

**CREATING PARTNERSHIPS FOR A COMPASSIONATE CIVILIZATION
SGI-USA CO-SPONSORS STATE OF THE WORLD FORUM CONFERENCE
BY JANET LOURENZO AND CALEY GUIDA, SAN FRANCISCO**

The 1999 State of the World Forum is designed to create partnerships for envisioning and creating a sustainable and compassionate civilization. This year's annual gathering was held in San Francisco on October 1-6, 1999, and brought together over 800 luminaries, leaders and futurists from around the world. The Forum event is a global platform where leading thinkers—who seldom have the opportunity to work together—engage in dialogue and develop programs and policies to address our greatest global concerns.

For the many San Francisco SGI-USA members who attended, this was a kind of “New Age” United Nations without the bureaucracy and protocols. The five-day conference featured many panel discussions and over fifty roundtable sessions. SGI members participated in the dialogue on; “The Earth Charter: Establishing a New Covenant with Nature and Humanity,” “Capitalism and the Compassionate Society” and “The Role of Religion and Spiritual Leadership in the 21st Century.” The opening dinner gala titled, “Creating a Culture of Peace” featured welcoming remarks by Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan and Jim Garrison, President, State of the World Forum. Mr. Garrison's opening statement, “The people in this room are the leaders of the 21st Century,” was especially meaningful to me (Janet), as SGI district leader in Redwood Coast Territory.

The entire city of San Francisco seemed charged with the hopeful spirit of the Forum's activities. Fellow SGI-USA member, Charlotte Kobayashi said that, “As I walked down California Street, streams of people strolled by smiling and talking, using gestures of peace, friendliness and acceptance. Some wore saris, others wore traditional Maori tattoos, or a few sprigs of *ti* leaves (native to Hawaii for spirit cleansing), and others wore conventional business suits. Strangers smiled as we were all seated for the Keynote Address on the Earth Charter, presented by Steven Rockefeller, Professor of Religion, Middlebury College. There were over 500 places set, with 10 to each round table. On my left was a management consultant from Germany, whose mission was to help companies blend spiritualism in the workplace. On my right sat a designer of a magazine called, *Humanity*, connecting nature and mankind from around the world. There were many others in attendance from every corner of the world, including Mexico, Japan, The Philippines, Bosnia and young Palestinian children from a refugee camp.”

President Ikeda once stated, “It is hard to overstate the significance of the Earth Charter, which is being undertaken through the united efforts of concerned people throughout the world from all national and cultural backgrounds. I offer my heartfelt prayers for the reward and successful civil society consultations involved in the drafting process.”¹

SGI-USA also co-sponsored a special event addressing the elimination of nuclear weapons titled, “Creating a Culture of Peace for the 21st Century,” featuring Dr. Helen Caldicott, founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility, and Dr. Patch Adams, founder of the Gesundheit Institute. Former U.S. Senator Alan Cranston, who led the discussion on eliminating nuclear weapons, described the forum as a “transforming event for many.” “I (Caley) felt it was a culmination of my twenty years of practice. The friends I made represent a wealth of cultural diversity and creative genius. I look forward to sharing my Buddhist life philosophy with my new and treasured friends, and putting into action President Ikeda's vision of hope for the 21st century.”

The closing session, “Family, Community and the Human Spirit” was held at Grace

Cathedral. SGI-USA member, Roberta Donnay was most impressed by the Forum's 130 Emerging Youth Leaders from over fifty countries who all stood in front of the assembly and taught us a simple song. Hafsat Abiola, a young woman from Africa said, "We want to tell our elders that it's OK, we can take it from here." Roberta said, "That declaration meant more to me than all the famous people and beautiful presentations, because it was a simple statement from the people, showing once again the power and hope of the youth."

As San Francisco SGI members, we felt proud to be a part of this global effort of discussion and action towards the realization of a sustainable and compassionate society in the new millennium.

1. Foreword to *Buddhist Perspectives on the Earth Charter*, published by the Boston Research Center for 21st Century.

The State of the World Forum

The State of the World Forum network is comprised of leaders and activists in business, science, academia, politics, religion and the arts. The Forum also gives priority to gender parity and the full inclusion of youth. Combining all these constituencies as equals to address common issues and challenges, the Forum also gives priority to bringing those from the grassroots together with those widely known and acclaimed, as well as with the gatekeepers of capital and power.

The State of the World Forum's uniqueness has been in the breadth and scope of its interests; the diversity of individuals it has brought to its various gatherings and initiatives; and its willingness to place the issue of spirituality on a par with economic, scientific, cultural and political discussions.

The first State of the World Forum gathering took place in San Francisco, September 27-October 1, 1995. Convened by Mikhail Gorbachev, more than 400 innovative leaders and thinkers from 50 countries came together. The central question Mr. Gorbachev challenged this gathering to take up was what principles, priorities and values should guide humanity as it moves beyond the strictures of the Cold War into the next phase of development. This was debated and discussed from the vantage points of science, economics, global security, religion and the arts.

During the 1996 and 1997 Forums, this conversation was continued. The inclusion of youth and the emphasis on gender parity, combined with people coming from all over the world and representing all manner of constituencies and disciplines, engendered discussions which were both catalytic and transformative. Issues addressed ranged across the entire spectrum of human interest in the late twentieth century. All perspectives were welcome, every point of view was heard, and everyone was invited to honor diversity as the key to creativity.

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The State of the World Forum, working in cooperation with the office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in association with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in cooperation with the Conference of Non Governmental

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Organizations (CONGO) and the United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI), and in partnership with other networks, constituents and corporations worldwide, will convene its annual gathering of leaders of civic society September 3-9, 2000 in New York. This event will take place concurrently with the special United Nations Millennium Assembly of heads of state convened at the special invitation of the Secretary General, to discuss the future of the United Nations and the priorities to which it should address itself.

CO-CHAIRS

Askar Akaev, President, Kyrgyzstan • Oscar Arias, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate • Jean-Bertrand Aristide, President, Haiti (1991-1996) • James A. Baker, III, U. S. Secretary of State (1989-1992) • Tansu Ciller, Prime Minister, Turkey (1993-1996) • Marian Wright Edelman, President, Children's Defense Fund • Sonia Gandhi, Chair, Rajiv Gandhi Foundation • Jane Goodall, Primatologist • Mikhail Gorbachev, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate • Ruud Lubbers, Prime Minister, The Netherlands (1982-1994) • Frederico Mayor, Director General, UNESCO • Thabo Mbeki, Deputy President, Republic of South Africa • Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General, 1995 UN World Conference on Women • Wally N'Dow, Secretary General, 1997 UN World Conference on Habitat • Yasuhiro Nakasone, Prime Minister, Japan (1982-1987) • Lea Rabin, First Lady of Israel (1992-1995) • Jose Ramos-Horta, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate • Jehan Sadat, First Lady of Egypt (1970-1981) • Ted Turner, Chairman, Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. • Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate • Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate • Muhammad Yunus, Managing Director, Grameen Bank

“During the years since its inception, the State of the World Forum has come a long way. It has created a large network of activists, many of whom I call my friends. Working together and interacting with them is a thought-provoking experience that enriches one's mind, a practical study in achieving unity in diversity. In our globalizing and increasingly interconnected world, we must learn to listen to and hear each other, to assure that change, which is inevitable, works for the benefit of all. Our meetings in San Francisco and follow-up activities are part of this quest.”—Mikhail Gorbachev, President, Soviet Union (1985–91); Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, 1990; Founder, State of the Word Forum.