AI as an occasion to interrogate the meaning of their continued reliance upon nuclear weapons in their security doctrines.

Making the invisible visible

My third proposal pertains to climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR).

The necessary responses to climate change are not limited to the reduction of greenhouse gases; there is also an urgent need to take steps to limit the damage wrought, for example, by extreme weather events. These were also the main themes discussed at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 25) held in Madrid last month.

According to a report released by Oxfam ahead of COP 25, climate-related weather disasters increased five-fold over the last decade. Globally, a far greater number of people are displaced because of causes originating in climate change than by natural disasters such as earthquakes or by armed conflict. [\[75\]](#)

Here, I would like to suggest that a UN conference focusing on climate change and disaster risk reduction be held in Japan.

Since 2007, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) has convened and organized the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction. The forum, originally held biennially, is attended by government officials and representatives of civil society, with the 2015 forum being rolled into the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan. The most recent session of the Global Platform (GP 2019), held in Geneva last May, was attended by more than 4,000 participants from 182 countries. [\[76\]](#) The Global Platform will now be held every three years, with the next slated to take place in 2022. I would like to suggest that this meeting be held in Japan and be the site of focused deliberations on DRR in relation to extreme weather events and the challenges facing recovery efforts.

In 2015, the Third UN World Conference on DRR adopted the Sendai Framework. The framework presents several targets, among which is to substantially reduce the number of those affected by natural disasters by 2030. To meet these targets, countries need to draw from their respective experiences in order to strengthen measures to reduce the risks of disasters caused by extreme weather events.

In September 2019, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure was launched at the initiative of India. This international partnership will serve to strengthen coordination for technical support and capacity building to develop infrastructure that is resilient not only to the kind of seismic disasters that have long been an important focus but also to the impacts of climate change. Japan, which has seen an increasing number of climate-induced disasters in recent years, has joined this coalition. I propose that Japan, through its collaboration with India and other member states, take leadership in putting together global guidelines concerning this issue at the Global Platform.

I further suggest that one of the main themes at the next Global Platform be the role of local governments in the face of climate-fueled disasters, and that the gathering be an opportunity for

building partnerships among municipalities. To date, over 4,300 municipalities across the globe have signed up to the UNDRR’s Making Cities Resilient campaign, [77] with Mongolia and Bangladesh seeing the participation of all their municipalities. [78] This year marks the tenth year since the campaign began. It is important for municipalities to continue strengthening coordination among each other, with increased emphasis on managing the risks of extreme weather events.

About 40 percent of the world’s population live within 100 kilometers of the coast, [79] putting them at increased risk from climate-induced disasters. The vast majority of the Japanese population also live in coastal areas. Given this, I feel it would be valuable for municipalities in the coastal areas of Japan and other Asian countries, such as China and South Korea, to share experiences and best practices related to climate change and DRR, in this way generating synergies beneficial to Asia as a whole.

In June of this year, the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction will be held in Australia. I hope this conference will be the occasion to deepen discussion on strengthening collaboration among municipalities and that this will see expansion into a worldwide initiative through the GP 2022.

In addition to the themes mentioned above, I hope the 2022 meeting will prioritize discussions on ways of creating a more inclusive society in which those who are most seriously impacted by climate-fueled disasters will not be left behind.

The GP 2019 in Geneva had a strong focus on the promotion of gender equality and social inclusion. Half of the panelists and 40 percent of participants were women. In addition, more than 120 people with disabilities attended. [80] One UN SDGs Advocate, Edward Ndopu from South Africa, shared his thoughts on inclusive recovery processes after disasters:

People with disabilities constitute the world’s largest minority group—15 percent of the global population—yet people with disabilities are systematically forgotten about. . .

There is a connection between the physical act of leaving people with disabilities behind and the very real social implications of exclusion on the lives of people with disabilities. [81]

Mr. Ndopu, who was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy at the age of two, also stated the need for a reconstruction of societal attitudes toward those most at risk in the wake of disasters. I believe that this point is integral to any effort to enhance resilience—an essential condition for both pre-disaster risk management and post-disaster recovery. Only by promoting a sense of shared living and strengthening the fabric of interconnection in our daily lives can we continue to develop the capacity to protect people’s lives and dignity from the onset of disaster to post-disaster recovery processes.

One of the key ideas highlighted in a session on gender-responsive DRR and resilience-building at the GP 2019 was that “it is important to make the invisible, visible in disasters.” [82] Because the circumstances in which many women live their day-to-day lives are obscured by societal norms and discriminatory attitudes, they are at greater risk of being left behind when assistance is most needed.

When extreme or erratic weather events make evacuation necessary, women are often among the last to leave, staying behind to look after children and elderly or sick relatives, especially in cases where male

family members have left home in search of an income elsewhere. On the other hand, it is undeniable that women are an immense source of strength in the aftermath of disasters, providing support and care for people in their communities.

UN Women has stressed that the actual and potential contributions of women to disaster risk reduction—from leadership in the immediate aftermath of disaster through to the building of resilience in the community—are a social asset that remains largely untapped.

When I think about the structural factors that tend to obscure awareness of people or things that nonetheless clearly exist, I am reminded of an analogy that appears in one of the Mahayana sutras regarding the light of the stars during daytime. Despite the fact that countless stars exist in the heavens, each emitting its own bright light, we are not aware of them during the day because of the light of the sun.

Whether in the course of normal life or in times of disaster, women play a crucial role, generating networks of mutual support within local communities. That is why reflecting their voices in every step along the process of shaping disaster management measures—both for geophysical disasters such as earthquakes and for extreme weather events—will be the key to building disaster-resilient communities.

This year, 2020, will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Developed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, it sets out clear guidelines for achieving gender equality. The declaration states:

The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue. They are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society. [\[83\]](#)

The spirit of gender equality is also crucial in the field of disaster risk reduction. Whether in the context of DRR or of extreme weather events resulting from climate change, measures to strengthen resilience must go beyond improving hard infrastructure. I therefore strongly feel that we must not only strive to ensure that gender equality becomes a reality, but also prioritize those who tend to be overlooked and left behind in everyday life as we work to build community resilience.

Over the years, as a faith-based organization, the SGI has regularly attended international conferences on DRR including the Global Platform, while also engaging in emergency relief and recovery activities in times of disaster. In 2017, the SGI co-organized an event at the GP 2017 in Cancun, Mexico, titled “Locally-led Disaster Risk Reduction by Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs)—Implementing the Sendai Framework.” At this meeting, the SGI released a joint statement with Christian, Muslim and other FBO partners, [\[84\]](#) and a similar joint statement was issued at the GP 2019 in Geneva. [\[85\]](#)

In March 2018, the SGI along with four other FBOs formed the Asia Pacific Faith-Based Coalition for Sustainable Development (APFC), and in July the five members of APFC submitted a joint statement to the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The statement includes the following shared determination:

At the core of the mission of FBOs is the will to address the root causes of vulnerabilities and to bring hope and well-being to the communities at the margins of society. . .

Faith-based groups play a crucial role in the localization of risk reduction, resilience building and humanitarian action. [86]

The SGI shares this spirit with the FBO community and will continue to support efforts to enhance resilience motivated by a vision of an inclusive society in which the dignity of all people is respected.

Education for children in crisis

The last of my four proposals relates to strengthening support for children and young people deprived of educational opportunities due to armed conflict or natural disasters. It is my belief that protecting the human rights and future development of the next generation is the cornerstone of creating a sustainable global society.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child will celebrate its thirtieth anniversary of entry into force this September. With 196 States Parties—a number greater than the membership of the UN—it is the most widely ratified universal human rights treaty. The convention stipulates that governments have an obligation to ensure the right of all children to education, and indeed the proportion of primary-school-age children who are not in school decreased from around 20 percent in 1990 to less than 10 percent in 2019. [87] Despite this progress, millions of children and young people living in conflict- and disaster-stricken countries still face serious educational disadvantages.

In Yemen, a country devastated by prolonged conflict, 2.4 million school-age children are deprived of education. [88] School infrastructure has been targeted and severely damaged, with premises being used as military bases or civilian shelters. In Bangladesh, which has been repeatedly impacted by environmental disasters exacerbated by the climate crisis, vast numbers of families have been driven into poverty and displacement. In the process, there is concern for children’s health, and a growing number find their access to education impeded.

Globally, more than 104 million children and young people are currently deprived of an education as a result of conflict and disaster. [89] However, less than 2 percent of humanitarian funding is allocated to this area. [90] Education has conventionally been accorded less importance in relief activities than the food and medical supplies needed for survival. And even after the recovery phase has begun, education has always been one of the last areas to receive attention. The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) emphasizes the role of schools in providing children with an important place to reclaim their daily lives. Spending time with friends at school offers children psychological succor to start healing from the traumatic experiences of growing up in conflict or disaster zones.

The World Humanitarian Summit

In 2016, then Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon convened the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Turkey. The purpose was to reform global humanitarian aid efforts at a fundamental level by building a more inclusive and diverse system to respond to current crises in a more effective way. The summit brought together 9,000 participants representing 180 Member States, including 55 Heads of State and Government, hundreds of civil society, nongovernmental and faith-based organizations, and partners from the private sector and academia.

Against this backdrop, Education Cannot Wait (ECW) is a new global fund established during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and hosted by UNICEF. It is the first initiative of its kind dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted crises. In total, ECW has already reached more than 1.9 million children trapped in humanitarian emergencies, providing them with educational opportunities. [\[91\]](#) This sets the groundwork for crisis-hit young people to regain their sense of security and hope as they continue to advance toward the future with dreams in their hearts. It also serves as a vital resource, bringing peace and stability to the community and society.

As ECW Director Yasmine Sherif explains:

How is it possible to build a socio-economically viable society if the citizens and refugees in that society cannot read or write, cannot think critically, have no teachers, no lawyers, no doctors. . .

Education is key to promoting peace, tolerance and mutual respect: it reduces the likelihood of violence and conflict by 37% when girls and boys have equal access to education. [\[92\]](#)

Among the SDGs is the target of ensuring that all girls and boys complete quality education. It is unacceptable to allow children and young people living in countries afflicted by conflict or disaster to be left behind and become a “lost generation.”

In 2016, the year ECW was established, it was estimated that US\$8.5 billion was needed annually to provide a basic education package for the approximately 75 million children affected by such crises, equivalent to US\$113 per child a year. [\[93\]](#) The number of children in need has since increased to 104 million, [\[94\]](#) but it is clear that diverting even a small fraction of global military spending, estimated at an annual US\$1.8 trillion, [\[95\]](#) would be sufficient to provide international support for the kind of education that would enable millions of youth living in dire conditions to take a hopeful step forward in their lives.

I urge the international community to strengthen the financial foundation of ECW in order to enhance the provision of education during emergencies. Doing so will constitute a major contribution to creating a sustainable global society where everyone can live with dignity and security.

In my 2009 peace proposal, I called for the expansion of innovative financing mechanisms such as international solidarity levies, in order to accelerate the process of achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals. As we look to achieve the successor targets—the SDGs—there is a need to redouble efforts. It is time to explore additional measures to raise further funds toward this goal, including the establishment of an international solidarity levy dedicated to education.

The solidarity levy on airline tickets currently implemented in France and other countries is being used as an international funding source to support people in developing countries suffering from infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Other examples of innovative financing frameworks include UNITLIFE, which was set up five years ago to fight chronic child malnutrition.

At the G7 Development Ministerial Meeting in July, Japan—which last year held the presidency of the Leading Group on Innovative Financing for Development—addressed the necessity of innovative financing methods such as international solidarity levies in order to leverage development efforts.

In collaboration with UNICEF, Japan has been instrumental in distributing textbooks to 100,000 elementary school students and providing school supplies and school bags to 62,000 children in war-ravaged Syria. [96]

In areas of Afghanistan where there has been a deficit of humanitarian aid, Japan has funded the construction of seventy schools, enabling 50,000 children to study in suitable learning environments. [97] I urge Japan to deploy its rich experience in supporting educational development overseas by taking an active role in strengthening the financial basis of ECW and leading discussion on formulating new platforms that can increase the availability of international solidarity funding for education.

I would like to share an example from UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, of the hope that can be inspired in the hearts of displaced families when they are able to access education where they have sought refuge. A young mother and her two children were forced to flee Nicaragua in the face of major social and political unrest. Her decision to take her son and daughter out of school and move them to neighboring Costa Rica was heart-wrenching, but the dangers they faced gave her no choice. Even collecting the children's school grades and certificates was fraught with risk, and the family barely managed to leave the country with a small suitcase between them. What worried the mother most was whether her children would be able to attend school in their new country.

Fortunately, she found that primary school in Costa Rica is free and guaranteed for all children. Further, many of the schools in the north of the country have sought to meet the needs of displaced families by simplifying their entry requirements to allow children with no official documentation to register. Because many of these children had been out of education for some time, a number of schools provided extra lessons aimed at helping them catch up. Thanks to this system, her children were able to return to school.

Her son, aged fourteen, expressed his great happiness at being able to study again, sharing his dream of one day becoming a doctor. He and his younger sister, ten, now happily hold hands as they head to school each day. As one teacher at their school explained, his goal is to help the kids who had been forced to leave their homeland “feel at home” within the walls of the school. [98]

Behind the staggering figure of 104 million school-age children denied access to education due to humanitarian emergencies are individuals with their own life stories. Ensuring equal access to education for these children will enable them to regain hope and advance toward their goals in life.

Education is one of the three pillars—along with peace and culture—around which the SGI's socially engaged activities in 192 countries and territories are centered. These activities are designed to promote empowerment—of, by and for the people.

The motivating spirit of our movement is eloquently symbolized by a design used on the cover of *Soka kyōikugaku taikei* (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy), published ninety years ago (November 18, 1930) by the two founding presidents of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, two educators sharing a mentor-disciple bond. The design depicts an oil lamp whose light dispels the surrounding darkness.

When society is in the throes of upheaval or fraught with threat, it is always children and young people who bear the brunt. Deeply anguished to witness such conditions firsthand, Makiguchi dedicated himself to primary school education, the frontline of learning. Putting his all into igniting the light of hope in the hearts of his young students, he continued his research into modes of human education that would help people develop their capacity to create happiness. His efforts culminated in the aforementioned work, *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*.

Makiguchi was in his thirties during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) and worked hard to promote education for girls and women, an area in which Japan lagged significantly. Many families were struggling financially, often having lost their main breadwinner through death, injury or illness as a result of the war. He responded to their plight by implementing a tuition assistance program in which students of such families were either fully covered or received a 50 percent reduction to their fees.

In his forties, he served as principal at an elementary school established especially for underprivileged families. During this time, he visited and helped care for children who had fallen ill and arranged school meals for undernourished children. The reason Makiguchi went to such lengths to support his students can no doubt be traced back to his own searing experience of being deprived of access to education due to family circumstances.

He was in his fifties when the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 devastated the Tokyo metropolitan area. Many children were forced to move to new schools, and he welcomed them at the school where he was principal, providing them with necessary school supplies. So concerned was he about the well-being and whereabouts of his former students that he walked the neighborhoods of schools where he had previously worked to confirm their safety.

Similarly, under the constraints prevailing during wartime, Josei Toda, Makiguchi's closest disciple, published thirty-five issues of educational magazines for children during the years between 1940 and 1942. His earnest desire for children's happiness and well-being never diminished, even after he was imprisoned, alongside Makiguchi, on charges of violating laws enforced by the military government intended to curtail freedom of thought. Makiguchi died while still in prison.

Toda remained undaunted by his own two-year incarceration, which ended just one month before the end of World War II. On release, his first act was to start a correspondence course for children. With many schools not fully functioning in the chaotic aftermath of the war, he strove to ensure educational opportunities continued uninterrupted.

As this history eloquently attests, the hearts of the two founding presidents of the Soka Gakkai burned with the determination to keep the light of education alive for all children, regardless of their circumstances. The publication date of *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy* is celebrated as the founding of the Soka Gakkai, and it is my belief that the illustration of the oil lamp on its cover embodies their pledge to action. As the oil lamp so aptly suggests, the flame of education requires constant tending. The light is kept shining by those who pour into it their passion and by society's support for their efforts.

Carrying on the torch passed to me by my predecessors Makiguchi and Toda, I have established a network of educational institutions in various countries, including the Soka Junior and Senior High Schools in Tokyo and Osaka, Soka University in Japan and Soka University of America, as well the Brazil

Soka schools. I have also engaged in dialogues with educators from around the world, working for more than half a century to build a society dedicated to serving the needs of education, one that ensures the dignity and happiness of children, now and into the future.

Striving to raise awareness of the importance of building a society that serves the needs of education, the SGI is committed to promoting empowerment of, by and for the people in order to address the climate crisis and other global challenges with an expanding momentum of human solidarity.

Notes

- [1] See UN, “Climate Action Summit 2019.”
- [2] Guterres, “Remarks on Climate Change.”
- [3] Toda Peace Institute, “Climate Change, Migration and Land in Oceania,” 4.
- [4] Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, 27.
- [5] Guterres, “Address to the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly.”
- [6] (trans. from) Makiguchi, *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu*, 2:397.
- [7] *Ibid.*, 1:13.
- [8] *Ibid.*, 2:399.
- [9] See IMF, “Real GDP Growth.”
- [10] See Future Earth, “Global Carbon Dioxide Emissions Set to Rise.”
- [11] See Banerjee and Duflo, *Poor Economics*, ix.
- [12] *Ibid.*, 70.
- [13] *Ibid.*, 138.
- [14] (trans. from) Nakamura, *Budda no kotoba*, 135–36.
- [15] See Ikeda and Chowdhury, *Creating the Culture of Peace*, 132.
- [16] *Ibid.*, 140–41.
- [17] (trans. from) Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu*, 4:62.
- [18] Hammarskjöld, “Remarks at United Nations Day Concert.”
- [19] *Ibid.*
- [20] See IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers.”
- [21] See Ikeda and Boulding, *Into Full Flower*, 92.
- [22] (trans. from) Nakamura, *Shakuson no shogai*, 57.
- [23] Jaspers, *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus*, 26.
- [24] Nichiren, *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, 192.
- [25] *Ibid.*, 91.
- [26] See Plant for the Planet, “Trillion Tree Campaign.”
- [27] Guterres, “Remarks at Closing of Climate Action Summit.”
- [28] Schnall, “Conversation with Wangari Maathai.”
- [29] UN, “UN to Launch Biggest-ever Global Conversation.”
- [30] See Guterres, “Remarks to the General Assembly.”
- [31] UN News Centre, “At UN, Youth Activists Press for Bold Action.”
- [32] Global Climate Strike, “7.6 Million People Demand Action.”
- [33] Science Focus, “Christiana Figueres on Climate Change.”
- [34] (trans. from) Figueres, “*Datsu tansoka e.*”
- [35] See UNEP, “Higher and Further Education Institutions.”
- [36] See Global Covenant of Mayors, “About Us.”
- [37] UN News Centre, “At UN, Youth Activists Press for Bold Action.”
- [38] Peccei, *One Hundred Pages for the Future*, 178.
- [39] Peccei, *The Human Quality*, 13.
- [40] *Ibid.*, 67.
- [41] *Ibid.*, 101.

- [42] Ikeda and Peccei, *Before It Is Too Late*, 110.
- [43] See Club of Rome, “Planetary Emergency Plan,” 7.
- [44] UN GA, “Political Declaration of the High-level Political Forum.”
- [45] Thunberg, “Greta Thunberg UN speech at COP25.”
- [46] See UN Treaty Collection, “Status of Treaties.”
- [47] Reuters, “Risk of Nuclear War Now Highest Since WW2.”
- [48] UN GA, “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,” Article 1.
- [49] Guterres, “Remarks at the University of Geneva.”
- [50] Datan and Scheffran, “The Treaty is Out of the Bottle,” 130.
- [51] *Ibid.*
- [52] See Norwegian People’s Aid, “Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor,” 4.
- [53] See ICAN, “ICAN Cities Appeal.”
- [54] See UNODA, “Appeal of the Hibakusha.”
- [55] ICCPR, “General Comment,” paragraph 66.
- [56] *Ibid.*, paragraph 2.
- [57] UN GA, “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.”
- [58] See Soka Gakkai Youth Division, ed., *Hiroshima and Nagasaki*.
- [59] ICDSI, *Common Security*, 139.
- [60] (trans. from) Ikeda, *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu*, 1:102.
- [61] Reagan, *An American Life*, 267.
- [62] *Ibid.*, 595.
- [63] American Presidency Project, “Joint Soviet-United States Statement.”
- [64] Guterres, “Securing Our Common Future.”
- [65] Nakamitsu, “Keynote Speech.”
- [66] Federal Foreign Office, “Political Declaration.”
- [67] See UN GA, “Strengthening the Review Process.”
- [68] Guterres, “Remarks at the University of Geneva.”
- [69] See SIPRI, *The Impact of Artificial Intelligence*, 23.
- [70] *Ibid.*, 95.
- [71] *Ibid.*, 19–20.
- [72] *Ibid.*, 51.
- [73] Kennedy, “Commencement Address at American University.”
- [74] SIPRI, *The Impact of Artificial Intelligence*, 121.
- [75] See Oxfam International, “Climate Fuelled Disasters.”
- [76] IISD, “Summary of the Sixth Session.”
- [77] See UNDRR, “Making Cities Resilient.”
- [78] See UNDRR, “Bangladesh Joins Cities Campaign.”
- [79] See UN, The Ocean Conference, “Factsheet.”
- [80] IISD, “Summary of the Sixth Session.”
- [81] GFDRR, “WRC4: Disaster Recovery for Persons with Disabilities.”
- [82] UN Women, “Promoting Women’s Leadership.”
- [83] UN Women, “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.”
- [84] See Global Platform, “Public Joint Statement of Faith-based Organizations to GP2017.”
- [85] See ACT Alliance, et al., “Joint Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) Statement.”
- [86] APFC, “Joint Faith Based Organizations’ (FBOs) Statement.”
- [87] See UNICEF, *For Every Child, Every Right*, 7.
- [88] See GPE Secretariat, “Going Back to School in Yemen.”
- [89] See UNICEF, “1 in 3 Children.”
- [90] See ECW, “75 Million Crisis-affected Children.”
- [91] See ECW, “Results Dashboard.”
- [92] IPS, “World’s Spreading Humanitarian Crises.”
- [93] *Ibid.*
- [94] See UNICEF, “1 in 3 Children.”

- [95] See SIPRI, “World Military Expenditure.”
- [96] See MOFA, “Official Development Assistance (ODA).”
- [97] Ibid.
- [98] See UNHCR, “Costa Rican Schools.”

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