

**SEATTLE INCIDENT TRIAL VERDICT SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 21  
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Closing arguments in the Seattle Incident trial were heard at the Tokyo District Court on Dec. 7. At the next court session, scheduled for March 21, the presiding judge, Fumio Shimoda, is expected to announce a verdict. The trial, which began in 1995, involves a defamation lawsuit filed by High Priest Nikken and Nichiren Shoshu against the Soka Gakkai and its publications. To win the trial, Nikken must convince the court that Mrs. Hiroe Clow's account of his March 1963 dispute with prostitutes and subsequent encounter with the Seattle police is untrue. The account was carried in Soka Gakkai publications in 1992.

The Soka Gakkai defense attorneys emphasized in their closing argument that the verdict should hinge on who is telling the truth: Is it Mrs. Clow? Or is it Nikken? The defense reviewed the many holes and inconsistencies in Nikken's testimony while reminding the court that Mrs. Clow's testimony has been corroborated by police officers at the scene of the incident.

The Soka Gakkai attorneys again focused on Nikken's questionable diary of his 1963 trip to America. The crucial March 19, 1963, diary entry suggests that Nikken went to sleep at 1:00 a.m. that evening, which would not be true if he were with the police at 2:00 a.m., as Mrs. Clow testified.

The defense wondered why, although Nikken allegedly discovered the diary on March 17, 1995, he did not immediately submit it to the court. On June 26, 1995, in fact, the plaintiff's attorney repeated to the court Nikken's previous statement that he had not left the hotel the night of the incident. On Sept. 29, 1995, however, Nikken suddenly announced he had left his hotel after all — but still did not mention the diary. Only when the court rejected his attorneys' 1997 request to wind up the case and ordered Nikken to testify against their objections did he reveal the diary.

Defense attorneys also reminded the court that scientific tests conducted on the diary by the defense suggest that Nikken's bedtime for the March 19 entry was added at a later date.

The day before this session, on Dec. 6, the same court ruled in favor of Nichiren Shoshu in an entirely separate libel suit, which caused confusion when some tried to confuse SGI members that this ruling was on the Seattle Incident trial. The Dec. 6 ruling involved Nichiren Shoshu's suit against the Soka Gakkai over photographs published in 1992 of Nikken with several geisha, or female escorts. The Soka Gakkai is appealing this decision, and Mr. Morio Miyahara, an attorney for the Soka Gakkai, states, "We have every expectation that we will win."

In 1992, based on the accounts of a number of people, the Soka Gakkai asserted that Nikken sometimes frequented geisha houses, a practice typically carried out by the very wealthy in Japan. Nichiren Shoshu denied that Nikken went to geisha houses, and the photographs of the high priest surrounded by geisha were subsequently published to document the Soka Gakkai's claim. At the request of the priest Hosho Shiina, who was present at the November 1986 party from which the photographs came and provided the Soka Gakkai with them, the photographs were cropped and altered (the eyes of the geisha were masked and in one of the photos a man present was removed) to protect the identity of the others present.

The court ruled that the changes to the photographs were unacceptable, “even in the case of a person who repeatedly violates ethical norms and practices” or who would “deserve the criticism of society as a religious leader.” While Nichiren Shoshu demanded that the Soka Gakkai must publish an apology, the judge said no. Nichiren Shoshu also requested that the Soka Gakkai never print the geisha photos again; this was also rejected.

While Nichiren Shoshu demanded that the Soka Gakkai pay damages of \$10 million, the judge reduced the sum to \$40,000. And instead of paying more than \$31,000 for Nichiren Shoshu’s filing fees for the suit, the judge asked the Soka Gakkai to pay only about \$200.