

SGI DAY — JANUARY 26
The SGI Offers Hope to the World

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SGI Day is a day of hope. Every year on Jan. 26, to commemorate the SGI's establishment in 1975, SGI President Ikeda presents a detailed proposal to the United Nations outlining his perspective on the world's problems.

In these peace proposals Mr. Ikeda always takes a positive approach toward the world's problems. While he never glosses over the seriousness of these problems — nor the United Nations' internal problems — his emphasis is on what we can do now to make things better in the future.

In this sense, his peace proposals offer a uniquely Buddhist perspective — one based on hope. In his 1996 proposal, he quoted the late Norman Cousins, who said that “the main characteristic of pessimism, like cynicism, is that it sets the stage for its own omens. It shuns hope for the future....”

But it's not easy to be optimistic about the world when we see what's going on in the news. In 1996, in fact, often what we thought was on the mend seemed to break again.

Tragedies like Rwanda seemed to be repeating themselves. Many felt that when Benjamin Netanyahu was elected prime minister of Israel, his position on Palestinian statehood set the Middle East peace process back at least a couple of years.

In recent weeks we have seen the peace in Bosnia prove itself to be more and more tenuous. In Russia, a new brand of nationalism has been born as the country faces what Dr. Yuri A. Petrosyan recently told President Ikeda is the most challenging time in its history.

In short, the world does not seem to be taking the direct course toward peace, but the long, winding, bumpy road there. It's like we are lurching toward peace. It's no surprise that the recent news of the Guatemalan peace treaty being signed — which ended a 36-year civil war — was met with cautious joy even in Guatemala.

But President Ikeda always backs up his peace proposals with historical examples of the common people rising to the challenge and successfully changing their world. In his 1996 proposal he turned to the current example of the new South Africa: There the people are moving steadily forward — now with a new constitution — in creating a nation where people of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures form what Mr. Ikeda described as “a multi-hued, harmonious whole while giving free rein to the distinctive characteristics of each component group.”

At the same time that President Ikeda keeps looking to the positive, he admits that solutions may naturally be a long time coming. “It will take many years and much effort to resolve the global problems we now face,” he said in his 1996 proposal.

Last year at a meeting with Spring Training Course participants in Tokyo, the SGI president expressed this long-term perspective when he shared details of a report from an SGI delegation to Mongolia. He explained how he saw the SGI's newly established relationship with Mongolia as a result of Nichiren Daishonin's work more than 700 years earlier.

“Nichiren Daishonin established a profound Buddhist connection with Mongolia,” he said. “When the Mongol emissaries sent to Japan were beheaded by the Kamakura government, the Daishonin lamented their fate.... He again offered prayers at the time of the Mongol invasions. I sense that the seeds planted with his prayers at that time are now

putting forth shoots.”

Last September another seed put forth a shoot: The World Boys and Girls Art Exhibition, jointly organized by a few Mongolian organizations, the SGI and UNESCO, was held at the Mongolian Children’s Palace in Ulan Bator, Mongolia.

The SGI has been planting seeds throughout the world for 22 years now. Formed in Guam, with representatives of 51 countries in attendance, the SGI began with the SGI president’s encouragement that its members devote themselves to planting these seeds of peace.

Now there are SGI organizations in 128 countries, many of which started with just one or two members but which are now steadily growing. When President Ikeda talked about Mongolia, he mentioned how happy he was that there are two SGI members living there, who he said “have won great trust and confidence among the people of that country.”

The SGI has achieved many things in its 22 years, but the greatest hope our organization offers the world is not in these achievements alone but also in our membership, the people who make up the SGI. Only human beings can nurture hope; Nichiren Daishonin clarified that the ultimate origin of hope is the human heart. The spirit behind SGI Day is related to this important teaching of the Daishonin. The Middle East, Bosnia, Rwanda — where are the answers? Inside the human heart, the Daishonin says — the heart that hangs on to hope, even when it faces a troubled world. Such hearts can be found in plentitude in the SGI.

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