

## CARIBBEAN REGION ANNOUNCED

**MIAMI, FEB. 25** SGI-USA General Director Fred Zaitso formally announced the creation of the Southern Zone and a new region, the Caribbean Region, during a meeting with Florida members at the Miami Community Center. This change promises to enhance communication and nurturing of members throughout the seven southern states of Florida, Georgia, Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, as well as the Caribbean.

Thus three regions — Atlanta, Florida and Caribbean — make up the Southern Zone, with Cliff Sawyer (who lives in south Florida) and Sheilah Edwards (an SGI-USA vice general director based in New York) holding dual responsibilities as Southern Zone and Caribbean Region leaders. Donna Fabian of Atlanta and Ingmar Soto of south Florida are the zone youth leaders. Senior Vice General Director David Kasahara of New York will serve as advisor to the zone.

General Director Zaitso took time to share some recent guidance from SGI President Ikeda on a variety of subjects from leadership to marriage and single life. On behalf of President Ikeda, he thanked all those who offer their homes for Buddhist meetings as places for “nurturing human potential.” Buddhism is based on the idea of a great reformation in human life, he said, and so naturally “leaders must grow and reform themselves.” Again quoting President Ikeda, Mr. Zaitso reiterated: “We must nurture a new wave of caring leaders for the 21st century. Human revolution doesn’t mean other people’s human revolution.”

Mr. Zaitso was accompanied by Cliff Sawyer and Sheilah Edwards on a journey to the islands of Puerto Rico, St. Maarten/St. Martin and Trinidad and Tobago, where general meetings and various other activities with SGI-USA members were conducted.

— *By Terry Ellis*

**PUERTO RICO, Feb. 27** The town of Isla Verde where the SGI-USA community center is located played host to a general meeting held this evening. Some members from the seaport of Mayagüez had chartered a bus and traveled more than two hours to attend the festive event.

To the members’ delight, General Director Zaitso delivered his entire speech in Spanish, diverting from the original plan to have an interpreter read the text. Cultural performances featured a salsa dance by young women and a quartet who performed a classical number.

After Puerto Rico Area Leader Eleso Echevarria gave opening words, Sheilah Edwards addressed the members, stressing that daily challenges are opportunities to grow strong. SGI President Ikeda handmade the organization, she said, and the members come first. She recalled SGI General Director Eiichi Wada’s guidance, during his visit to the United States at the end of last year, that while one sincere word of concern can encourage people for a lifetime, one insincere word can wound their hearts forever. So let’s use warm, beautiful words to encourage one another whenever we speak, she said.

Cliff Sawyer expressed his sincere desire to get to know the members personally and find out what he could do to help them accomplish what they wanted to do as an organization.

— *By Cliff Sawyer*

**ST. MAARTEN/ST. MARTIN, Feb. 28** Spirits were high as members gathered at 3:00 p.m. for the Caribbean Area General Meeting at the Maho Beach Hotel Convention Center. General Director Zaitso praised the pioneering efforts of all the Caribbean members and announced the formation of the new Caribbean Region. After the recitation of evening gongyo, Master of Ceremonies Urmain Dormoy and his daughter Dantza welcomed everyone in English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Papiamentu, the languages of the island. Then he welcomed Mr. Zaitso, who had last visited the islands six years ago. Representatives from the neighboring islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Antigua, St. Lucia, Nevis, Guadeloupe, St. Croix and St. Thomas joined the festivities, pledging to strengthen organizational unity throughout the entire Caribbean.

Mr. Zaitso shared recent guidance from President Ikeda explaining the four keys to advancing in our lives and the organization: Pray for members' happiness, health, to have no accidents and for prosperity. "But this does not mean pray just for people you like and get along with," he explained. "True advancement comes only as we expand our compassionate prayers to everyone, including those people we do not like. We cannot stay in our comfort zone. We must always continue to move ourselves to have a fresh and vital life-condition."

He said that President Ikeda expects the 21st century to be an era of dynamic expansion. How do we create this? By carrying out the basics of faith, practice and study, chanting daimoku, refreshing our determination and sharing this Buddhism with others.

Dr. Cora Christian from the U.S. Virgin Islands gave words of encouragement and made a presentation of Mako Jumbie dolls, the traditional dance of carnival on her island. Caribbean members affectionately call her Grandmother because she was the first person to receive the Gohonzon in this area.

Cliff Sawyer congratulated all the members on their new step forward in Caribbean kosen-rufu. He said: "Being the least experienced of all the zone leaders, it is I who have much to learn from all of you. I'm sure I'll make mistakes, but you can be sure also that I will chant wholeheartedly for our victory together, and I will do everything in my power to help you."

— *By Jacci Thompson-Dodd*

**TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, March 1** Participants at the general meeting held today at the Emerald Isles Area Culture Centre were treated to scintillating cultural performances featuring the steel pan, calypso, poem and dance that were distinctly Trinidadian. General Director Zaitso's announcement that the Caribbean will now be recognized as a region in its own right, and that the SGI-USA organization is now legally registered on Trinidad and Tobago was greeted with thunderous applause and unfettered expressions of joy.

Mr. Zaitso said to treat these developments as a new departure, a new beginning. He urged all to deepen their faith and commitment to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, to return to the basics of faith, practice and study and challenge our comfort zone, as well as to foster strong unity to prevent being influenced negatively by the Nikken sect.

Sheilah Edwards also echoed similar sentiments to Mr. Zaitso about the occasion representing a new beginning. She then outlined plans for the establishment of a bookshop at the Centre in the not-too-distant future.

Cliff Sawyer praised the Trinidad and Tobago members for the high levels of energy and excitement that they displayed during the cultural performances. He said that SGI members should use their respective cultures to advance kosen-rufu.

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Mr. Zaitso's encouragement, as well as that of Mrs. Edwards and Mr. Sawyer, certainly gave everyone present a great boost, as evidenced by the animated discussion that followed the meeting. It is a momentum that the members vow to sustain.

— *By Michael Henry*

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