

SGI and ICAN—Partnership Underlined by Friendship

Soka Gakkai International (SGI) would like to wholeheartedly congratulate the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) on their receiving of the Nobel Peace Prize 2017. In so doing, we offer this reflective account, looking at the past decade and at how SGI and ICAN have worked together toward our shared aim of nuclear abolition, and at how we have developed “partnership underlined by friendship.”

“SGI has been one of our greatest partners in this fight,”¹ said Beatrice Fihn, Executive Director of ICAN, during an interview at the time of the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in July this year. And since the launch of ICAN in 2007, SGI has been proud to work as one of the movement’s international partners toward the realization of a world free from nuclear weapons.

ICAN now has 468 partner organizations in 101 countries, and has played a significant role as a civil society actor in the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on July 7 this year at the United Nations (UN) treaty negotiating conference.

It was on October 1, 2007, that Tilman Ruff, the then Chair of the fledgling ICAN, first visited the SGI Headquarters in Tokyo together with Katsuko Kataoka, Secretary General of Japanese Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (JPPNW). Their visit followed the launch of ICAN earlier that year by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) who were the Nobel Peace Prize laureates of 1985. IPPNW had launched ICAN as an international campaign at two public events earlier that year in April—the first being in Melbourne, Australia and the second in Vienna, Austria.

SGI itself had already been working toward the abolition of nuclear weapons for several decades—its starting point being a historic declaration issued by second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda on September 8, 1957, known as the Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons. On September 8, 2007, in response to a call by current SGI President Daisaku Ikeda in 2006, and to commemorate the 50th anniversary of this declaration, SGI had just launched an international campaign, the People’s Decade for

¹ Seikyo Shimbun. 2017. “The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons Adopted: Voices of Key Individuals from Various Circles—Toward a Peaceful World with People’s Passion and Power.” July 11, 2017.

Nuclear Abolition, and so it was natural that these two groups come together and start exchanges at a time marked by two major milestones in their activity.

History began in a rather small meeting room on that first day in October where Hirotsugu Terasaki and Kimiaki Kawai, two figures responsible for SGI's peace activities, welcomed their two friends from IPPNW. In the meeting, they had rousing discussions over how they could work together toward the shared goal of these two groups—the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons. They reconfirmed that SGI and IPPNW shared the same understanding about the importance of education for the public, with a particular focus on young people and so it was with the greatest pleasure that SGI was invited to partner with ICAN on that very day. We were honored to be able to help ICAN get established at such an early stage, and we have been supporting ICAN's work and collaborating with ICAN in many various opportunities ever since.

There is also a background story leading up to this meeting which we would like to share. The partnership between SGI and ICAN can in fact be traced back to a long-time friendship and cooperation between SGI and IPPNW which in turn stemmed from a friendship between SGI President Daisaku Ikeda and IPPNW Co-President Bernard Lown. These two men had met twice—the first in Moscow in May 1987 and the second in Tokyo in March 1989. Amidst their discussions they had agreed to initiate a collaborative endeavor toward their shared goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons. In September 1989, following such agreement, SGI and IPPNW cosponsored an exhibition titled *War and Peace* at the UN Headquarters in New York, in cooperation with the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs, and this was the first collaboration between these two organizations.

So it was against this backdrop that SGI and ICAN were able to start to work together based on mutual historical trust. For SGI's part, President Ikeda had been consistently proposing the necessity of various efforts toward a world free from nuclear weapons such as a treaty for the prohibition of nuclear weapons in his annual UN peace proposals which he had been publishing since January 1983. In a proposal on UN reform written in September 2006, President Ikeda proposed a UN "Decade of action by the world's people for nuclear abolition."² He stressed the importance of people in civil society becoming the catalysts in efforts toward a world free from nuclear weapons by

² Ikeda, D. 2006. "Fulfilling the Mission: Empowering the UN to Live Up to the World's Expectations." August 30, 2006.

<http://www.sgi.org/content/files/about-us/president-ikedas-proposals/UNproposal20060830.pdf>

collectively raising their voices to overcome the general lack of political momentum and direction.

In response to his call, SGI launched the People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition initiative on September 8, 2007, in order to redouble its efforts toward this goal. The initiative aimed to increase the number of those in the world who reject these weapons and to create a global grassroots network toward this end, collaborating with various international movements, including ICAN.

The first major collaboration was to promote ICAN. In 2008, SGI helped ICAN link with Herbie Hancock, the world-famous jazz musician, so that he could become a supporter of the campaign and SGI is grateful to him for his message which was carried on the ICAN website in which he says, "Because I cannot tolerate these appalling weapons, I wholeheartedly support ICAN."³

SGI also collaborated with ICAN when producing educational materials, such as *Testimonies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Women Speak Out for Peace (2009)*, a DVD set of short interviews with women hibakusha, and an awareness-raising exhibition *Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons (2012)*⁴ which has become a key educational tool in SGI's global nuclear abolition efforts up until today.

At the same time, in the international community, a major turning point was being marked regarding the global discussions taking place on nuclear disarmament. In April 2010, President Jacob Kellenberger of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) issued a statement announcing that the debate about nuclear weapons must be conducted based on "the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law."⁵

At the following Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in May 2010, the final documents expressed for the first time a deep concern at the "catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons" and reaffirmed "the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international

³ ICAN (website). *n.d.* Accessed October 19, 2017. <http://www.icanw.org/>

⁴ SGI. 2012. "Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons." August 2012. <http://www.sgi.org/in-focus/2012/eyt-world-free-nuclear-weapons.html>

⁵ Kellenberger, J. 2010. "Bringing the era of nuclear weapons to an end." April 20, 2010. <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/statement/nuclear-weapons-statement-200410.htm>

humanitarian law.”⁶ Since then, a movement to examine the issue of nuclear weapons from the humanitarian perspective centered around non-nuclear weapon states—“the humanitarian initiative”—started to become active.

The momentum of this humanitarian initiative led to three international conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons (i.e. conferences focusing on the humanitarian dimensions of, and risks associated with, nuclear weapons) being organized in Oslo, Norway (March 2013), Nayarit, Mexico (February 2014) and Vienna, Austria (December 2014). These conferences were attended by representatives from government, the UN, and also other international and civil society organizations where active discussions and exchanges were being held. In addition, a joint statement on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons was issued by a group of States Parties at the Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference in April 2012. Since that time a series of resolutions on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons were adopted at the UN General Assembly. ICAN took a lead role as a representative of civil society at these conferences, and SGI, as an international partner of ICAN, attended and worked together with ICAN to make positive contributions to the debates through addressing the conferences directly.

In parallel with the contributions being made at the level of policy-making debates, SGI and ICAN co-led various activities in order to raise global public awareness on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons as part of a shared purpose toward the abolition of nuclear weapons.

For example, SGI hosted showings at various venues around the world of the *Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons* exhibition which was produced with the support of ICAN. The exhibition was shown at the ICAN-organized Civil Society Forum which was held prior to the Oslo Conference in March 2013. It was also held as a side event at the Second Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference in Geneva in April 2013, as well as the Nayarit Conference held in Mexico in February 2014. In Bahrein, SGI and ICAN jointly organized another anti-nuclear weapons exhibition—*From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Toward a World Free From Nuclear Weapons*⁷ This exhibition was

⁶ UN. 2010. “2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Final Document.” June 18, 2010.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=NPT/CONF.2010/50%20\(VOL.I\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=NPT/CONF.2010/50%20(VOL.I))

⁷ SGI. 2007. “From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Toward a World Free From Nuclear

the first of its kind to be held in the Middle East. In this way, SGI was engaging in activities to raise public awareness about these issues, while also gaining cooperation and support from like-minded individuals and groups.

Following the adoption of the TPNW in July 2017 and its opening for signature by the Member States in September this year, SGI in cooperation with ICAN produced and released the animation *Reshape History*⁸ as a tool to promote and raise awareness of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in order to gain wider acceptance and support for it from the general public.

SGI also took every opportunity to work together with ICAN to plan and conduct activities for the abolition of nuclear weapons. It participated in the Civil Society Forum organized by ICAN at the time of the three international conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and other campaigners' meetings as well as the Humanitarian Disarmament Forum co-organized by ICAN and other groups which coincided with the First Committee of the UN General Assembly.

SGI has also been making efforts as a member of a faith community. Based on the belief that the issue of nuclear weapons has an ethical and moral dimension, and thus people of faith should play a proactive role in dealing with this issue, SGI has been working hard to strengthen solidarity and form consensus amongst faith communities around the world by issuing interfaith statements. These activities have consequently helped contribute to the broadening of constituencies being engaged in the movement of ICAN.

In April 2014 in Washington DC, SGI organized an interfaith symposium titled *Making a Difference—Faith Communities and the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons* supported by various organizations including ICAN and other civil society groups as well as those of Muslim, Christian and Jewish traditions. As an outcome of the symposium a joint statement⁹ was adopted, which was endorsed by various people of faith including those from SGI and other Buddhist groups, and Muslim and Christian

Weapons.” September 8, 2007.

<http://www.peoplesdecade.org/decade/exhibition/th/s/th.html>

⁸ People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition (website). *n.d.* Accessed October 24, 2017.

<http://www.peoplesdecade.org/>

⁹ Faith Communities and the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. 2014. “Joint Statement of US Religious Communities on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear War.” April 24, 2014.

<http://www.sgi.org/content/files/in-focus/2014/Joint-Faith-Statement-Antinukes.pdf>

groups. It was then handed to Enrique Roman-Morey, chairman of the Third Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference in May at the UN Headquarters in New York.

Starting from this symposium, on the occasion of the Civil Society Forum in Vienna hosted by ICAN prior to the Vienna Conference in December 2014, an interfaith panel titled “Faiths United Against Nuclear Weapons: Kindling hope, mustering courage” was co-organized by SGI, ICAN and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in cooperation with Religions for Peace. The panel brought together Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and Hindu communities to discuss the moral and ethical dimensions of the issue of nuclear weapons. As an outcome of the panel, an interfaith joint statement¹⁰ was adopted which was presented by SGI at the following Vienna Conference as a representative of these faith colleagues. This effort helped to get the interfaith initiative established leading up to even further collaboration amongst communities of faith.

Since then, faith communities have worked together to deliver a series of joint statements under the name of Faith Communities Concerned about Nuclear Weapons at eight occasions including the 2015 NPT Review Conference (April to May 2015 at the UN Headquarters, New York), the UN Open-ended Working Group for nuclear disarmament in 2016 (February, May and August 2016 at the UN Offices, Geneva), the First Committee of the UN General Assembly (October 2016, New York) and at the 2017 Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference (May 2017 at the UN Office, Vienna) as well as the unprecedented UN Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (March 27 to 31 and June 15 to July 7 at the UN Headquarters, New York). SGI has been proud to work together with Pax Christi International and WCC and all our many colleagues of faith-based organizations and people of faith.

These efforts have helped to communicate the voices of faith communities to the policy-making processes, and promoted the enactment of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, working alongside ICAN. We at SGI were moved to see that the efforts undertaken by religious leaders were recognized in the treaty, as referred to in the preamble of the TPNW which was adopted on July 7, 2017.

¹⁰ Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. 2014. “Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons—Faith Communities on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons.” December 9, 2014.

<http://www.sgi.org/content/files/in-focus/2014/HINW14-Statement-Faith-Communities.pdf>

SGI has also worked tirelessly to ensure that the role that young people can play in the movement for nuclear weapons abolition is recognized and it has collaborated with ICAN in this endeavor.

In August 2015 an International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition was held in Hiroshima, which was organized by a steering committee consisting of representatives from many organizations including SGI, the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, ICAN, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, PAX (a Peace organization in the Netherlands) and Mines Action Canada.

30 young people representing various peace organizations from 23 countries other than Japan attended the summit and discussed the issues being faced as they worked toward the realization of a world free from nuclear weapons, and called for further action toward this goal. As a follow-up, an international youth network named Amplify was launched in the following year in May 2016 in order to continuously promote the movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons. This network is engaging in activities to promote the abolition of nuclear weapons.

SGI and ICAN have thus been working together toward the abolition of nuclear weapons in many areas ranging from engagement with and proactive contribution toward policy-making processes, grassroots awareness-raising activities, interfaith efforts, the promotion of youth activities and the development of educational tools.

The challenge facing nuclear weapons abolition has now entered into a new phase thanks to the adoption of the TPNW at the UN and the conferment of the Nobel Peace Prize 2017 to ICAN. Our next immediate challenge is now to inform and convince as many people as possible of the TPNW and to explain why it is relevant in order to strengthen and realize broader support for the treaty in a more universalized way. Such efforts are also indispensable to ensure that the nuclear weapon and nuclear weapon-dependent states that did not participate in the TPNW negotiating conference will work together with non-nuclear weapon states toward the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons as a global undertaking.

In this sense, SGI believes that we must reiterate the point that nuclear weapons in any hands are dangerous and wrong. They are dangerous not only from the perspective of security but from the ethical and moral perspective also.

In Article 12 of the TPNW, there is a stipulation on each State Party to make efforts

toward the universalization of the treaty. In view of the fact that the treaty was adopted with the participation and contribution of civil society, civil society is also expected to play a role in encouraging these efforts of each State Party as stipulated in Article 12. In order to strengthen voices from civil society to that end, a correct understanding of the realities of the atomic bombings which the hibakusha have spoken about over many decades should be shared and maintained beyond borders and beyond generations. Peace and disarmament education holds the key in this regard. This is where civil society is expected to play a role. In this sense, the collaboration and friendship between ICAN and SGI will only continue to be strengthened as we work together in our shared hope toward such a noble goal.