

GLOBAL FRIENDSHIPS FOR PEACE
Thai-Cambodian New Year's Festival
By Nipant Thongsrisook, Arleta, California

MORE than 600 Thai and Cambodian members and their friends—from elementary-aged to senior citizens—gathered April 4 at the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium in Santa Monica, California, to celebrate their traditional New Year's Day (April 13). The event was the first Thai-Cambodian joint general meeting for the greater Los Angeles area. About sixty members from Las Vegas also participated.

In his message to the participants, SGI President Ikeda quoted Nichiren Daishonin: "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 788). He went on to say: "A society that values culture is a society that values human happiness. Happiness lies in the pursuit of beauty, benefit and virtue. The power of culture may be hard to detect at times, but it is a fundamental force, since it transforms the human heart. Political and economic developments may be flashier but culture and education are the forces that shape any age."

He also said: "I ask that each of you chant daimoku to make each day victorious. Please have confidence that your steady efforts will lead you on a brilliant course toward eternal happiness and triumph."

The celebration featured experiences by Molly Rangsiyanondha and Vuthi Feng, an inspiring original song by a chorus, a skit and various native dances including enchanting performances by children.

The gathering was a dream come true since the Thai members held an outdoors potluck meeting five years previously and talked about staging a general meeting at the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium. In the beginning of the preparations that took place over an eight-month period for the joint New Year's celebration—from planning to rehearsals—a Cambodian member suggested having a joint exchange meeting.

Professional dance teachers who are friends of the SGI committed many weekends helping the performers, most of whom had never danced before.