



**“Transforming the Human Spirit”**

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I would like to express my gratitude to our hosts and all those whose support has made possible this important international conference and for the opportunity to address one of the most critical threats facing our world.

On July 7 of this year, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was adopted by the United Nations negotiating conference. This was a historic and concrete step forward toward the abolition of nuclear weapons. As a civil society organization, the SGI maintained a deep interest and active involvement in the negotiating process.

It was John F. Kennedy who said, “Our problems are manmade—therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man’s reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable—and we believe they can do it again.”

This way of thinking strongly resonates with our own. The question then becomes how best to take on the challenges that face us. The SGI’s activities for peace, in particular for the abolition of nuclear weapons, arise from the philosophical stance that a transformation in the spirit of one person can transform society. This idea has been expressed by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda as follows: “A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation, and, further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind.”

We can anticipate two objections to this approach. The first is that if the only way to achieve nuclear disarmament is by transforming the human spirit then a world without nuclear weapons is an impossibility. Nuclear disarmament is already extremely difficult; if transforming the human spirit is then added as a necessary precondition, the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons becomes unreachable. A second objection might be to question whether it is in fact possible to transform the human spirit. This touches on the core questions of human existence.

To respond first to the second objection, we believe that the spiritual life of humans is

characterized by its diversity and mutability. Neither good nor evil are fixed realities intrinsic to human life, but are always subject to the possibility of change. We manifest different aspects of our inner life through our proactive engagements with others and in response to the ways they act on us. Crucially, we believe that sublime possibilities of wisdom, compassion and courage exist as potentialities inherent in all human life. Our practice as Buddhists lies in the ceaseless effort to bring forth those best potentialities in both ourselves and others. What we term “transforming the human spirit” means making manifest the best qualities already inherent in human life.

Then to respond to the first objection, I will note that we consider difficult challenges such as that of nuclear disarmament to be prime opportunities to bring forth the more positive aspects of the human spirit. To engage the challenge of abolishing nuclear weapons is to confront the most demonically destructive aspects of human life that underlie nuclear weapons and their radical negation of the dignity and sanctity of life. Buddhism describes these destructive impulses as the “three poisons” of anger, greed and the fundamental ignorance or folly from which they arise. We do not, therefore, view transforming the human spirit as a necessary condition for the achievement of nuclear disarmament. Rather, we believe that through taking on this immensely difficult challenge each of us can develop the best qualities inherent in the human spirit. This is our core approach.

It goes without saying that this is not easy. It is vital that in confronting these issues we continue to foster new awareness and new sustaining motivation. Education can and must play a crucial role in this regard. And it is for this reason that education—providing learning opportunities—has been a consistent feature of our activities.

Today, continued possession of nuclear weapons is justified for reasons of national security, on the basis of nuclear deterrence theory. How then do we help people awaken from the mad nightmare of such deterrence, by which the world’s citizens are held hostage and “peace” is maintained by a balance of terror? This is the key question.

To do this requires that those engaged in the movement for nuclear disarmament put

forward a new vision of security, one that is easily understood, robust and appealing. We need to awaken people from the present nightmare with the bright lights of a new vision. Concepts such as integral disarmament, human security and human development all indicate the orientation for such a vision.

Within the disarmament field, humanitarian concerns have provided such orientation. They have helped introduce a human perspective to the security discourse. The humanitarian discourse has led to an explicit recognition within the international community of the impermissible nature of nuclear weapons, contributing importantly to the realization of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

Underlying the humanitarian discourse has been the assertion that the nuclear weapons issue is not just a question of international law, but has a distinctly ethical and moral dimension.

Here the role played by the world's religious traditions has been noteworthy. His Holiness Pope Francis issued a statement to both the 2014 Vienna Conference and the TPNW negotiating conference held in New York this year, positively impacting the debate. For its part, the SGI actively participated in the initiative by Faith Communities Concerned about Nuclear Weapons, which issued a total of eight joint statements to the UN General Assembly, the NPT Review Conference and TPNW negotiating conference, urging the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons.

The Preamble of the TPNW recognizes the efforts made by religious leaders. This is a clear acknowledgement that the voices raising ethical or moral concerns have been an indispensable element in the international discourse over the years.

Within the SGI, we have given sustained consideration to the kind of approach that would most effectively engage a broad-based public constituency in the debate on nuclear weapons abolition. The concept we developed is expressed in the phrase, "Everything You Treasure."

The desire to protect the people and things we love is a core human sentiment. Propelled by this, we humans have built homes, woven fabric, raised crops and harvested them. At the same time, the urge to protect what we value—the people we love—has propelled the development of military technologies. The destructive power of weapons continued to grow over the course of centuries, culminating in 1945 in the development and use of nuclear weapons.

As Albert Einstein put it, “The release of atom power has changed everything except our way of thinking.” Indeed, despite the fact that we today live lives that are profoundly interdependent, how consciously aware of that reality are we?

If an awareness of our deep interdependence could truly take hold in the minds of each individual, we would become conscious of the fact that any harm done to others will in some form redound to us. This is the foundation for the ethos that SGI President Ikeda has expressed as the commitment not to build one’s happiness on the suffering of others.

It is for this reason that our movement has focused on expanding the reach of empathy. This starts by encouraging frank dialogue among people based on the universal human desire to protect the things we treasure. This can in turn foster a shared awareness that nuclear weapons—in any hands—are dangerous and wrong as a means of protecting the things and people we treasure. On this basis, we can pursue the elimination of nuclear weapons as the shared global undertaking of humankind.

This was the thinking behind the launch of our campaign, “People’s Decade for Nuclear Abolition,” in 2007 and for our collaboration with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) recipients of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, in promoting global grassroots efforts in awareness-raising. The exhibition we developed in cooperation with ICAN, titled “Everything You Treasure—For a World Free from Nuclear Weapons,” has to date been held in 80 cities in 19 countries, attracting numerous visitors.

The challenge of initiating dialogue is something that can be taken up by anyone. Dialogue holds limitless possibilities. What starts as a simple conversation on a given topic can naturally deepen into richer forms of dialogue over time.

The core of the SGI's religious activities is the local small-group discussion meeting which brings together people from different social backgrounds where they exchange and share their experiences in faith. We believe that this kind of dialogic platform can be adapted and applied to the movement to abolish nuclear weapons.

The various exhibitions that the SGI has developed over the years are based on this same formula, in that we seek to generate fora for dialogue. The exhibitions have become the site of spontaneous dialogue among viewers, generating a sense of empathetic connection and shared concern. This in turn can give rise to action and solidarity and even a new generation of citizen leaders.

We further believe that this kind of dialogic approach can be applied to all forms of diplomatic effort toward the realization of a world without nuclear weapons.

As another of the SGI's activities, we have supported efforts by young people to record war experiences, in particular those of the *hibakusha*. This of course provides an opportunity for youth to learn about the realities of war and nuclear weapons. But even more, it is through such encounter and dialogue that young people can develop and grow as leaders.

Through such activities, we have sought to involve a broad spectrum of participation and to develop youth leadership.

As I have sought to summarize, the SGI's movement for nuclear weapons abolition focuses on the inner diversity and mutability of human life. Through dialogue, we seek to extend the reach of empathy and raise popular awareness. These I believe are the special characteristics of our efforts, which may be understood as a grassroots program of peace and disarmament education.

The role of peace and disarmament education is referenced in the Preamble to the TPNW. Article 12 calls for efforts to universalize the Treaty. In light of the origins of the Treaty, which was drafted with the participation and contributions of civil society, it is clear that civil society can make important and indispensable contributions here also.

Nuclear weapons are dangerous from a security perspective. From an ethical and moral perspective, they are wrong. This renders them unacceptable in any hands. Today, with the geopolitical risks of nuclear conflict at almost unprecedented levels, it is vital that this awareness be shared widely by all people.

We are determined to continue to collaborate with the diverse actors who share our goal of encouraging this awareness through peace and disarmament education.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak and for your kind attention.

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