

Toward a New Era of Peace and Disarmament: A People-Centered Approach

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Amid the continued escalation of global challenges, crises that were previously unthinkable are now becoming reality throughout the world.

With the average global temperature at its highest on record in the past four years [\[1\]](#) and the impact of extreme weather conditions being felt everywhere, the problem of climate change is especially alarming. The refugee crisis also remains a deep concern, with the number of individuals forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflict and other reasons now at 68.5 million. [\[2\]](#) Trade disputes are also casting a heavy shadow over society. During the general debate at last year's United Nations General Assembly, many world leaders voiced their concerns over recent trade developments and their impact on the global economy. In addition to these challenges, the UN has been calling for urgent action on issues related to disarmament.

Last May, UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched the UN Disarmament Agenda as a comprehensive report on this issue. He cited the fact that annual global military expenditure had surpassed US\$1.7 trillion, [\[3\]](#) the highest level since the fall of the Berlin Wall, [\[4\]](#) and warned: "When each country pursues its own security without regard for others, we create global insecurity that threatens us all." [\[5\]](#) Noting that total military spending was around eighty times the amount required to meet the humanitarian aid needs of the whole world, he expressed deep concern over this increasing gap in resource allocation and the fact that necessary funds were not being directed toward ending poverty, promoting health and education, combating climate change and other measures to protect the planet. If current trends continue, progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aimed at ensuring that no one is left behind, is at risk of coming to a standstill.

Disarmament, which has been a major focus of the UN since its founding, has been an issue of personal concern and a central theme of the peace proposals I have composed annually for more than thirty-five years. As a member of the generation that experienced firsthand the atrocities of World War II and as heir to the spirit of second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900–58)—who took persistent action based on his commitment to rid the world of misery—I am acutely aware that disarmament is vitally essential to the task of uprooting conflict and violence, which threaten the dignity and lives of so many.

Humanity possesses the power of solidarity, a strength with which we can overcome any adversity. Indeed, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)—an undertaking whose achievement was long considered impossible—was adopted two years ago, through the power of such solidarity, and movement is progressing toward ratification and entry into force.

The darker the night, the closer the dawn: now is the time to accelerate momentum toward disarmament by taking the present crises as an opportunity to create a new history. To this end, I would like to propose three key themes that could serve as a kind of scaffolding in the effort to make disarmament a cornerstone of the world in the twenty-first century: sharing a vision of a peaceful society, promoting a people-centered multilateralism and mainstreaming youth participation.

A shared vision

The first theme I would like to explore is the need for a shared vision of what constitutes a peaceful society.

The omnipresence of weaponry is raising threat levels worldwide. Although the Arms Trade Treaty regulating international trade in conventional arms—from small arms to tanks and missiles—entered into force in 2014, key arms-exporting states have remained outside the Treaty, making it difficult to stop the spread of weapons in conflict regions. In addition, we have seen recurring instances of the use of chemical and other inhumane weapons. The modernization of weapons technology has also brought with it grave issues: there is rising concern over questions of international humanitarian law when military drone strikes have impacted civilians.

Tensions are mounting over nuclear weapons as well. Last October, US President Donald Trump announced that the United States will withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) it had signed with Russia. While disputes over observance of the terms of the Treaty have continued between the two countries, there is a danger of a renewed nuclear arms race involving other nuclear powers as well if the INF does in fact collapse. Such conditions certainly drive home Secretary-General Guterres' remarks in the foreword to the Disarmament Agenda in which he warns: "The tensions of the cold war have returned to a world that has grown more complex." [6]

Why does history seem to be repeating itself in this way in the twenty-first century? Here, I am reminded of the penetrating words of the eminent physicist and philosopher Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (1912–

2007). Weizsäcker's lifelong commitment to world peace was one of the topics of discussion in a dialogue I had with his son, Dr. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker, honorary president of the Club of Rome.

Characterizing the period between 1989, the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, and 1990, the reunification of Germany, Weizsäcker noted that as far as the world as a whole was concerned there had been almost no significant change. [7] For someone who had lived most of his life in a divided Germany and who had repeatedly stressed the historic nature of the sequence of events that led to the end of the Cold War, this was a somewhat surprising statement, reminiscent of Socrates' self-identification as a midwife of truth.

Socrates as midwife

Socrates (ca. 470–399 BCE) described himself as an intellectual midwife who helps others give birth to their own wisdom and determine the truth in their own beliefs. This Socratic method, known as maieutics, introduced in Plato's *Theaetetus*, is employed to stimulate critical thinking and evoke doubts about commonly held ideas through dialogue and posing questions. In *Theaetetus*, Socrates finds similarities between his mother's craft as a midwife and the process of producing truth, which also involves the pain of delivery. Whereas a midwife either induces or relieves the pains of labor to help deliver a child, Socrates assists the soul and helps his interlocutor give birth to an idea.

Reflecting on the political and military situation of the time, he asserted that efforts to overcome “the institution of war” [8] had yet to reach the point where they could be described as a transformation of consciousness. In other words, he believed that even the end of the Cold War had not opened the path toward the core challenge of overcoming war as an institution, the repeated military struggle for hegemony among different groups. He further cautioned: “It never is certain, not even today, whether those new types of weapons constantly being produced could not lead to an outbreak of war, after all.” [9] I strongly feel the weight of his words, which apply to the current situation of global affairs as well.

The issues of peace and disarmament have indeed remained unresolved ever since the Cold War era. Although this remains a severe challenge—indeed an aporia—I would insist that there is still a ray of hope. We can find it in the fact that disarmament talks are no longer conducted solely from the standpoints of international politics and security, but have increasingly included the humanitarian perspective. A succession of treaties prohibiting inhumane weapons such as land mines, cluster bombs and nuclear weapons have been adopted. Riding on this new historical momentum of incorporating the humanitarian approach in shaping international law, all states must begin the process of cooperating and working together to make meaningful headway in the area of disarmament.

To this end, it is useful to examine the idea of “peacelessness as an illness of the soul” (Ger. *Friedlosigkeit als seelische Krankheit*), which Weizsäcker identified as an impediment to progress in disarmament. His likening of issues that hinder peace to an illness afflicting all is premised on the view that no state or individual can consider themselves unconnected—no one is immune. This perspective is underpinned by his view of human beings as indeterminate life-forms, without a fixed nature, [10] who cannot be categorized as either good or evil. [11] As such, he stressed that we should not consider peacelessness as something external to ourselves, the result of stupidity or evil; rather, we should “have the phenomenon of illness clearly in view.” [12] He explained that neither instruction nor condemnation will succeed in overcoming the pathology of peacelessness: “It requires a different kind of approach which one should call healing.” [13] How can we begin to administer the cure unless we recognize this illness within ourselves and learn to accept both ourselves and others as ill? [14]

I believe it was this kind of awareness that led Weizsäcker to take a unique approach at a time when the United Kingdom had just joined the US and Soviet Union in the nuclear arms race. The 1957 Göttingen Manifesto, in whose drafting he played a central role together with other scientists, reflects on Germany’s position in the world: “We do believe that the best way [for West Germany] to promote world peace and to protect itself is to voluntarily do without all kinds of nuclear weapons.” [15] Rather than being directed at the nuclear-weapon states, which were engaged in a heated arms race, these words principally address the stance the authors’ own country should take toward the nuclear issue. The manifesto’s drafters also declare that as scientists, they have a professional responsibility for the potential effects of their work, and as such, they “cannot remain silent on all political questions.” [16]

Incidentally, the Göttingen Manifesto was launched the same year that President Toda issued his declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, grounded in his convictions as a Buddhist. While recognizing the importance of movements opposing nuclear testing that were gaining traction at the time, he asserted that the ways of thinking that justify nuclear weapons and upon which security issues are based must be rooted out in order to bring about a fundamental solution to the problem: “I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons.” [17]

His declaration, issued some six months before he passed away, was made from the standpoint that it is impermissible for anyone to threaten the fundamental right to live shared by the people of the world. Its significance lies in the fact that he returned the issue of nuclear weapons, which had been pedestaled as necessary for the peace and security of states, to the realm of the intrinsic value of life, a question of pressing concern for all people.

In an effort to carry on this spirit, I have continued to maintain that if we are to truly put an end to the era of nuclear weapons we must struggle against the real enemy, which is neither nuclear weapons per se nor the states that possess or develop them, but rather the ways of thinking that permit the existence of such weapons—the readiness to annihilate others when they are perceived to be a threat or a hindrance to the realization of our objectives.

In September 1958, a year after Toda made his declaration, I composed a work titled “A Way out of the Burning House” in which I made reference to the Parable of the Three Carts and the Burning House found in the Lotus Sutra. According to that parable, a wealthy man’s house suddenly catches fire but, seeing as it is very spacious, his children who are inside remain unaware of the danger in which they are placed and show neither surprise nor fear. The man then finds ways to entice them to come out of their own accord, thus enabling all to exit the burning house unharmed. Citing this parable, I stressed that any use of atomic or hydrogen bombs would be an act of suicide for the Earth—the collective self-destruction of humankind—and that, because nuclear weapons pose a profound threat to people of all countries, we must work together to find a way out of the “burning house” that is our world enshrouded by this unprecedented danger. [18] As this parable symbolizes, the most crucial point is that our efforts must aim to save all people from danger.

In this sense, I deeply concur with the views set forth by Secretary-General Guterres in the Disarmament Agenda where he outlines three new perspectives that go beyond the security rhetoric which has long taken center stage in these debates: disarmament to save humanity, disarmament that saves lives and disarmament for future generations. [19]

What then is required if we are to overcome the pathology of peacelessness, at the heart of which lies the willingness to use any means necessary to meet one’s objectives with no thought to the damage incurred, and instead accelerate global momentum toward the kind of disarmament that saves lives? A treatment-focused Buddhist approach may shed some light on how to address this challenge.

Among the Buddhist teachings we find the story of a man named Angulimāla, [20] a contemporary of Shakyamuni, who was widely feared as the murderer of many. One day, Angulimāla spots Shakyamuni and decides to kill him, but though he pursues him with all his might he is unable to catch up with him. Out of frustration, he finally halts and shouts, “Stop!” to which Shakyamuni replies, “Angulimāla, I have stopped. You too should stop.”

The perplexed Angulimāla then asks him why he is being asked to stop when he has already stopped moving. Shakyamuni explains that he was referring to Angulimāla’s acts of killing living things without mercy and the malice behind them. Deeply affected by Shakyamuni’s words, Angulimāla determines to eliminate the malice in his heart and cease his evil-doing. Then and there, he throws down his weapons and asks to become Shakyamuni’s disciple. From that time on, Angulimāla deeply repents his past crimes and engages earnestly in Buddhist practice, seeking expiation.

There is another important turning point in Angulimāla's story. One day, as he is walking around the city begging for alms, he sees a woman suffering from the pains of childbirth. No one is at her side, and he too, feeling utterly helpless, leaves the scene. However, unable to stop thinking of her pain, he approaches Shakyamuni to recount what he has seen. Shakyamuni urges him to go to her immediately and offer the following words: "Sister, since my birth I have not destroyed a living thing knowingly, by that truth may you be well and may the one to be born be well."

Fully aware of his own history of evil deeds, Angulimāla cannot grasp Shakyamuni's true intent. However, Shakyamuni clarifies that Angulimāla has, of his own accord, already succeeded in dispelling the malice lurking behind his actions, deeply repenting and earnestly engaging in religious practice. As if to remind him of this, Shakyamuni again urges him to offer these words to the pregnant woman: "Sister, since I was reborn as one who seeks the noble path, I have no recollection of having consciously taken the life of a living being. By this truth may you be well and may the one to be born be well." Knowing Shakyamuni's profound compassion, Angulimāla rushes to the woman's side and offers her these words. The suffering woman is calmed and safely gives birth.

The Geneva Conventions

The Geneva Conventions comprise a series of international treaties that establish the basis of international humanitarian law. Originating in 1864 as the initiative of social activist Henri Dunant (1828–1910), the First Geneva Convention defined the basic rights of wartime prisoners and provided protection for the wounded and civilians. After the experiences of World War II, four conventions were adopted by a diplomatic conference in Geneva on August 12, 1949: (1) The Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field; (2) The Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea; (3) The Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War; and (4) The Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Additional protocols were adopted in 1977.

These two events indicate the changes Shakyamuni hoped to inspire in Angulimāla. He first sought to direct his attention to the malice, the intent to do harm, that had governed his actions for so long. Then, by illuminating a path by which Angulimāla could save the lives of this mother and child, Shakyamuni sought to direct him toward a personal commitment to become someone who saves others.

Needless to say, this parable depicts the inner transformation of a single individual and is set in a completely different era and cultural milieu from our own. Nevertheless, I believe it still holds relevance to our time because it doesn't limit itself to the cessation of hostile acts but is oriented toward the saving of lives. This, I would like to propose, could serve as a useful basis for a remedy capable of transforming society at its core.

The Geneva Conventions, which were adopted seventy years ago in 1949 and which established vital principles for international humanitarian law, were drafted with intentions

that resonate with Angulimāla's story. The preparatory work for the Conventions, which included the aim of establishing safe zones for not only pregnant women but all women and children as well as the sick and elderly, had been undertaken by an International Red Cross conference in the final years of World War II. At the time of the Conventions' adoption after the war, the states which had participated in the negotiating conference declared:

[The conference's] earnest hope is that, in the future, Governments may never have to apply the Geneva Conventions for the Protection of War Victims;

... Its strongest desire is that the Powers, great and small, may always reach a friendly settlement of their differences through cooperation and understanding between nations. [21]

The drafters were not simply seeking to caution against violations of the Conventions. Their deepest desire was to forestall the conditions of great suffering and loss of life that would require their application. The Conventions—which formed the foundations for subsequent international humanitarian law—manifested this powerful determination precisely because the cruelty and tragedy of war had been acutely felt by the participants in the negotiating sessions.

Unless we consistently revisit the origins of the Geneva Conventions, we will remain mired in the kind of arguments that justify as acceptable any action so long as it does not explicitly violate the letter of the law.

It is especially crucial that we bear this in mind in light of the rapid advances being made in the development of lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) using artificial intelligence (AI), bringing into view the possibility that battles will be waged without any direct human control. Failure to address this issue puts at risk the animating spirit of international humanitarian law as expressed in the Geneva Conventions.

Now more than ever, we must redouble our efforts to overcome the pathology of peacelessness. To that end, it is vital that we cultivate a mutual recognition of this pathology and join together in search of a cure. In other words, we must develop a common vision for a peaceful society, and I believe the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is a forerunner of the kind of international disarmament law that can help frame such a vision.

The TPNW is a form of international law that goes beyond the traditional confines of disarmament or humanitarian protection. Jean Pictet (1914–2002), former director general of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who is credited with coining the term “international humanitarian law,” stressed that it is none other than “a transposition into international law of moral, and more

specifically, of humanitarian concerns.” [22] The TPNW, which crystallizes the resolve shared by hibakusha and many others to never allow a nuclear tragedy to be repeated, precisely falls within this same genealogy of international law.

The TPNW also displays characteristics of international hybrid law, an emerging standard that has begun to garner attention. As a legal approach originally proposed to address climate change in a way that ties it to issues concerning human rights and forced displacement, international hybrid law promotes a change to the ways we have traditionally thought about classifications of legislation. In this context, the TPNW is a legal instrument that recognizes the interconnected nature of the global challenges facing us today, bringing them together under the broadest possible umbrella.

International hybrid law

International hybrid law is a method of approaching issues through an interdisciplinary lens, taking into consideration the interconnected nature of issues which may not be adequately addressed from a single field of law. It has developed since 2007 to respond to climate change from three perspectives: environmental, human rights and refugee or migration law. It has demonstrated the interrelations between these different perspectives and that an environmental issue like climate change cannot be addressed without having considerable direct or subsidiary impacts on human rights or migration. It is a recognition of the intertwined causal relations around climate change and reframes states’ responsibility to respond in a comprehensive manner.

Even security issues that are deeply concerned with matters of state sovereignty must equally take into consideration factors such as the environment, socioeconomic development, the global economy, food security, the health and well-being of current and future generations, human rights and gender equality—this is the directionality that has been clearly enunciated in the TPNW. Nuclear disarmament discourse must be based on the shared awareness that we cannot achieve authentic security unless each of these interconnected concerns is adequately addressed. Otherwise, negotiations will continue to focus on the balance of arms possessed by each side, making it that much harder to move beyond the context of arms control.

In this sense, the TPNW can provide the momentum for breaking through the longstanding impasse in nuclear disarmament. Further, by expanding the network of support for the Treaty, we can make major strides toward the goals of: opening the way for a world of human rights based on mutual respect for the dignity of all; creating a humane world where the happiness and security of ourselves and others is central; and building a world of coexistence based on a shared sense of responsibility for the environment and future generations. This, I believe, can be the TPNW's greatest contribution to history.

People-centered multilateralism

The next theme for advancing the cause of disarmament that I would like to discuss is the need to work together to foster people-centered multilateralism, an idea that was given voice in the outcome document of last August's conference of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) affiliated with the UN's Department of Public Information [\[23\]](#) (DPI/NGO Conference). It is an approach that is focused on protecting those who face the most serious threats and challenges.

While the idea of people-centered multilateralism was originally proposed in the context of promoting the achievement of the SDGs, I feel that it can also contribute significantly to shifting the current of world events toward disarmament. Just as Secretary-General Guterres warned at the launch of the UN Disarmament Agenda, world military spending continues to increase while the resources available to respond to humanitarian crises are inadequate. Every year, on average more than 200 million people are impacted by natural disasters. [\[24\]](#) Similarly, 821 million people were suffering from hunger as of 2017, and nearly 151 million children under the age of five were experiencing stunted growth as a result of malnutrition. [\[25\]](#) Such facts as these compel us to question the meaning and objectives of existing national security policies.

Here, I think it is valuable to cite the views of Hans van Ginkel, former rector of United Nations University, on the nature and objectives of human security. While acknowledging the seeming complexities of security, Van Ginkel notes that if we view the world from the perspective of each individual, it becomes very clear what people experience as threats or sources of insecurity:

Yet it is clear that traditional security has failed to deliver *meaningful* security to a significant proportion of the people of the world at the individual level. . . Still, attitudes and institutions that privilege "*high politics*" above disease, hunger, or illiteracy are embedded in international relations and foreign policy decision-making. Indeed, we have grown so accustomed to this approach that *for many*, "*security*" has become equal to state security. [\[26\]](#) (emphasis in original)

Here, Van Ginkel is pointing to the fact that, compared to questions of national security, the response to threats to the lives and livelihoods of individuals seems to lack urgency. The result is to deprive great numbers of people of any meaningful sense of security.

In another speech, Van Ginkel describes the plight of people living in conditions of extreme poverty:

Indeed, how can one experience the joys and the meaning attached to human life, how can one experience a life of human dignity, when survival from day to day—yes from day to day, sometimes even from hour to hour—is not even ensured? How can one project oneself into the future and build bonds with others if living long enough to see tomorrow constitutes a major challenge? [\[27\]](#)

This brings powerfully home the depth of the suffering experienced by those whose interests have been overlooked under traditional ways of thinking about security. This includes not only people afflicted by poverty or inequality but also those driven from their homes and forced to seek refuge from armed conflict or disaster.

The foundation for people-centered multilateralism must be the effort to build a world in which all people can enjoy a feeling of meaningful security and can together foster hope for the future. This approach, however, does not have to start *ex nihilo*, as it is already the focus of ambitious attention in Africa, an element of the response to the many serious challenges facing the continent. The 2002 establishment of the African Union was a watershed moment in this regard.

In 2012, against a backdrop of efforts to develop more effective cooperative responses to humanitarian crises, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) entered into force. This is a groundbreaking convention with aspects unseen elsewhere, as it seeks to bring together region-wide efforts to protect internally displaced persons.

There are other notable examples of assistance to refugees in African countries. Uganda, for example, has accepted some 1.1 million refugees fleeing conflicts in South Sudan and elsewhere. [\[28\]](#) In addition to being granted freedom of movement and opportunities for employment, refugees are allotted land to cultivate and integrated into the local education and healthcare systems. Many Ugandans have themselves experienced the miseries of armed conflict and forced displacement as refugees, and these memories appear to provide the basis of support for these policies.

A related example from Tanzania stands out. Tanzania currently hosts more than 300,000 refugees from neighboring countries. [\[29\]](#) Cooperating with the local population, some of these refugees are involved in activities to raise saplings in nurseries. This project, initiated in response to deforestation and environmental degradation driven by the need to find firewood, has to date resulted in the planting of some 2 million trees in the refugee camps and surrounding areas. The image of so many green trees being planted in the great earth of Africa recalls powerfully to mind the conviction of my late friend Wangari Maathai (1940–2011): that planting trees can help to heal the land and break the cycle of poverty. “Trees,” she wrote, “are living symbols of peace and hope.” [\[30\]](#) For refugees struggling to start life anew, the trees they have raised are without doubt a symbol of hope, a promise of meaningful security.

For more than five decades, I have been asserting that the twenty-first century will be the century of Africa. This is based on my steadfast belief that those who suffer most have the greatest right to happiness. We can see in Africa the dawn of a new people-centered multilateralism, an approach that holds great promise for the world.

The Global Compact on Refugees

Endorsed in December 2018 by the UN General Assembly, the Global Compact on Refugees establishes a framework for more predictable and equitable international responses to the large-scale movement of refugees. The Global Compact aims to ease pressure on host countries, build refugees' self-reliance, support their inclusion into the national development planning of host countries and foster conditions that will enable them to return voluntarily to their home countries. By investing in services and infrastructure in host communities, the Compact aims to ensure a people-centered approach with direct benefits for both local people and refugees.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at present some 30 percent of the refugees it supports are living in Africa. [31] This past December, the Global Compact on Refugees was adopted by the UN, reflecting recognition of the difficulties countries face in accepting large numbers of refugees without support. International society must come together to strengthen support not only for the refugees themselves but also the countries that have accepted them.

There is a regrettable tendency for people living in countries that are not directly impacted by the refugee crisis or problems of poverty to distance themselves from these challenges and the responsibility to resolve them. The goal of people-centered multilateralism is to get past the differences

in national perspective and find ways of relieving the suffering of people facing grave threats or crises.

The story of Shakyamuni's four encounters describes the initial motivation for the teachings of Buddhism, and it is suggestive of the transformation in consciousness required of us today. Born into a royal family in ancient India, Shakyamuni enjoyed high political status and material abundance. His youthful years were spent in an environment where large numbers of people directly served the royal family, such that he never had to worry about the cold of winter or the heat of summer or that his clothes would ever be soiled by dust, chaff or the dew of night. [32]

One day, however, Shakyamuni stepped outside the palace gates where he saw people suffering the ravages of illness and old age. He also came across the corpse of a person who had died by the side of the road. Deeply shaken by these encounters, he intensely sensed the reality that no one, himself included, could avoid the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death. What pained him beyond these sufferings themselves was the way so many people imagined themselves immune from them and, as a result, despised and distanced themselves from those who suffer. Later, recalling these events, he described this human psychology as follows:

In their foolishness, common mortals—even though they themselves will age and cannot avoid aging—when they see others aging and falling into decline, ponder it, are distressed by it, and feel shame and hate—all without ever thinking of it as their own problem. [33]

His words apply not only to the suffering of aging but also to sickness and death. Our sense that the sufferings of others bear no relation to us, the distaste we might even feel, was admonished by Shakyamuni as the arrogance of the young, the arrogance of the healthy, the arrogance of the living. If we reconsider that arrogance in terms of the connections of the human heart, we can clearly see how the apathy and lack of concern arising from arrogance actually deepens and intensifies the suffering of others.

In any era, there is room for such attitudes to take hold—the fatalism, for example, that sees poverty or other dire conditions to be an individual’s fixed destiny or the result of personal failings, or the kind of negation of morality that denies responsibility for any harm or pain one has inflicted on others. Shakyamuni’s response to such attitudes was his teaching that although the various sufferings of life may be unavoidable, it is possible to transform one’s life through the full development of one’s inner potential. Further, our efforts to empathize with and support those struggling with difficulties help weave networks of mutual encouragement, giving rise to an expanding sense of security and hope.

The focus of Buddhism is not confined to the inevitable sufferings of life, but takes in the reality of people confronting various difficulties within society. Thus, we find within the canon of Mahayana Buddhism (*The Sutra on Upāsaka Precepts*) encouragement to build wells, plant fruit trees and build water channels, help the old, the young and the weak to cross rivers and console those who have lost their land. [34] This urges us to recognize that we are likely at some point to experience the suffering that afflicts other people—that there is no happiness which is our sole possession, no suffering that remains entirely confined to others—and to strive for the welfare of both self and others. In this, the essential spirit of Buddhism is expressed.

Taking as one’s own the pains and sufferings of others is exactly the philosophical wellspring for the SGI’s activities as a faith-based organization (FBO) as we work to address global challenges such as peace and human rights, the environment and humanitarian concerns.

It seems clear to me that there is a deep continuity between the psychology that Shakyamuni observed—the dismissal of aging or illness as irrelevant to oneself and a consequent coldness in our contact with such people—and the phenomenon observable today in which people dismiss the poverty, hunger or conflict suffered by others as irrelevant to their own lives and therefore best ignored.

This brings to mind the following passage from the outcome document of the DPI/NGO Conference I mentioned earlier: “We the Peoples reject the false choice between nationalism and globalism.” [35] Indeed, the pursuit of nationalism—my country first—strengthens the trend toward xenophobia, and the advance of globalism that focuses solely on profit creates a world in which the strong prey on the weak. This is why I concur that the current era demands that all countries work together to put into action a people-centered multilateralist approach, which focuses on protecting those vulnerable to serious threats or challenges.

In the history of efforts to achieve security, we often encounter the idea that if the castle walls are solid enough, we will be safe. This takes the contemporary form of the idea that so long as we live within national borders protected by military strength, our security will be ensured. In fact, however, global issues such as climate change generate harms that don’t respect national borders, necessitating a new approach.

As one example of this, in March of last year a groundbreaking framework, the Escazú Agreement, was adopted by the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to protect environment-related rights. The region has suffered the impacts of tropical cyclones and ocean acidification. In addition to strengthening regional cooperation, the agreement includes people-centered policies such as the protection of environmental activists and mandating the incorporation of a diversity of views in the making of important decisions.

A number of noteworthy global-scale efforts are also being undertaken. Two years ago, the UN Environment Programme initiated the Clean Seas Campaign, which aims to reduce the plastic that is a major source of marine litter. At present, more than fifty countries are participating in the campaign, and their combined coastlines represent more than 60 percent of the world's total. [36] Traditionally, protecting the coastline has meant a focus on defensive military activities, but now this is beginning to take on an entirely new meaning: looking beyond national differences to protect the oceans and collaborate in preserving ecological integrity.

Reviewing history, we can see that both xenophobic nationalism and profit-prioritizing globalization have roots in the imperialism that emerged as a major force in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the destructive impacts of imperialism could be seen throughout the world. In 1903, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), the founding president of the Soka Gakkai, urged an end to the kind of competition for survival in which countries seek their security and prosperity at the expense of the inhabitants of other countries. In its place he urged the adoption of authentically humane modes of competition whose essence he defined as “to engage consciously in collective life” by choosing “to do things for the sake of others, because by benefiting others, we benefit ourselves.” [37] Our world today desperately requires this kind of reorientation.

Through the ongoing accumulation of experiences of mutual assistance and collaboration in responding to humanitarian crises and environmental challenges, we can foster trust and a sense of security to ease the tensions and conflicts that arise from the pathology of peacelessness. From there we should be able to find our way out of the competitive arms race in which we are currently mired.

This September a climate summit will be held at UN Headquarters. This represents an excellent opportunity to advance the cause of people-centered multilateralism on a global scale. I strongly urge that this opportunity be used to identify important areas of collaboration to protect the lives and dignity of our fellow humans living on this planet, to develop more effective policies for combating global warming and to further the transformation of our understanding of security.

Mainstreaming youth participation

The third and last of the disarmament themes I would like to discuss is the mainstreaming of youth participation.

At the UN, “youth” has become a keyword across many fields. At the center of this is the Youth2030 strategy launched last September, which aims for the empowerment of the world's 1.8 billion young people and for younger generations taking the lead on an accelerated engagement with the SDGs. Similar developments can also be seen in the field of human rights, with the UN designating youth as the focus of the fourth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education. I called for such a designation in my proposal last year and hope that all efforts will be made to ensure that this fourth phase is successful.

The importance of youth to disarmament is clear, something which Secretary-General Guterres stressed in the Disarmament Agenda. The fact that he chose the University of Geneva over UN Headquarters or some other diplomatic venue to launch the agenda speaks volumes.

And young people like the students present in this room are the most important force for change in our world. . . I hope you will use your power and your connections to advocate for a peaceful world, free from nuclear weapons, in which weapons are controlled and regulated, and resources are directed towards opportunity and prosperity for all. [38]

He addressed the long-festering issue of nuclear weapons alongside the risks of conflicts sparked by the development of new technologies as grave threats to the future of his young listeners. He singled out cyberattacks as a source of particular concern. Cyberweapons could be used not only to strike military targets but to infiltrate critical infrastructure to paralyze whole societies. They carry the risk of impacting large numbers of civilians and inflicting grave damage.

This kind of arms competition threatens the processes of daily life even when there are no active hostilities. But the issue goes beyond the physical threats to peace and humanitarian concerns: we must also consider the impact on how people live their lives, in particular the impact on youth. Because of the complexity and scale of the issue of arms competition, it inculcates a widespread resignation, the sense that reality is beyond our power to change. This is perhaps its most fundamental and grievous impact.

This was a concern that occupied Weizsäcker and is reflected in his call to overcome the pathology of peacelessness. He anticipates two types of criticism that might be directed at his advocacy for institutionally guaranteed peace. The first is the idea that we are already living in conditions of peace, a peace that is ensured by large-scale weaponry. The other is that there has always been war and that it will occur again in the future because it is part of human nature. Weizsäcker points to the paradox that these two criticisms are often voiced by the same person, who, on the one hand, asserts that we are living in peace but on the other, dismisses peace as a “pious wish.” This contradiction often goes unnoticed by the proponent of these arguments.

According to Weizsäcker, when confronting an issue on which it is difficult to remain focused, people’s psychological reaction is often to drive it out of their consciousness. While this might at times be necessary if we are to maintain mental equilibrium, it can hardly be termed an optimal response when a decision impinging on survival is required. This prevents us from thinking seriously about what is required to create peace, the actions we must take to achieve that end. [39]

Half a century has passed since Weizsäcker made this observation, but even today there are many people in the nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states who, even if not actively supporting deterrence policy, consider it an unavoidable necessity for the maintenance of national security. So long as nuclear war does not actually break out, there would seem to be no problem with thinking that large-scale weaponry maintains peace and averting one’s eyes from the threat posed by nuclear weapons. But, in fact, this pervasive resignation regarding the nuclear issue has a deleterious effect on the foundations of society and on the future of young people.

If security strategies based on nuclear deterrence fail and nuclear war breaks out, it will result in horrific devastation and enormous loss of life for both friend and foe. But the damage done by deterrence theory is not limited to this: even if nuclear weapons are never used people will still be forced to live with the absurd and existential threat they pose, while the protection of defense and military secrets will be prioritized and justifications for curtailing people’s rights and freedoms in the name of national

security will remain. When a pervasive sense of powerlessness is added to the mix, it creates a mood within society that it is acceptable to overlook human rights abuses as a necessary evil as long as they do not have a direct impact on one's own life. If the overpowering negativity arising from the pathology of peacelessness continues to exert its influence, young people will be denied the opportunity to develop a healthy and rich humanity.

In 1260, Nichiren (1222–82), the Japanese Buddhist reformer who developed his understanding of Buddhism based on the Lotus Sutra, which expresses the essence of Shakyamuni's teachings, submitted the treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" to the highest political authority of his day. In it, he identified a widespread sense of resignation as the root cause of the disorder assailing society.

At the time, the Japanese people suffered from repeated disasters and armed conflicts, and many were sunk in apathy and resignation. Society as a whole was permeated by pessimistic philosophies that despaired of the possibility of resolving challenges through one's own efforts, and many people's sole focus was on maintaining a sense of inner tranquility. Such ways of thinking and acting ran entirely contrary to the teachings animating the Lotus Sutra, which call on us to maintain unyielding faith in the potential existing within all people, to work for the full development and flowering of that potential and to build a society in which all people shine in the fullness of their dignity. Nichiren's treatise urges an earnest confrontation with the challenge of how to spark the light of hope in the hearts of people beaten down by repeated disaster, how to mobilize social change to prevent wars and internal conflicts. He thus stresses the need to root out the pathology of resignation that lies hidden in the deepest strata of our social being, infecting us all: "Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil." [\[40\]](#) His treatise calls on us to reject resignation in the face of our deep social ills and instead to muster our inner human capacities so that we may together meet the severe challenges of our age as agents of proactive and contagious change.

As heirs to Nichiren's spiritual heritage, the members of the Soka Gakkai have, since the times of our founding and second presidents Makiguchi and Toda, viewed our mission within society as the construction of a popular solidarity of action dedicated to eliminating misery from Earth.

In his analysis of Shakyamuni's perspective on the nature of suffering, which is seminal to Buddhist thinking, the philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) declared that it had no hint of pessimism. [\[41\]](#) Elsewhere, Jaspers explored means for overcoming the sense of powerlessness. He used the term "boundary situation" (Ger. *Grenzsituation*) to describe the unavoidable realities that individuals confront. He pointed out that the only way to avoid a boundary situation in our present existence is to close our eyes to it, but that to do so would be to shut ourselves off from our inner potential. [\[42\]](#)

Here, I would like to focus on Jaspers' insight that boundary situations are concrete and particular to each of us and that it is this that enables us to find the path to a breakthrough. In other words, each of us carries the unique burdens of our lives in the form of the particularities of our birth or surroundings, and these restrictions serve to narrow the conditions within which we live. When, however, we recognize our own boundary situation and resolve to overcome it, the narrowness of our individual circumstances, which cannot be supplanted for anyone else's, is transformed into the depth with which we live out our original selves.

Jaspers states that “in this boundary situation there is no objective solution for all time; there are only historic solutions for the time being.” [\[43\]](#) It is this that generates the particular weight of each of our actions—actions that only we can take.

Jaspers’ call could be said to describe the approach that propelled me in my own actions, starting during the Cold War era, to open a path for peace and coexistence. In 1974, a time of heightened Cold War tension, I made my first visits to China and the Soviet Union. At the time, I encountered criticism from people who demanded to know why a person of faith would travel to countries whose official ideology rejected religion. For my part, however, it was precisely as a person of faith strongly desiring the realization of peace that I wanted to lay the foundations for friendship and exchange, and it was this that made me feel I could not squander the opportunity presented by the invitations extended to me by the China-Japan Friendship Association and M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, respectively. Needless to say, I was not in possession of any infallible plan or method that could guarantee success. Rather, I earnestly embraced each encounter and dialogue in the uniqueness of that one-time-only circumstance, creating opportunities for educational and cultural exchange one step at a time.

After the end of the Cold War, convinced that no country or people should be isolated, I traveled to Cuba, whose relations with the United States at the time were at a low point, to Colombia, which faced a severe terrorism problem, and elsewhere. Refusing to give in to a sense of powerlessness or resignation, convinced rather that my nongovernmental status as a person of faith opened unique avenues of action, I traveled to each of these places. In the same spirit, I have continued to author annual proposals for peace and disarmament for the last thirty-five years and have taken action to expand the solidarity of civil society.

Now that the longstanding goal of a treaty outlawing nuclear weapons has been attained, I would like to address the young people of the world in light of my own experiences: Each of you is a possessor of life imbued with dignity and limitless possibility; although the realities of international society may be severe and seemingly immovable, there is no need for you to accept or resign yourselves to this reality, now or in the future.

In June last year, the Argentine human rights activist Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and I issued a joint appeal to youth, rooted in our conviction that, indeed, another world is possible.

The lives and dignity of tens of millions of people are violated by war and armed conflict, starvation, social and structural violence. We must open our arms, minds and hearts in solidarity with the most vulnerable in order to rectify this grave situation. [\[44\]](#)

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) offers a model in this regard. It mobilized the passion and rich creativity of the younger generation in support of the adoption of the TPNW, for which it was recognized with the conferral of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017.

The SGI’s own efforts as an international partner of ICAN from its inception have likewise been propelled by youth. In 2007, the SGI launched the People’s Decade for Nuclear Abolition. Japan’s youth membership led the way in gathering 5.12 million signatures calling for a world free from nuclear weapons. In Italy, our youth membership championed cooperation with the Senzatomica campaign, holding awareness-raising exhibitions in more than seventy cities around the country. Student

members in the US have launched Our New Clear Future, a movement to promote dialogue and consensus-building toward the abolition of nuclear weapons by the year 2030, with activities held on university campuses nationwide.

Some of the above activities were included in a report submitted by the SGI last year as a contribution to the UN's Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security mandated by Security Council Resolution 2250, adopted in 2015. This resolution requests the Secretary-General to carry out a study on young people's "positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution" [\[45\]](#) and to make its results available to the Security Council and all member states. The contributions of the SGI youth members were referenced in the Progress Study. The report submitted by the SGI youth outlined the People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition and provided the following analysis: "In fact, involving youth seems to have the ripple effect of reaching those who are not aware of the issue, and further energizing those who are already engaged." [\[46\]](#)

To call forth and mutually strengthen the will for transformation from within people's hearts—it is in this capacity for life-to-life resonance that the essence of youth is found.

As we survey the tasks that lie ahead—achieving the early entry into force of the TPNW and, beyond that, encouraging the participation of nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent states leading toward the elimination of nuclear weapons—it is clear that nothing is more indispensable to arousing and sustaining global public interest and support than the powerful engagement of youth.

It is my firm conviction that it is vibrant mutual inspiration among youth that holds the key to achieving disarmament across the three thematic areas I have explored here.

Friends of the TPNW

Next, I would like to offer five proposals comprising concrete steps to help resolve urgent problems concerning peace and disarmament and to significantly advance efforts to achieve the SDGs.

The first pertains to the early entry into force of the TPNW and expansion of the number of countries participating. Since its adoption in July 2017, the TPNW has been signed by seventy states, or more than one-third of the UN member states; twenty have ratified so far. Fifty states need to ratify for it to enter into force, and the process of ratification has been advancing at a steady pace comparable to that of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention.

Moreover, it should be noted that nearly 80 percent of the world's states, including those yet to become states parties to the TPNW, have put in place security policies conforming to the prohibitions set out in it. According to Norwegian People's Aid, a partner of ICAN, 155 states adhere to the prohibitions against developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, acquiring, possessing, stockpiling, transferring, receiving the transfer of, using, threatening to use, allowing any stationing, installation or deployment of any nuclear weapons and assisting or receiving any assistance to engage in any activity prohibited under the Treaty. [\[47\]](#)

In other words, an overwhelming majority of the world's states, including those that do not adhere to the TPNW at this point, maintain security policies that are not dependent on nuclear weapons,

signaling their acceptance of its core norms. It is vital to achieve the entry into force of the Treaty and expand the scope of its ratification so that these norms on the prohibition of nuclear weapons become truly universal.

At the same time, there are those who argue that the TPNW could deepen divisions within the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) regime, the key international framework for nuclear disarmament. The fact is, however, that the goals of the two Treaties are ultimately the same, and the TPNW in no way undermines the NPT. Rather, we should focus on the fact that the TPNW can breathe new life into the obligation to conduct good faith negotiations toward nuclear disarmament as stipulated in Article VI of the NPT.

Here, I would like to propose the creation of a group of like-minded states to deepen and extend the debate that has developed during the process leading up to the adoption of the TPNW, with an eye toward expanding participation in the Treaty. It could be called Friends of the TPNW, modeled after Friends of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), a group that is working for the entry into force of that treaty. Since being initiated by Japan, Australia and the Netherlands in 2002, Friends of the CTBT has held ministerial meetings every other year. Some seventy countries participated in the ninth such meeting last year. [\[48\]](#)

Annex 2 States

Annex 2 of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which was opened for signature in September 1996, includes a list of forty-four states whose signature and ratification are required for the Treaty to enter into force. Of these, thirty-six have signed and ratified. At present, five Annex 2 States have signed but still not ratified the Treaty: China, Egypt, Iran, Israel and the US, and three others—North Korea, India and Pakistan—have neither signed nor ratified.

It is noteworthy that participants in the ministerial meetings include nuclear-weapon, nuclear-dependent and non-nuclear-weapon states. States have taken part irrespective of their signing or ratification status. A number of governments have ratified the CTBT after attending these ministerial meetings, and there have also been cases of states that have participated in a ministerial meeting after ratification where they have encouraged other Annex 2 States to ratify.

While the United States has yet to ratify, both then Secretary of State John Kerry and former Defense Secretary William Perry have attended these ministerial meetings. Secretary Perry shared crucial lessons concerning nuclear weapons,

including false alarms of Soviet ICBM launches during the 1970s. Building on the experience of Friends of the CTBT, a similar group focused on the TPNW could serve as a forum for sustained dialogue across their different stances regarding the Treaty.

I would strongly urge Japan to join and participate in such a group. I have consistently called for Japan, as the only country to have suffered a nuclear attack in wartime, to support and ratify the TPNW. Having played a vital role in Friends of the CTBT, Japan should cooperate in the formation of a Friends of the TPNW and encourage other nuclear-dependent states to participate in the dialogue, even as it works to overcome the challenges hindering its own accession to the Treaty.

The TPNW requires that the first meeting of states parties be convened within one year of its entry into force. I think that a Friends of the TPNW should be launched prior to this meeting because establishing a place of dialogue open to all states in advance would make a significant contribution to resolving differences over the treaty. Since Japan has declared its desire to serve as a bridge between

the nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states, it makes sense that it should take the initiative in creating a venue for such dialogue.

In the final stages of the negotiations on the TPNW, Japan announced the establishment of a Group of Eminent Persons for Substantive Advancement of Nuclear Disarmament. This group recently issued recommendations based on discussions among experts from nuclear-weapon, nuclear-dependent and non-nuclear-weapon states:

The stalemate over nuclear disarmament is not tenable. . . The international community must move urgently to narrow and ultimately resolve its differences. . . All parties even though they might have different perspectives can work together to reduce nuclear dangers. [49]

Japan should support the work of a Friends of the TPNW, taking to heart this insight offered by the Group of Eminent Persons and collaborating with other countries such as Austria, which has volunteered to host the first meeting of states parties. I hope this group will actively create venues for dialogue among and between nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states in coordination with organizations that contributed to the adoption of the TPNW such as the ICRC, ICAN and Mayors for Peace.

Second People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition

Launched in 2018 by the SGI, following the completion of the first Decade that was initiated in September 2007, the second People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition calls for promotion of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) with the aim of its early entry into force—ratification by fifty states. Working with various international antinuclear weapon movements, this SGI-led campaign focuses on awareness-raising and peace and disarmament education. The SGI global network comprises people from diverse backgrounds and provides a stage on which youth in particular can play an essential role toward the goal of abolishing nuclear weapons.

For more information, see:

<https://peoplesdecade2.wixsite.com/nuclear-abolition/about>

New initiatives have arisen from within civil society to build support for the TPNW. For example, last November, ICAN launched a new campaign, the Cities Appeal. Cities in the US and the UK, both nuclear-weapon states, and in Canada, Australia and Spain, nuclear-dependent states, have already joined the appeal. Through this initiative, ICAN aims to expand solidarity among local governments that support the TPNW while also enabling individual citizens to become proactively engaged. By using social media and the #ICANSave hashtag, people can share their conviction that they have the right to live in a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, Mayors for Peace, a network of 7,701 cities in 163 countries around the world, is calling for all states to join the Treaty. [50]

In my proposal last year, I suggested the creation of a world map showing municipalities supporting the TPNW. I stressed the value of making clearly visible the global popular will that refuses to accept a state of affairs in which the horrors of

a nuclear exchange remain a possibility, as a means of moving the world as a whole in the direction of denuclearization.

The SGI launched a second People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition last year, to build on the work of the first Decade, which concluded in 2017 with the adoption of the TPNW. The second Decade is focused on expanding global support for the Treaty and paving the way toward a world free from nuclear weapons, and we will continue to work with like-minded partners to this end.

A fourth special session of the General Assembly

My second proposal pertains to measures to advance nuclear disarmament.

The year 2020 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the NPT, which preceded the TPNW in enunciating the goal of total nuclear disarmament and establishing obligations to negotiate toward that end. Today, the NPT is considered to be the most universal instrument of international law pertaining to disarmament, with a membership of 191 states. In the initial stages of the negotiations, however, there were concerns that there would be only minimal adherence by non-nuclear-weapon states.

Made keenly aware of the horrific potential of nuclear war by the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the US and the USSR proposed a draft text of a treaty to prevent proliferation beyond the five states possessing nuclear weapons at that time. But it did not include provisions for disarmament. In the ensuing negotiation process, Article VI—a commitment by the nuclear-weapon states to pursue negotiations in good faith toward the goal of complete nuclear disarmament—was included to reflect the positions of non-nuclear-weapon states. In other words, it was because of the strong sense of urgency on the part of the nuclear-weapon states to halt proliferation and the willingness of non-nuclear-weapon states to accommodate them, trusting in their good-faith commitment to nuclear disarmament, that it was possible to initiate the NPT regime.

Half a century later, even after a decrease from the peak levels seen during the Cold War, there are still an estimated 14,465 nuclear weapons in the world today. [\[51\]](#) To date, all reductions in nuclear weapons have been effected through bilateral disarmament agreements between the US and Russia: not a single nuclear warhead has been eliminated as a result of a multilateral agreement. And when viewed in terms of capability rather than numbers, the ongoing modernization of weapon systems actually indicates a trend toward escalation.

Here, I am reminded of the concern expressed by Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker in a lecture delivered in July 1967, shortly before negotiations on the NPT began in earnest. He noted that for all their inadequacies, nuclear disarmament agreements could, when effective, prevent new sources of danger from developing and help states learn to work together. However, “they do not abolish existing arsenals and, taken in isolation, cement the status quo with all its inherent unresolved problems.” [\[52\]](#)

It is true that the NPT prevented the worst-case scenario envisaged by US President John F. Kennedy (1917–63) in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis of a world with as many as twenty-five nuclear-armed states. From the perspective of nuclear disarmament, however, the NPT certainly has tended to cement the status quo and with it all the unresolved issues, just as Weizsäcker had cautioned.

We must keep in mind the fact that it was the reaffirmation of Article VI disarmament commitments that made possible the Treaty’s indefinite extension in 1995, following the end of the Cold War. The final document of the conference where this was decided states, “The undertakings with regard to nuclear disarmament as set out in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons should thus be fulfilled with determination,” [\[53\]](#) clearly indicating that the extension was not unconditional. And indeed, the four Review Conferences that took place between 2000 and 2015 were marked by repeated calls for the fulfillment of these Article VI obligations.

At the 2020 NPT Review Conference, which will mark the fiftieth anniversary of its entry into force, states parties should keep in view the circumstances and motivations that brought the Treaty into being and focus their deliberations on the Article VI commitments as they seek to break the longstanding stalemate.

Here, I would like to highlight the statement made by the Nordic countries at the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference, held in April 2018. Noting the ongoing US-Russia confrontation over the INF Treaty, it states: “We have to join forces to maintain and strengthen the relevance of the [NPT] and refrain from any action which may undermine it.” [\[54\]](#) The statement also urges countries to focus on what unites them and encourages them to direct their attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from any use of nuclear weapons, the shared concern that was affirmed at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. It is significant that, in addition to Finland and Sweden, the signatories include Denmark, Norway and Iceland, nuclear-dependent members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

At the annual NATO Conference on Weapons of Mass Destruction, Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation held last October, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu proposed that a ministerial meeting be held at the beginning of the 2020 NPT Review Conference where a political declaration could be adopted. I fully support this proposal as such a declaration would reaffirm that which unites us through the NPT.

The preamble of the NPT stresses the need to make every effort to avert the danger of a nuclear war and the importance of strengthening trust between states in order to “facilitate the cessation of the manufacture of nuclear weapons, the liquidation of all their existing stockpiles, and the elimination from national arsenals of nuclear weapons and the means of their delivery.” [\[55\]](#) This ministerial meeting should affirm the spirit of the NPT preamble and express deep concern regarding the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use. It should further declare a firm pledge, on the fiftieth anniversary of the NPT’s entry into force, to take real steps to advance the cause of nuclear disarmament.

I would also like to suggest that the final document of the 2020 NPT Review Conference include a recommendation to establish a UN open working group to discuss concrete steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines, marking a clear directional shift toward nuclear disarmament. Nuclear weapons have not been used in war since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and the nuclear-weapon states, NATO member states and others have begun to recognize their declining military utility. Even during the Cold War, it was clear that there could be no winner in a nuclear war. Given this growing awareness of their lack of military utility, what reason can remain to justify nuclear-dependent security doctrines?

Weizsäcker warned that possessing atomic bombs for the purpose of intimidation, even while hoping they would never be used, was akin to dancing on the edge of the abyss. [\[56\]](#) And yet we continue to do this to this day. Keeping nuclear warheads on high-alert status, ready to be launched at any moment, even in the absence of intense hostility, means that we will never be free from the fear of their accidental detonation. The essential fragility and peril of nuclear deterrence forces us to live with this unremitting vulnerability. It is time to make the collective decision to extinguish the flames that engulf “the burning house,” to use the imagery of the Lotus Sutra parable I referred to earlier.

This means eliminating the essential fragility and peril of nuclear deterrence, and to that end, I urge all nuclear-weapon states to prioritize steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their security doctrines.

Removal of nuclear warheads from high-alert status is both extremely urgent and could be implemented with relatively little preparation. Nor is it without precedent: it was done in 1991 by US President George H. W. Bush (1924–2018) and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev as they worked together to bring the Cold War to a conclusion. President Bush ordered all strategic bombers, 450 Minuteman II ICBMs and ten nuclear submarines carrying SLBMs taken off alert. In response, President Gorbachev ordered around 500 ground-launched missiles and six nuclear submarines removed from operational forces. The entire process was effected in a matter of days.

As this precedent makes clear, taking nuclear weapons off high-alert status can be done immediately through a political decision on the part of nuclear-weapon states. Discussions on a phased removal process could take place in a UN open working group on reducing the role of nuclear weapons with the participation of nuclear-dependent and non-nuclear-weapon states.

Today there is less real risk of being subjected to a nuclear attack from another country compared to the Cold War era. The most widespread concern is the threat of nuclear detonation by accident or as a result of human error. A resolution adopted last month by the General Assembly on decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems received support from 175 countries. It would be most significant for the nuclear-weapon states to build on this broad international support by taking the bold measure of removing their nuclear arsenals from high-alert status. Such nuclear risk reduction, or “horizontal disarmament,” combined with efforts to reduce the number of weapons in nuclear arsenals, or “vertical disarmament,” is a vital element in fulfilling Article VI commitments.

Here, I would like to propose that a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD-IV) be held in 2021 as a follow-up to the 2020 NPT Review Conference. It should reconfirm the obligation for multilateral disarmament negotiations and set the basic goals of major reductions in nuclear arsenals and a freeze on their modernization. It should also initiate multilateral disarmament negotiations toward the 2025 NPT Review Conference.

Achieving consensus on disarmament has never been easy. In fact, when the first special session (SSOD-I) was held in 1978, negotiations proved difficult despite the demands of many states. States expressed their various opinions about the draft agreement, using brackets to indicate language that remained in dispute. Consensus could not be reached, nor a resolution adopted, until these were resolved. It then fell upon former Mexican foreign minister Alfonso García Robles (1911–91) to coordinate the various views and break through the impasse. He addressed the conference as follows:

I would suggest to all representatives that we enter into a kind of gentlemen’s agreement here to the effect that paragraphs which, after lengthy and arduous negotiation, are now free from brackets should not be subjected to the introduction of any further brackets unless there are circumstances of exceptional significance which make that absolutely necessary; otherwise, I very much fear that we shall find ourselves in a situation rather like that of the faithful wife of Ulysses, in Greek mythology, who spent the days weaving and the nights unravelling what she had woven. [\[57\]](#)

Due to the efforts of García Robles, who would later receive the Nobel Peace Prize, all disputed text was resolved and brackets removed, and a final document was unanimously adopted. This document is still considered foundational for disarmament deliberations. I hope that, at this fourth special session, all states will follow his example with both earnest commitment and a readiness to compromise to achieve a consensus on disarmament of nuclear and other weapons.

I further hope that sufficient opportunities will be afforded to representatives of civil society to speak at this session. At the first special session, representatives of twenty-five NGOs and six research institutes addressed the General Assembly, the first time that civil society made its voice heard in this way.

For my part, I wrote disarmament proposals on the occasion of the first (1978), second (1982) and third (1988) special sessions. During the second special session, the SGI organized the “Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World” exhibition at UN Headquarters in New York. This exhibition, with its portrayal of the horrors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, played a part in the adoption of the World Disarmament Campaign by the SSOD-II. Since then, the SGI has consistently worked to promote disarmament education. Through activities such as holding symposiums related to a fourth special session, we will continue to amplify the voices of civil society calling for a world free from nuclear weapons.

A ban on lethal autonomous weapons

My third proposal is to establish a legally binding instrument that prohibits all lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS), also known as AI weapons or killer robots. Although such weapon systems have yet to be deployed, they are under development in several countries. There is growing international concern that if any country were to deploy them for military use, the impact would be equivalent to that of the advent of nuclear weapons, radically transforming the global security environment. One of the threats posed by LAWS is that they make it possible to wage combat without direct human intervention, lowering the threshold for military action and risking a dramatic undermining of international humanitarian law.

We also need to consider problems that are unique to LAWS. As pointed out in the UN Disarmament Agenda, various automated weapons capable of functioning without the intervention of an operator have been developed and used over the years—from the unmanned V-1 flying bombs of World War II to anti-personnel landmines, which remain buried in many places around the world. The agenda expresses concern over the fact that LAWS pose an entirely different level of threat: their incorporation of AI may cause them to perform “unanticipated or unexplainable actions.” [\[58\]](#)

In 2014, an informal meeting of experts to discuss questions related to regulating LAWS was held under UN auspices, and this became one of the topics I discussed with the eminent peace scholar Dr. Kevin Clements. Focusing on the dangers of robotic weapons, I highlighted the threat they present from a humanitarian perspective. These weapons, when given a command to attack, automatically go on killing with no hesitation or pangs of conscience. I also reiterated the urgent need to completely outlaw such weapons before any atrocity can take place and to create a framework to ban their development or deployment.

Referring to the international Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, Dr. Clements stressed the importance of strengthening collaboration among a broad range of actors, including the UN, members of the diplomatic community and civil society. [59] At a meeting of governmental experts in April last year, the majority of participating states agreed on the importance of retaining human control over weapon systems, with representatives of twenty-six states calling for a total ban on LAWS. [60] I therefore urge that a conference to negotiate a treaty banning LAWS be promptly convened in order to respond to the warnings voiced in the UN Disarmament Agenda and the concerns raised at such expert meetings.

Last February, the Japanese government announced that it has no intention of developing fully autonomous weapon systems. Last September, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling for EU members to begin negotiating a legally binding instrument prohibiting LAWS. Meanwhile, within global civil society, the membership of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots has expanded to eighty-nine NGOs in fifty-one countries. [61]

SGI Statement

The SGI's public statement was submitted to the UN General Assembly First Committee on disarmament and international security on October 17, 2018. It urges the world's governments to support the early entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and calls on those governments as yet unable to do so to identify specific prohibitions to which they are able to commit. It also emphasizes the importance of disarmament education and characterizes the struggle for disarmament as "a struggle against all forms of injustice and intolerance."

For more information, see:

<https://www.sgi.org/resources/ngo-resources/peace-disarmament/statements/unga-first-committee-sgi-statement-2018.html>

For our part, last October, representatives of the SGI attended the UN General Assembly First Committee, submitting two statements. One was a joint statement issued by Faith Communities Concerned about Nuclear Weapons. Endorsed by fourteen groups and individuals from different faith traditions, including Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, the statement called for the TPNW's early entry into force and for substantive discussions in multilateral forums on a legally binding instrument to prohibit LAWS. [62] The other was the SGI's public statement highlighting the serious military threats posed by LAWS and pointing out that their use "undermines the principles of human autonomy, responsibility and dignity, as well as the right to life." [63]

If LAWS were to be left unregulated or even actually used, the nature of combat would be fundamentally transformed. Fully autonomous weapon systems create not only a physical disconnect—the situation in which those who

direct attacks and those who are targeted are not in the same place, as already seen in the case of drone strikes—but also an ethical disconnect, completely isolating the initiator of the attack from the actual combat operation.

When considering the implications of this ethical disconnect, which in some ways are of even greater concern than the military threats posed by robotic weapon systems, I am reminded of an experience described by Richard von Weizsäcker (1920–2015), the first post-reunification president of Germany. I met with the president, the younger brother of the physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, in June 1991, eight months after the reunification of Germany. In our discussion, we talked about the dangers inherent in the kind of closed, airless societies that both Germany and Japan experienced during the 1930s and 40s.

In his memoirs, he shared the following episode. He first visited the Soviet Union as a West German parliamentarian, in 1973, paying a visit to a memorial cemetery in Leningrad (present-day Saint Petersburg) dedicated to the colossal number of Russians killed while the city was under siege by the German army during World War II. When asked to say a few words at a formal banquet that evening, President Weizsäcker confessed that he had in fact participated in the Siege of Leningrad as a young infantryman, to which the room fell silent. He told his audience that he and his fellow soldiers had been “fully aware of the suffering on all fronts but especially in this city. And now we are here to do our part to make certain that future generations will never have to repeat our experiences.” [64] The silence gradually gave way to a feeling of human warmth.

If fully autonomous weapon systems were to be used in actual combat, would it be possible for former enemies to experience the kind of encounter that President Weizsäcker describes? Would there be any room for deep remorse over one’s actions, a poignant sense of powerlessness in the face of war or a personal resolution to dedicate oneself to peace for the sake of future generations?

I, too, visited that memorial cemetery in Leningrad in September 1974, the year after President Weizsäcker. As I placed flowers at the monument, I offered heartfelt prayers for the repose of the deceased and renewed my vow to work for peace. When I met with Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin (1904–80) on the final day of my stay in the country, I mentioned my visit to the cemetery. The premier responded that he had been in the city at the time of the siege and fell silent as if recalling the horrors of that time. That moment initiated a candid and open-hearted exchange of views between us. I can still picture the earnest look on the premier’s face as he related his conviction that we must first relinquish the very idea of war if we are to tackle the global challenges facing humankind. My own experience helped me grasp how uniquely valuable and important the interactions between President Weizsäcker and the Russian people must have been.

In his memoir, President Weizsäcker vividly describes his experience of war:

Since all the men facing each other across the battle lines worried chiefly about their own survival, we can assume that our foes were not so different from ourselves. . . I remember a silent night march in long lines in which we suddenly sensed, coming in the other direction, an equally silent line. We could barely make each other out, and yet we realized abruptly that the others were Russian. Now the crucial point for both sides was to keep calm, so we felt our way past each other in silence and unscathed. We were supposed to kill each other, yet we would have preferred to embrace each other. [65]

In a world of AI-controlled weapon systems, is there any chance that we would be able to “keep calm” in the face of the complicated feelings that cross the lines of friend and foe, sensing the weight of humanity bearing down upon us, and thus be able to hold off, even for a moment, the decision to attack?

It is certainly important to discuss restrictions on LAWS in light of the imperatives of international humanitarian law—such principles as protecting civilians in times of conflict and prohibiting the use of weapons that cause unnecessary suffering to combatants as well as the obligation to determine whether the employment of a new weapon would violate any existing international law. But above and beyond that, we must not overlook the ethical disconnect inherent in LAWS, which contrasts so sharply

with the kind of human connection described by President Weizsäcker in his recollections. Although different in nature from nuclear weapons, any use of fully autonomous robotic weapons would have irreversible consequences for both the country using them and the country they are used against.

I therefore strongly urge all parties—those states already calling for a ban on LAWS, countries such as Japan that have declared their intention not to develop such weapons and NGOs committed to the Stop Killer Robots campaign—to come together to work for the early adoption of a legally binding instrument comprehensively prohibiting the development and use of these systems.

Strengthening UN initiatives on water resources management

Next, as my fourth proposal, I would like to offer some thoughts and perspectives regarding the UN's water-related SDGs. More specifically, I would like to make a number of proposals on the management of water resources.

The SDGs call for achieving “universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.” [66] It is estimated that around 2.1 billion people lack access to clean and safe water [67] and that roughly 40 percent of people worldwide are affected by water scarcity. [68] Even as demand for water continues to increase due to factors such as population growth, economic development and changing consumption patterns, water quality is deteriorating as a result of the introduction of untreated wastewater in rivers in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Also, the water cycle is being disrupted by climate change, with dry regions becoming even drier and wet regions experiencing even more rain. [69]

In response to this crisis, the UN General Assembly launched the Water Action Decade (the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018–2028) last March. At the launch at UN Headquarters, General Assembly Vice President Mahmoud Saikal noted the unequal impacts of water scarcity:

No one, working in this building, will go thirsty. None of us will wonder whether our next sip of water will make us ill. None of us will risk our dignity, or our safety, to meet our basic human needs. This, simply, is our reality. But, for too many people around the world, it is a different story. [70]

More than 600 million people worldwide are said to be taking water from unprotected wells and from untreated surface water such as lakes, ponds, rivers and streams because they do not have access to safe sources of water in their immediate environment. [71] Large numbers of women and children are compelled to travel long distances to collect water, often having to endure long hours carrying heavy loads. Many people develop diseases as a result of consuming unhygienic water, leading to the deaths of great numbers of children each year. In this regard, providing access to safe water goes beyond issues such as poverty and income disparity. Ensuring that all people can live in dignity—no longer having to fear for their health or worry about the unnecessary burden of fetching their own water—is a core concern in the pursuit of basic human rights. It is often the case that people living in developed countries only come to realize how much they take adequate supplies of clean and safe drinking water for granted in times of natural disaster.

The right of access to clean and safe water has been stipulated in international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Then, in 2010, the UN General Assembly recognized the “right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights,” [72] and this right has also been affirmed by resolutions adopted by the UN Human Rights Council.

In view of the above, I would like to suggest the creation of the post of special representative for water resources within the UN to coordinate global efforts to ensure access to safe water—a key goal of the SDGs and the basis for protecting the life, livelihood and dignity of all.

Although there is no existing UN entity dedicated exclusively to water issues, there are currently more than thirty international organizations involved in water and sanitation programs under the coordination of UN-Water. A special representative for water resources appointed by the Secretary-General would work together with the agencies coordinated by UN-Water to encourage member states to build partnerships for technology transfer through, for example, the sharing of best practices.

One approach would be for the special representative for water resources to bring together regular UN meetings on the Water Action Decade. The High-Level Panel on Water convened by the UN and the World Bank Group comprising eleven heads of state and government likewise recommended that this kind of conference be held either annually or biannually. [73] I believe it is essential that an approach grounded in the kind of people-centered multilateralism I discussed earlier be applied to water-related issues through, for example, the holding of such regular meetings.

Referring to his experience as prime minister of Portugal when it reached an agreement with Spain on a water resources convention and other examples of water cooperation like those between India and Pakistan and Bolivia and Peru, Secretary-General Guterres has stated that “water has historically proven to be a catalyst for cooperation not for conflict.” [74] It is estimated that 286 transboundary river and lake basins and 592 transboundary aquifers exist today, [75] and approximately one-third of the former are covered by cooperative management frameworks between or among the concerned states. [76] Similar international water agreements could be negotiated in the remaining areas with the support of a special representative for water resources and the agencies coordinated by UN-Water to ensure sustainable water supply and improvement in water quality in transboundary river and lake basins.

In view of rising concerns about the future adequacy of fresh water supplies around the world, I urge Japan and other nations with abundant know-how and advanced technologies regarding water reuse and desalination to proactively contribute solutions. Japan has supported international efforts to tackle water and sanitation-related problems, in terms of both physical and intellectual infrastructure, by building facilities and training technicians, and has established itself as a key partner to many countries.

In addition, Japan has for many years been engaging in exchanging technology and information on water resources with South Korea and China, holding meetings with Korea since 1978 and with China since 1985. Last year, the three countries held the Third Ministerial Meeting on Water Resources, in which they each shared best practices and reaffirmed their commitment to promoting further exchange and cooperation toward achieving the water-related SDGs. I would like to see Japan apply

its experience to the resolution of water-related problems in Northeast Asia and to regional confidence building. Also, I hope that China, Japan and Korea will work together to offer support to countries in the Middle East and Africa where there is growing demand for water reuse and desalination.

The Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VII) is slated to take place in Yokohama this August. At TICAD V in 2013, the Japanese government announced that it would continue to provide support for ensuring safe drinking water for approximately 10 million people as well as training 1,750 engineers. [77] At this year's conference, I hope Japan will follow up and strengthen its commitment on these initiatives and also draw up an overarching plan for water reuse and desalination projects in countries in Africa.

Although Japan is a country blessed with plentiful water resources, it is also highly exposed to a variety of natural disasters, ranking fifth among the most exposed countries worldwide, according to the WorldRiskReport 2018. [78] The need for safe water is felt most intensely in the wake of natural disasters and this alone should motivate Japan to exercise people-centered multilateral leadership in helping nations currently struggling to improve their citizens' access to safe water.

As a member of civil society, the SGI will support the Water Action Decade by holding an exhibition focusing on the everyday life and struggles of women impacted by water-related issues. It is estimated that women and girls in low-income countries spend approximately 40 billion hours collecting water every year. [79] These women and children are often exposed to violence along the arduous daily journey to collect water, and their health is harmed by the strain of the heavy load. When provided with access to safe water, more women can devote their time to other forms of work and more girls can attend school—leading to their overall empowerment. Through this exhibition, the SGI will look to cast light on the conditions of such women and girls and their efforts to overcome various water-related issues.

UN Women, an organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, has profiled such experiences. One is that of a woman living in Tajikistan and her struggles to bring clean water to her village. After being widowed, she was left to raise her five children on her own, each day having to walk for many hours to collect water from the river. Long deprived of clean water, her fellow villagers had very little hope that things would ever change, but she and other women formed a group to take matters into their own hands. With the support of several NGOs and with the help of their fellow villagers, they were able to assemble 14 kilometers of water pipes and successfully bring clean water to the village, providing more than 3,000 people with safe drinking water. Speaking about their achievements, she says: “This was a small victory for us. We want to do more to improve our lives. We have plans to create a mini-farm and build small greenhouses. We are confident that we will succeed.” [80]

Nothing embodies progress toward achievement of the SDGs more powerfully than the smiles of hope and joy on the faces of these women.

At the launch of the Water Action Decade at UN Headquarters, thirteen-year-old Autumn Peltier spoke as a representative of civil society. “We all have a right to this water as we need it—not just rich people, all people,” the indigenous water activist from Canada told leaders. “No child should grow up not

knowing what clean water is or never know what running water is.” [81] In closing, she issued this call: “Now is the time to warrior up and empower each other to stand for our planet.” [82]

Through this exhibition, the SGI will seek to inspire greater action within civil society on the issue of access to safe water in order to protect humankind and the planet.

Universities: Central hubs for promoting the SDGs

My fifth and final proposal is to strengthen momentum toward making the world’s universities hubs for the realization of the SDGs. Launched in 2010, the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI), an initiative that aligns institutions of higher education with the UN in supporting and contributing to the realization of its global agenda, currently links more than 1,300 institutions in approximately 140 countries. [83] In October last year, UNAI announced that it had designated seventeen universities as SDG Hubs modeling innovative engagement related to each of the seventeen SDGs.

One of them, the University of Pretoria in South Africa, has been chosen as the hub for Goal 2: Zero hunger. Within the university, there are research centers dedicated to tackling the food crisis and improving nutrition. It also collaborates with institutions across the continent and around the globe and for several years has sponsored conferences on international food security. It has also prioritized the integration of the SDGs into its curricula across all programs.

The Ahfad University for Women in Sudan has been chosen as the hub for Goal 5: Gender equality. Aiming to equip women with the skills needed to actively contribute to their communities and countries, the university offers four master’s programs specializing in gender-related fields including gender and development and gender and peace studies.

De Montfort University in the UK has been designated as the hub for Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions. As a leader in the UN campaign to promote the well-being of refugees and migrants, facilitating their coexistence with local populations, it is committed to providing educational opportunities for refugee youth. Advocating for the dignity of migrants and refugees, the university is also promoting an oral history project to archive refugee stories to be shared with the public.

Among Japanese universities, the Nagaoka University of Technology has been chosen as the hub for Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure. During their three-year term as SDG Hubs, the seventeen universities will take the lead in propelling efforts toward the realization of the SDGs in their respective commitment areas.

In the words of Ramu Damodaran, chief of UNAI, “Scholarship does good. Students deliver goods. Nowhere has this combination worked more effectively, indeed dramatically, than in university engagement with the SDGs.” [84] I could not agree more—the potential residing within universities is truly limitless. Universities can serve as havens of hope and security in society and can make crucial contributions to the well-being of humanity as a whole. Based on this belief, I would like to call for the expansion of the network of universities committed to supporting the SDGs, building on the work of these seventeen hub universities.

One vehicle for realizing this might be for universities around the world, starting with the members of UNAI, to select the SDGs that are the particular focus of their efforts and actively work for their achievement. Aiming to promote cooperation among institutions that are working on the same goals and to broaden solidarity among students across the globe, I would like to propose the holding of a world conference of universities in support of the SDGs sometime next year, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the UN.

The UN's Youth2030 strategy calls on UN entities to amplify and reinforce the voices of young people at major summits such as the seventy-fifth anniversary events and to establish regular engagement between young people and the Secretary-General. In this context, a world conference of universities in support of the SDGs would bring together educators and students from around the globe, accelerating momentum toward their achievement. It could also provide the opportunity for a dialogue forum with the Secretary-General.

In my capacity as founder of Soka University, I have worked to promote academic exchanges and have conducted dialogues on the social mission of universities with the heads of academic institutions around the world.

Soka University has a long history of ties with the University of Buenos Aires, one the seventeen SDG Hubs. During my conversations with the university's long-serving rector, Oscar J. Shuberoff (1944–2010), I shared my belief that exchanges between universities would undoubtedly give birth to the creation of new wisdom and value. The process of dialogue and the cultivation of mutual understanding never fail to generate fresh energy and a more ideal path toward a better future for the world. He agreed and commented that the world's universities face common challenges and need to work together to find solutions. I was moved by his conviction that it is the duty of educators to reach out to those in greatest need.

As a UNAI member, Soka University is engaged in activities with a particular focus on five of the initiative's ten basic principles: encouraging global citizenship; advancing peace and conflict resolution; addressing issues of poverty; promoting sustainability; and promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding, and the "unlearning" of intolerance. [\[85\]](#)

Soka University joined UNHCR's Refugee Higher Education Program when the SDGs were launched in 2016 and has accepted asylum seekers as students under this agreement. It also has ongoing exchange agreements with the UN Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization. In terms of its curriculum, Soka University launched courses on education for global citizenship last year focusing on such SDG-related fields as peace, the environment, development and human rights. In addition, it is actively taking part in a number of research initiatives relating to the SDGs, including that of building societies based on regenerative sustainability.

Soka University of America (SUA) has also committed resources to programs focusing on global challenges. Part of the unique curriculum it offers is a Learning Cluster, an intensive research seminar where students form teams and explore specific themes of their own choosing, always with a field learning component. The university provides students with specific learning opportunities, including UN Study Tours. Since 2014, SUA has also been organizing an annual conference on building a culture of peace and nonviolence in observance of the International Day of Non-Violence.

In my 2006 proposal on UN reform, I called on the world's universities and institutions of higher learning to actively support the work of the UN as an integral part of their social mission. I described a future scenario in which individual students and universities connect with one another to form a web of networks supporting the UN that would eventually crisscross the entire globe. Indeed, just such a network has developed through the 1,300 universities participating in UNAI. The recent launch of the SDG Hubs provides a perfect opportunity to invite more universities into this network, allowing participants to share experiences and accumulated learning while coordinating their activities to build a global society in which no one is left behind.

The SGI will continue promoting the achievement of the SDGs through education for global citizenship, one of our core initiatives in support of the UN. We have organized exhibitions addressing various global issues, many of which have been hosted by universities around the world, including the University of Bergen in Norway, a UNAI SDG Hub. It has always been my conviction that universities are optimal venues for bringing together the wisdom to create solutions and find new approaches to problems. Young people, students in particular, are the primary agents who can unleash the kind of transformative energy our world requires.

Last June, when the joint appeal to youth which I wrote with Dr. Pérez Esquivel was launched at a press conference in Rome, the text was presented to two student representatives. A gathering to discuss the appeal was held the following day in the city's student quarter. The appeal stresses the importance of the empowerment of young people through education for global citizenship and proposes the following three focus areas for such efforts:

1. Promoting a common awareness of a universal sense of history in order to prevent the repetition of tragedies.
2. Promoting the understanding that Earth is our common home, where no one is to be excluded on the basis of difference.
3. Promoting the humane orientation of politics and economics, cultivating the wisdom needed to achieve a sustainable future. [\[86\]](#)

Based on these three commitments, the SGI is determined to strengthen our collaboration with academic institutions around the world and consistently advance education for global citizenship through activities such as the holding of exhibitions to raise awareness about the SDGs.

The gathering of students in Rome happened to fall on June 6, the birth anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. His educational philosophy provides the inspiration for the activities of the Soka Gakkai and the SGI. A central aspect of his thinking is expressed in the following statement:

Educational efforts built on a clear understanding and with a defined sense of purpose have the power to overcome the contradictions and doubts that plague humankind, and to bring about an enduring victory for humanity. [\[87\]](#)

Based on this unwavering confidence in the limitless potential of education and through our commitment to the empowerment of youth, the SGI will strive to build a sustainable and peaceful global society where all can manifest their inherent dignity.

Notes

- [1] See WMO, “WMO Climate Statement.”
- [2] See UNHCR, “Global Trends,” 2.
- [3] See Guterres, “Securing Our Common Future,” 4.
- [4] *Ibid.*, ix.
- [5] Guterres, “Remarks at the University of Geneva.”
- [6] Guterres, “Securing Our Common Future,” vii.
- [7] (trans. from) Weizsäcker, *Bedingungen der Freiheit*, 10.
- [8] Weizsäcker, *Major Texts on Politics and Peace Research*, 112.
- [9] Weizsäcker, *Pioneer of Physics*, 76.
- [10] (trans. from) Weizsäcker, *Der ungesicherte Friede*, 46.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 49.
- [12] *Ibid.*, 47.
- [13] *Ibid.*, 36.
- [14] *Ibid.*, 51.
- [15] University of Göttingen, “The Manifesto.”
- [16] *Ibid.*
- [17] Toda, “Declaration.”
- [18] See Ikeda, “*Kataku*.”
- [19] See Guterres, “Securing Our Common Future,” x–xi.
- [20] See Ñāṇamoli, *The Middle Length Discourses*, 710–12, 714.
- [21] ICRC, “Resolutions of the Diplomatic Conference.”
- [22] Pictet, *Development and Principles*, 1.
- [23] As of January 1, 2019, renamed Department of Global Communications.
- [24] See IFRC, “World Disasters Report,” 168.
- [25] See FAO et al., “The State of Food Security,” v.
- [26] Van Ginkel, “Knowing Risk,” 5.
- [27] Van Ginkel, “Enhancement of Human Dignity,” 36.
- [28] See UNHCR, “Global Focus: Uganda.”
- [29] See UNHCR, “Saplings Take Root.”
- [30] Maathai, *Unbowed*, 293.
- [31] See UNHCR, “Global Trends,” 13.
- [32] See Woodward, trans., *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 128.
- [33] (trans. from) Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha 1*, 156.
- [34] See Shih, trans., *The Sutra on Upāsaka Precepts*, 133–34.
- [35] UN, “People-Centered Multilateralism.”
- [36] See UNEP, “World Overwhelmingly Commits.”
- [37] (trans. from) Makiguchi, *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu*, 2:399.
- [38] Guterres, “Remarks at the University of Geneva.”
- [39] (trans. from) Weizsäcker, *Der ungesicherte Friede*, 34–35.
- [40] Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1:15.
- [41] See Jaspers, *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus*, 28.
- [42] See Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 179.
- [43] *Ibid.*, 211.
- [44] Ikeda and Esquivel, “To the Youth of the World.”
- [45] UN Security Council, “Resolution 2250.”

- [46] SGI, “The Role of Youth in Nuclear Disarmament,” 17.
- [47] See Norwegian People’s Aid, “Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor 2018,” 6.
- [48] See MOFA, “Ninth Ministerial Meeting.”
- [49] MOFA, “Building Bridges to Effective Nuclear Disarmament,” 1.
- [50] See Mayors for Peace, “Member Cities.”
- [51] See SIPRI, “Modernization of Nuclear Weapons Continues.”
- [52] Weizsäcker, *Major Texts on Politics and Peace Research*, 59.
- [53] UNODA, “1995 Review and Extension Conference,” 9.
- [54] Embassy of Sweden, “Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference.”
- [55] UN General Assembly, “Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,” 5.
- [56] Weizsäcker, *Major Texts on Politics and Peace Research*, 60–61.
- [57] UN General Assembly, “Verbatim Record of the 14th Meeting,” 39–40.
- [58] Guterres, “Securing Our Common Future,” 55.
- [59] Ikeda and Clements, *Toward a Century of Peace*, 141.
- [60] See Amnesty International, “UN: Decisive Action Needed.”
- [61] See Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, “Membership.”
- [62] Faith Communities Concerned about Nuclear Weapons, “Public Statement.”
- [63] SGI, “Statement to 2018 UN General Assembly.”
- [64] Weizsäcker, *From Weimar to the Wall*, 190–91.
- [65] *Ibid.*, 65.
- [66] UN General Assembly, “Transforming Our World,” 18.
- [67] See WHO and UNICEF, “Progress on Drinking Water,” 24.
- [68] See WHO, “10 Facts on Climate Change and Health.”
- [69] See UNESCO, “Nature-Based Solutions for Water,” 3.
- [70] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, “Statement Delivered by H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Saikal.”
- [71] See WHO, “Drinking-water.”
- [72] UN General Assembly, “The Human Right to Water and Sanitation,” 2.
- [73] See High-Level Panel on Water, “Making Every Drop Count,” 31.
- [74] Guterres, “Remarks at Launch of International Decade for Action.”
- [75] See UN, “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018,” 20.
- [76] See UN-Water, “Transboundary Waters,” 2.
- [77] See MOFA, “Japan’s Official Development Assistance White Paper 2013,” 49.
- [78] See “WorldRiskReport 2018,” 48.
- [79] See Guterres, “Remarks at Launch of International Decade for Action.”
- [80] UN Women, “From Where I Stand.”
- [81] CBC News, “Canadian Teen Tells UN ‘Warrior Up’ to Protect Water.”
- [82] IWDA, “Indigenous Canadians Speak for Water on World Water Day 2018.”
- [83] See UNAI, “Connecting Universities and Colleges.”
- [84] IDN-InDepthNews, “UN Announces ‘SDG Hubs’ Connecting Universities with 2030 Global Agenda.”
- [85] See UNAI, “Principles.”
- [86] Ikeda and Esquivel, “To the Youth of the World.”
- [87] (trans. from) Makiguchi, *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu*, 8:365.

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