

SGI Calls for World Focus on Disarmament

By JEFF FARR

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The SGI has recently joined other voices in calling on the United Nations to focus more attention on disarmament. SGI representative Kazuo Ishiwatari attended a U.N.-sponsored conference, "New Agenda for Disarmament and Regional Security," held July 22–25 in Sapporo, Japan, for this purpose.

Government representatives from 37 countries, including the United States, attended, each in an unofficial capacity. There were also participants from academic and research institutes, the media and other nongovernmental organizations.

Mr. Ishiwatari proposed on the SGI's behalf that member-states renew their efforts to implement the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and that a worldwide small arms registry system, to help control the flow of arms to conflict areas, be established. (Most conflicts today are carried out with small weapons, because they're less expensive and easier to use.)

Mr. Ishiwatari also proposed that "governments engage in a thorough program of education and public information for disarmament, including nuclear disarmament, as part of their overall educational efforts," adding that "many NGOs, including the SGI, could certainly play an active role in its implementation."

The SGI's history of opposition to nuclear arms and testing began Sept. 8, 1957. Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, surprised everyone at a youth division sports meet that day when he made his staunch Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons. "It is my wish to attack the problem at its root," he said, "that is, to rip out the claws that are hidden in the very depths of the issue."

Forty years later, despite the end of the Cold War and the growing international consensus supporting disarmament, nuclear weapons still have their claws embedded in our future. As long as a great number of nuclear weapons continue to exist — 15,000 in the United States and 10,000 in Russia — the fear remains that they will be misused or fall into the wrong hands.

Prvoslav Davinic, director of the U.N. Centre for Disarmament Affairs, was very supportive of the SGI's disarmament education proposal. "The more you educate people the more successful you might be in preventing war," he said. "In any conflict, fighting doesn't produce very good results. In the end maybe you achieve your objective but lose a great deal in getting there."

"The process of education is absolutely necessary," he said. "Educating people about the peaceful means of resolving conflicts, the necessity of disarmament and consequences — it's an essential part of our everyday environment."

The SGI's proposals at the conference were in line with Toda's statement on Sept. 8, 1957, that "we, the citizens of the world, have an inviolable right to live." This right to live is the basis of the SGI's stance on disarmament. To eradicate nuclear weapons from the world, to control the flow of small arms and to educate the world's people about disarmament are steps that will protect individuals' right to live, the SGI believes.

Renewed interest within the United Nations in disarmament has been encouraging to NGOs like the SGI. Last year the United Nations endorsed the International Court of Justice's decision that nuclear weapons are illegal and adopted the CTBT. (However, three nations refused to sign the CTBT, delaying its implementation.) The new U.N. secretary-general, Kofi Annan, has also been placing special emphasis on disarmament.

To commemorate the 40th anniversary of Toda's declaration, the SGI is sponsoring various projects to promote disarmament. The Soka Gakkai in June unveiled a monument in

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Hiroshima, Japan, to the innocent victims of atomic bombs and nuclear accidents.

In August, a delegation of Soka Gakkai youth division members will visit San Francisco, Dallas and Los Angeles, also to commemorate this anniversary. And in September, the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, the top priority of which is disarmament, will hold a disarmament conference in England.

The SGI has also held the “Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World” exhibit, which was born of the Cold War era but has now outlived it, in 26 cities in 17 countries. Plans to continue holding the exhibit in new cities are in the works.

Based on the reception the exhibit received last summer in Costa Rica and recently in Argentina, Mr. Ishiwatari said at the conference that “by no means is the issue of nuclear disarmament settled in the mind’s of the world’s citizens. They fully recognize that we have entered a phase when the final touches need to be made to the disarmament process. There is a strongly rooted sentiment among the global public which will not allow regression. Nations must not go against sensible world public opinion but work all the harder to facilitate disarmament.”

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