

The Illuminating Spirit of José Rizal

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech on the conferment of the first Rizal International Peace Award at the Philippine International Convention Center, Manila, Feb. 9.

It is indeed a great honor to be the recipient of the first Rizal International Peace Award. As I received this prestigious award, I was moved by a solemn sense of both its significance and of the weighty responsibility that attends it. I would like to express to those assembled today my deep appreciation and gratitude.

I am further profoundly grateful to His Excellency President Fidel V. Ramos, who found time in the midst of his pressing official duties to honor us with his presence today. Please accept my most sincere thanks.

I share this immense honor with my dear friends of the SGI Philippines who are daily striving to contribute to their society as responsible citizens and neighbors. I also share this joy with SGI members in 128 countries worldwide who join us in offering their heartfelt felicitations on the centennial of Philippine independence.

Earlier today, I had the privilege of visiting the beautiful, green Rizal Park and of laying a wreath at the foot of the magnificent statue of Dr. José Rizal that stands near the site of his martyrdom.

The heroes of war are commemorated with statues throughout the world. It is sad that there are far too few statues to honor the memory of the heroes of peace and humanitarianism.

It is for this reason that I firmly believe that efforts to share with the world the spirit of Dr. Rizal, conveying his message into the coming century, advance the cause of peace and the interests of humanity.

To our great joy, in November 1996 Soka University was presented with a superb bust of Dr. Rizal by the Order of the Knights of Rizal. I repeat here our promise to enshrine this bust as one of the school's eternal spiritual treasures within the new Administration Building when it is completed next year.

Before us lies the vast path that Dr. Rizal pioneered at the risk, and finally the cost, of his life. This path is first of all a path toward victory for ordinary people, for the common person. Dr. Rizal was a valiant hero who emerged from among those who had suffered most intensely through more than three centuries of colonial rule.

To revive and restore the "downtrodden rights of humanity" from José Rizal's *The Reign of Greed*, he raised his voice and acted with immense courage — the courage of a lion. "We must win freedom," he asserted, "by deserving it, exalting individual reason and dignity, loving the just, the good, the great, even dying for it."

What a brilliant, hope-filled statement of faith in his fellow citizens! In his words, we hear the invincible roar of a lion, stirring and rousing the soul of humankind eternally into the future.

He rejected violence, insisting that peace be attained through peaceful means. The stream of his visionary philosophy flows into the river of nonviolent action in this century, led by Mahatma Gandhi in India and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States. More recently, the People Power Revolution of February 1986 was a dramatic enactment of the ideals of Dr. Rizal. The Republic of the Philippines has experienced a renewal and today is making remarkable strides on all fronts under the outstanding leadership of President

Ramos.

Here, also, we find the living pulse of Dr. Rizal's philosophy of hope, his unwavering faith in the infinite potential of the human being. Dr. Rizal clearly stated his understanding of our purpose in this life: to seek happiness for oneself and one's fellows by following the road toward progress and perfection. Indeed, this must be the object of all human endeavors, whether in the realm of science or politics, society or religion. We the common people must become wiser and stronger, so that we can advance, without hesitation or fear, toward the goals of peace and happiness. To this end, we must work to build the global solidarity of youth that Dr. Rizal pioneered.

Traveling extensively in Europe, Asia and the United States, Dr. Rizal was a world citizen filled with the spirit of youth and humanity. Through the power of culture and character, he forged bonds of friendship and solidarity wherever he went. His superlative poems and literary works continue to be loved by people throughout the world.

He also produced and published the first Tagalog translation of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, sharing its inspiring words with the youth of his homeland.

As is well known, his travels also took him to Japan, which he visited in February 1888, exactly 110 years ago.

In the decades that followed, however, Japan brutally betrayed the affection and friendship he had brought to her shores. In its madness, militarist Japan invaded and inflicted unspeakable horrors on his beautiful homeland.

To ensure that there is never a repetition of this cruelty and barbarity, we must create waves of friendship — a flowing river of peace that deeply and firmly binds together the hearts of our young people. It is my belief that cultural and educational exchange are the means to achieve this. I have devoted myself to this effort and will continue to do so. As President Ramos has stressed, a culture of peace is the greatest legacy we can leave to the next generation.

Dr. Rizal described youth as the "fair hope of this land of mine," and declared education of the people to be his "supreme aspiration." He was deeply concerned about the dangers of radical change, and chose instead the way of peaceful gradualism based on education.

Even in exile, he founded a school where he showered love and attention on the children of poor families. The golden record of his contributions in humanistic education continues to shine to this day.

Dr. Rizal's 35-year life was a succession of persecutions and trials. And yet he looked down upon these events as if from a great height. He declared that an honest man arouses the greatest hatred. The just and worthy must suffer so that their ideas may be known and spread.

The Japanese educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), who founded the movement that developed into the SGI, was a near contemporary of Dr. Rizal. Relentless in his criticism of Japanese militarism, he died in prison at 73. He was moved and inspired by convictions that closely parallel those of Dr. Rizal.

Through the great persecutions they both endured, through their willing martyrdom for crimes of which they were innocent, each succeeded in lighting a spiritual flame that continues to burn as a passionate quest for justice.

Their struggles have been passed on and are continued today by the young people in whom they believed so deeply, on whose growth and development they staked everything.

To live with the spirit of Dr. Rizal is to live in eternal youth.

Throughout my life, I will work with you, the direct spiritual heirs of Dr. Rizal, as we advance with the world's youth along the great path of peace.

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In closing, I extend my earnest prayers for the continued good health and well-being of His Excellency President Ramos, of the distinguished members of the Order of the Knights of Rizal, and of all those who have so kindly attended today. Allow me also to voice my prayers for the lasting prosperity and glory of the Republic of the Philippines.

Malamin salamat po! (Thank you very much!)

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