

We Can't Take Nuclear Disarmament for Granted

Recent nuclear tests in India have shocked the world. Reaction has been swift and strong. The United States has imposed sanctions. Pakistan, India's estranged neighbor, is said to be preparing its own test. China has condemned India's move. Japan has threatened to cut off aid, and Russia, India's longtime ally, has expressed disappointment.

In the years since the Cold War, nuclear annihilation has seemingly become less and less likely — at least no one is building backyard bomb shelters anymore. But the new tests have again brought home the chilling reality that nuclear arms still threaten everyone everywhere.

And the threat isn't coming from the usual suspects anymore. The nations with established nuclear capability are advocating non-proliferation, but, as the *Los Angeles Times* put it recently, there's "a relentlessly growing list of 'new' nuclear powers in Asia and the Middle East." India and Pakistan top the list of nuclear "flashpoints," but according to many experts, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Israel and terrorists are the real dangers to nuclear stability.

What makes the India tests particularly troublesome is the glee with which the Indian people greeted the news. People celebrated in the streets; the tests were a matter of national pride. In fact, the new prime minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was recently elected in part because he said he'd pursue a nuclear future.

Ironically, India's tradition of non-violence and respect for humanity contains just the message the world needs most today. From Ashoka the Great, recognized as one of the greatest kings in history, to Mahatma Gandhi and his successors, India has been home to many who knew the futility of force in securing human happiness.

We can only hope that the Indian people, as well as the rest of us, will revive this legacy of non-violence, embrace it and secure a lasting peace based on its wise and profound principles. It is this "message of peace," SGI President Ikeda said last year, "that I am confident India will continue to broadcast to the world in the 21st and 22nd centuries. There may be those who say that my outlook is entirely too optimistic. I will not, however, under any circumstance, abandon my faith in humanity. I direct implacable faith toward the inner grandeur of humanity."

To tap into this inner grandeur, though, is no easy task. And it is this internal realm in which the fight against nuclear weapons must be waged. Only when people's hearts and minds are changed will peace become a reality. Only when nuclear weapons are recognized as the ultimate evil will the world be safe from them. So long as people believe that violence can solve problems, we'll have war.

Leaving this work to governments isn't the solution. As SGI President Ikeda wrote in his latest peace proposal, "All people should actively strive to confront the issues that threaten the survival of humankind and the sanctity of human life, as I have urged repeatedly over the years."

Our SGI movement to spread the Daishonin's life-affirming philosophy is perhaps the surest way of opening people's hearts and minds to the promise of tolerance and mutual respect. Our religious dialogues are only one part of our efforts for peace, however. Taking action with like-minded people toward common goals is another powerful way of steering the world away from violence.

Toward this end, the SGI has sponsored anti-nuclear weapons exhibitions that have traveled the world. Recently, the Soka Gakkai in Japan has actively supported Abolition

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2000, a worldwide movement initiated by the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation here in the United States. The youth division there — “inspired by a strong sense of responsibility for the future,” Mr. Ikeda said — collected some 13 million signatures in support of that initiative. SGI youth in Italy, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have also collected signatures. And last week in Japan, the Soka Gakkai’s Peace Committee and Youth Peace Conference issued a public condemnation of India’s latest tests and urged all nuclear nations to disarm. SGI-USA youth, too, are discussing appropriate actions.

More than 40 years ago, the Soka Gakkai’s second president, Josei Toda, made his declaration against nuclear weapons. This remains our proud legacy today. Our goal of eradicating the nuclear weapons threat has motivated our activities ever since.

While much has been done to eliminate this evil technology, recent events make it obvious that we can’t take nuclear disarmament for granted. More stills need to be done.

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