

**PERSPECTIVE**  
**GRAMMY WINNER STANDS UP FOR PEACE**  
**BY NESTOR TORRES**  
**MIAMI**

**Nestor Torres finds his own path to peace and discovers that ‘every day is a manifestation, a proof of the correctness, validity and tremendous power, of this practice.’**

You must write a song for the little island,” SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima said to me. It took me a second to figure out what he meant — “the little island.” I realized he was talking about the Puerto Rican island of Vieques.

At the beginning of last year, Mr. Nagashima asked Orlando Cepeda and myself to help bring the Victory Over Violence campaign to Puerto Rico. This was a dream come true for me because I had always wanted to be involved with SGI activities on the island. Being Puerto Rican myself, it was a way to repay my debt of gratitude to my native land.

“If you want to address the violence issue in Puerto Rico, you must be prepared to deal with and take a stand on the Vieques issue...”

Everywhere we went on our VOV campaign, the Vieques issue would show up. From meetings with university presidents and city mayors to comments by common citizens to the media — Vieques would not go away.

Although I was born and raised in Puerto Rico, I only knew Vieques as a little island off the eastern coast. We knew that the United States Navy had been conducting bombing exercises there for years which continue today, but not much attention was given to the harsh reality that the thousands of inhabitants of Vieques endure.

In June of last year, the initial activities of Vida Sin Violencia (Life Without Violence), as the Victory Over Violence campaign is called in Puerto Rico, included an all-star concert of which I was in charge. On the first day of rehearsals, some friends who were supporting the event asked if I would like to participate in a documentary about Vieques. I agreed.

As I began to read the script off the teleprompter, I could not believe what I was saying. Appalled, angry, ashamed, indignant — none of these words can describe the anguish I felt as I recited the facts, numbers and statistics before me. I finally understood what it was about Vieques. I determined right then and there that I would write and include a song about Vieques in my upcoming CD. But what kind of song would it be? I certainly did not want to make a political statement, for I strongly felt, as I still do, that the Vieques matter is a human rights issue, not a political one.

The Vida Sin Violencia events were a success and I went on with a very busy summer schedule leading up to the production of my new CD. This is when I saw Mr. Nagashima, who reminded me of the pledge I had made three months before.

“Everything changes/nothing is constant/life is eternal/is what you make of it...”

In “The Fourteen Slanders,” Nichiren Daishonin tells the story of a boy who learns Buddhist teachings from the god Shakra, who is disguised as a demon (see *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 757). These lines are a variation on a teaching the boy heard, and for some time I had wanted to use them in a song. With the help of many people and in spite of great reservations from the label, I included two versions of “Paz Pa’ Vieques” (Peace for Vieques) on my new CD, “This Side of Paradise,” for which I was honored to

receive a Latin Grammy award.

From a Buddhist perspective, and a personal one, the situation in Vieques is bound to change; once people's lives awaken to their mission, they will make change happen. Nothing is constant, not even that which seems to be hopeless. No matter how bad or difficult things might be, there is always hope for change, and even further, there is always the possibility that we can turn poison to medicine.

What I have learned and continue to discover—particularly in light of the atrocities of Sept. 11—is how fortunate I am to be practicing Buddhism at this particular time. Every day is a manifestation, a proof of the correctness, validity and tremendous power, of this practice. That, and SGI President Ikeda's guidance and example that Buddhism *is* daily life, has allowed me to stand up for the sake of justice in the way that is best suited for me. As a musician, my most effective weapons are my songs aimed at every human heart, including the Navy soldiers and even the terrorists. You see, they too are human, just like the Viequenses, and we must never forget that.