

HUMAN RIGHTS LECTURE SERIES COMMENCES NINTH YEAR

Soka University of America, Calabasas, is Southern California's only institution of higher learning offering a continuing free program in human rights. Launched in 1992, the Human Rights Lecture Series provides up-close and personal contact with human rights leaders from around the world.

Soka University of America's founder, Daisaku Ikeda, has said that "humanity is charged with the task of not merely achieving a 'passive peace'—the absence of war—but of transforming on a fundamental level those social structures that threaten human dignity. Efforts to enhance international cooperation and the fabric of international law are, of course, necessary, but even more vital are the creative efforts of individuals to develop a multi-layered and richly patterned culture of peace, for it is on this foundation that a new global society can be built."

It is to these principles and high ideals that SUA students and the general public can openly interact with human rights leaders such as Mrs. Rosa Parks, Dr. Benjamin Spock, Dr. Elena Bonner, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, Dr. Cornel West, Dr. Mary Catherine Bateson, Mr. Carlos Fuentes, Mr. Morris Dees, the Honorable Shirley Chisholm, among many others, on a wide range of important and valuable subjects.

According to Deborah diCesare, SUA program director for the series, approximately 10,000 people have attended the Human Rights Lecture Series since its inception. "It is encouraging to see people taking time from their busy lives to learn about issues such as human rights education, genocide or the International Criminal Court," Ms. diCesare says. She attributes collaborating with the community, civil and human rights organizations, public and private colleges and high schools as the key to the success of the human rights program.

"The community forums sponsored by Soka University of America are a valuable contribution to well-informed discussion of important public issues," says Marvin Schacter of the National Council of the United Nations Association-USA. "The variety of [human rights] topics considered, and the diversity of opinions expressed, are especially appreciated. They add to the quality of our civic life and strengthen our democratic society."

"This series is exactly what our society is in need of for action and progress," adds Ted R. Leutsinger, vice president of the World Federalist Association. "Only by participating in such well-organized and operated sessions, led by persons of credibility and wisdom, can humankind be prepared and be motivated to take those steps toward the higher levels of which we are capable."

In her experience with the speakers, Ms. diCesare is repeatedly impressed by the humility and commitment of each person and by "how much people willingly risk of themselves for the betterment of humanity."

In a panel discussion on "Civil Rights for American Ethnic Minorities," Mrs. Rosa Parks, the mother of the civil rights movement, stated, "It was the simplicity of doing what's right." Mrs. Parks continued, "In the struggle to bring about equality, justice, peace and goodwill toward all people, and the desire to make America into the America it should be, it is up to us to do our best."

Richard Leaky, the world's foremost paleoanthropologist, addressed a riveted audience about "Africa's Perilous Sport: The Hunt for Democracy" while standing for nearly two hours on prosthetics. Leaky lost both legs in a plane crash and had been attacked with whips and clubs for speaking out to protect the human rights of the Kenyan people.

In his lecture at SUA, the late Dr. Benjamin Spock, internationally recognized authority on child rearing, said: "Research shows that watching violence desensitizes people. Children can tend to lose their horror toward violence. Don't expose your children to violent shows. Even if they say, 'Everyone's watching it,' tell them you don't care. Parents feel afraid of being different. I hated being different as a kid. Yet it's good."

Continuing to dedicate itself anew to the challenges and causes of peace, this fall's Human Rights Lecture Series will be celebrating the United Nation's International Year of the Culture of Peace on Oct. 26. For more information, please contact the Calabasas campus' Program Development office at 818-878-3780, or by e-mail at prodev@soka.edu.

Soka University of America, Calabasas is an independent, coeducational institution of higher education that offers a 33-credit Master of Arts program in Second and Foreign Language Education as well as an Intensive English Program for visiting students from Japan. The Calabasas campus currently serves approximately 200 students, and is approved to operate by the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education.