

## SOUTH AFRICA: THE HOPE OF HUMANKIND

**During his visit with South African President Thabo Mbeki, SGI President Ikeda remarks: ‘Through the power of the people, South Africa has constructed a peaceful human republic, a “rainbow nation.” This represents the hope of humankind.’**

Meeting on Oct. 1 with South African President Thabo Mbeki, who had arrived just that morning for a three-day state visit, SGI President Ikeda congratulated him on his two years as president. President Ikeda took the opportunity to present the South African leader with a poem titled “Lion of the New Century Advancing Toward the African Renaissance,” that he had composed in Mr. Mbeki’s honor. He apologized for only being able to present him with the Japanese version at this time, having only finished writing the poem that morning, and promised to forward an English translation as soon as possible. Mr. Mbeki expressed his appreciation and, as he looked at the text of the poem, laughingly joked that perhaps it was a hint that he should learn Japanese.

President Ikeda expressed his condolences on the recent death of Mr. Mbeki’s father, Govan Mbeki, who passed away on Aug. 30 at the age of 91. He described the elder Mr. Mbeki as “a hero of the liberation movement who helped usher in the dawn of democracy in South Africa.” He noted that Govan Mbeki spent 23 years in jail with Nelson Mandela. After Nelson Mandela was elected president in 1994, the senior Mr. Mbeki served as deputy president of South Africa’s Senate.

President Ikeda also commented that Govan Mbeki was known as “a warrior with a pen,” and recalled the famous story of his writing his celebrated work *South Africa: The Peasant’s Revolt* on toilet paper while in solitary confinement in the 1960s. For his activism and literary contributions, he was later awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Amsterdam.

Noting that both of President Mbeki’s parents were teachers and activists in the antiapartheid struggle, President Ikeda stressed the paramount importance of education. “The success of later generations,” he said, “will be decided first and foremost by education.” He continued that he had been deeply moved by President Mbeki’s appeal: “For liberation—education! Every educator, a liberator! Every liberator, an educator!” The first and second presidents of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, he observed, had also embodied these words, which captured the very essence of education.

The SGI leader touched on another anecdote he had heard about Govan Mbeki. Once the president’s father had been asked by one of his colleagues in the struggle how they could possibly fight without weapons, to which the elder Mr. Mbeki had replied to the effect, “The authorities may have guns, but we have people.” Calling these timeless words, President Ikeda remarked: “Just as your father said, through the power of the people, South Africa has constructed a peaceful human republic, a ‘rainbow nation.’ This represents the hope of humankind.”

President Mbeki remarked that the members of his father’s generation had made enormous contributions to their country. For not only did they free South Africa from the yoke of apartheid, he explained, they also played an important role in shaping the direction of the country’s future. He said he believed it was the duty of the members of his own generation to realize the vision that had been forged at great personal risk and sacrifice by their predecessors, including his father. President Ikeda declared that President Mbeki was doing precisely that—translating the ideals of his predecessors into reality.