

# Toward an Era of Human Rights: Building a People's Movement

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## **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)**

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is the first legally binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons, adopted with the aim of their eventual elimination. The Treaty was endorsed by 122 countries at United Nations Headquarters in New York on July 7, 2017; in order to come into effect, it must be ratified by at least fifty countries; as of January 2018, it has been signed by fifty-six and ratified by five. Contained in its twenty articles are provisions that signatory states must agree not to develop, test, produce, manufacture, transfer, possess, stockpile, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons, or allow nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory. States currently possessing nuclear arsenals may join the Treaty upon submission of a time-bound plan for the verified and irreversible elimination of their nuclear weapons program. Supporters of the Treaty believe it marks an important step towards a nuclear-free world by outlawing the weapons under international law.

The year 2017 proved to be a turning point for peace and disarmament. A series of negotiations at the United Nations finally led to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in July; to date it has been signed by more than fifty states. Once it enters into force, the Treaty will follow bans on biological and chemical arms to complete the international framework prohibiting all weapons of mass destruction.

The idea of abolishing weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear arms, was on the UN agenda from the outset, dating back to the very first resolution adopted by the General Assembly in January 1946, the year after the UN's establishment. Adoption of the landmark TPNW represents a breakthrough in a field that has been marked by seemingly unbreakable impasse. Moreover, the Treaty was realized with the strong support of civil society, including the survivors of nuclear weapons use, the hibakusha. Their contributions were recognized when the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the civil society coalition that has continued to strive for a treaty-based prohibition of nuclear weapons.

In her speech at the Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony held in December, Setsuko Thurlow, who spoke after ICAN Executive Director Beatrice Fihn, declared the following based on her experience as a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima:

Humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist. . .

These weapons are not a necessary evil; they are the ultimate evil. [\[1\]](#)

This conviction is shared by the members of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), who have been working together with ICAN since soon after its founding—a collaboration that was reconfirmed when Ms. Fihn visited the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Japan this January.

## International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is a civil society coalition based in Geneva, Switzerland, launched in 2007. As of January 2018, the coalition is composed of 468 nongovernmental organizations in 101 countries worldwide, representing millions of members united in the common goal of a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons. The SGI has been an international partner of this movement for the realization of a nuclear-weapon-free world since its early stages. ICAN received the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of its “work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons” and “ground-breaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons.” Subsequent to the July 2017 adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, ICAN’s main focus has been on persuading nations to sign, ratify and implement the Treaty. This is done through public awareness-raising events and advocacy work at the United Nations and in national parliaments, often working together with hibakusha.

To fundamentally negate the existence of those seen as enemies, to be willing to eradicate them with an extreme destructive power—this cruel tendency to deny human dignity underlies the thinking that justifies the possession of nuclear weapons.

This is precisely what my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900–58), expressed in his declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons in September 1957 amidst the intensifying nuclear arms race of the Cold War. As the nuclear threat expanded in the name of a deterrence-based peace, Toda declared, “I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons,” [\[2\]](#) condemning the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons as fundamentally jeopardizing the right of the world’s people to live.

Taking Toda’s declaration to heart, during a lecture I gave a half-century ago (in May 1968) just as negotiations on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) were coming to a conclusion, I proposed that, going beyond agreement on the NPT, it was important to prohibit nuclear arms in all their phases and aspects, including manufacture, testing and use.

In addition, on the occasion of the First Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament forty years ago (1978), I submitted a ten-point proposal for nuclear disarmament and abolition. I subsequently wrote a proposal on the occasion of the Second Special Session on Disarmament (1982) as well. The following year, I began authoring annual peace proposals to commemorate the SGI’s founding on January 26, an effort I have continued for the past thirty-five years in the hope of opening a path for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons.

Why have I focused so single-mindedly on finding a resolution to the nuclear issue? This is because, just as Josei Toda discerned, so long as nuclear weapons exist the quest for a world of peace and human rights for all will remain elusive.

One organization with which the SGI has developed strong ties in our shared efforts for nuclear abolition is the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. Jayantha Dhanapala, who served as the organization’s president until 2017, has stressed that a moral compass is indispensable in addressing the multitude of global challenges including the nuclear problem. He writes:

It is widely, but wrongly, assumed that the realm of ethical values and the world of pragmatic politics are wide apart and that never the twain shall meet. The achievements of the UN illustrate that there can be a fusion between ethics and policy, and it is this fusion that contributes to the betterment of mankind and to peace. [\[3\]](#)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which commemorates its seventieth anniversary this year, can be seen as a pioneering example of this.

Here, while considering the significance of the UDHR, I would like to offer some thoughts and perspectives on a human rights-focused approach to resolving global issues. For I believe that such an approach, rooted in concern for the life and dignity of each individual, can bring about the fusion of ethics and policy that is required for an effective response.

### **The spiritual sources of human rights law**

The first theme I would like to stress is that at the heart of human rights is the vow never to allow anyone else to suffer what one has endured.

Last year, UN Secretary-General António Guterres created the new post of Special Representative for International Migration to address issues related to refugees and migrants. Today, with some 258 million migrants in the world [\[4\]](#) and an ever-growing number of refugees, the foregrounding of negative stereotypes—that such people are either a burden or a threat—is fueling a climate of social exclusion.

Louise Arbour, the first person to hold this post, has stated:

One of the things we need to highlight is the need for migrants, like everybody else, to have their fundamental human rights respected and protected without discrimination on the basis of their status. [\[5\]](#)

This understanding must serve as the foundation for resolving the migration and refugee crisis.

As the history of the twentieth century with its two world wars illustrates, the incitement of contempt and enmity toward certain groups of people can result in tragedy on an unimaginable scale. The UDHR, adopted in December 1948, three years after the UN's founding, was a crystallization of the wisdom gained from those bitter lessons. It is vital, then, that we once again affirm the spirit of the Declaration in order to find a resolution to the various human rights issues we face today, including discrimination against migrants and refugees.

In June 1993, I had the opportunity to meet Dr. John P. Humphrey (1905–95), who helped draft the Declaration in his capacity as the first director of the UN Human Rights Division. In discussing the significance of the UDHR, Dr. Humphrey spoke movingly of his personal life experiences and the discriminatory treatment he had experienced.

Born in Canada, Dr. Humphrey was touched by tragedy from a young age, losing both his parents to illness. He also suffered a grievous injury in a fire that resulted in the loss of his arm. Separated from his siblings, he attended a boarding school where he was repeatedly tormented by other students. The Great Depression struck soon after Dr. Humphrey's graduation from university and just one month after his marriage to his wife. Although he managed to stay employed, he was pained at the sight of the multitudes of jobless around him. He also witnessed fascist oppression firsthand during his days as a researcher in Europe in the late 1930s, and this intensified his sense of the need for international legal protection for the rights of all people.

On one occasion, Dr. Humphrey reflected on his pride in the fact that the UDHR guaranteed not only the civil and political rights of the people but also their economic, social and cultural rights. [\[6\]](#) I am sure that his personal background and life experiences had a great influence on his work to help draft and compile the Declaration.

He stressed that the UDHR was the result of a collaborative effort and that it owed some degree of its prestige and importance precisely to the fact that its authors retained their anonymity. Perhaps this is why his contributions remained largely unknown, even after retiring from his twenty-year post as director of the UN Human Rights Division. [\[7\]](#)

Even so, when Dr. Humphrey personally gifted me a facsimile of the draft of the Declaration, each handwritten letter seemed to shine with the prayer of one who sows seeds for a future where all may live in dignity. Over the years, the SGI featured this draft of the UDHR as part of its exhibition “Toward a Century of Humanity: An Overview of Human Rights in Today’s World” and at other similar events.

I was able to meet Dr. Humphrey for a second time in September 1993, during this exhibition’s first international showing in Montreal, Canada. The promise I made to him that day—to transmit the spirit of the Universal Declaration to future generations—remains with me still.

### **The flame of human goodness**

As well as the adoption of the UDHR, the year 1948 also saw the start of the policies of racial segregation in South Africa known as apartheid. Nelson Mandela (1918–2013), who subsequently became South Africa’s president, transmuted his feelings of rage and grief at the injustice and discrimination he faced into the struggle to dismantle apartheid. I first had the pleasure of meeting President Mandela in October 1990, eight months after his release from prison.

In his autobiography, he describes his motivation for committing himself to the struggle for freedom in his youth:

A steady accumulation of a thousand slights, a thousand indignities, a thousand unremembered moments, produced in me an anger, a rebelliousness, a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people. [\[8\]](#)

Despite the brutal treatment he endured in prison, President Mandela’s heart never became engulfed in hate because even in the most harrowing of times he would hold on to the “glimmer of humanity” [\[9\]](#) he saw in the guards and use it to keep himself going.

President Mandela, who sensed that not all whites harbored hatred for blacks, made the effort to learn Afrikaans—the language spoken by the prison guards—and was able to soften their hearts by addressing them in their native tongue. Even the despotic prison warden showed some degree of warmth toward him for the first time as he was taking leave of his post. Through this unexpected experience, President Mandela understood that the prison warden’s continued cruelty was rooted in the fact that “his inhumanity had been foisted upon him by an inhuman system.” [\[10\]](#)

During his twenty-seven years—some ten thousand days—of imprisonment, President Mandela cultivated an abiding conviction that “man’s goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished.” [\[11\]](#) Following his release, as the nation’s president, he took action to protect the lives and dignity of all people, black and white alike.

One time, when anger against whites in the black community was fueled by another massacre of black people by a group of whites, President Mandela did not rely simply on hackneyed phrases to appeal for harmony. In the middle of a campaign speech, he suddenly called out to a white woman who was standing toward the back of the audience and asked her to come to the stage. Smiling, he introduced her to the crowd as the person who had nursed him back to health when he fell ill in prison.

It is not the difference of race that constitutes the problem. Rather, the problem is what lies within the human heart. The mood of the crowd changed as they saw this message unfold before them, and the impulse for revenge subsided. President Mandela’s actions in that moment seem to reveal that he knew too well, painfully so, how the chains of an inhuman system could rob one of their humanity.

The Buddhism upheld by the members of the SGI portrays the example of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, whose persistent practice resonates with the conviction that the flame of human goodness can be hidden but is never extinguished. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging appears in the Lotus Sutra, which encapsulates the essence of Shakyamuni’s teachings. True to his vow to never look down on others no matter how much they despised him, this bodhisattva bowed in reverence to each person he met. Even when slandered or mistreated, he refused to abandon his practice of offering them the following words: “You can absolutely attain Buddhahood.”

To the very end, despite the cruel treatment he endured in prison, President Mandela did not let his trust in people’s humanity wane. Similarly, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging continued to believe in the incomparable dignity inherent within the other, regardless of their disdain for him.

Nichiren (1222–82), who propagated Buddhism in thirteenth-century Japan based on the Lotus Sutra’s teaching of the dignity of all people, explains that the spirit of this sutra is encapsulated in the actions of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. He writes:

What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being. [\[12\]](#)

Indeed, Shakyamuni’s actions to light a flame of hope in the hearts of people were not the result of some transcendent capacity on his part, but stemmed from a very human desire to alleviate in some way the suffering of those he encountered.

On one occasion, unable to ignore the plight of a disciple who was bedridden with illness, Shakyamuni proceeded to wash the man and offer encouragement, even as others stood by. When a blind disciple trying to mend the seam of his robe muttered, “Is there no one who will thread this needle for me?” it was Shakyamuni who approached him to lend a helping hand. Later, even amidst his grief at the death of his two most trusted disciples, Shakyamuni pressed ahead, encouraging himself to keep going. And after turning eighty, while accepting the fact of his physical limitations, he continued to expound his teachings for the sake of others to the very last moment of his life.

To go to the side of those sunk in the depths of despair, to bring the sun to rise in one's heart in the midst of painful circumstances and to continue to encourage and embolden others—this all too human behavior of Shakyamuni is the font from which the vital flow of the Lotus Sutra's philosophy of life's inherent dignity arises and continues to this day.

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the Buddha is referred to as an ordinary being worthy of the highest respect. As such, a Buddha is in no way estranged from humanity. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging exemplifies the Lotus Sutra's core teaching—that it is through our human efforts to awaken to and savor our own dignity as we cherish and care for those around us that our lives come to shine with the sublime light of Buddhahood.

Nichiren described this transformative power of life as follows: “We thus become the father and mother of this [Buddha of] perfect enlightenment, and the Buddha is the child that we give birth to.” [\[13\]](#) Every person who takes action for the sake of others even while carrying the burden of personal hardship manifests their original essence and mission to illuminate society with the light of dignity.

The same can be said of human rights. They are not granted to us by laws or treaties; the imperative to protect the freedom and dignity of all people arises from the fact that each of us is inherently precious and irreplaceable.

As exemplified by the lives of Dr. Humphrey and President Mandela, the individuals who have succeeded in breathing life into human rights legislation are those who, while subjected to discrimination and human rights violations themselves, refused to allow others to suffer what they had endured as they worked to break down harsh social barriers one by one.

## A world free from tragedy

The SGI's peace movement originates in the convictions of founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) and second president Josei Toda, who both waged a struggle of resistance against Japan's militaristic regime during World War II. In *The Geography of Human Life*, written at the start of the twentieth century, Makiguchi expresses concern over the plight of the world's people amidst the expansion of colonialism: “In seeking to seize control of others' countries, [the imperial powers] do not hesitate to commit cruel atrocities.” [\[14\]](#)

In 1930, as the increasing militarism of Japan began to gravely impact the education system, Makiguchi published *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*, in which he argued that education should serve to enhance learners' capacity to create value for the happiness of themselves and of society as a whole. He held fast to these beliefs and continued to strive to put his ideas into practice even as the militarist authorities tightened their grip on every aspect of life—from

### National Mobilization Law

Adopted in March 1938, the National Mobilization Law enabled the Japanese state to control the economy and the lives of its citizens without parliamentary consultation. Despite being openly criticized in the Japanese parliament, the law came into effect due to strong pressure from the Japanese military. Protracted war in China was putting increasing strain on the Japanese economy, with the military demanding a 2.5-million-yen budget, an amount nearly equivalent to the entire national budget of the previous year. The law gave the Japanese bureaucracy wide-ranging authority over the economy, including the ability to conscript workers for war industries. By the time it was abolished, in December 1945, millions of young men and women had been compelled under the law to work in factories, often disrupting or ending their education.

politics and the economy to culture and religion—under the National Mobilization Law and slogans such as “Obliterate the self and serve the state” (Jpn: *messhi hoko*). Strict in his critique of the regime, he maintained that “To void and empty the self is a lie. What is true is to seek genuine happiness both for oneself and for others.” [\[15\]](#)

Makiguchi did not yield before the authorities and their ideological crackdown even when the movement’s publication was suppressed and the Special Higher Police intensified their surveillance of its meetings. He continued to speak out and as a result, in July 1943, he was detained on charges of violating the Peace Preservation Law and committing acts of blasphemy against State Shinto and the emperor. His disciple Josei Toda and other leaders were arrested with him.

Imprisoned, deprived of fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly and religion, Makiguchi remained unwavering in his convictions to the final moment of his life, passing away while still confined at the age of seventy-three.

Nelson Mandela wrote that a new world will not be realized by passive bystanders, but rather that “honour belongs to those who never forsake the truth even when things seem dark and grim, who try over and over again, who are never discouraged by insults, humiliation and even defeat.” [\[16\]](#)

If we focus solely on the fact that Makiguchi died in prison, it may seem as though his ideals never came to fruition. However, his vision was kept alive by Toda, who endured the struggles of imprisonment alongside him.

When the Korean War erupted against a backdrop of escalating Cold War tensions, Toda was not preoccupied with questions of international politics, but instead expressed a deeply personal concern:

It is not my purpose to debate matters of victory or defeat in war or the pros and cons of policies and ideologies; rather, I grieve at the thought that war causes countless people to lose their husbands or wives and leaves so many people seeking for lost children or parents. . . [\[17\]](#)

The people have nowhere to go. Nothing brings more misery than losing all hope for one’s beloved homeland. [\[18\]](#)

Like Makiguchi, Toda’s thoughts were constantly directed at the plight of the ordinary people.

He maintained the same outlook during the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 as well. While keenly aware of the political history that led to the uprising, his real focus was on the immense suffering of citizens. In this spirit, he declared: “It is my fervent wish to build a world free from such tragedy as quickly as possible.” [\[19\]](#) His was a firm vow to generate a people’s movement that would have a truly transformative impact.

Toda expressed this conviction in his vision of what he called “global nationalism” (Jpn: *chikyu minzokushugi*)—creating a world where the people, whatever their nationality, would never find their rights and interests trampled on. He also insisted that nuclear weapons, which deny people their fundamental right to live, are an absolute evil that cannot be tolerated. Seven months before his passing, he made his declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons and entrusted the mission

### ***Chikyu minzokushugi***

The term *chikyu minzokushugi* can be directly translated as “global nationalism” and indicates a belief in the underlying unity of the world’s peoples. It was first used by second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda at a Soka Gakkai Youth Division meeting in 1952. The term corresponds to what today is known as “global citizenship.” Toda’s strong determination to consider people’s happiness as his first principle at all times was the wellspring of his ideal of global citizenship. Based on his experience of the tragedies wrought by Japanese ultranationalism, Toda sought to liberate people from the chains of narrow-minded nationalism, to enable them to transcend the limitations of a vision confined to just one state or people. He called for an awareness that humankind is one, ultimately sharing a common destiny. Toda was convinced that wars among states and peoples would end and a peaceful world society be constructed when people realized this ideal and took full responsibility as members of a single human community.

of forging a path toward their prohibition and abolition to the youth of my generation.

In its work for the realization of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the SGI’s continued emphasis has been on a human rights-based approach centered on protecting the right to live. This approach draws from the spiritual heritage of the mentors of our movement, Makiguchi and Toda, whose vision of world peace was not limited to efforts to ease interstate tensions or prevent war but whose abiding focus was on resolutely protecting the life and dignity of every person.

It is indeed significant that the TPNW, while a disarmament treaty, is at the same time infused with the spirit of international human rights law. One of its most remarkable aspects is its focus on the human and the suffering endured; the rationale for prohibition, for example, is based on the risk nuclear weapons pose to the “security of all humanity.” [\[20\]](#)

In addition, the Treaty makes clear that its implementation will not depend solely on the actions of states and explicitly recognizes the important role to be played by civil society.

Looking back, the shift from viewing the individual as the object of concern to the subject of rights within international society was signaled by the UN Charter, which opens with the words “We the peoples,” and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which enunciates the rights to be enjoyed by “everyone.”

The Preamble of the TPNW includes reference to the contributions of the hibakusha, who have continued to highlight the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons through their personal testimonies as victims of the atomic bombings. During the negotiating sessions, civil society representatives were seated at the back of the conference rooms. And yet in key ways it was civil society, most prominently the world’s hibakusha—victims of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and of the production and testing of nuclear weapons worldwide—who provided the impetus that led to the Treaty’s adoption. Their devotion, as one nation’s representative put it, “placed them at the forefront of respect.” [\[21\]](#)

As part of this civil society network, the SGI has been deeply engaged with the Treaty process, collaborating with ICAN to create and organize exhibitions that raise public awareness about the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons, for example, and submitting working papers to the negotiating sessions.

The ideals of peace and human rights cannot be achieved in a single leap. The legal and institutional protection of each individual’s rights is established and given substance through the expanding efforts of civil society, drawing on the deepest spiritual sources of law—the vow to let no one else suffer what one has endured.



## The power of human rights education

The second theme I would like to discuss relates to the vital role of human rights education in surmounting social divides. In recent years, issues concerning international borders—strengthening immigration control in response to the influx of refugees and migrants, and territorial disputes over resources—have gained prominent attention. At the same time, however, we are also witnessing a rise in global connectivity through infrastructure such as railways, electricity grids and undersea internet cables that cross national boundaries.

There are an estimated 750,000 kilometers of undersea internet cables and 1.2 million kilometers of railway lines worldwide, a total length far greater than the 250,000 kilometers of international borders on our planet. Spending on infrastructure constitutes about US\$3 trillion per year, well over the US\$1.75 trillion spent annually on defense, and this gap is only widening. [\[22\]](#)

In light of these facts, Parag Khanna, a senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore, has proposed revising our view of geopolitics:

The absence of the full panoply of man-made infrastructure on our maps gives the impression that borders trump other means of portraying human geography. But today the reverse is true: Borders matter only where they matter; other lines matter more most of the time. [\[23\]](#)

Khanna stresses that this global commitment to infrastructure is not limited to regions like the European Union but can also be seen in zones of geopolitical tension, where it provides states involved the opportunity to overcome “the hurdles of both natural and political geography” [\[24\]](#) and mutually benefit from such an undertaking.

Khanna’s efforts to foreground the role of functional geography while also recognizing the role of political geography in the context of cross-border infrastructure projects is cognate with the perspective expressed by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi in his work *The Geography of Human Life*. Makiguchi, who stressed that the behavior of human beings and states was profoundly influenced by their understanding of geography, called on them to base their activities on the principle of what he termed “humanitarian competition,” which, he explained, meant to consciously choose to set aside egotistical motives, striving to protect and improve not only one’s own life but also the lives of others.

Even if the contours of national borders are seen as nonnegotiable, the continued growth of these lattices of global infrastructure linking one country to another can engender richer ties between and among them. Such activity, I believe, can be seen as a nascent expression of the kind of humanitarian competition that Makiguchi advocated.

One of the foundations of Makiguchi’s philosophy is the idea that value arises from relationality. This same principle can be applied to the challenge of human rights, where it points to the importance of expanding networks of connection that bring people and things together across difference.

Through expanding his network of individual connection, for example with his white nurse and guards, Nelson Mandela strengthened his conviction in the humane possibilities of all people, which became

the foundation for his political activities following his release. In this way, he offers an example of how relationships can be transformative, giving rise to positive value despite deep differences.

Shakyamuni, who expounded the dignity of all people, regularly warned his disciples against the danger of allowing our language to cast things in a fixed or immutable light. He admonished them that it is not by birth but through one's actions that one becomes a brahman, [25] that is, a person worthy of the highest respect. Put differently, a person's worth should never be determined by the language with which they are described.

### The Ten Worlds

Buddhism identifies Ten Worlds—ten states or conditions of life that we experience within our lives, moving from one to another at any moment according to our interactions with our environment and those around us.

The Ten Worlds are the worlds of hell, hungry spirits, animals, *asuras*, human beings, heavenly beings, voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, bodhisattvas and Buddhas. In some Buddhist teachings, the “nine realms”—the worlds other than Buddhahood, are considered to be fundamentally separate from the Buddha state. This is not the view taken in Nichiren Buddhism, which teaches that all ten worlds, or realms, are present in every human being.

The worlds of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones are sometimes known as the “two vehicles”; in many Buddhist teachings people in these life states are seen as being cut off by their arrogant attachment from the ultimate enlightenment of Buddhahood. However, the Lotus Sutra that Nichiren embraced teaches that even individuals of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood.

The teachings of Buddhism include the phrase “loathing, rejecting and severing the other nine realms.” [26] This is used to describe and critique the worldview that separates Buddhas from human beings and expounds that in order to attain the highest, most sublime state of life (Buddhahood), one must first loathe, reject and cut oneself off from all other life states (the nine worlds).

With this in mind, Nichiren writes:

The doctrine that those of the two vehicles could never attain Buddhahood was not a source of lamentation for those of the two vehicles alone. We understand now that it was a sorrow to ourselves as well! [27]

This is a statement of how denying the dignity and potentialities of a specific person or group not only assaults their dignity but also undermines the basis for our own. While this represents a perhaps specifically Buddhist understanding of the nature of life, it also points to a reality—the dangers inherent in putting up barriers to anyone's experience of human dignity—that must be taken into account in considering today's human rights challenges.

Throughout the world, we see disturbing examples of xenophobia in which individuals or groups are singled out as the objects of loathing, avoidance and isolation. Two antidiscrimination resolutions were adopted during regular sessions of the UN Human Rights Council last year: one on combating intolerance based on a person's religion or belief, another on starting negotiations on the additional protocol to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted at the General Assembly in 2016 also warned: “Demonizing refugees or migrants offends profoundly against the values of dignity and equality for every human being, to which we have committed ourselves.” [28]

To a certain degree, it is only natural to feel a sense of attachment to a group composed of people with whom one shares common attributes. It is likewise perhaps to be expected that we should feel some apprehension at welcoming people of different national origins into the community we call home.

### **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)**

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) is a United Nations convention that was adopted and opened for signature on December 21, 1965, and entered into force on January 4, 1969. The Convention commits its members to the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of understanding among all races. In addition, it also requires its parties to outlaw hate speech and criminalize membership in racist organizations. The adoption of the Convention was prompted by incidents of anti-Semitism around the world, which led the United Nations General Assembly to adopt a resolution condemning all manifestations and practices of racial, religious and national hatred as violations of the United Nations Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On March 24, 2017, the Human Rights Council resolved to commence negotiations on the draft additional protocol to the Convention criminalizing acts of a racist and xenophobic nature. As of January 2018, there are 179 states parties to the Convention.

However, we must recognize how such feelings can lead to exclusionist behavior and human rights violations as feelings of enmity and hostility are externalized in hate speech and other forms of discrimination.

While increasing our capacity to connect with others, the rise of a postindustrial information society in recent years has also led to a phenomenon where people only associate with those who share the same frame of reference. Among the causes for what is known as the “filter bubble” are data searches that return information already attuned to the user’s preferences, thus obscuring other sources. Gradually, without realizing, one is enveloped in an isolating membrane of preselected information.

What is troubling about this phenomenon is the degree to which it can impact a person’s understanding of social issues. Even if one actively seeks out information on an issue of particular concern, the content encountered on websites and social media feeds will end up bearing a close resemblance to the views one already holds. In this way, from the outset one is distanced from differing opinions, which never become the object of careful consideration.

Internet activist Eli Pariser cautions: “In an age when shared information is the bedrock of shared experience, the filter bubble is a centrifugal force, pulling us apart.” [\[29\]](#) The ability to make good decisions depends on situational awareness and context, and yet, he writes, “In the filter bubble, you don’t get 360 degrees—and you might not get more than one,” [\[30\]](#) warning us of the adverse effects of our restricted outlooks.

Research on diversity has shown how people who are members of the dominant group within a society are often unaware that they enjoy freedom from discrimination. Their lack of awareness can compound the claustrophobic social atmosphere experienced by members of minorities. I will never forget when Rosa Parks (1913–2005), the mother of the American civil rights movement, described to me during our meeting in January 1993 her personal experience under a system of legal racism that caused immense suffering to countless individuals.

Until African Americans found the means to give the anguish they felt tangible, visible form, it remained largely unnoticed by white American society. The historic bus boycott movement sparked by Mrs. Parks’ unambiguous refusal to accept injustice generated a current of change precisely because it communicated that anguish so widely and effectively.

## Learning to live together

For its part, Japanese society is rife with discrimination against Chinese, Koreans and the citizens of other Asian countries.

In the course of my efforts to promote exchange with Japan's neighbors and foster mutual understanding and trust, I became friends with former South Korean prime minister Lee Soo-sung, whose father served as a judge during Japan's colonial occupation of the Korean Peninsula (1910–45). The prime minister's father continued to report to work in traditional Korean garb and refused to use the Japanese language. His subsequent refusal to comply with a directive compelling Korean citizens to adopt Japanese names cost him his legal career. The Japanese authorities dismissed him from his post and prevented him from practicing law.

Over the years, I have often spoken with the youth of Japan about the bitter lessons of history. In doing this, I have been impelled by the urgent need to transmit to the future accounts, such as that of former prime minister Lee, of our nation's inhumane treatment of its neighbors before and during the war and the deep pain that it has caused.

During a commemorative lecture at Soka University in October 2017, the former prime minister told the students:

Even the most talented and accomplished person should never look down on others. Likewise, members of one ethnic group must never behave arrogantly toward those of another.

I sincerely hope the younger generation will take these words to heart in order to uproot the prejudice and discrimination that still pervade Japanese society.

Many members of dominant social groups may view discrimination as something unrelated to their lives, but for members of marginalized groups it is the undeniable reality of daily life. Human rights education calls attention to such unconscious predispositions, which fuel discrimination; in this way, it offers people the opportunity to reflect on their everyday behavior. In our work to promote human rights education, the SGI has placed emphasis on the kind of empowerment and awareness raising that can restore dignity to all people and build a pluralist and inclusive society.

The SGI supported the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004). We called for the adoption of a follow-up international framework and have engaged in activities in support of the World Programme for Human Rights Education that began in 2005. Partnering with other civil society organizations, we supported the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training in 2011 and have subsequently worked to develop a civil society network for human rights education. The SGI also organized showings of a film it coproduced, *A Path to Dignity: The Power of Human Rights Education*, and is currently promoting international showings of its newest exhibition "Transforming Lives: The Power of Human Rights Education," which debuted at the UN European Headquarters in Geneva in March 2017.

A case study portrayed in both the film and exhibition details how a human rights training program conducted with the Victoria Police in Australia helped to dissipate societal tensions. After an

investigation brought to light abusive behavior by the Victoria Police toward members of the LGBT community, the police department adopted a human rights training program that further resulted in improved treatment for members of migrant communities.

As a result of the program, police staff were able to clarify their role within the framework of human rights and the need to avoid conflating the person, who must always be protected, and their behavior, which if illegal must be managed.

This change in police attitudes also brought about a shift within immigrant communities. One immigrant youth explained that he always felt uneasy whenever approached by the police. One day, a police officer invited him to learn about a program on youth leadership. After participating in the program, the young person's attitude toward the police changed as he began to realize that both he and the officer were ordinary people, the only difference being that one of them wore a uniform.

In this way, a human rights training program not only led to a change in police attitudes toward members of the community but also to a gradual decline in migrants' ill-feelings toward them and the overall strengthening of trust between local residents and the police. [\[31\]](#)

This case study illustrates that the real significance of human rights education and training programs lies far beyond acquiring specific knowledge or a certain set of skills—it lies in reviving our desire to perceive the common humanity in those who are different from us and in weaving the bonds of a shared social life.

The World Programme for Human Rights Education has focused on different target audiences every five years and has seen three phases thus far. The first (2005–09) focused on human rights education in the primary and secondary school systems; the second (2010–14) highlighted higher education and human rights training for teachers and educators, civil servants, law enforcement officials and military personnel; and the current third phase (2015–19) focuses on media professionals and journalists. I would like to propose that young people be the focus of the fourth phase, slated to begin in 2020.

While they are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the filter bubble in this digital age, youth also have a special aptitude for sharing what they have learned about human rights with others in their lives, making them a powerful force for expanding the circle of those committed to overcoming discrimination and prejudice. The core group of individuals leading ICAN were young people in their twenties and thirties. If members of the younger generation can shape the movement for human rights promotion in a similar way, we can surely shift the global current from one of division and conflict to one of coexistence.

Those who remain trapped in the echo chambers of the filter bubble or within unconsciously constructed walls fail to see the brilliant glow of humanity inherent in others. The humane light they too possess will also remain hidden, unable to reach those around them. Through its power to remove the barriers between self and other that arise from differences in identity and social standing, human rights education has the ability to expand opportunities for that humane light to shine most resplendently, both for ourselves and for others.

Mahayana Buddhism puts forth the analogy of Indra's net, an enormous net suspended above the palace of the Buddhist deity Indra with brilliant jewels attached to each of its knots. Each jewel not

only exudes its own brilliance but contains and reflects the image of all the other jewels in the net, which sparkles in the magnificence of its totality. Indra’s net mirrors the kind of ideal society that can be realized through human rights education.

The pluralist and inclusive society called for in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training finds its firm basis in the process of weaving multiple bonds of connection that will ensure we each shine with, and are illuminated by, the light of humanity.

### **A culture of human rights woven of shared joy**

The third theme is that the bonds that form a culture of human rights are woven through the experience of joy shared with others.

On December 10, 2017, a campaign marking the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was launched at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, the site where the Declaration came into being on that date in 1948. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein stated: “We must take a robust and determined stand: by resolutely supporting the human rights of others, we also stand up for our own rights and those of generations to come.” [\[32\]](#)

The awareness underlying his call is evident in other UN campaigns as well. It can be seen in TOGETHER, the UN campaign dedicated to improving the lives of refugees and migrants, and in the activities carried out by the HeForShe UN Women Solidarity Movement for Gender Equality. As these campaign names suggest, expanding intersectional solidarity is critical to building an authentic human rights culture—something intrinsically different from the kind of passive tolerance in which one has no real understanding of the hardships experienced by others.

Passive tolerance is far removed from coexistence in the truest sense. There is a danger that people’s actions will remain superficial and minimal—limited to acts such as permitting others to live in the same neighborhood or complying with the relevant laws and rules. Such passive tolerance falls short of leading people to actively recognize the common humanity in those they perceive as different, making it an ineffective counter to exclusionist impulses in times of heightened social tensions. This has impelled a fresh approach, led by the UN, to create a human rights culture based on jointly working to transform public awareness toward a society where all can live in dignity.

In Buddhism, we find the phrase: “Authentic joy is that which is shared by oneself and others.” [\[33\]](#) Based on this principle, I believe that the wellspring for creating a society of mutually enriching coexistence can be found in a way of life where we experience joy in seeing one another’s dignity radiate its full potential.

The Lotus Sutra depicts a series of scenes in which Shakyamuni’s disciples, moved upon hearing his teaching of the dignity of life, one by one begin to voice their vow to live by this principle. This sets off a chain reaction of jubilation—described in such phrases as “their hearts were filled with great rejoicing” [\[34\]](#) and “their minds danced with joy” [\[35\]](#)—by which all deepen their sense of the ultimate value and dignity of life.

The people's movement of the SGI is powered by this same sense of mutually shared joy. It arises from efforts to support each person across differences, so they may continue advancing as they take on life's challenges. It flows from witnessing friends shine with dignity as they persevere in the face of difficulty, from celebrating another's growth and progress as though it were our own. This sharing and mutual savoring of joy has been the wellspring of our movement.

This concept of shared joy brings to mind the historian Dr. Vincent Harding (1931–2014), who told me of his experience participating in the American civil rights movement. Dr. Harding's visit as a graduate student to the home of Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–68) was decisive in leading to his lifetime commitment to the cause.

This was during a time in the US when the bus boycott had sparked a massive groundswell of voices calling for an end to institutional racism. Tensions ran high, especially in Southern states, as an African American university student was barred from attending classes and black students continued to be refused entry into high school.

Dr. Harding, who lived in Chicago at the time, was exploring the possibility of creating an inclusive church community of black and white Christians. In the course of their work, his group of friends began to ask themselves:

What would we do if we were living in the South, where it is illegal and dangerous for blacks and whites to live and work together as sisters and brothers? Would we still try to live as we believe and honor our relationships with one another, even if we might get into serious trouble? [\[36\]](#)

Following this discussion, five friends—two black and three white—decided to test the proposition by traveling together to the South. They drove an old station wagon, making their first stop in Arkansas, where they visited the home of central figures in the movement to help students who had been refused entry into a newly integrated high school. Here, they witnessed firsthand the horrific threats directed at these leaders.

Next, they traveled through Mississippi—where violence against those who challenged the practices of segregation and white supremacy continued unabated—arriving in Alabama where Dr. King was recuperating at his home in Montgomery from a stab wound he had received in a recent attack. Despite this, Coretta Scott King (1927–2006), Dr. King's wife, warmly welcomed the group to their home, where they were able to meet Dr. King.

Recalling the encounter, Dr. Harding told me:

During that first Montgomery encounter, he [Dr. King] was impressed that the five of us—two blacks and three whites—were traveling together as brothers. . .

One of his major goals was not simply to establish legal rights for black people but to go beyond that to create what he termed the “beloved community” in which all people could rediscover a sense of our fundamental connectedness as human beings. [\[37\]](#)

It goes without saying that Dr. King regarded the adoption of new laws that would pave the way for an equal and just society as a paramount struggle that had to be won: Legal frameworks like civil rights legislation create the groundwork for countering discrimination and oppression prevalent in society and are thus absolutely necessary. And yet Dr. King set his sights even higher—he sought to completely root out prejudice and resentment and aim for what Dr. Harding described as “a new America—an America where blacks and whites, as well as people of all colors, could come together to find common ground for the common good.” [\[38\]](#)

In August 1963, five years after Dr. Harding’s encounter with Dr. King, rising momentum in the civil rights movement culminated in the March on Washington, which drew masses of people from all races and backgrounds. In a record of that day’s events that appears in his autobiography, Dr. King encapsulates the sentiments of the participants as follows:

Among the nearly 250,000 people who journeyed that day to the capital, there were many dignitaries and many celebrities, but the stirring emotion came from the mass of ordinary people who stood in majestic dignity as witnesses to their single-minded determination to achieve democracy in their time. [\[39\]](#)

I can’t help but feel that the sentiment shared among those present was one of indivisible joy at witnessing their collective desire for freedom and equality bring about one change after another in society. Their joy was not merely the product of a single day’s journey to Washington but arose from a long and arduous process, a steady accumulation of hard-fought battles leading up to that day.

The March on Washington was not only historic in terms of the solidarity shown by people of all backgrounds, including many whites, but, as Dr. King noted, it also brought the country’s three major religious faiths closer than any other issue in the nation’s peacetime history. [\[40\]](#)

In a similar way, the SGI’s efforts in pursuit of nuclear abolition, including our recent work with various faith-based organizations in drafting and issuing joint statements, arise from a single-minded determination to create a groundswell of change through the solidarity of ordinary citizens. The starting point for this initiative was an interfaith symposium held in Washington DC in April 2014, where representatives of the Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist traditions came together to debate the nuclear weapons issue, producing a joint statement signed by people from fourteen different faith-based organizations.

Since then, this network of faith communities has continued to raise a shared voice for nuclear abolition, issuing eight joint statements at important junctures, including the 2014 Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, [\[41\]](#) the 2015 NPT Review Conference, [\[42\]](#) the second session of the 2016 United Nations Open-ended Working Group [\[43\]](#) and the negotiating sessions that produced the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons held in 2017. [\[44\]](#)

These bonds of solidarity are founded not only in a sense of common mission across religious traditions; they also manifest a profound joy in being able to advance together for the resolution of crucial human challenges.

In November 2017, the SGI participated in the international symposium “Perspectives for a World Free from Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament” held at the Vatican. During an audience with



conference participants, Pope Francis not only denounced the use of nuclear weapons but also their possession. Declaring that they create a false sense of security, he said that only an ethics of solidarity could serve as the true foundation for peaceful coexistence. He also recognized the importance of what he termed a “healthy realism” of the kind displayed by the many states that responded to the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons through the negotiations that produced the TPNW. [\[45\]](#) I fully concur with these views.

It was fifty years ago, one month after the assassination of Dr. King, that I made my first public statement urging international consensus on prohibiting nuclear weapons. To this day, I cannot forget the passage from his final address in which he posed the question of which age he would choose to live in from the entire panorama of human history. While noting the appeal of such eras as the Renaissance or the moment Abraham Lincoln (1809–65) signed the Emancipation Proclamation, he explained that the present was the moment in history he would choose:

Now that’s a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick; trouble is in the land, confusion all around. That’s a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. . .

Another reason that I’m happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we are going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history. Survival demands that we grapple with them. [\[46\]](#)

We must heed Dr. King’s words. They are most relevant now, as momentum toward a culture of human rights is building through the collaborative efforts of the UN and civil society and as the movement to realize the entry into force of the treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons—which will protect the world’s people’s right to live—enters its crucial phase.

What stands before us is an undertaking that will be chronicled in the annals of human history. The challenge of creating the new reality of a global society where all may live in peace and dignity is not beyond our reach. And it is my firm belief that the solidarity of ordinary people will be the driving force for its realization.

### **Lessons on averting nuclear war**

Continuing, I would like to make a number of specific proposals regarding the resolution of global issues from the perspective of protecting the life and dignity of each individual.

The nuclear weapons issue is the first thematic area about which I would like to make concrete proposals.

In July 2017, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which comprehensively prohibits all phases of nuclear weapons—from their development, production and possession to using or threatening to use them—was adopted at the UN with the assent of 122 nations.

When the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued its advisory opinion in 1996 that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to international law, it was unable to render judgment

regarding the extreme case in which the very survival of a state was at stake. The TPNW is a blanket prohibition recognizing no exceptions, including this one.

In December 2017, a second signing ceremony for the TPNW was held at the UN, timed to coincide with the ceremony at which the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, demonstrating continuing efforts to achieve the Treaty's entry into force. On the other hand, however, there is a persistent perception within the nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states that the Treaty's approach is unrealistic.

There are, in fact, examples of countries which, having possessed nuclear weapons, then chose the path of denuclearization. South Africa is one such example; it began dismantling its nuclear weapons in 1990, the year after President F. W. de Klerk made a speech in parliament in which he undertook to end the apartheid system of white minority rule. This was followed by South Africa's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1991 and by the signing of the Treaty of Pelindaba, which declared the African continent a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ), in 1996.

The Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco) establishing the world's first NWFZ states in its preamble that it seeks not only to banish the scourge of a nuclear war but also to achieve "the consolidation of a permanent peace based on equal rights" [\[47\]](#) for all. In other words, it came into being through the intertwined pursuit of denuclearization and human rights.

The ideal of international human rights law is the quest to protect the life and dignity of each individual in all national settings, a quest in which the continued pursuit of nuclear arms has no place.

As tensions surrounding North Korea's nuclear weapons development program demonstrate, there is real concern within the international community that nuclear weapons once more represent a mounting threat and source of intimidation. Another worrying development in recent years has been the ongoing diplomatic dispute between the United States and Russia over possible violations of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

At the core of nuclear deterrence policy is the threat of their use. In giving deeper consideration to the problems that inhere in this approach, I am reminded of the philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–75) who identified "sovereignty" as an expression of the kind of free will that seeks to prevail over others. Arendt contrasted this kind of freedom with that of ancient Greece where freedom was something embodied in interactions with others, as words and actions imbued with a kind of "virtuosity." According to Arendt, this understanding of freedom has, since the start of the modern era, been supplanted by a freedom of choice rooted in the individual will—a free will from which acknowledgement of the existence of others is absent:

Because of the philosophic shift from action to will-power, from freedom as a state of being manifest in action to the *liberum arbitrium* [free will], the ideal of freedom ceased to be virtuosity in the sense we mentioned before and became sovereignty, the ideal of a free will, independent from others and eventually prevailing against them. [\[48\]](#)

The most extreme example of a sovereignty that seeks to prevail over others is seen in states that pursue their security objectives through the possession of nuclear weapons and the threat of the catastrophic destruction they can wreak.

In one sense, the history of international law can be seen as the repeated effort to clarify the lines that sovereign states must not cross and to establish these limits as shared norms. In *On the Law of War and Peace*, Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), distraught at the wars that convulsed Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, called for recognition of the continued humanity of those we consider to be enemies and of their right to have promises made to them kept. [\[49\]](#)

In the nineteenth century, this idea took the form of prohibitions on certain weapons and acts in time of war and, in the twentieth century, in the wake of two world wars, led to the prohibition of the use or threat of use of military force in international relations by the UN Charter. To date, treaties banning biological and chemical weapons and, more recently, landmines and cluster munitions have made clear that these are weapons whose use is impermissible under any circumstances. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of countries that continue to desire their possession.

Last year marked the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention. At present, 192 states are parties to the convention, and approximately 90 percent of the world's stockpiles of chemical weapons have been destroyed. [\[50\]](#) Once an international norm has been clearly established, it carries a weight that shapes not only the behaviors of individual states but the course of the world as a whole.

Beatrice Fihn, the Executive Director of ICAN, stressed this point in her speech at the Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony:

No nation today boasts of being a chemical weapon state.

No nation argues that it is acceptable, in extreme circumstances, to use sarin nerve agent.

No nation proclaims the right to unleash on its enemy the plague or polio.

That is because international norms have been set, perceptions have been changed. [\[51\]](#)

Through the adoption of the TPNW, nuclear weapons have been clearly defined as weapons whose use is impermissible under any circumstances.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has warned: “Global tensions are rising, sabres have been rattled and dangerous words spoken about the use of nuclear weapons.” [\[52\]](#) It is precisely because we are living in a time of deepening nuclear chaos that we must earnestly interrogate the assumptions underlying nuclear deterrence policy.

Here, I would like to consider some of the lessons of the Cold War, a time of seemingly ceaseless exchanges of “dangerous words” regarding nuclear weapons and their possible use. A recent TV documentary [\[53\]](#) explored the visit to the United States of Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971), the first by a Soviet Premier. The visit took place in September 1959, two years after the successful launch of the Sputnik satellite, which followed in the wake of the test launch of a Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile.

While the image of Khrushchev as a dangerous warmonger had taken hold among the American public, resulting in him facing political criticism wherever he went, it was nevertheless clear that he took real pleasure in his interactions with ordinary American citizens.

Despite differences in their respective stances, Khrushchev was able to establish a certain degree of trust between the Soviet Union and the American government. The following year, however, an American U2 spy plane was shot down in Soviet airspace, and relations again took a turn for the worse. The Berlin Crisis followed in 1961, and relations reached their nadir during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis where President John F. Kennedy (1917–63) and Premier Khrushchev exercised restraint at the last moment, preventing the worst imaginable outcome.

The documentary ends by imagining Khrushchev's inner state of mind and posing the poignant question: While there were, of course, reasons that compelled Khrushchev, as a politician, to compromise, can we not imagine that the fond memory of his fleeting encounters with American citizens played a part in preventing him from stepping over the line into nuclear war?

While this question is, of course, speculative, an awareness of the reality that it is the great mass of ordinary citizens who would suffer and die in a nuclear attack was something that I recognized in Khrushchev's successor Alexei N. Kosygin (1904–80) when I met him some years later, in September 1974.

At the time, the Soviet Union's relations with both the United States and China were increasingly tense. Determined to do everything in my power to help prevent nuclear war, I shared with Premier Kosygin what I had witnessed when I traveled to China three months earlier, where Chinese citizens were busily building shelters against the eventuality of a Soviet attack. I had also seen and been deeply distressed by the sight of junior high school students in Beijing digging an underground shelter in their schoolyard.

I conveyed the dread that I had sensed among the Chinese people and asked the Premier if the Soviet Union intended to launch an attack on China. He responded firmly that the Soviet Union had no intention of attacking or isolating China. I carried this message with me when I traveled to China again later that year. This experience drove home for me how important it is for leaders of the nuclear-weapon states to always keep in mind the masses of people—including children—who live under the threat of nuclear weapons.

In a similar vein, we have recent testimony of the shock felt by US President Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) in 1982 as he watched a computer simulation of a military exercise in which cities destroyed by a Soviet nuclear attack were displayed as red dots on a map of the United States. With each passing moment, the number of these dots increased until, “before the President could sip his coffee, the map was a sea of red.” [\[54\]](#) Reagan is said to have stood gripping his coffee mug, transfixed by this sight.

This must have been in President Reagan's consciousness as he later pursued dialogue with the Soviet Union, eventually holding a series of summit meetings with General-Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, with whom he concluded the INF Treaty.

Bringing these realities to light was the objective of the exhibition “Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons” developed by the SGI in collaboration with ICAN. The opening panels of the exhibition invite viewers to consider what they treasure, the things that are important to

them. The answer to that question will, of course, be different for each person. But we are convinced that confronting the reality that the use of nuclear weapons would destroy everything each of us treasures is essential to building the popular solidarity needed to bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end.

As seen in the Cuban Missile Crisis, where mutual provocations escalated to just short of the point of no return, there is no way of knowing when the “balance of terror” might break down as a result of miscalculation or mistaken assumption. The leaders of the nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states need to be clearly aware of the ultimately precarious nature of this balance.

In 2002, when tensions between India and Pakistan were running high, US diplomatic efforts played a key role in enabling the two parties to exercise restraint. US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who was mediating between the two sides, urged the Pakistani president to remember that using nuclear weapons is not an option. He pressed:

You want to be the country or the leader who, for the first time since August of 1945, has used these weapons? Go look at the pictures again, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki! [\[55\]](#)

The Pakistani side was persuaded by this argument, as was the Indian side, making it possible to defuse the crisis.

I think that these lessons of history show that the factors preventing nuclear war to date have not necessarily been the logic of deterrence based on the balance of terror, but actually something else entirely.

One element is the effort not to close off, but to maintain lines of communication between countries in conflict. Another is to keep vividly in mind the scale of human suffering—demonstrated by the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—that any use of nuclear weapons would wreak on millions of ordinary citizens.

### **“That no one suffer what we endured”**

In April–May this year, the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference will meet, and in May, the UN will host a High-Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament. These will be the first venues for debate and deliberation that will include both the nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states to be organized since the adoption of the TPNW. I strongly urge all participants to engage in constructive debate toward the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons. I hope that world leaders will take the opportunity to commit to steps that their governments can take in the field of nuclear disarmament in advance of the NPT Review Conference. This would also be a prime opportunity to make public which among the seven acts prohibited by the TPNW they could consider committing to.

The prohibition on the transfer of nuclear weapons, for example, or against assisting other states in acquiring nuclear weapons are among those to which the nuclear-weapon states could agree within the context of the NPT. Likewise, for the nuclear-dependent states, it should certainly be possible to consider the prohibition on using or threatening to use nuclear weapons and against assisting, encouraging or inducing such acts in light of their respective security policies.

### Seven Acts Prohibited by the TPNW

Under the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the state parties undertake never to:

- (a) Develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices;
- (b) Transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly or indirectly;
- (c) Receive the transfer of or control over nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices directly or indirectly;
- (d) Use or threaten to use nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices;
- (e) Assist, encourage or induce, in any way, anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Treaty;
- (f) Seek or receive any assistance, in any way, from anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Treaty;
- (g) Allow any stationing, installation or deployment of any nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices in its territory or at any place under its jurisdiction or control.

The efficacy of international law is enhanced by the mutual complementarity of so-called “hard law” such as treaties and “soft law” in forms such as UN General Assembly resolutions and international declarations. In the field of disarmament, there is the example of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), in which states that have not yet ratified the Treaty enter into separate agreements to cooperate with the international monitoring system. In the case of the TPNW, in parallel with efforts to gain further signatories and ratifications, it would be useful to generate a body of voluntary commitments by nonparties to the Treaty to abide by specific prohibitions, setting these forth in declarations of national policy.

We must remember that the TPNW did not arise in isolation from the NPT. It was, after all, the 2010 NPT Review Conference that expressed—with the support of both the nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states—a renewed awareness of the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons use, and it was this awareness that accelerated momentum for a prohibition treaty. <sup>[56]</sup> The TPNW, for its part, gives concrete form to the nuclear disarmament obligations under Article VI of the NPT and promotes their good-faith fulfillment.

In November 2017, the Toda Peace Institute, which I founded in recognition of my mentor’s legacy, organized an international conference in London on the theme of cooperative security. The conference deliberated the challenges of advancing nuclear disarmament, which has long been stalled. It also considered ways in which the NPT and the TPNW can be complementary. A further conference to be held in Tokyo in February will bring together specialists from Japan, South Korea, the United States and China to explore ways of breaking the current impasse surrounding North Korea’s nuclear weapons program and promoting peace and security in Northeast Asia.

Against the backdrop of a lack of progress in nuclear arms reduction, ongoing modernization of nuclear arsenals and critical proliferation challenges, now is the time to seek synergies between strengthening the foundations of the NPT and the prohibition norm clearly enunciated by the TPNW. Such synergies can create the path to a future in which the tragedy of nuclear weapons use will never be repeated.

In this regard, I earnestly hope that Japan, as the only country to have experienced the use of nuclear weapons in war, will take the lead in enhancing conditions for progress in nuclear disarmament toward the 2020 NPT Review Conference. Japan should use the opportunity of May’s High-Level Conference to stand at the forefront of nuclear-dependent states in declaring its readiness to consider becoming a party to the TPNW.

To paraphrase the words of Colin Powell: Is it Japan’s intention to become a country that countenances the possibility of nuclear weapons being used again, for the first time since August of 1945? Having

experienced the full horror of nuclear weapons, Japan cannot turn away from its moral responsibility.

The TPNW is imbued with the heartfelt desire of the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that no country be targeted for nuclear attack and that no country ever make the decision to launch a nuclear strike. Hibakusha Setsuko Thurlow described her feelings on the adoption of the Treaty as follows: “It has also convinced us that our continued discussion of our experiences, which are painful to remember, is the right thing to do and will never be in vain.” [\[57\]](#)

Last year, at the first preparatory committee meeting for the 2020 NPT Review Conference, the representative of Japan stressed: “The recognition of the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons underpins all approaches towards a world free of nuclear weapons.” [\[58\]](#) Japan’s stance on this issue must always be grounded in the spirit the hibakusha have embodied—that no one else ever experience the suffering they have endured.

Another proposal I would like to make in support of the universalization of the TPNW regards the mobilization of the growing solidarity of civil society.

The significance of the Treaty is found in its comprehensive outlawing of all aspects of nuclear weapons. But of equal or even greater note is the fact that it incorporates the role and participation of civil society as vital protagonists supporting its implementation, not limiting this to states and international organizations. The Treaty stipulates that, in addition to states that have yet to join, civil society will be invited to participate as observers in the biannual conference of the parties and the review conferences that are to be held every six years.

This is a recognition of the importance of the role played by the world’s hibakusha in particular and civil society as a whole in the adoption of the Treaty. At the same time, it is evidence that the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons is indeed a shared global undertaking that requires the participation of all countries, international organizations and civil society.

The Preamble of the Treaty stresses the importance of peace and disarmament education. This was a point that the SGI repeatedly stressed in civil society statements to the negotiating conference as well as in working papers submitted to the conference. [\[59\]](#) We are convinced that peace and disarmament education can ensure the intergenerational heritage of knowledge of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. Such knowledge and the education that promotes it build the foundation for the active implementation of the Treaty by all countries.

To support efforts to realize the early entry into force and universalization of the TPNW, the SGI will, this year, launch the second People’s Decade for Nuclear Abolition. This will build on the work of the first Decade, which I suggested in a proposal on reinvigorating the UN released in August 2006. The Decade began in September 2007, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda’s declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

During this first Decade, in order to convey the horrors of nuclear weapons and war, the SGI, in collaboration with ICAN, produced a five-language DVD *Testimonies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Women Speak Out for Peace*. The “Everything You Treasure” exhibition has been held in eighty-one cities in nineteen countries. Also, following the gathering by the SGI of 2.27 million signatures calling for a

nuclear weapons convention presented to the NPT Review Conference in 2010, we collaborated in gathering 5.12 million signatures in 2014 for the Nuclear Zero campaign.

The SGI also worked with a number of organizations in holding the International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition in Hiroshima in August 2015. We participated in the international conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons as well as various meetings and negotiating sessions held under UN auspices in order to ensure that the voices and concerns of civil society are represented.

Through such activities, the SGI has worked to ensure that the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons remains central to the disarmament discourse. We have called for negotiations on a legally binding treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons in all their phases and aspects, rooted in the desire of ordinary citizens for a world free from nuclear weapons.

Where the first People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition was focused on realizing a legally binding instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons, the second will feature an increased focus on peace and disarmament education in the effort to universalize the TPNW and effect real-world transformations based on it. This means channeling the voices of the world's people in support of the Treaty and promoting the concrete processes that will advance the cause of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

### Mayors for Peace

Mayors for Peace is an international organization of cities across the world that are dedicated to the promotion of peace. It was established by then Mayor of Hiroshima Takeshi Araki on June 24, 1982, at the Second UN Special Session on Disarmament held at UN Headquarters in New York. Mayor Araki's proposal grew out of abhorrence at the deaths of some 140,000 people in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. The organization to which his proposal gave birth offered cities a way to transcend national borders and work together to press for nuclear abolition. In the years since the organization's formation, subsequent mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have continued to call on municipal leaders around the world to support the Mayors for Peace vision. At present, there are 7,536 signatory cities in 162 countries and territories around the world.

Mayors for Peace now embraces more than 7,500 cities in 162 countries and territories, demonstrating the extent of voices calling for a world without nuclear weapons including, importantly, in the nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states. Further, the ICAN coalition of civil society organizations now comprises 468 organizations worldwide.

In order to promote the universality of the TPNW, I think it is important, in addition to civil society efforts to encourage the participation of more states, that the global scale of support for the Treaty be made continuously visible. It could be effective, for example, to collaborate with ICAN, Mayors for Peace and others to create a world map in which the municipalities supporting the Treaty are displayed in blue, the color of the UN, and to widely publicize civil society voices in support of the Treaty and communicate these voices to the venues where UN or other disarmament conferences are being held.

Likewise, efforts should be made to build an ever-broader constituency in favor of the Treaty, with a focus on, among others scientific and faith communities, women and youth. Civil society should continue to urge states to participate in the Treaty and, following its entry into force, encourage states not yet parties to the Treaty to attend the meetings of the states parties and review conferences in an observer capacity.

Earlier, I referred to a simulated military exercise conducted in the midst of the Cold War in which a map of the world was turned an apocalyptic red. We, the world's people, can no longer tolerate a state



of affairs in which the horrors of a nuclear exchange remain a possibility. The weight of this global popular will needs to be demonstrated clearly in order to move the world as a whole in the direction of denuclearization.

In her acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, Setsuko Thurlow stated:

When I was a 13-year-old girl, trapped in the smouldering rubble, I kept pushing. I kept moving toward the light. And I survived. Our light now is the ban treaty. . .

No matter what obstacles we face, we will keep moving and keep pushing and keep sharing this light with others. This is our passion and commitment for our one precious world to survive. [\[60\]](#)

From the foundation of the global network that has been built by ICAN, Mayors for Peace and others, we need to make visible the global popular will for nuclear weapons abolition. The weight of this popular will can eventually bring about a change in policy by the nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states and finally bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end. That is my belief and heartfelt conviction.

### **Educational access for migrant children**

The second thematic area I would like to address is human rights. Here, the first proposal I would like to make regards improving conditions for refugee and migrant children.

Currently, work is underway at the UN toward the adoption of two agreements by the end of 2018: a global compact for migration and one for refugees. I would like to urge that human rights be identified as the thread that connects each of the individual elements in these compacts, and that the international community make the securing of educational opportunities for refugee and migrant children a priority objective and shared commitment.

There are currently 65.6 million forcibly displaced persons in the world, and over half of the world's refugees are children under the age of eighteen. [\[61\]](#) Likewise, many immigrant children suffer adverse treatment as a result of prejudice and discrimination.

Migrant children who have become separated from their parent or guardian face particularly grave circumstances. According to a 2017 UNICEF report covering the years 2015 and 2016, their number has increased nearly fivefold since 2010, to more than 300,000 unaccompanied and separated children in eighty countries. [\[62\]](#)

In line with the title of the UNICEF report, "A child is a child," the rights and dignity of all children must be equally protected regardless of their status as refugees or migrants. This is the guiding principle of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The importance of improving conditions for children was repeatedly noted in the New York Declaration that was adopted at the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants in 2016. It states, "We will protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all refugee and migrant children, regardless of their status, and giving primary consideration at all times to the best interests of the child." [\[63\]](#) The Declaration also

expresses a determination to “ensure that all children are receiving education within a few months of arrival” [\[64\]](#) in the receiving countries.

To give concrete form to this determination, the two global compacts should include commitments by states to enact policies that ensure all children have access to education. Moreover, frameworks should be established whereby states that accept only a small number of refugees and migrants provide various forms of support to those that receive refugees in larger numbers.

As stressed in the New York Declaration, access to education not only offers basic protection to children in adverse circumstances but can also serve to instill hope for the future among members of the younger generation.

Yusra Mardini, a Syrian refugee and athlete appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2017, has stated: “With food for our stomachs, refugees can survive. But only if they are given food for the soul will they be able to thrive.” [\[65\]](#)

The boat carrying Yusra and other refugees broke down between Turkey and the Greek island of Lesbos during the long flight from her war-torn homeland. She and her sister jumped into the ocean to pull the boat to safety, swimming for hours and risking their own lives to save those of the other twenty passengers. After eventually arriving in Germany, she trained as a swimmer, becoming a member of the first-ever Refugee Olympic Team in the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics. She is now a full-time student in Germany and continues to train in hopes of competing in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Yusra insists: “Refugees are just normal people living through traumatic and devastating circumstances, who are capable of extraordinary things if only given a chance.” [\[66\]](#)

More than anything, I believe it is education that will create that chance.

It is also my earnest hope that the educational experience that is so vital to the future of refugee children will extend to the children studying with them in host communities, fostering a robust spirit of coexistence.

Here, the experience of ICAN Executive Director Beatrice Fihn, reflecting on her childhood in Sweden, is relevant:

I grew up in a community with many immigrants. When I was seven, my school had a sudden influx of children from the Balkans. They all had undergone horrific experiences. . . I also had friends whose parents had migrated from drought-stricken Somalia. Meeting them and hearing their stories and then meeting their parents who had actually undergone those experiences brought home the reality of conflicts and crises taking place in other countries. [\[67\]](#)

These encounters with refugee and migrant children from around the world became a motivating factor in her work addressing crucial global issues.

UNHCR is advocating for the integration of refugees into national education systems. The friendships developed among children in school settings can contribute significantly to deepening exchanges on the family-to-family level and with the host community as a whole. In addition to the school system,

nonformal educational settings offer important learning opportunities for refugee children, and the SGI will work actively in collaboration with other organizations to support such initiatives.

### **The human rights of the elderly**

Next, I would like to address the human rights of the elderly, an urgent issue confronting contemporary society.

According to the UN, there are more than 900 million people aged sixty and over living in the world today, and this number is expected to reach 1.4 billion by 2030. [68] Many governments, particularly those of developed countries, are struggling to respond to the sudden changes in social structure brought about by rapidly declining birth rates and aging demographics.

This was one of the issues discussed at the eighth session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing held at the UN in July 2017. It was pointed out that the enjoyment of all human rights diminishes with age, in spite of the declaration in the UDHR that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights; this is due to negative images of the elderly as less productive, less valuable to society, a burden to the economy and to younger generations. Participants agreed that such structural discrimination and prejudice can lead to the social exclusion of older persons and must be combated.

The need to protect the rights of older persons was addressed in a draft resolution submitted to the UN General Assembly by Argentina in 1948, shortly before the UDHR was adopted in Paris. However, the rights of the aged did not draw the interest of governments for many years; international discourse on the subject only began to develop in earnest with the Vienna World Assembly on Ageing, held in 1982. That discourse resulted in the adoption of five UN Principles for Older Persons in 1991, comprising independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity. While independence (respecting the will of the individual), care (safeguarding health and daily living) and dignity (ensuring protection from discrimination and abuse) are of course core rights of the aged, it is crucial to remember that on their own they are only a starting point.

I am reminded here of the dialogue I conducted with Dr. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker, Co-President of the Club of Rome. One of the topics we discussed was how to bring a sense of purpose and fulfillment to the lives of older persons. Based on his experience, Dr. Weizsäcker stressed that it would benefit society as a whole to create the conditions by which older persons could continue working if they so desired. [69]

I fully agree with his opinion; it is my firm belief that being able to contribute in some way to the happiness of others and the world, be it through work or in some other capacity, brings one joy and fulfillment in life. In that sense, the other two UN Principles—participation and self-fulfillment—are indispensable in enabling elderly persons to experience meaning and satisfaction in their lives.

To be treated well is, of course, essential to a person's experience of dignity. But even more important is being looked to by others as an irreplaceable source of spiritual support. It is this that brings our dignity to an even brighter luster. The significance of such bonds remains unchanged even by grave illness or dependence on others for nursing care. Being surrounded by people who derive joy and happiness from your presence is itself a source of dignity.

Three years ago, the Soka Gakkai in Japan launched the exhibition “Hope and the Culture of Peace,” which seeks to counteract negative images of aging by presenting the stories of older persons who are actively contributing to the welfare of young people and of society as a whole. The exhibition calls for the creation of a culture of peace and of human societies that treasure the rich experience and wisdom of the elderly.

As emphasized at the Second World Assembly on Ageing (2002) and later by the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (2017), protecting the human rights of older persons is integral to the creation of a culture of human rights that respects people of all ages and will not brook any form of discrimination.

The need for an international legal instrument for the protection of the rights of older persons was among the topics deliberated at the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, and in this regard, I strongly hope there will be an early start to negotiations on a convention on the rights of older persons. I would also like to propose that a third World Assembly on Ageing be held in Japan, where the aging of the population is more advanced than anywhere else in the world.

The Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing agreed upon at the Second World Assembly on Ageing stresses that the experiences and resources of older persons can be “an asset in the growth of mature, fully integrated, humane societies,” [\[70\]](#) and that, in addition to their role as leaders in the family and community, they can contribute positively to coping with emergencies and to promoting rehabilitation and reconstruction.

This has in fact been the experience of Japan in its reconstruction efforts following the March 11, 2011, Tohoku Earthquake. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 adopted at the Third UN World Conference on the issue describes how the participation of older persons is indispensable for enhancing the disaster risk management capacity of society. [\[71\]](#)

A convention on the rights of older persons should be based on the UN Principles referenced above. Further, it should include provisions for what is known as “aging in place,” whereby people are enabled to continue living with dignity and a sense of purpose in their long-accustomed community.

Sharing personal narratives of overcoming life’s inevitable hardships is a central aspect of the SGI’s faith activities, with local organizations actively working to create spaces for this. Many older members have sparked the flame of courage and hope in the hearts of younger generations through words that carry the unique weight of deeply lived experience.

In 1988, three years before the UN Principles for Older Persons were adopted, I proposed that the Soka Gakkai group comprising our more elderly members be called the Many Treasures Group. One chapter of the Lotus Sutra describes the emergence of an enormous Treasure Tower adorned with innumerable jewels and precious stones. A Buddha named Many Treasures Buddha appears within this tower and testifies to the truth of Shakyamuni’s teaching that all people are endowed with inherent dignity. It was with this in mind that I proposed this name for my beloved friends who have accumulated invaluable experience in the twin realms of life and faith. Following the formation of the Many Treasures Group, groups in specific regions of Japan were also formed, including the Lifespan Treasures Group in Tokyo and the Golden Treasures Group in Kansai. There are now similar groups around the world, such as the Goldener Herbst (Golden Autumn) Group in Germany and the Diamond Group in Australia.

Our older friends are truly treasures both within our Buddhist organization and in their respective communities. They have told their stories of meeting and transcending, through their practice of faith, the inevitable sufferings of what Buddhism refers to as birth, aging, sickness and death, playing an invaluable role in perpetuating the spiritual legacy of peace activism within the SGI as they share their experiences of war, including experiences as atomic bomb survivors. They have also helped sustain networks of mutual support and encouragement in the process of recovery from disaster with their deep knowledge of the history of the community and human relationships there.

The SGI will continue to promote the sharing of personal narratives, passing on the lessons of life, war and disaster to future generations. To this end, we will join with other faith-based organizations to hold symposia aimed at generating in society a new ethos of protecting the rights and dignity of older persons.

### **Local governments unite for climate action**

The third and final thematic area I would like to address is how to catalyze momentum toward meeting the seventeen UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to such global challenges as poverty, hunger, education and climate change. Among these, there has been important progress in establishing structures for international cooperation to combat climate change.

Last November, Syria, the last country to join the Paris Agreement on climate change, deposited its instrument of ratification with the UN. While the announced decision of the United States to withdraw remains a concern, the basic structure by which all states can collaborate to reduce greenhouse gas emissions remains in place.

In recent years, many parts of the world have experienced extreme weather events, bringing home the reality that no place on Earth is safe from such threats. We have seen a dramatic increase in the number of climate refugees driven from their homes by the ravages of drought, flooding and rising sea levels. Estimates project that the number of environmental migrants could reach as many as one billion by 2050, if present trends in global warming continue. [\[72\]](#)

The Paris Agreement offers a pathway for safeguarding the livelihoods and dignity of people from such threats. It also serves as the foundation for creating a sustainable society that we can pass on to future generations. Under the terms of the Paris Agreement, no country can withdraw until four years have passed from its entry into force, that is, before November 2020. It is strongly hoped that the United States will remain part of the agreement and will work with other countries to achieve its goals.

Combating climate change is certainly a thorny challenge; however, I take hope in the ambitious initiatives being undertaken by and among local governments. One example is the resolution adopted last year at the United States Conference of Mayors in which more than 250 mayors committed to procure 100 percent of the energy needs of their cities from renewable sources by 2035. [\[73\]](#) In Europe, Paris has announced plans to permit only electric vehicles within its limits by 2030, [\[74\]](#) while Stockholm has set the goal of becoming fossil fuel-free by 2040. [\[75\]](#) Further, in June last year, 140 mayors representing the world's major cities issued the Montréal Declaration in which they expressed their determination to implement the Paris Agreement regardless of the international political context. [\[76\]](#)

These examples demonstrate the capacity of cities and municipalities to take effective action in a field where the perception of conflicting national interests has paralyzed governmental response to shared risk. They have recognized that supporting implementation of the Paris Agreement contributes directly to the protection of their citizens.

Germany's Federal Environment Ministry has taken the lead in establishing partnerships on climate action among municipalities within the European Union, an example of efforts to share best practices and lessons learned. There is an urgent need to devise similar cooperative frameworks within the Northeast Asia region, which is responsible for large volumes of greenhouse gas emissions. To that end, I propose the establishment of a local government network for climate action between Japan and China, which together account for one-third of global heat-trapping gas emissions. [77]

In Japan, forward-looking action plans designed to combat climate change are being implemented in municipalities designated as "Future Cities" and "Eco-Model Cities." In China, the world's leading installer of solar power capacity, sources of renewable energy are being adopted widely in many communities.

### Climate Neutral Now Initiative

Climate Neutral Now is an initiative launched by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that represents a global community of organizations committed to becoming climate neutral by the second half of the twenty-first century. Centered around the three actions "Measure, Reduce and Offset," the initiative encourages individuals and companies worldwide to calculate their climate footprint, lower their level of greenhouse gas emissions as much as possible and offset what cannot be reduced with UN Certified Emission Reductions (CERs). The UN Climate Change secretariat invites organizations to take the Climate Neutral Now Pledge, joining a growing movement of companies and governments taking the lead in reducing emissions and contributing to accelerating global progress to a climate-neutral future. The initiative began as a result of the 2015 Paris Agreement, the global agreement to combat climate change.

One possible way to start the process of establishing this kind of Japan-China local government network for climate action would be to encourage municipalities in both countries that have already made important efforts in combating climate change to participate in the UN-led Climate Neutral Now initiative launched in 2015.

Partnerships for environmental protection have already been established between Tokyo and Beijing, Kobe and Tianjin as well as Kitakyushu and Dalian. By further fostering cooperative action among local authorities in areas such as technological collaboration and the sharing of knowledge and best practices, the two countries could create the foundation on which a broader regional framework could be built.

Today, the number of people traveling between Japan and China has reached almost 9 million per year [78] and sister-city agreements currently total 363. [79] As hard as it might be to imagine from today's perspective, when I issued a

proposal for the normalization of diplomatic ties between Japan and the People's Republic of China in September 1968, almost half a century ago, relations between the two countries were tense enough to threaten what little trade existed between them, and merely to speak of bilateral friendship was to provoke harsh criticism. This was the context within which I made the following statement to a gathering of more than ten thousand students:

There are a number of issues that need to be resolved before full normalization of relations can take place. . . These are all complex issues, fraught with difficulty. And they

cannot be solved without mutual understanding and deep trust between the two nations and most importantly, a shared aspiration for peace. . .

Whether as a state or as a people, in international society today, engaging purely in the pursuit of one's own profit is no longer acceptable. It is surely by adopting a broad global perspective and by seeking to contribute to peace, prosperity and the advancement of culture, that we will prove our worth as a people in the coming century. [\[80\]](#)

In the intervening half-century, not only has China become Japan's largest trading partner but Japan has also emerged as China's second largest trading partner after the US. In the educational field as well, Chinese universities now represent the largest number of academic exchange partners for Japanese educational institutions. In 1975, Soka University, which I founded, was the first Japanese institute of higher education to welcome state-sponsored Chinese students coming to study in Japan following the normalization of bilateral relations. Today, there are more than 4,400 academic exchange agreements between Chinese and Japanese universities. [\[81\]](#)

In 1979, one year after the signing of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship, a Japan-China youth friendship exchange program was launched, providing generations of young people annual opportunities to deepen friendship and mutual understanding. On a grassroots level, the Soka Gakkai sent a youth delegation to China for the first time in 1979 and has continued to conduct youth exchanges to the present. In 1985, our organization and the All-China Youth Federation signed an exchange agreement under which regular exchange programs have continued. The most recent such program took place in November 2017, when a Soka Gakkai youth delegation visited China, enhancing ties between the two countries.

In all these ways, bilateral exchanges have increased substantially, and cooperation in various spheres has been strengthened.

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China. This presents an auspicious opportunity to build on the long-standing cooperation between the two countries and to forge stronger bonds. The best way to do this is through solidarity of action in service of the interests of Earth and humankind.

Climate action and sustainable cities are critical challenges for achieving the SDGs. It is thus my strong hope that China and Japan will work together to mobilize the innovative strengths and passions of their younger generations in the task of creating model responses to these challenges in ways that will resonate throughout Northeast Asia and the world.

### **Women's empowerment: Key to resolving global challenges**

Lastly, I would like to take up the question of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as it relates to the SDGs.

Gender equality and empowerment should not be regarded as just one of the seventeen SDGs, but rather should be recognized as key to accelerating progress toward the achievement of the entire

spectrum of goals. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, the lead organization for gender equality, made the following statement to the UN Security Council in October 2017:

The women, peace and security agenda continues to expand its footprint on global policymaking. It is now an essential pillar in global affairs. [\[82\]](#)

The Preamble of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) states that the equal participation of both women and men is an indispensable factor for attaining sustainable peace and security. It also calls for supporting and strengthening the effective participation of women in the nuclear disarmament fields. Women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding has been expanding since the adoption of Resolution 1325 by the Security Council in 2000, and the TPNW now explicitly highlights the importance of women's involvement in disarmament as well as in recasting national security policies.

This awareness of the importance of including women's perspectives in the process of meeting global challenges is not limited to peace and conflict resolution. The Sendai Framework launched in 2015 at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction notes that empowering women within disaster preparation is vital to enhancing resilience. More recently, the annual Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 23), held in Germany in November 2017, adopted a Gender Action Plan. These moves are evidence of emerging international recognition that women's participation is key to effective climate action.

Here, I would like to propose that the UN proclaim an international decade for women's empowerment to encourage these transformative effects to take hold in all spheres of society. The decade could run from 2020, the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1325, to 2030, the culminating year for achieving the SDGs. The decade would be an occasion for intensifying efforts to empower women and increasing momentum for attaining the SDGs.

Women's empowerment cannot be an optional agenda: It is an urgent priority for many people in dire situations.

One Syrian woman in a refugee camp in Jordan started to work as a tailor in a center operated by UN Women. She recounts, "We no longer feel helpless, our work makes us feel productive and empowered." [\[83\]](#)

Another woman, who fled her home in Burundi, is currently living in a refugee camp in neighboring Tanzania. Lacking employment, she was overwhelmed by uncertainty about her future. As she participated in the vocational training programs run by UNHCR, however, her outlook changed to the point that she expressed hope of one day returning to her homeland where she could make use of her newly acquired skills in bread making to earn a living and send her children to school. [\[84\]](#)

As evidenced by these testimonies, women's empowerment can serve as the driving force to restore hope and the ability to advance in the face of challenging circumstances.

Grounded in the Buddhist commitment to uphold the dignity of all people, the SGI has been consistently working to expand the scope of women's empowerment. As a civil society organization, the SGI has supported the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), sending delegates to the annual



sessions at UN Headquarters and, since 2011, collaborating with other organizations to organize side events. The SGI has also engaged with the activities of the UN Human Rights Council by cosponsoring events focusing on such themes as the role of faith and culture in advancing women’s rights and nonformal education for gender equality.

A global Platform on Gender Equality and Religion was launched at the CSW session in March 2017. It aims to elevate recognition of the importance of women’s rights and contributions through faith-based discourse and to shape policy and legislative efforts for gender equality on the local, national and international levels. [85] The SGI will support the platform and collaborate with other faith-based organizations so that it becomes a source of empowerment for women and girls in difficult situations. Together with these partners, we wish to spin the “Ariadne’s thread” of women’s empowerment by which humankind can emerge from the current labyrinth of global challenges.

In all these ways, I hope we can bring together the voices of civil society to build momentum for the establishment of an international decade for the empowerment of women.

I am convinced that the ideal of a world in which no one is left behind, articulated in the SDGs, will be shared and embraced by all as we strive to protect the rights of women and girls—who constitute half the world’s people—and through our efforts to create societies where all can live with hope and dignity.

As I envision the challenges that lie ahead between now and the year 2030, I recall these words which Rosa Parks shared with me: “There’s no law that says people have to suffer.” These words were spoken to her by her mother, who herself struggled against discrimination. The earnest determination distilled in these words is the spirit we all need as we work across differences to advance the entire SDG agenda with a focus on the struggle for gender equality.

It is the pledge of the SGI to continue striving to create a groundswell of people’s solidarity with which to surmount the challenges facing humanity, grounded in efforts to safeguard the life and dignity of each individual.

## Notes

[1] ICAN, “Nobel Lecture.”

[2] Toda, “Declaration.”

[3] Dhanapala, “The Importance of the UN as a Moral Compass.”

[4] See UN DESA, “Population Facts,” 1.

[5] Arbour, “Highlighting ‘positive impact’ of migration.”

[6] (trans. from) *Seikyo Shimbun*, “Kokka no shimin kara sekai no shimin e.”

[7] See Humphrey, “The Dean Who Never Was,” 197.

[8] Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 83.

[9] *Ibid.*, 542.

[10] *Ibid.*, 403.

[11] *Ibid.*, 542.

[12] Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1:852.

[13] (trans. from) Nichiren, *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu*, 413.

[14] (trans. from) Makiguchi, *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu*, 1:14–15.

[15] *Ibid.*, 10:8.

[16] Mandela, *Conversations with Myself*, 175–76.

[17] (trans. from) Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu*, 3:74.

- [18] Ibid., 3:78.
- [19] Ibid., 3:289.
- [20] UN General Assembly, “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,” 1.
- [21] UN News Centre, “Conference to Negotiate Legally Binding Instrument.”
- [22] Khanna, *Connectography*, 11.
- [23] Ibid., 14.
- [24] Ibid., 15.
- [25] See Norman, trans., *The Group of Discourses*, 2:18.
- [26] (trans. from) Nichiren, *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu*, 403.
- [27] Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 2:472.
- [28] UN General Assembly, “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants,” 3.
- [29] Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, 9–10.
- [30] Ibid., 143.
- [31] See HREA, SGI, OHCHR, *A Path to Dignity*.
- [32] OHCHR, “Values Enshrined in Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”
- [33] (trans. from) Nichiren, *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu*, 761.
- [34] See Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra*, 228.
- [35] Ibid., 82.
- [36] Ikeda and Harding, *America Will Be!*, 50.
- [37] Ibid., 54.
- [38] Ibid.
- [39] King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 221–22.
- [40] See Ibid., 222.
- [41] Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, “Faith Communities on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons.”
- [42] UN, “Faith Communities Concerned about the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons.”
- [43] SGI, “Public Statement to the Open-ended Working Group.”
- [44] Reaching Critical Will, “Public Statement to the First Negotiation Conference.”
- [45] Francis, “Address to Participants.”
- [46] King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 360.
- [47] OPANAL, “Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,” 6.
- [48] Arendt, *Hannah Arendt*, 454.
- [49] See Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace*, 406.
- [50] See OPCW, “20 Years of the OPCW.”
- [51] ICAN, “Nobel Lecture.”
- [52] Guterres, “Secretary-General’s Video Message.”
- [53] Point du Jour, *Khrushchev Does America*.
- [54] Hoffman, *The Dead Hand*, 39.
- [55] Yoshida, “Japan Still Clings.”
- [56] See UN General Assembly, “2010 Review Conference,” 19.
- [57] Thurlow, “Special Contribution.”
- [58] MOFA, “Remarks by H.E. Mr. Fumio Kishida.”
- [59] See UN, “On the Objectives and Significance.”
- [60] ICAN, “Nobel Lecture.”
- [61] See UNHCR, “Figures at a Glance.”
- [62] See UNICEF, “Five-Fold Increase.”
- [63] UN General Assembly, “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants,” 6.
- [64] Ibid., 7.
- [65] UNHCR, “Yusra Mardini Appointed UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador.”
- [66] Ibid.
- [67] Fihn “Aikyan jimukyokucho intabyuu.”
- [68] UN DESA, “Chair Summary.”
- [69] See Ikeda and Weizsäcker, *Knowing Our Worth*, 131–34.
- [70] UN, “Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing,” 10.

- [71] See UNISDR, “Sendai Framework,” 23.
- [72] See Kamal, “Climate Migrants Might Reach One Billion by 2050.”
- [73] See UNFCCC, “More than 250 US Mayors Commit to 100% Renewable Energy by 2035.”
- [74] See Love, “Paris Plans to Banish All but Electric Cars by 2030.”
- [75] See C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, “Cities100.”
- [76] See UNFCCC, “Mayors of 140 of World’s Largest Cities.”
- [77] See EPA, “Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data.”
- [78] See Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Japan, “Press Release.”
- [79] See CLAIR, “Japanese Local Governments.”
- [80] Ikeda, “Proposal.”
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- [84] See UNHCR, “Opportunities to Earn a Living.”
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