

THIS BEAUTIFUL EARTH: PHOTO ESSAYS BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA 'MOSCOW IN GREEN'

It was a fresh morning, after a rain.

May in Moscow, at the dawn of a reborn Russia.

In 1994, two-and-a-half years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was facing a continuous onslaught of troubles as it entered a new era in its history. Though I noticed new changes in the course of my scheduled activities, I wanted to feel them directly, first-hand.

"Let's go for a walk," I told my wife and the others in my party, and we stepped outside.

Along the western wall of the Kremlin is an expanse of green called Alexandrovsky Garden. There, trees and tulips, moistened by the recent spring rain, bathed themselves joyfully in the soft sunlight.

Someone once told me: "In Moscow, the winters are very long. You still have to wear an overcoat in April. So May is a truly pleasant time for Muscovites, a season everyone dearly looks forward to."

Trees, flowers and blades of grass, turning to the eagerly awaited sunlight, seemed all at once to put forth the flame of life. Just as the people were invigorated by their newly gained freedom, the Moscow spring glowed with vibrant energy.

That winter had been particularly harsh. Society's tumult had made it hard for people to obtain needed goods, and I had worried that many might not survive the season.

Exchanging greetings with passersby in the park, I sensed the robustness of the Russian people. In this society with an uncertain future, people were smiling and seemed confident and composed.

It may take several decades for Russia to overcome her present chaos. But because of the strength and energy of her people, I am absolutely confident that this present Russian "winter" will turn into spring.

On the northern edge of the park stands the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It bears the inscription "Your name is unknown, your deeds immortal."

During World War II, some 20 million Soviet citizens perished — the largest human sacrifice of any combatant nation. A Russian song someone once taught me goes:

*Ask if the Russian people want war!
Ask the vast land,
The birch forests,
And the soldiers lying asleep forever beneath the trees.
Ask if the Russian people want war!
Ask the Russian mothers,
Wives who have lost their husbands on the battle field,
Children who have lost their fathers....*

No national border or social system can contain this outcry of the human heart. If one could gather and concentrate this cry of humanity, one could lay siege to and destroy war itself.

When I visited the Soviet Union in the midst of the Cold War, I was criticized for doing

so. How could I go to such a place? people complained. But I dared to go to advance even a single step the cause of human friendship. “I am going because there are people there” is the answer I gave my critics.

Twenty years had passed since then. I once again offered solemn prayers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where I had placed flowers during my first visit to the Soviet Union. Nearby was a group of elementary school children, who had come to the park for a school outing. I had a pleasant talk with them, enjoying their carefree smiles. I told them, “When you get bigger, please come and visit Japan,” and their cute voices rang with joyful excitement. The Soviet Union has disappeared, but the people live on. Humanity endures. The children survive. Politics have changed; the economy has been transformed; but the workings of human life continue, unchanged.

The color green is the color of life, the color of hope, and the color of peace. Green is the color of the 21st century.

In the Russian language, the word for the Earth and peace is the same — *mir*. Beyond a nearby stand of trees, I heard the voices of other children. Looking, I saw these young ones playing happily, framed by an arch of green. Aiming my camera at this simple, peaceful scene, I clicked the shutter.

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