The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a worldwide association of 79 constituent organizations with membership in 190 countries and territories. Based on the life-affirming philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, SGI members aim to develop positive human potentialities for hope, courage and altruistic action.

As an NGO with formal ties to the United Nations, the SGI is particularly active in public education with a focus on peace, sustainable development and human rights. This report contains a selection of activities carried out by SGI organizations around the world during the period from November 2003 to December 2004. Activities fall under consistent broad themes, but the scope and nature of the activities conducted in each country vary in accordance with the culture and characteristics of that society.
Contents

3 PEACE
3 Youth Peace Forum in Argentina and Peacebuilders in Venezuela
3 Women Unite for Peace in Singapore and Panama
3 Nonviolence Seminar in India
4 SGI-South Africa Peace Symposiums
4 Building a Culture of Peace

5 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
5 Seeds of Change
6 A Quiet Revolution Awarded
6 Earth Charter Summits
7 Taiwan Environmental Protection
7 School Resources in Canada
7 SGI-Philippines and Canada Reforestation Activities

8 HUMANITARIAN / EMERGENCY RELIEF
8 Disaster Relief in Japan
9 Soka Gakkai Malaysia Fundraiser
9 SGI-Dominican Republic Offers Medical Care
9 Tsunami Disaster Response

10 EDUCATION
10 Social Awareness Rallies in Brazilian Schools
10 SGI Educators Promote Humanistic Education
10 Women Educators Meet in Bolivia
11 Model UN Assembly in UK
11 Education Seminar in Côte d'Ivoire
11 Goethe Lecture in Germany

12 HUMAN RIGHTS AND OTHER UN LIAISON ACTIVITIES
12 World Programme for Human Rights Education
13 UNEP-Civil Society Organizations' Asia Pacific Regional Meeting
13 The Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN (RNGO)
13 Secretary-General's Report on UN-Civil Society Relations

14 INTERFAITH / INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITIES
14 Interfaith Conference in New York
14 Australia and Argentina Interfaith Dialogues
15 Parliament of the World's Religions
15 World Boys and Girls Art Exhibition in Dubai
15 Youth Exchanges With China
16 Lotus Sutra Manuscripts Exhibited in Thailand
16 SGI-Mexico Joins Interfaith Conference
On August 27-28, SGI-Argentina hosted its eighth Youth Peace Forum at the SGI-Argentina Culture Center in Buenos Aires. Some 200 students, from 19 local junior and senior high schools, participated in the event. Representing Argentina’s respective states, participants discussed educational challenges and spoke with experts in human rights education, communication education and environmental education.

The SGI-Venezuela youth group launched a project called “Constructores de la Paz” (Peacebuilders) to prepare young people to contribute to peace. The first lecture was held on November 15, together with the José Félix Ribas Institute. Later, the SGI-Venezuela group joined forces with the “Puentes de Paz” (Bridge of Peace) program involving the regional offices of UNHCR and UNICEF, which aims to help protect and integrate refugee children into Venezuelan society and schools.

On June 12 and 13, the Singapore Soka Association sponsored the “Asia Women for Peace Conference” in Singapore. SGI women and peace scholars and activists from eight countries—including Nepal, Malaysia, Cambodia and Sri Lanka—held lively discussions on “Women’s Inspirations—Building a Culture of Peace.”

Participants included women’s representatives from the People’s Association, the Interreligious Organization, AWARE (Association of Women for Action and Research) and the National Institute of Education.

"The Century of Women: A Humanistic Existence" exhibit opened on June 23 at the SGI-Panama Culture Center in Panama. The exhibit portrayed women’s struggles in securing equal rights and their potential to help build a peaceful society. On the same day, SGI-Panama women hosted a forum on women’s issues.

On July 7, Bharat (India) Soka Gakkai (BSG) sponsored a seminar on nonviolence at its International Peace Center in New Delhi, India. Three leading Indian thinkers, including M.S. Swaminathan, president of the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs and father of India’s Green Revolution, discussed ideas contained in SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s 2004 Peace Proposal, “Inner Transformation: Creating a Global Groundswell for Peace.” Some 250 people, including scholars and UN and NGO representatives, attended the seminar. The audience also viewed Another Way of Seeing Things, the award-winning film based on an essay by SGI President Ikeda that points to the dangers of media stereotyping.
SGI–South Africa Peace Symposiums

Commemorating the tenth anniversary of South Africa’s democratization, the "Gandhi, King, Ikeda: A Legacy of Building Peace" exhibition, introducing the peace and human rights activism of these three 20th-century leaders, was shown in three cities in South Africa—Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban—during August and September. In Johannesburg, it was on display at Museum Africa for two weeks in early August. Coinciding with the Johannesburg showing, on August 9, SGI-South Africa co-hosted a panel discussion on "Women—Catalysts for Peace" with the Women’s National Coalition, celebrating Women’s Day. SGI-South Africa then hosted a symposium on "Peace in the 21st Century—Dream or Reality?" on August 11 at the Museum.

On February 4, "Building a Culture of Peace for the Children of the World" opened in the Visitors’ Lobby of the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The exhibition illustrates the importance of building a culture of peace at all levels of society.

The exhibition supports the UN International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), and the inaugural showing was a collaboration of the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS); several permanent missions to the UN; SGI-USA; the Min-On Concert Association and the International Committee of Artists for Peace (ICAP).

UN Under-Secretary-General Anwarul K. Chowdhury and 1976 Nobel Peace Laureate Betty Williams spoke at the exhibition opening, which also featured a performance by ICAP members, pianist Herbie Hancock, flutist Nestor Torres, guitarist Larry Coryell and bass player Buster Williams.

Educators in the New York area created a teacher’s manual and a student pamphlet to accompany the exhibition and peer hosts held small group discussions with visiting students.

In June, the exhibition was held at Rayburn House Office Building for the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC; on July 7, at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Barcelona, Spain; and at the Stravinski Hall in Montreux, Switzerland, during the last three days of the 38th annual Montreux Jazz Festival later in July.

Another showing of the exhibition at the SGI-USA New York Culture Center coincided with “Living a Culture of Peace Week,” from September 18 to 26; over 50 events including community festivals, concerts, interfaith dialogues, spoken word events and film showings were held in venues throughout New York City, New Jersey and Connecticut. Participating organizations included SGI-USA, the Turkish American Multicultural Educational Foundation, The Langston Hughes Library and Cultural Center and El Puente.

Building a Culture of Peace
The "Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter and Human Potential" exhibition was initially created by SGI and the Earth Charter Initiative for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg.

The now updated exhibition links panels on the state of the world with a hopeful message about the potential of even one individual to make a positive change. It is structured around the Earth Charter—a declaration of ethical principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society—and is a key resource for SGI and Earth Charter-related organizations during the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

Individuals who have tackled problems in their local communities and become a force for global change are introduced, including 2004 Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai, who began a movement in Kenya through which women have planted 30 million trees.

Professor Maathai’s story, together with two other case studies, is the subject of the related award-winning documentary film, A Quiet Revolution. This film, a collaborative project of the SGI, UNEP, UNDP and the Earth Council, is frequently used together with the exhibition.

The exhibition has now been translated into Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, French, Italian and German and is being widely used by SGI and other organizations, often in tandem with related activities, from environmental initiatives such as recycling and cleanup drives to interfaith seminars.

SGI-Italy is using the exhibition in a public youth program that generates discussion on social issues and sustainable development. "It is very, very useful as a tool for education. It definitely changes people's views and gives them a means for taking action," says Godelieve Coymans of SGI-Italy.

From February 10, the exhibition was shown at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. SGI-Canada and the Edmonton Branch of the United Nations Association in Canada were cosponsors. From June 1-4, it was shown at Dr. John M. Denison Secondary School, Newmarket City, Ontario, Canada, as a part of the school's Environment Week.

The exhibition was on display at the Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina (UNAM) in April and in June at Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM) in Lima, Peru. It was also shown in October in Hong Kong at the Hong Kong Central Library.
together with SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s “Dialogue with Nature” photographs and an exhibition from the Hong Kong Environment Protection Department.

**A Quiet Revolution Awarded**

*A Quiet Revolution*, an SGI-sponsored documentary on environmental issues, received the Special Festival Award at the 12th International Sports, Tourist and Ecological Film Festival (MEFEST) in Serbia-Montenegro. Begun in 1993, during the peak of the Bosnian war, the festival has continued to inspire hope in people. *A Quiet Revolution* was selected for the award from among 85 films from 17 countries. On September 26, the awards ceremony was aired on RTS (a national television station).

**Earth Charter Summits**

SGI-USA members helped coordinate Earth Charter Community Summits across the country in October. In New Paltz, New York, SGI-USA members worked with students from the State University of New York to organize a summit that featured a lecture by environmentalist Lester Brown attended by 600 people, a community festival, and a multicultural concert including Hebrew and Indian devotional songs, Middle-Eastern dance and African and hip-hop songs. Students, faculty and representatives from more than 28 community organizations participated.

In Columbus, Ohio, a three-day Earth Charter Community Summit, “Creating a Just Community of Life” featured screenings of *Another Way of Seeing Things*, and *Mandela, Son of Africa, Father of a Nation*, as well as extensive efforts to clean up Walnut Creek, which runs alongside the SGI-USA Columbus Community Center. A cultural festival on the last day featured a Japanese dance group, a bluegrass band, Latin dancers, African drummers and dancers and readings from the Earth Charter.

In Madison, Wisconsin, the summit was entitled “Ideas to Action.” It included a visit to the Edgewood College rain garden that replenishes groundwater, a walk among 70 species of trees from around the world adorning the campus, and a visit to the remains of Native American burial grounds that once lined the banks of waterways near the campus.

In Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota, SGI-USA members joined members of other religious, environmental, peace, youth and human rights organizations under the theme of “The Earth Charter and Human Destiny: A Vision for a Sustainable Future.” Michael Dowd, author and evolutionary theologian, was keynote speaker. Children’s activities included readings by author Phyllis Root from her book *Big Momma Makes the World*. Ideas generated for future action included using the Earth Charter as the basis for study groups and sharing brochures at community, neighborhood, school and faith-based events.
As an organization that has been awarded as an “excellent community organization,” Taiwan Soka Association (TSA) actively engages in environmental protection.

On August 8, about 100 TSA members from the city of Kaohsiung joined representatives of other organizations to help plant grass at a newly constructed park in the city. In another area, members from the district of Changhua adopted a nearby public park and are responsible for its maintenance and upkeep. On November 7, three hundred local members gathered to clean up the park.

Realizing that awareness is the key to ongoing environmental protection, TSA continues to promote the “Seeds of Change” exhibition in educational institutions throughout the island. This follows the exhibition’s showing at more than 120 locations near the end of 2003.

School Resources in Canada

Cultivating Peace is an educational initiative started by an NGO called Classroom Connections in Canada in response to September 11. Classroom Connections produces educational materials related to peace and diversity in English and French.

The first set of materials, Cultivating Peace in the 21st Century, was distributed to 80 percent of secondary schools in Canada in September 2002. For the second installment of their program, Cultivating Peace—Taking Action, released in April 2004, Classroom Connections incorporated the SGI-sponsored film A Quiet Revolution and “Seeds of Change” exhibition materials.

SGI–Philippines and Canada Reforestation Activities

On January 11, volunteers from the young men’s division of SGI-Philippines planted trees on one of the Malasag Hills, in the northern part of Mindanao Island. The young men started planting trees in June 1999 in response to an appeal for reforestation assistance by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. They have continued to visit the site bi-monthly to care for the trees.

In recognition of SGI-Philippines’ environmental conservation efforts, the North Mindanao Region has assigned a two-hectare site in the Malasag Hills to SGI-Philippines, designating it “SGI Hill.” The hill provides a natural habitat for many trees indigenous to the Philippines, including mahoganies, nara and molave, as well as fruit trees such as mango and papaya.

On May 17, SGI-Canada youth planted trees near the SGI-Canada Caledon Centre for Culture and Education in a suburb of Toronto. Local SGI-Canada youth have engaged in tree-planting efforts for three years, under the leadership of the Credit Valley Conservation (CVC), a local environmental protection organization. This year, around 70 youth members participated in planting some 650 cedar seedlings.
Disaster Relief in Japan

The Japanese archipelago suffered a series of devastating floods, typhoons and earthquakes during 2004. The Soka Gakkai responded quickly to these events, opening local community centers to evacuees, delivering relief supplies and making donations to local authorities dealing with the crises.

In July, torrential rains caused floods and mudslides in Niigata and Fukushima prefectures, affecting 20,000 homes. Disaster relief centers were set up at three Soka Gakkai community centers that also served as emergency shelters. Soka Gakkai volunteers contributed and delivered food, drinking water, towels and other emergency supplies to flood victims. Floods in Fukui prefecture later in the month caused the evacuation of 40,000 households, and two local Soka Gakkai community centers served as emergency shelters. Donations to support local government relief efforts were also made to the mayors of eight cities affected by flooding.

On October 20, Typhoon No. 23, packing winds of up to 230kph and torrential rain, devastated the Shikoku, Chugoku and Kinki regions of Japan. This typhoon caused floods and mudslides, killing some 80 people and injuring hundreds. Soka Gakkai members visited damaged homes and helped with cleanup efforts, removing earth from mudslides.

Following a severe earthquake in the Niigata region on October 23 that killed 34 people, injured over 2,000 and destroyed over 6,000 homes, Soka Gakkai offered emergency aid and shelter to some of the estimated 100,000 people unable to return to their homes.

Starting from October 24, the Nagano branch of Soka Gakkai delivered a total of forty tons of basic necessities—including food, potable water, blankets and clothing—to the most seriously affected towns. Local Soka Gakkai members regularly provided freshly prepared food to families taking refuge in Soka Gakkai community centers.

Soka Gakkai members with medical expertise in the area also visited the centers to offer advice and encouragement; many elderly people were among those evacuated. Local members visited affected areas every day to deliver basic supplies using motorbikes.

Soka Gakkai has a long tradition of rapid response to emergencies. After the major 1995 Kobe earthquake, Soka Gakkai donated a total of 230 million yen (over US$2 million) for purchase of relief goods. Ten local centers were converted into evacuation centers and relief supplies were delivered via four helicopters, 1,200 trucks, 900 motorbikes and 1,350 bicycles.
Soka Gakkai Malaysia Fundraiser

On August 21 and 22, Soka Gakkai Malaysia (SGM) held a charity cultural gala in Penang to raise funds for 25 charitable and educational organizations. The event coincided with the country’s 47th National Day celebrations and the 20th anniversary of SGM’s establishment. With the theme “Malaysia—Land of Hope and Culture,” a total of 1,500 SGI members and other performers were involved in the dynamic performance, which included a Chinese orchestra and an Indian dance group. More than RM 450,000 (approx. US$118,600) was raised and divided between charitable organizations such as the National Stroke Association of Malaysia, the Mount Miriam Hospital and the Silver Jubilee Home for the Aged.

SGI–Dominican Republic Offers Medical Care

On October 10, SGI–Dominican Republic members helped provide medical care to local residents in several towns in Agua Santa del Yuna City, Duarte State. Residents in the area have suffered from severe floods every year. In cooperation with doctors and staff from a local hospital, SGI members assisted in immunizations, dental and hearing checkups. Some 668 local residents had medical checkups and health education classes were held for children.

Tsunami Disaster Response

SGI organizations throughout Asia mobilized financial and human resources to respond to the catastrophic tsunami which devastated large parts of the region on December 26, 2004.

On January 5, 2005, Soka Gakkai in Japan made donations of 5 million yen (approx. US$48,000) for relief operations to the Tokyo embassies of India and Thailand respectively and later donated US $100,000 to the government of Indonesia and US $30,000 to Sri Lanka.

Singapore Soka Association (SSA) worked in partnership with Mercy Relief, a local humanitarian NGO, to offer relief. At the time of going to press, SSA had raised S$249,000 (approx. US$151,000) in donations and collected 54 tons of relief items, including canned food, clothing and medicine, which were shipped to Sri Lanka. On January 3, SSA General Director Ong Bon Chai led a Mercy Relief Mission to that country.

SSA and Mercy Relief worked closely with the Soka Gakkai Lanka Buddhist Association and the Prime Minister’s Office to ensure the goods reached the victims. Many of the supplies were transported to the Galle area, where 182 refugee camps housed some 120,000 people displaced by the disaster.

Bharat Soka Gakkai (SGI-India) made an initial donation of 500,000 rupees (approx. US$11,500) to the Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund and collected a further 2 million rupees for rehabilitation efforts such as rebuilding schools.

SGI-Malaysia members in Kuala Lumpur and four other regions made donations to organizations including the Malaysian Red Crescent Society, the Mercy Humanitarian Relief Fund and the National Disaster Relief Fund.

SGI-Thailand gave emergency goods to the Rajapranugroh Foundation (Foundation of Cooperation Between the King and the People), the Ministry of Culture and Bangkok city government in support of relief efforts as well as sending some goods directly to affected areas such as Panga and Ranong.

The Taiwan Soka Association donated TWD 1,000,000 (approx. US$31,000) to the Interior Ministry to support its relief efforts and on January 6, SGI-Korea donated US$47,000 to MBC Broadcasting to help run its South East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami relief operation. SGI-Hong Kong gave HK$1,050,000 (US$134,824) to UNICEF Hong Kong.
Social Awareness Rallies in Brazilian Schools

On November 16 and 17, 2003, SGI-Brazil (BSGI) Student and High School Divisions sponsored civic rallies at more than 20,000 venues throughout Brazil. Some 360,000 people participated in the events, aimed at heightening public awareness of issues concerning the environment, education, and health. In one São Paulo venue, local BSGI students put on a skit about finding solutions to violence and drugs at school, and invited a BSGI Doctors’ Division member to give a lecture.

In Santo André, a São Paulo suburb, students sponsored a panel discussion with local water department officials and environmentalists. Another group invited the director of an ecological research institute at the State University of Campinas to speak. In Presidente Prudente, BSGI students held a fashion show of clothes made from recycled material. BSGI Student Division Chief Fábio Oda said the BSGI youth were able to garner much support in their recent campaign to encourage people to become good citizens who contribute to Brazil’s development and prosperity.

SGI Educators Promote Humanistic Education

SGI educators in South Korea held conventions at five locations to exchange reports on the practical application of first Soka Gakkai President Tsunesaburo Makiguchi’s value-creation educational theories, which see children’s happiness as the purpose of education. At a symposium in Seoul, around 500 educators shared ideas and experiences and reconﬁrmed their sense of purpose as educators to promote humanistic education.

In Japan, the Soka Gakkai Education Department has now compiled 20,000 reports on Soka Gakkai educators’ professional experiences and activities. The project, started 20 years ago, originates from an education proposal by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda in which he suggested that recording the day-to-day experiences of educators could serve as a basis for developing educational theories that are applicable to modern society. Soka Gakkai Education Department members hold annual conferences to share reports and experiences of their efforts to develop humanistic education.

Women Educators Meet in Bolivia

On October 9-10, SGI-Bolivia women held a Women Educators’ Conference to commemorate October 11, “Bolivian Women’s Day.” Some 750 women educators met to present papers and discuss “Humanistic Education—the Foundation of Bolivia’s Development.” Women’s Day in Bolivia commemorates the birthday of Adela Zamudio (1854-1928), a female poet, writer and educator, who dedicated her life to educating young Bolivian women during an era of military dictatorship, when women had few educational opportunities.
On July 12, SGI-UK’s Taplow Court center hosted a gathering of 120 14-year-olds who were participating in a Model United Nations General Assembly. SGI-UK, UNICEF’s regional office and the United Nations Association were cosponsors of the event. Students from 11 local schools were joined by delegations from South Africa and Uganda. Participants represented 37 UN member states and discussed global issues such as problems faced by refugees and AIDS, in a simulated general assembly. The fact that the XV International AIDS Conference was taking place at the same time in Bangkok made the discussions very pertinent. Many creative solutions were proposed, and a newspaper entitled The United Nations News was produced at the end of the day.

**Education Seminar in Côte d’Ivoire**

SGI-Côte d’Ivoire hosted its fourth education seminar on September 18-19 in Abidjan, attended by some 1,200 people. This series of education seminars is based on the belief that education is the driving force for peacebuilding. Following a lecture by a Ministry of National Education representative, SGI-Côte d’Ivoire’s Gnaka Narcisse introduced the educational philosophy of Soka Gakkai’s founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi.

**Model UN Assembly in UK**

On July 12, SGI-UK’s Taplow Court center hosted a gathering of 120 14-year-olds who were participating in a Model United Nations General Assembly. SGI-UK, UNICEF’s regional office and the United Nations Association were cosponsors of the event. Students from 11 local schools were joined by delegations from South Africa and Uganda. Participants represented 37 UN member states and discussed global issues such as problems faced by refugees and AIDS, in a simulated general assembly. The fact that the XV International AIDS Conference was taking place at the same time in Bangkok made the discussions very pertinent. Many creative solutions were proposed, and a newspaper entitled The United Nations News was produced at the end of the day.

**Goethe Lecture in Germany**

On April 24, the Soka Gakkai-affiliated Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP) hosted a lecture on German writer, poet and philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), at the SGI-Germany Villa Sachsen Grand Culture Center in Bingen. Dr. Manfred Osten, former general secretary of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, was the guest speaker. Dr. Osten spoke about Faust and Goethe’s view of time, pointing out the negative effects of giving priority to speed and efficiency over quality in today’s society. SGI-Germany supported the event. Villa Sachsen often serves as a venue for cultural events in the local community.
World Programme for Human Rights Education

SGI has been a key participant in the establishment of the “World Programme for Human Rights Education,” a new global framework for human rights education to succeed the UN Decade for Human Rights Education that ended in 2004. The resolution to establish the World Programme was adopted at the 60th annual session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, held between March 15 and April 23.

Prior to and during the session, SGI initiated and participated in a number of consultations involving NGOs, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and government delegates in Geneva, representing the collected opinions of grassroots and academic institutions of many parts of the world in the negotiation process.

At the plenary session of the Commission, SGI representative to the UN in Geneva Kazunari Fujii made a joint NGO statement on behalf of 18 co-signed organizations on “NGO support for Human Rights Education,” calling for adoption by the Commission of a resolution that sets up a global framework for human rights education. The first phase of the World Programme (2005-2007) will focus on human rights education in primary and secondary school systems.

During every annual session of the Commission, a number of women’s organizations actively promote women’s rights. At the invitation of the women’s NGO network in Geneva, SGI made a presentation on the UN mechanism on human rights protection at a meeting held concurrently with a Commission session.

In September, SGI was invited by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNESCO to a meeting of some 50 international experts on human rights education to help finalize the draft plan of action of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.
From November 20-21, in Bangkok, Thailand, SGI participated in the Asia Pacific Civil Society Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 6th UNEP Global Civil Society Forum, which will take place in Nairobi in February 2005. The Conference of NGOs (CONGO), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Office in Asia and Asian NGOs organized the preparatory meeting. *A Quiet Revolution*, a film sponsored and co-produced by SGI, was screened. Many participants commented that the film is an excellent tool for education on sustainable development and environmental protection, and expressed their intention to use the film in their work.

SGI’s representative to the UN in New York, Hiroyuki Sakurai, has been appointed president of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN. Mr. Sakurai, whose tenure began in early 2005, has been an active committee member since 1999. He has also served as interim president since June 2004. He prepared briefings on “Global Governance and Religion: Partners or Adversaries?” in April and “Child Martyrs/Child Orphans: Religion and the Eradication of Poverty” in June. Mr. Sakurai also chaired the committee’s General Committee Meeting in June.

**The Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN (RNGO)**

In September 2002, Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed the establishment of an independent panel of eminent persons to review relations between the United Nations and civil society toward strengthening and reforming the UN. The High-Level Panel produced its report containing reform proposals in June 2004 and the subject was debated in the General Assembly in October 2004.

Under the leadership of Hiroyuki Sakurai, the Committee of Religious NGOs held discussions with the Director of the Panel. In October, Mr. Sakurai prepared and chaired the “Religious NGOs, Civil Society and UN Reform” briefing. The following month he reported at the General Assembly on the activities of the Committee of Religious NGOs and on The United Religions Initiative (URI)’s roundtable discussion on the Secretary-General’s Report on UN-Civil Society Relations. URI, which organized the roundtable discussion, titled “How Can Faith and Interfaith Groups Work More Effectively with The United Nations?” is a grassroots interfaith program founded in 1995.
INTERFAITH/INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Interfaith Conference in New York

SGI-USA hosted the "NAEIS & NAIN Connect 2004" interfaith conference and an interfaith film festival at its New York Culture Center from July 24-27. The National Association of Ecumenical and Interreligious Staff (NAEIS) and the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) collaborated on the conference, which was supported by SGI-USA.

Participants joined workshops on themes such as "The Role of Faith-Based Institutions in Combating Racism in Society" and "Public Policy and the United Nations." A Sikh leader shared how his local community united behind Sikh residents when their temple was fire-bombed by teenagers who assumed they were connected to Osama bin Laden.

Speakers included Gillian Sorensen, senior adviser at the United Nations Foundation, and Diana L. Eck, professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University and author of A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation. At a forum on strengthening and expanding interfaith partnerships, Ms. Sorensen underscored the important role played by NGO religious organizations in bringing spiritual and ideological values into UN discussions and laid out the challenges facing the religious community, stating that the politics of religion is more difficult than that of states.

On July 27, SGI representatives moderated a workshop on how best to communicate global issues to the religious community.

The first NAIN Interfaith Film Festival included a screening of the award-winning film Another Way of Seeing Things.

Australia and Argentina Interfaith Dialogues

On August 8, SGI-Australia and the Victoria branch of Pax Christi, a Christian peace movement, cohosted an interfaith peace forum at the SGI-Australia Centre in Melbourne, Australia. Some 250 people representing a variety of faiths attended. The participants discussed "Interfaith Responses to Terrorism—Building a Peaceful World." On October 8, SGI-Australia also hosted a conference entitled “Race, Religion and Rhetoric” at its Sydney center which was coorganized by FAIR (Forum on Australia’s Islamic relations), Islamic Realm, SGI-Australia and the Uniting Church of Australia.

SGI-Argentina youth hosted an interfaith dialogue on August 9 at the SGI-Argentina Culture Center in Buenos Aires. Speakers included representatives from Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist traditions. Participants exchanged ideas on how to build a culture of peace based on solidarity, love, compassion and religious faith.
Representatives of SGI-Spain and SGI-USA participated in the Parliament of the World’s Religions, held in Barcelona, Spain, from July 7-13 with the theme, “Pathways to Peace: The Wisdom of Listening, the Power of Commitment.” Some 3,500 people attended the conference from around the world.

SGI-Spain’s General Director Enrique Caputo and SGI-USA’s Guy McCloskey spent three days in a pre-parliament assembly of 350 scholars and representatives of the world’s religions, addressing such topics as religion-based violence, refugee relief, debt relief for developing countries and providing equal access to water.

During the conference, SGI members staffed a booth and displayed the exhibition “Building a Culture of Peace for the Children of the World.” On July 13, an SGI-Spain representative chaired the “Voices of Different Religious Traditions for Peace” symposium, where participants exchanged ideas on "The Role of Religions in Nonviolence and Tolerance" and "The Need for Promoting Peace Education."

The World Boys and Girls Art Exhibition was held for the first time in the Middle East, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from October 23 to November 2, at the Dubai Shopping Center. The exhibition was supported by the Dubai Humanitarian City. On display were some 147 children’s paintings representing 116 countries. The opening ceremony included the screening of Another Way of Seeing Things, based on an essay of same title by Daisaku Ikeda.

Youth Exchanges With China

Soka Gakkai youth members held exchange visits with an All-China Youth Federation (ACYF) delegation, hosting the delegation’s visit to Japan from March 26 to April 7 and visiting China from November 22 to 28. The ACYF, with 370 million members, is the largest youth organization in the world.

The first Japanese Soka Gakkai youth delegation accompanied SGI President Daisaku Ikeda on his sixth trip to China in 1984. The following year, Soka Gakkai youth hosted the first visit to Japan of an ACYF delegation. At that time, China’s current President Hu Jintao led the Chinese delegation. Since then, Japanese and Chinese youth have visited each other’s country in alternate years.

During their visit to Japan in 2004, the ACYF delegation participated in exchange meetings with Soka Gakkai youth and local residents in Nagasaki, Kyushu and Fukushima prefectures. During an address at the Soka Gakkai Nagasaki Peace Center,
a delegate from Nanjing called on those present to
reflect on the history of Japanese military aggression
in China (which is often unacknowledged in Japan)
in order to deepen mutual understanding and secure
peace and friendship between the two countries. Par-
ticipants exchanged views on the role of youth and
women in peacebuilding in the 21st century. Mr. Jiang
Guangping, leader of the AYCF delegation, expressed
his resolve to strengthen the “bridge of friendship”
between China and Japan built by those such as the
late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and SGI President
Daisaku Ikeda.

In November, a Soka Gakkai youth delegation trav-
elied to Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai and Huaian City,
 birthplace of Premier Zhou, at the invitation of the
AYCF. The SGI youth visited various institutions and
held discussions with prominent Chinese figures and
local citizens.

In Nanjing, the delegation visited the museum of the
Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massa-
cre, where they laid a wreath. The museum, built on
a mass burial site, commemorates the hundreds of
thousands of Chinese citizens killed by the Japanese
Imperial Army when they captured Nanjing in 1937.

In October, a Soka Gakkai women’s delegation vis-
ited China on a goodwill tour. At a reception in Beijing
hosted by the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF)
on October 15, ACWF Honorary President Peng
Peiyun expressed her hopes that solidarity among
women would strengthen Sino-Japan relations.

In Taiwan, SGI youth have also been active in local ongo-
ing friendship exchange initiatives with mainland China.

Lotus Sutra Manuscripts
Exhibited in Thailand

On July 31, the “Lotus Sutra Manuscripts—The
World’s Spiritual Heritage” exhibition opened at
the National Library in Bangkok, Thailand. The exhi-
bition displayed rare and ancient manuscripts of the
Lotus Sutra and other important Buddhist texts, trac-
ing the journey of Buddhism eastward along the Silk
Road through Asia. It included a facsimile edition of
some of the oldest Sanskrit Lotus Sutra fragments
ever discovered. Over 30,000 people visited the exhi-
bition in Thailand during its three-city tour of Bangkok,
Chiang Mai and Thonburi. The Ministry of Culture and
SGI-Thailand sponsored the tour. Earlier in the year,
the exhibition was held at the Colombo Public Library
in Sri Lanka.

SGI-Mexico Joins
Interfaith Conference

On March 18, SGI-Mexico General Director Robe-
to Ríos attended the 1st Religious Diversity Con-
ference at the invitation of the sponsors, the National
School of Anthropology and History (ENAH) and the
Contemporary Religious Studies Center, on the ENAH
campus. Participants representing Christianity, other
Buddhist faiths, esoteric contemporary religions and
religions embraced by Afro-Americans also spoke.

For further information on SGI’s activities, please contact:

SGI Office of Public Information
15-3 Samoncho
Shinjuku-ku
Tokyo 160 0017, Japan

Tel: +81 3 5360 9830
Fax: +81 3 5360 9885

SGI website: http://www.sgi.org
Contact: sgipr@sgi.gr.jp

Soka Gakkai (Japan) English website: http://sokagakkai.info
Contact: webmaster@sokagakkai.info