

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA THE FOUNDING OF THE SGI

*The Ganges River starts from a single drop of water;
The journey to a lasting peace begins with a single step.
How important it is to bravely take that first step!
And then to continue on the journey, one step after another!*

It was a gathering on an island that is a jewel of the Pacific. There were no presidents, no ministers of state or political leaders, no tycoons, no scholars there that day. There were no reporters from the television stations or the newspapers covering it. Who was there? Ordinary citizens representing ordinary citizens. But these ordinary men and women were actually great pioneers who had pledged to dedicate their lives to the mission of propagating Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and bringing peace to the world.

Jan. 26, 1975—this was the day that the Soka Gakkai International was founded at a meeting on Guam, that beautiful island of lush tropical green and exotic blooms floating in the blue coral sea.



I had arrived on Guam two days earlier from Hawaii, after a trip across the United States. On the evening of Jan. 25, we held a friendship festival on Rizal Beach—located on the island's southwest coast and named for the Philippine national hero José Rizal. I will never forget that the then governor of Guam, Ricardo J. Bordallo, presented me with a traditional Chamorro costume.

The area near the beach, so peaceful now, was once the scene of bloody struggles between Japanese and American forces. Immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese military occupied Guam, but in a ferocious three-week battle in late July 1944, the U.S. forces took the island back. The U.S. lost some fourteen hundred men, while the Japanese lost twenty thousand in the fighting. Many of the residents of the island also endured terrible suffering and died. Remnants of the war, such as Japanese cannons, remain scattered across the island even today.

From war to peace! From hate to friendship! From conflict to harmony!

We chose Guam as an ideal place to make this new departure to change human history.

Guam's Governor Bordallo declared that day, Jan. 26, 1975, World Peace Day.



It was a time of high tension between the United States and the Soviet Union who were in the midst of a cold war, and of strained relations between the Soviet Union and China, too. Against that backdrop, I dashed around the world, visiting China in June and December of 1974, the Soviet Union in September, and then the United States at the beginning of 1975. In China I met with Premier Zhou Enlai, in the Soviet Union with Premier Aleksey Kosygin, and in the United States with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, as well as many other officials. I also visited the headquarters of the United Nations.

I was attacked and criticized both at home and abroad for visiting nations that reject religion. My actions were misunderstood. I was prepared for this. Determined to go

wherever there were people, I traveled through the world planting the seeds of peace and friendship, transcending barriers of ideology and national boundaries. With nothing more than dialogue, with a spirit of sincere goodwill, I wanted to bring together a divided world.

Premier Zhou said to me, “These last 25 years of the 20th century are the most important for the world as a whole.” I engraved those words deep in my heart so that I could build a strong movement for peace.



Looking back over the 20th century, the Soka Gakkai has experienced an important turning point roughly every quarter-century. Our first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, published his great work *Geography of Human Life* in 1903. Already back then he had the awareness of a global citizen, and he urged that we treat all the other nations of the world as our neighbors. A quarter-century or so later, on Nov. 18, 1930, the Soka Kyo-iku Gakkai (forerunner of the Soka Gakkai) was born, founded by Mr. Makiguchi and Josei Toda, mentor and disciple. Then, in 1951, the very midpoint of the century, Mr. Toda became the second president of the Soka Gakkai and proclaimed an all-out struggle to achieve kosen-rufu. And, in 1975, another quarter-century on, the SGI was born. It was 15 years since I had become the third president of the Soka Gakkai in 1960 and embarked overseas for the first time to follow my mentor’s injunction that I go out into the world.



The First World Peace Conference, held on Jan. 26, 1975, as the inaugural meeting of the SGI, took place at the Guam International Trade Center, a gleaming white building located in the central business district of Tamuning, not far from the airport. At the entrance to the hall on the ninth floor, before the meeting began, I was asked to sign the large meeting registry. On the first page I wrote my name and, in the column for nationality, I wrote “World.” I was thinking of Mr. Toda’s vision of global citizenship as I did this. It was an expression of my honest feelings, having decided to give my life for our members around the world.



Worldwide kosen-rufu is the goal that Nichiren Daishonin entrusted us, his followers, to fulfill. It is a struggle, a struggle for world peace, a struggle for the happiness of all humanity, a struggle for justice and human rights. The heroic members of lofty mission who gathered on that day 25 years ago represented 51 countries. Today, through the courageous and compassionate efforts of pioneer members exerting themselves with spirited tenacity and determination, we now have SGI members in 148 countries around the globe. Truly, the world is our stage. This is an unprecedented achievement that will shine forever in the history of Buddhism.

Our organization in South Korea, whose members could unfortunately not participate in that meeting, has since shown exemplary development. This brings me great joy.

I pray every day for the health, long life, and happiness of all of our noble members who are working tirelessly for kosen-rufu around the world.



On that day 25 years ago, I said to the members present: “The sun of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism has begun to rise on the horizon. Rather than seek after your own praise or glory, I hope that you will dedicate your whole lives to sowing the seeds of the

Mystic Law for the sake of peace throughout the entire world. I shall do the same.”

Today the sun of the SGI is rising brightly in the sky of the new century. Voices calling out for the light of Buddhist humanism around the globe are growing ever louder.

The time has come, my beloved fellow members of the SGI! Let us continue our journey of courage and hope into the third millennium, joyfully and intrepidly!