



Message for the Opening of the Exhibition
“From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace:
Transforming the Human Spirit”
United Nations Office in Vienna

Daisaku Ikeda
President, Soka Gakkai International (SGI)
October 4, 2010

H.E. Ambassador Dr. Helmut Böck, The Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations in Vienna
Ms. Ana Maria Cetto, Deputy Director General, Head of Department of Technical Cooperation, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
Mr. Genxin Li, Director of the Legal and External Relations Division, Provisional Technical Secretariat (PTS), Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)
The United Nations Information Service (UNIS), NGO Committee on Peace, Vienna,
Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a singular honor and joy to be able to hold the exhibition “From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit” here at the United Nations Office in Vienna, a city redolent with a rich heritage of culture and peace. On behalf of SGI members throughout the world, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have supported the holding of this exhibition and made today’s opening possible.

As we all know, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference held this past May in New York succeeded in overcoming the deep divisions that had caused the previous conference (2005) to end in failure; as a result, the conference was able to adopt a Final Document that included specific action plans.

Of particular importance was the fact that the conference expressed its “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 humanitarian law.” In contrast to much intergovernmental debate on the nuclear issue, which has often been framed in political or military logic, this language in the Final Document gave clear precedence to humane values and human dignity.

But the lamentable fact remains that, sixty-five years after atomic weapons were used against the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there is still no legal prohibition against their use, much less real progress toward their elimination. These horrific weapons continue to present an unacceptable threat to the lives of people throughout the world.

One underlying factor that has prolonged the era of nuclear weapons is the persistent notion that, for geopolitical or security reasons, they can somehow be considered a necessary evil.

In this sense, it is profoundly significant that the NPT Review Conference, a venue of uniquely weighty importance for nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, expressed in this way its awareness of the fundamentally inhumane nature of nuclear weapons.

Also of great importance was the fact that the NPT Review Conference’s Final Document made reference, for the first time ever, to proposals to outlaw these weapons through a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC). This outcome was achieved through the determined efforts of global civil society and governments working together toward a shared vision and goal. We must make this experience the basis for further collaborative endeavors as we advance, step by step, toward the establishment of an NWC.

The work of achieving a world without nuclear weapons is a task of unimaginably vast proportions; as

former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz has pointed out, it must be undertaken as a truly global enterprise.

New efforts and energies are now being directed toward this challenge. We can see this in the nascent collaboration between, for example, those in the peace movement, who have long called for nuclear abolition, and security strategists who have come to share this awareness. I urge all involved to accelerate this trend in order to bring further momentum to efforts to transform the era.

Of course not only the use, but even the possession, of chemical and biological weapons is now thoroughly stigmatized within international society. This consensus has taken the form of conventions outlawing all phases of these weapons of mass destruction. How then can it be that nuclear weapons, which are far more indiscriminate and destructive—giving rise to suffering that endures for generations—have yet to be prohibited?

The first step must be to commence negotiation in good faith. To ensure the success of such negotiations and the achievement of an NWC, it is essential that the principles of humanitarian law, affirmed by the NPT Review Conference, be applied to nuclear weapons. The SGI will continue to work with other NGOs and civil society actors to call for this.

The Government of Austria has exercised distinguished leadership in helping to spur new movement toward nuclear abolition; for this I wish to express my deepest respect and admiration. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt respect for the invaluable work undertaken by the IAEA and CTBTO toward the realization of a world free of nuclear weapons.

To quote the great Austrian writer Stefan Zweig: “It is in action that a thought becomes genuinely alive.”

Concrete action is indispensable if we are to bring the vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world to life. Now is the time for both political leaders and global civil society to come together toward the achievement of this grand vision. Our coordinated, full-fledged efforts are required.

Fifty-three years ago, on September 8, 1957, the second president of our organization issued a declaration in which he condemned nuclear weapons as an absolute evil and called for their complete prohibition.

This was a powerful expression of the determination to resist and combat any and all forces that would deny and trample on the dignity of human life.

Inspired by this declaration, we have focused our efforts on challenging this way of thinking—those aspects of our collective mentality that, consciously or unconsciously, accept the continued existence of nuclear weapons. We consider a transformation in people’s basic outlook—in the depths of the human spirit—the sine qua non for nuclear weapons abolition.

Over the years we have deepened our collaborative engagements with like-minded organizations such as International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), the Pugwash Conferences and the NGO Committee on Peace, Vienna, holding exhibitions and gathering signatures for nuclear abolition. Through these and other grassroots activities we have sought to generate an expanding global solidarity for peace.

During the NPT Review Conference held in New York this past May, for example, our youth membership presented to representatives of the conference and the United Nations the more than 2.2 million signatures they had collected calling for the adoption of an NWC.

We are determined to continue our efforts, working alongside our friends gathered here today, toward the earliest possible realization of a world without nuclear weapons. Together, let us create a new world in the twenty-first century, one that is lit by the bright light of hope.

Please allow me to conclude this message with my heartfelt best wishes for the continued well-being of all in attendance and the further success of all your important endeavors.