

**Nikken Ordered To Testify in Libel Trial**  
**By JEFF FARR, Associate Editor**  
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After years of requests by Soka Gakkai lawyers, a Tokyo judge ruled Sept. 29 that Nikken Abe, high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, must testify in the "Seattle Incident" trial. Lawyers for the Soka Gakkai, the defendant in the case, have long sought to question Nikken about his contradictory statements regarding his actions in Seattle the night of March 19–20, 1963.

Soka Gakkai lawyers hailed today's ruling by Judge Shizuka Hamano of the Tokyo District Court as a major step toward revealing the truth of the incident. "The recent decision by the court is only natural because Mr. Nikken Abe is the representative of Nichiren Shoshu, the plaintiff in the case, as well as the person alleged to be involved in the incident," said Morio Miyahara, the Soka Gakkai's lead defense attorney. Nikken's lawyers will question him on Dec. 22, the next session, followed by cross-examination on Feb. 2, 1998.

In 1992, when the late Hiroe Clow, an SGI-USA member, first shared her account of the incident, saying that Nikken was involved in a dispute with prostitutes the night in question, Nikken publicly declared he never left his hotel room after a Gohonzon-conferral ceremony he had attended earlier that evening. But in September 1995, on the eve of Mrs. Clow's testimony in the current case, Nikken did an about-face, claiming he had left his hotel for a drink and a walk.

Soka Gakkai lawyers first requested that Nikken testify in February 1995. They believe Nichiren Shoshu has since tried to avoid Nikken's appearance in court because of his contradictory statements and the fact that two defense witnesses — Mrs. Clow and former police officer Ronald Sprinkle — have given matching testimonies about the incident. A second officer, Victor Mayhle, has corroborated their accounts through a sworn deposition.

The Nichiren Shoshu Administrative Office released a response to Judge Hamano's decision today, claiming that only "for the sake of protecting the dignity of the heritage of Nichiren Shoshu" had Nikken's lawyers tried to keep him out of court. But now, according to the Administrative Office, Nikken has given his "gracious consent" to appear in court and "clarify the truth."

Because Japanese law requires any allegedly defamatory statement be proven a lie before it can be deemed libel, to win Nikken must present evidence that these three witnesses were not telling the truth. And if Nikken fails to appear on Dec. 22, the court will have no choice but to rule that the Seattle Incident did in fact occur and dismiss the suit, per the Japanese Code of Civil Procedures.

The Seattle Incident suit was initiated by Nichiren Shoshu in Japan in 1993 after the Soka Gakkai published Mrs. Clow's story in two of its newspapers, the *Seikyo Shimbun* and the *Soka Shimpo*. Mrs. Clow testified that a few hours after Nikken, then Nichiren Shoshu Study Department chief, conducted the Gohonzon-conferral ceremony, she was called by Seattle police to a downtown site where he had been detained for arguing with several women the police knew to be prostitutes.

The next day he was scheduled to travel to Chicago, so she begged the police for his release, and the police agreed, she said.

Mrs. Clow kept the incident to herself for almost 30 years to protect the priesthood's reputation, she testified, but Nichiren Shoshu's excommunication of the Soka Gakkai in 1991, led by Nikken, who had become high priest in 1979, inspired her to let the truth be known about Nikken's character.

The outcome of the trial is considered significant because Nikken, who has often called

Mrs. Clow a liar in speeches and in print, has promised he would resign as high priest if the Soka Gakkai's defense proves the Seattle Incident happened.

The current trial has lasted more than two years, 18 court sessions having been held. Nichiren Shoshu lawyers in March requested an early verdict in the trial, which was denied by then-presiding Judge Katsumi Shinohara, who was replaced in May by Judge Hamano.

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