

A Battle Without End

'It is easy to decry the United Nations as powerless or unnecessary. But we must first acquaint ourselves with the little-recognized struggles of those visionary individuals who earnestly fostered and protected the United Nations, the parliament of humanity.' — Daisaku Ikeda

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech after receiving a special commendation from the World Federation of U.N. Associations at the SGI World Youth Peace General Meeting, at the Soka International Friendship Hall, Sendagaya, Tokyo, Sept. 13.

The Honorable President Halim, Deputy Secretary General Sharma, Professor Nanda, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great honor to receive this commendation from the distinguished World Federation of U.N. Associations. I wish to express my sincerest appreciation.

In the chaotic period immediately after World War II, WFUNA quickly launched a people's movement for the United Nations, showing itself to be a great pioneer of peace. WFUNA remains a model and source of inspiration for all nongovernmental organizations around the world. It is with deep pride and humility that I, together with my fellow SGI members around the globe, accept today's honor from this most esteemed people's organization. Thank you very much.

I understand that many of the delegates who attended WFUNA's inaugural conference in 1946 were courageous young men and women who had fought for their countries in resistance or underground movements during the war. Moving on from resistance to the further challenge of constructing peace — this never-ending spiritual struggle lives on in WFUNA.

To my great joy, young leaders of the new century from 50 countries and territories are gathered here today. Together with these bright young successors, I pledge that the SGI will continue its efforts to support the United Nations and contribute to a peaceful world.

I have consistently advocated the resolution of global issues centering on the United Nations and have taken action based on this premise. Despite the difficulties that beset the United Nations, I believe that the only sure path of peace and humanism for our world lies in pursuing dialogue and forging harmony through initiatives centered around the United Nations.

I also count myself among those who believe that to reinforce and revitalize the United Nations it is essential to transcend national interests and bring together the goodwill of the people with the enthusiasm of youth. Based on this belief, I made a number of frank proposals and requests to then-U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. I suggested that in addition to talking with national leaders and government officials, he should devote more time to hearing the voices of the people and providing opportunities for dialogue with youth and students.

It has been said that from the top, one can only see 30 percent of a given situation. From below, though, from the grass roots, one can see about 70 percent. A lot can be seen from the people's perspective.

Last June, on a visit to the U.N. Headquarters in New York, I enjoyed a candid exchange of views with top officials on the vision of a United Nations supported by the people.

WFUNA has constantly striven to bring the United Nations closer to the people and

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people closer to the United Nations. For instance, WFUNA's innovative philatelic program, issuing commemorative stamps each year, has been instrumental in promoting the United Nations to the world. This is but one example of the creativity and ingenuity of WFUNA, an organization that has always focused its efforts on the people. For decades, WFUNA and its dedicated members worldwide have worked tirelessly to create an alliance of global citizens. Allow me to convey my heartfelt respect for these noble endeavors.

It is easy to decry the United Nations as powerless or unnecessary. But we must first acquaint ourselves with the little-recognized struggles of those visionary individuals who earnestly fostered and protected the United Nations, the parliament of humanity. WFUNA President Halim played an important role in this as the speaker of the legislative assembly of West Bengal. During the war, the Japanese army inflicted inhuman suffering on the Bengalese, repeatedly bombing their region. The Japanese occupation of Burma also halted rice imports from Burma to India. Bengal was subsequently afflicted with a serious famine in which millions perished. I will never forget this tragedy.

The great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore was quick to detect the dangerous rise of Japanese nationalism and sounded a strident early warning. He was particularly angered by the blatant betrayal of the pacifist spirit of Shakyamuni that he witnessed among Japanese Buddhist priests who mocked their profession by actively cooperating with the militarists and supporting the war of aggression.

At the height of this insane period, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Soka Gakkai founder, championing Buddhist pacifism and humanism, opposed nationalism head-on. He subsequently died in prison for his convictions. Josei Toda, his disciple and second Soka Gakkai president, was also imprisoned for opposing militarism. He was released just around the time the U.N. Charter was being promulgated. Standing in the devastated ruins of a defeated nation, he set out to rebuild the people's movement of the Soka Gakkai.

Since the organization he built was strong and solid, it became the target of malicious attacks, with opponents denouncing it as militaristic. However, President Toda never succumbed to external pressure.

As is stated in WFUNA's constitution, unless an unshakable force for peace is built on a moral alliance of humankind, we cannot prevent the tragic recurrence of war. As successor to Makiguchi and Toda, I have always regarded the groundless persecutions I have met as inevitable, and indeed I have perceived them as an honor. As a Buddhist scripture states, "Wise men and saints are tested by abuse" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 38).

The battle between good and evil is without end. The insidious roots of narrow-minded nationalism and chauvinism still have not been eradicated.

I want to share with you President Halim's greeting to members of the 6th SGI Youth Cultural Delegation to India last year: "Young people must keep a vigilant eye on the affairs of the world and influence their countries through dialogue. This is one of the rights of youth."

Youth will change history with their passionate voices of conviction. Youth will forge a path into the new century, speaking the truth with a penetrating courage and eloquence.

Forty years ago, the declaration against nuclear weapons of my mentor, President Toda, was like the roar of a lion. Using only his voice, the power of speech, he attacked — at its core — the devilish nature that threatens the very existence of humanity

On Sept. 11, I spoke with Dr. Nanda, a professor at the University of Denver, about India's "great soul," Mahatma Gandhi. Once, an elderly farmer, who had the good fortune to meet Gandhi, was asked about his impression of the great leader. He responded simply that Gandhi was a "big man." When asked how big, the farmer laughed and stated proudly,

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“He was as big as the Himalayas.” Then, with deep emotion, he said, “There is no one as big as him in the world today.”¹

I firmly believe and expect that the young people here today will surmount all hardships and trials, grow into towering individuals and, just like the Himalayan mountain range, forge themselves into capable individuals for peace in the 21st century.

I conclude my speech with my prayers for the continued success of WFUNA as we advance toward a U.N. renaissance.

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1. This episode appears in: *Tatsuo Morimoto, Gandhi to Tagoru* (Gandhi and Tagore) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1995), p. 109.

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