

**THE HISTORY OF THE BOSTON RESEARCH CENTER
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
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When the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, located in Cambridge, Mass., was founded by Daisaku Ikeda in 1993, the SGI president provided a challenge that guides all of our activities. He urged us to do the following: Be the heart of a network of global citizens. Be a bridge for dialogue between civilizations. Be a beacon lighting the way to a century of life. The exhortation, like a chiseled poem, was couched in the language of metaphor, placing emphasis on heart, network, bridge, dialogue and beacon. It underscored for us the importance of fostering peace by first creating our institution as a unique kind of place characterized by a welcoming embrace of multiple points of view.

We've learned that as we create the opportunity for dialogue in an open atmosphere where people are free to share their multiple perspectives and to generate a spirit of trust and friendship, the dialogue tends to move in the direction of revealing truths about our common humanity. The dialogue uncovers what President Ikeda, in his millennial message carried in the Center's latest newsletter, calls an "authentic universality." I can't help but think that these human networks that evolve from genuine dialogue are the most powerful force for peace in a fractured world.

In order to contribute to an evolving consensus on authentically universal ethics, the BRC brings together scholars and activists from different disciplines, schools, walks of life, age groups, ethnic origins and religious traditions to examine and elaborate on common values across cultures and religions. The particular values that we take as focal points are these: 1) nonviolence, 2) human rights, 3) economic justice and 4) environmental ethics.

The BRC has many activities to promote these values. Each year we present Global Citizen Awards to acknowledge and reward global leadership in the areas of peace, education and human rights. By showcasing the work of peace activists like Elise Boulding, Randall Forsberg, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and Oscar Arias, economists like Hazel Henderson, and educators like Vito Perrone, we help to spread the word that individual action has always been the most important force for change.

In addition, we initiate forums and conferences in support of civil society initiatives like the Earth Charter and the International Year for the Culture of Peace. Of our consultations and publications on the Earth Charter, Professor Winston Langley of the University of Massachusetts–Boston has written, "This type of [sponsorship] becomes part of the effort to develop moral solidarity among human beings." This year we will co-host with the Coalition for a Strong United Nations (CSUN) a conference commemorating the International Year for the Culture of Peace.

Publications that have evolved from the Center's initial on-site dialogues have been used in classrooms in more than 50 universities. These include this year's text, published in association with Wisdom Publications, *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*. The work has been acknowledged as making a substantial contribution for "this volume makes available — for the first time in one place — first-person statements of the ideas and work of such eminent Buddhist leaders as H.H. the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Maha Ghosananda, A.T. Ariyaratne, Daisaku Ikeda, Shih Cheng-yen, Sulak Sivaraksa and Robert Aiken: a cornucopia of visionary and creative social engagement." Editor David W.

Chappell stresses that the dialogue “is not a discussion about external issues, but a sharing of personal experiences that opens awareness to the range of human factors involved in social decisions.”

One year ago the Center published *Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions*, a collection of essays by representatives of a broad spectrum of religious traditions on what Boston University professor John Berthrong referred to as “defusing the contagion of hatred.” The Center also completed its set of publications on the Earth Charter, which includes: *Buddhist Perspectives on the Earth Charter*, *Women’s Views on the Earth Charter*, and *Human Rights, Environmental Law, and the Earth Charter*.

At the same time, it introduced an innovative series of dialogues, *Abolishing War: Dialogue with Peace Scholars Elise Boulding and Randall Forsberg*. Saul Mendlovitz, Dag Hammarskjöld Professor at Rutgers Law School, said of the book, “This volume will undoubtedly be useful for courses on conflict resolution and peace and world order studies in universities throughout the world...the policy community would be well advised to study these materials for they contain significant initiatives which officialdom could begin to undertake to promote the abolition of war.”

In his recent message to the BRC, “Creating the Foundation for a Culture of Peace in the New Millennium,” President Ikeda alludes to the story of Shrimala, a woman described in Buddhist scripture as a bodhisattva who personifies the reality that “all people, irrespective of gender, occupation, or social status, can reveal the Buddha nature that resides as a treasure in the depths of human life.” It is the conviction of the Center’s founder, Daisaku Ikeda, that “the lion’s roar of women committed to the creation of peace will be key in ushering in a new ‘Century of Life.’” In concert with this view, the BRC—following its work on post-Beijing conferences and development of an expanded network of women’s leadership groups—is continuing to contribute to the growth of women’s leadership through forums, colloquia and informal meetings.

Building on the success of our first “Creating Connections: Women’s Leadership Forum” in 1998, we are preparing for a two-part event in the spring of 2000, “Creating Connections: Peace with Self, Sister and Society.” This conference will celebrate sisterhood across generations, affirm practices of inner and outer peace, and renew our commitment to social justice.

Finally, the BRC organizes a biannual series on global ethics. Past topics for these conferences have included “Religion and Transnational Civil Society in the 21st Century”; “Religion and Ecology: Forging an Ethic Across Traditions”; and “From War Culture to Cultures of Peace: Challenges for Civil Society.” Early in the year 2001, we will gather together a wide spectrum of individuals to delve into the subject of economic justice.

In all of our work, we single out initiatives reflecting a broad humanism that is consistent with Buddhism and we create programs that help to strengthen the peace movement. We are very grateful to the inspired scholars, activists and other friends and neighbors who have helped, through their participation and support, to make the Center an oasis for dialogue where people are free to express their humanity in all its dimensions.