

# SGI USA MEMMO

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DATE

**July 10, 2003**

MEMO NO.

**ORG-022**

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**DISTRIBUTE TO:** All Zone and Region Leaders and Zone Office Managers

**TO:** All Leaders

**FROM:** SGI-USA Organization Department

**SUBJECT:** Islamic Representatives Protest Nichiren Shoshu  
New York Temple Priest

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This is to inform you of recent events in New York.

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At noon on Wednesday, July 9, 2003, Mr. Ghazi Khankan, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) New York, led a delegation of representatives from several local Islamic centers as they held a press conference in front of the Nichiren Shoshu Myosetsu-ji Temple in Flushing, N.Y.

The purpose of the event — which was covered by several news outlets — was to call on the temple's chief priest, Jisei Nagasaka, to apologize to the Muslim community for inflammatory anti-Islamic remarks he made in speeches over the past year and published on the temple's official web site and repudiate those remarks.

Mr. Khankan noted that these statements — which he characterized as “uncalled for in the diverse and pluralistic society in which we must both live in harmony” — were finally removed from the web site after several complaints, but he pointed out that “You still have not repudiated your disparaging comments nor apologized to all Muslims.”

In his remarks, Mr. Khankan cited comments from New York State Assemblyman Roger Green and Queens Borough President, Helen Marshall who joined him in condemning the priest's offensive remarks, which included such pronouncements as “Islam is a false religion and only Nichiren Shoshu is a true religion,” and other comments defaming Allah and the prophet Mohammed.

In a statement issued today, the leaders of the Northeastern Zone of SGI-USA applauded the efforts of CAIR to condemn these “inflammatory and irresponsible statements,” noting that “these times of strife call for building bridges — not walls — among the diverse peoples, cultures and religions of our city.”

They also pointed out that Article 7 of the SGI Charter states that “SGI shall, based on the Buddhist spirit of tolerance, respect other religions, engage in dialogue and work together with them toward the resolution of fundamental issues concerning humanity.”

— prepared by Bill Aiken, SGI-USA Office of Public Affairs

*(Please see page 2 of this memo for the full text of the Northeastern Zone statement.)*

## **Statement of SGI-USA Northeastern Zone Leaders in Response to Recent Actions by the Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)–New York.**

### Build bridges, not walls

We have learned of recent efforts by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)–NY in response to offensive, anti-Islamic remarks made by Jisei Nagasaka, chief priest of the Nichiren Shoshu Myoetsu-ji Temple in Flushing, NY, and — until recently — posted to the temple’s official web site. As leaders of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI)–USA in the New York area, we view Rev. Nagasaka’s actions with great concern, and applaud CAIR–NY’s call for an apology and repudiation of these inflammatory and irresponsible statements.

We are particularly concerned because, like Nichiren Shoshu, the SGI is rooted in the Nichiren School of Mahayana Buddhism. However, like most mainstream Buddhists, we reject the intolerant view toward other religions expressed in Mr. Nagasaka’s statements. Rather, our viewpoint is expressed in Article 7 of the SGI Charter, which states that: “SGI shall, based on the Buddhist spirit of tolerance, respect other religions, engage in dialogue and work together with them toward the resolution of fundamental issues concerning humanity.”

In remarks published in the immediate aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda rejected religious stereotyping, saying “I pray that people will not jump to the conclusion that all Arabs are dangerous and that Islam encourages violence” (*Seikyo Shimbun*, 9/16/2001). More recently, Mr. Ikeda has co-authored *Global Civilization: A Buddhist–Islamic Dialogue* with noted Muslim peace scholar Majid Tehranian (published by British Academic Press).

Here in the Tri-state area, the SGI has been active in creating and supporting efforts at interfaith understanding.

These times of strife call for building bridges — not walls — among the diverse peoples, cultures and religions of our city. In keeping with this, we hope that the leadership of Nichiren Shoshu Temple will be prompted to arrive at a greater respect for the thousands of New Yorkers and millions of fellow Americans who embrace the tenets of Islam.

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