

## The University Is a Driving Force for Human Rights

*SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at the 9th Soka Glory Gathering for students of Soka University and Soka Women's Junior College, held at the Soka University Auditorium in Hachioji, Tokyo, Nov. 2, 1996.*

Full marks for your wonderful performances today! I can imagine that some of your professors may have been musing as they watched you: "I only wish they'd apply themselves to their studies with the same dedication, passion and wisdom!"

Please make every effort to learn as much as you can and to continually cultivate and polish yourselves. Society is now turning in the direction where people will no longer be assessed by academic and intellectual abilities alone but by their humanistic qualities, such as emotional stability and character. I am fully confident that you will be the victors in this new age of humanism.

Today, I received the great honor of receiving an honorary doctorate in international education from Russia's Far Eastern State University in Vladivostok. This distinguished institute of higher learning is a brilliant beacon of intellect lighting the way to the 21st century, not only for the Russian republic but for the countries of Asia and the Pacific Rim as well.

I express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to Rector Vladimir I. Kurilov and his wife, Konkordia A. Kurilova. While I should have been the one to do the traveling, Rector and Mrs. Kurilov, along with Yevgeny Krasnov, the chairman of the Committee on Science and Higher Education in the Primorsky Territory Administration, graciously undertook the long journey to present the degree here in Japan. Again, my heartfelt appreciation to them. *Spasibo* (thank you)!

*This brings to 40 the number of honorary doctorates and honorary professorships that the SGI president has received.*

I am reminded of my journey to London to meet with the British historian Arnold Toynbee, with whom I spent literally dozens of hours speaking at his residence. Dr. Toynbee wrote me, indicating his strong interest in having a discussion with — as he so kindly put it — "a youthful philosopher and practitioner of Buddhism," and suggested that we meet. Dr. Toynbee at the time had a heart condition that prevented him from traveling overseas, so without hesitation I went to see him.

At the end of one of our talks, Dr. Toynbee told me that he regarded recognition from educational institutions as the highest of honors. He very thoughtfully and encouragingly added that he had received many honorary doctorates from universities throughout the world, and that, if his judgment were not mistaken, he expected I would receive still more.

### **A Shared Commitment To Creating Value**

One of the aims of the Far Eastern State University is to "promote values ensuring world peace and the development of international cooperation." This closely parallels the spirit of the first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, whose concept of value-creating education forms the foundation of Soka University.

In October 1903, just one year before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), Mr. Makiguchi published the great opus of his youth, *The Geography of Human Life*. In it, he roundly condemns the foolish tendency of people to become divided over trivial

and insignificant issues. He also discussed the physical and human geography of Vladivostok, which is home to the Far Eastern State University.

With profound insight, Mr. Makiguchi discerned that the people of Russia — whom he characterized as “persevering,” “composed” and “strong” — looked to this port-city at the edge of Asia with tremendous hope and soaring expectation.

I therefore dedicate this honorary degree from the Far Eastern State University to Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, in commemoration of the 125th anniversary of his birth. At the same time, I hope that all of you, my young friends, will emulate the people of Russia by developing the qualities of perseverance, composure and strength.

Vladivostok, known as the “San Francisco of Russia” because of its bustling port and cosmopolitan atmosphere, is a lovely city. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization has identified it as an international center for trade, science and tourism and one of the world’s 10 most promising cities for future development and growth. The Far Eastern State University has been a driving force behind the city’s advance.

A university is a powerhouse for change. When its students resolutely struggle to realize its founding spirit, have a sound vision, are willing to debate ideas, and put forth great efforts to advance, the university can be a force for positively reforming all spheres of society. That is why, in a sense, the quality of a society in large measure depends on the vitality and quality of its institutions of higher learning.

It gives me great joy to join hands with the Far Eastern State University and embark together on a great voyage of hope toward human peace and harmony. Once again, my gratitude.

Rector Kurilov of the Far Eastern State University is a legal scholar of global stature. He is an expert on human rights issues and is a leading authority on labor law.

Incidentally, starting this month, I will begin a dialogue on law and legal rights in Japan with some young lawyers who are Soka University graduates. I hope that our discussions may in some way help honest, hardworking people protect and safeguard their livelihoods and their rights.

### **The Voice of Justice Cannot Be Silenced**

During the 15th through the 17th centuries, European society was ravaged by witch hunts. In this, one of history’s cruelest episodes, the lives of countless people were ruined because of outrageous charges brought against them based on anonymous rumors and false accusations. People were unjustly arrested, tortured into confessing to acts they did not commit, forced to give false testimony and subjected to sham trials.

The number victimized in this way is truly staggering. Some estimate that as many as several hundred thousand people were executed during the witch hunts; others put the figure at several million. Moreover, the assets of those condemned to death in this way were seized by the Church, enriching the members of the clergy.

The power of authority has a devilish nature, and so does any religion that serves corrupt and abusive authority.

There was, however, one pioneer of human rights who dared to stand up against the atrocity of the witch trials conducted by the Inquisition. His name was Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535), a German lawyer who was also a prominent physician and philosopher. In 1519, Agrippa, with tremendous valor, agreed to defend a peasant woman falsely accused of practicing witchcraft. He boldly argued that the inquisitor — the priest presiding over the court convened in the name of religion — who was persecuting the innocent woman was the one who deserved to be branded a heretic.

Our voice is important. With it, we must speak out for justice. And we must do so unhesitatingly with the unflinching courage of a lion. Silence only signals defeat.

Agrippa's arguments infuriated the inquisitor. Nonetheless, the court was persuaded by the lawyer's clear assertions. Because of the strength of his reasoning and the proof he offered of the woman's innocence, Agrippa won the rare verdict of not guilty, thereby saving the woman's life.

Later, however, Agrippa himself became the target of envy and bore the brunt of vicious attacks. For the rest of his life, he was relentlessly vilified. That he suffered such attacks at the hands of cowardly and unscrupulous people proves that he was indeed a person of justice.

While facing this barrage of persecutions, one disciple came to his aid — a former student by the name of Johann Weyer (1516–88), also a physician, who later came to be known as the father of modern psychiatry. The path of mentor–disciple is the most elemental path in life. This stalwart disciple used his pen to defend the reputation and honor of his mentor, who was being treated with great contempt. The witch trials, he firmly proclaimed, were the devil's invention. Weyer's actions were those of a true disciple.

As a result of championing his mentor, Weyer naturally met with severe persecution. His books were banned and burned. Nevertheless, his persuasive arguments, supported by his knowledge of psychology, gradually influenced the thinking of his day and opened people's eyes to the truth.

A German philosopher noted, "All history is the struggle between the intelligent and the powerful."<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that the university is precisely the place to cultivate the intellectual strength necessary to defeat corrupt and unscrupulous people in positions of power and gain the grounding to become a person of intellect who will not tolerate injustice.

### **The Flame of Indignation**

In his heart, Weyer burned with indignation at the base individuals who harassed innocent people and caused his mentor — a man of exemplary virtue and character — to suffer. He must have thought, "How can I remain silent while my dear teacher and the people are being treated with such contempt?"

When I visited the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom [1972], a professor, literally trembling with emotion, mentioned to me how a number of outstanding Cambridge graduates had been killed by the Japanese during World War II. Although the war had ended decades earlier, his anger at this tragedy was as fresh as if the war had just occurred. That scene is indelibly engraved in my mind. He embodied the kind of unremitting anger and flame of indignation toward injustice of which I have just been speaking.

Weyer rebuked the persecutors with the intensity of a blazing fire, proclaiming that he would seek revenge for their inhumanity in the "court of truth." He was determined never to allow them to get away with their lies.

Sadly, this pattern of throwing groundless accusations at and trying to damage reputable people, who have done no wrong, continues to this day. Mr. Makiguchi died in prison for his unwavering stand against the Japanese militarist government. Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, was also wrongly imprisoned. And I, too, have encountered a stream of persecution simply because I have fought for justice.

This spirit to struggle against unjust power is the very heart of Soka University. Great people are forged not in fair weather but amid great adversity. I hope you will always take pride in studying at this noble institution. I also hope you will resolve to do your very best here and learn as much as you can during your years as a student.

Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), the founder of Keio University [a prestigious Japanese private university], was a prominent writer and educator who worked to disseminate Western thought in Japan during the Meiji Era (1868–1912). He, too, maintained a relentless struggle to educate the Japanese people despite constant threats against his life because of his progressive ideas.

All genuinely great people, all pioneers, have traveled this same route.

### **Creating Solidarity With Activists for Peace**

This unflinching spirit was also shared by the two-time Nobel laureate and father of modern chemistry Linus Pauling (1901–94), with whom I had the honor of sharing a friendship.

At the height of the Cold War, Dr. Pauling resolutely called for peace and friendship between the United States and the Soviet Union, and for the abolition of nuclear weapons. As a result, authorities subjected him to unremitting intimidation. Dr. Pauling told me how Albert Einstein had strongly encouraged him to continue fighting even though the future prospects of democracy might seem dismal. “I will fight,” Einstein had declared, “and I hope that you will continue to do the same.”

It is a great pleasure for me to announce today that the Pauling family, out of respect for the friendship I shared with the late Dr. Pauling, has expressed the intention of entrusting me with some very precious personal effects of his. I am profoundly touched and honored by their gesture.

I have developed friendships spanning the globe and have worked to create a bond of solidarity among people of intellect who actively fight for truth. And I sincerely hope that you, the Soka students, will carry on this work.

I am praying for your growth. Thank you very much!

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1. Translated from German: “Alle Geschichte ist ein Kampf der Klugen gegen die Starken.” Quote by Rathenau in *Von Schwachheit, Frucht und Zweck*.