

A RECORD OF MY LIFE BY DAISAKU IKEDA ACTION COUNTS

‘Action is what counts first and foremost’ when it comes to contributing to international society, SGI President Ikeda writes.

Empty rhetoric has no place when it comes to contributing to international society. Nor will economic aid alone suffice. Action is what counts first and foremost.

This has recently become evident in the growing awareness of the significance of humanitarian assistance. And this is why the SGI has been taking concrete measures to support the United Nations.

These efforts include the “Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World” exhibition, which the SGI cosponsored with the United Nations. This exhibition has been held in 33 cities in 22 countries, including Moscow, Geneva and New York, and viewed by approximately 1.5 million people. Approximately 320,000 people in 13 cities in five countries have viewed the “War and Peace” exhibition. And some 310,000 people in 26 cities in eight countries have viewed the exhibition “Toward a Century of Humanity—An Overview of Human Rights in Today’s World.”

Other exhibitions that the SGI has sponsored in cooperation with the United Nations are “Nuclear Arms: Threat to Humanity,” “Toward the Century of Life: The Environment and Development,” “International Textbooks,” “World Boys and Girls Art Exhibition,” “Toys of the World and Education,” “World’s Children and UNICEF” and “What Are the Rights of the Child?”

Also in support of the United Nations, between 1973 and 1999, the youth of the Soka Gakkai have conducted a total of 20 fund-raising campaigns to support refugee relief efforts. Between 1980 and 1999, 14 delegations of youth representatives have visited refugee camps in different parts of the world. These activities have fostered many youth capable of making valuable contributions to the international community.

The SGI has also sponsored public lectures on a wide range of topics and carried out broad-ranging publication activities. In 1998, youth collected approximately 13 million signatures on the Abolition 2000 petition calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, which were then submitted to the United Nations.

The SGI and the Soka Gakkai in Japan are both registered as non-governmental organizations with the United Nations. It seems, however, that the scope of activities of both organizations is far more recognized in other countries than in Japan.

In my annual peace proposal to commemorate Jan. 26, the anniversary of the SGI’s founding, I always incorporate specific agendas for strengthening the United Nations. Each proposal stresses the idea of creating a United Nations with a human face and an organization that people can wholeheartedly support.

With this aim, as early as 1975, I proposed the establishment of an Association of World Citizens to Safeguard the United Nations. The idea was that the United Nations, in addition to being a gathering of national representatives, should include representatives of the people. It has been my constant assertion over the years that the United Nations must listen to the views and concerns of ordinary citizens and make use of them.

With regard to the fundamental problem faced by the United Nations of financial

administration, I have proposed that the United Nations be empowered to receive support from individual citizens throughout the world. No ideal can be actualized without a solid financial base.

Many continue to avoid and overlook the question of financing the United Nations, despite the fact that if the present state of affairs persists, it could spell the United Nations' demise. I therefore recommend that the United Nations accept contributions from companies and organizations as well as individuals—enforcing a rule of no favors in return—in place of the present system of relying entirely on dues from governments. I want to see the people of the world pool their wisdom and come up with a sound program for the United Nations' financial management.

People have always found ways to overcome their ethnic differences and help one another.

We are entering a period of change in cooperative international relations centering around the United Nations. For example, at the time of the United Nations' founding, the ideal of ethnic self-determination was the ever-brilliant promised land. But now those ethnic groups are themselves sparking controversy, and ethnic conflict is breaking out in areas across the globe. This has raised the question as to whether it is enough to simply create borders around individual ethnic groups.

As seen in the example of the former Yugoslavia, the ideal of ethnic independence has at the same time become the tragedy of the post-Cold War era. We have seen similar scenarios played out on numerous occasions. The equation goes: Ethnic group B has been controlled by ethnic group A for a long period of time. After achieving nationhood, group B begins “cleansing” members of group A from the region they newly inhabit.

At some point, this chain of hatred must be broken. It is only natural, of course, that people who have been oppressed will want to realize their independence. But the tragedy resulting from making the establishment of a nation the sole, absolute objective of ethnic independence must not be forgotten.

Can it really be said that in such areas as Sarajevo and Kosovo, where we have witnessed intensified ethnic conflict, relations have always been strained? In my dialogue on “Choices for the 21st Century” with Dr. Majid Tehranian of the University of Hawaii, which was serialized in the Japanese monthly journal *Ushio*, we discussed this point in detail. We observed how nearly all the regions presently experiencing complicated ethnic strife were once places where diverse groups of people coexisted in peace.

The Nobel Prize-winning author Ivo Andric, a native of the former Yugoslavia, writes the following about Sarajevo: “It is the middle of the night in Sarajevo. First the clock of the Catholic Church lugubriously chimes 2:00. About a minute later, the Eastern Orthodox Church faintly announces 2:00. A little later, the clock tower of the Mosque hoarsely rings 11:00, Mecca time. The Jews, whose synagogue is without a belfry, live according to their own time.”

Just 10 years ago, Sarajevo, now a symbol of ethnic conflict, was a symbol of ethnic harmony.

It is a fact that Muslims in the former Yugoslavia once presented a church to Catholics who did not have the means to build one themselves. Also, in Cordoba, the old capital of Spain, around the time when the Muslims unified Spain, the Mosque in the city served as a place of worship for Muslims on Friday and for Christians on Sunday. While Islam and Christianity tend to be thought of as mortal enemies, in light of history, the length of time

that the opposite was true is much longer.

In reality, people have always found ways to overcome their ethnic differences and learned to support and help one another in the course of their daily lives. Should not getting back to this original spirit of working together on a popular level be an aim of the United Nations' various aid efforts? Merely forcing the logic of so-called advanced nations on others will only magnify the distortions of society.

The well-known social activist Frantz Fanon says that any reform must be rooted in the lives and awareness of the people: "If the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across the river or going by boat. The bridge should not be 'parachuted down' from above; ... on the contrary it should come from the muscles and the brains of the citizens."

A society in which the people are rooted in daily life, enjoying heightened awareness and creating value — this is what leads to a world without war. Future international aid and international cooperation projects must not overlook the standpoint of people's everyday lives.

People who enjoy self-respect and confidence can guarantee peace.

I touched on this in my 1999 peace proposal for this year, but nationalism is stirred when people begin to lose their sense of ethnic identity. In the case of Japan, the country is currently facing a stagnating economy, and its citizens are losing confidence. Coupled with this is a proliferation of nationalistic tendencies.

When people lose faith in their home country, the tendency is to put on a show of bravado and treat others with contempt. The slightest attempt by an "outsider" to bring up the truth regarding the past actions of one's own country may invite irrational denials — indicating a real loss of self-confidence.

Likewise, on an individual level, when people lose confidence in themselves, they tend to try to maintain their sense of self by taking on an air of superiority and looking down on others. They display a state of anger where they care for no one but themselves.

The mind-set that allows one to resort to violence against another and the jealousy that rages when one cannot stand the thought of another being better than oneself — both are states of mind that lead people to rally behind the banners of nationalism and fascism.

How can such inclinations toward feelings of superiority and anger be overcome?

In analyzing the psychology of fascism and evaluating Gandhi's thought as the only force that can stand up to it, the German author Hermann Broch, himself a victim of fascist oppression, writes, "With its characteristic philosophical consistency, Indian thought has recognized the central position of the presentation of victory in mania-inspired events in modern times."

Central to fascism is a mad lust for victory. It is driven by a spirit of jealousy that seeks to win over others at all costs and bring about their downfall, and to do away with those more capable than oneself.

Shakyamuni says: "Though one defeats a million men in battle, one who overcomes the self alone is in fact the highest victor. For one who is self-controlled and always disciplined in action, victory over the self is better than victory over others. The victory of someone like this cannot be made into defeat, even by a god [the heavenly musician Gandharva], an angel, or a devil" (*The Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha*, p. 39).

In the final analysis, the heart is most important. The creation of a culture of people who

enjoy true self-respect and confidence, who achieve victory over the self, is the greatest guarantee of national security.

This spirit must be fostered. Toward that end, in addition to activities aimed at preserving peace, we need to develop activities that actually create peace. As I mentioned earlier, rather than assistance coming from above, I believe it is indispensable for people to receive support that respects and preserves the culture of their daily lives.

The SGI was bestowed the title of Peace Messenger from the United Nations in 1987. This honor belongs to all those who have dedicated themselves to promoting activities in support of the United Nations.

In August 1999, World Federation of United Nations Associations President Hashim Abdul Halim, Executive Committee Chairperson Malcolm Harper and Deputy Secretary-General Sitaram Sharma appointed me an WFUNA honorary adviser, in a ceremony that took place in Japan.

The WFUNA is an organization of U.N. associations in countries around the world that seeks to raise public awareness and understanding of the United Nations and its agencies. Founded in August 1946, it is the only NGO that is authorized to display the United Nations' insignia. It presently has member associations in 86 countries.

The SGI became formally affiliated with WFUNA in 1997 — a significant achievement when one considers that the federation is comprised mostly of national U.N. organizations.

In making the presentation, Mr. Halim said that by appointing me an honorary adviser, he hoped that WFUNA might learn from the SGI's multifaceted activities and participate in the movement that we have developed.

I am determined to respond to his expectations by working even harder to support the United Nations.

Twelve in a series