

## **FURTHERING OUR COMMITMENT TO PEACE A LETTER FROM SGI-USA GENERAL DIRECTOR FRED ZAITSU**

Each day that the terrible conflict in Kosovo drags on, more and more of our members are asking important questions: What can they do about it? What is our religious organization doing about it? What is our position?

As Buddhists, I believe we can each start by praying sincerely and as often as possible to the Gohonzon for the safety of all involved, and for a speedy end to the violence. At each meeting that I attend, I urge our members to do this.

The SGI Charter reminds us that one of our fundamental purposes is to contribute to peace, culture and education based on Buddhist respect for the sanctity of life. It commits us to challenging the global issues facing humankind through dialogue and practical efforts based on a steadfast commitment to nonviolence.

As SGI President Ikeda writes in his 1999 Peace Proposal, "Toward a Culture of Peace — A Cosmic View": "Ways of resolving international problems and conflicts peacefully must be devised if we are successfully to break with the culture of war.... We must always be extremely cautious in opting for military force as a solution..... In the final analysis, since they usually leave wounds that continue to fester, forcibly imposed 'hard power' solutions are not real solutions at all.... No matter how much we try to justify or rationalize them, as long as the opponent regards them as unfair, such measures will always lead to an intractable cycle of conflict or revenge. Instead of resorting to hard power solutions, we must first clarify the nature of the problem and then employ dialogue — the essence of 'soft power' to remove, one by one, the obstacles to solution."

The situation in Yugoslavia is complex and contradictory, and the seeds of current ethnic and religious conflicts were planted centuries ago. Contemporary political and military factors seem to complicate the search for solutions. But whatever our political views, it cannot be denied that violence perpetuates and deepens violence and hatred.

One thing of which we can be certain is that the root causes of these problems exist in the hearts and minds of human beings. Therefore the solutions lie with human beings. For us, the practice of faith is the driving force for the fundamental changes that must occur in the hearts and minds of each human being.

As Buddhists, we must try to ensure that our thoughts, conversations and actions are creative, inspired and positive, and that we never forget that all the people involved, on every side, are human beings with immense potential for good.

At times like this it is easy to feel powerless, overwhelmed by the scale and speed of events. Now we are challenged to use our Buddhist faith and practice so we can awaken the immense potential to initiate change we each possess. We can each find ways to express our desire for peace, to work for better understanding amongst different cultures, and to contribute to humanitarian needs.

Each member is free of course to do whatever they think is best. You have the right to voice your personal opinions in various ways. You may choose to contribute to organizations trying to respond to the plight of those directly caught up in the crisis. On an organizational level, as in the past, after thorough discussion with the leadership in your local area, you may arrange a cooperative effort with a reputable service organization.

Nichiren Daishonin's treatise "Rissho Ankoku Ron" states: "If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquility throughout the

four quarters of the land, should you not?" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 38).

As Nichiren Daishonin wrote, the most fundamental action for all of us must be our prayers and faith. With this in mind, let's determine to pray and exert ourselves to develop further our SGI movement to establish a fortress of peace in each individual's life.

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