

SGI'S GLOBAL ACTIVITIES—POLAND REPORT
THE RISING TIDE OF HUMANISM IN POLAND
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In the early 1990s, an SGI chapter was formed in Poland. Maria Markiewicz, the chapter women's division leader, describes her personal experience and her country's transformation.

It was in a small apartment in Warsaw that the Poland chapter of the SGI was established on Jan. 19, 1992. The inaugural meeting was attended by around 20 members and friends. We will always treasure in our hearts the message we received from SGI President Ikeda that day: "You are all pioneers, worthy of utmost respect, with the praiseworthy mission of opening a new path of peace and vibrant humanism and culture in Eastern Europe."

Poland has had a tragic history, as seen in the extreme misery it suffered under Nazi occupation during World War II. At the start of the 1980s, however, the "Solidarity" movement led by Lech Walesa sparked a democratic process which eventually forced the government to convene the Round Table Conference in 1989, followed by the first free elections in July of that year and the creation of a democratic government. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November of the same year was the climax in a period of unimaginably rapid change. At the same time, people had unreasonable faith in the word *freedom*, believing it would produce immediate growth and happiness just like magic.

I first started practicing Nichiren Buddhism in 1987 during a two-year stay in New York. My husband, a professor at Warsaw University, had been asked to teach at Rockefeller University, and our two daughters and I went with him to embark on a new life in America, filled with hope and anticipation.

My daughters had been ill, one with heart disease and the other with an eye problem, but they both underwent successful operations before leaving for America. Almost as soon as we arrived in New York, however, I was involved in a traffic accident that left me unable to walk for six months. My husband expected me to be nothing but an obedient housewife, which plunged me into severe loneliness for days on end. I repeatedly asked myself what this "freedom" that America is so famous for was all about. I asked myself, "What is happiness? What is the purpose of my life?" It was about this time that a friend of mine advised me to start practicing Buddhism to strengthen my life-condition. I had no reason to reject it.

I knew of no other SGI members in Poland, and after we returned to our country in August of 1988, I practiced Buddhism alone and unsupported for three years. In reality, the present chapter leader, Yoshiaki Ishizuka, was living and working in Poland at the time, and Polish SGI members living abroad and established a group to pray for peace in their home country. But I had no way of knowing this. The only things I could do were remember the guidance and encouragement I'd received in New York and talk about Buddhism with my friends. One by one people started to chant with me, and we began to conduct various activities together, always encouraging one another. I found my life force strengthening and my confidence in humanity growing stronger.

Around that time, I heard someone say: "Communism was a good system for communists. Capitalism is a good system for capitalists. It is a shame we still haven't found a system that is good for humanity." When I heard those words, I felt that the key

to realizing such a system was could be found in the achievement of “the human revolution of just a single person” as described by SGI President Ikeda. To achieve that, what is most essential is the SGI, a movement dedicated to helping people realize the tremendous potential they inherently possess—what Buddhism calls the seed of Buddhahood.

In the fall of 1991, after searching for some time, I found SGI President Ikeda’s address in *Who’s Who* and I wrote him a letter. Some time later, Mr. Ishizuka brought me a reply. This was an opportunity to start regular meetings of members living in Poland. We also made contact with Polish citizens who were practicing Buddhism overseas. We now have a total of about 60 active members. Youth division members are currently taking the lead in our activities, which consist of discussion meetings, study meetings, dialogues with friends and various other events. During 1999 we were able to take part in two joint training courses with SGI members from Eastern Europe.

Many of our youth division members are demonstrating active proof of the power of Buddhism in society. Paolo Cozza an SGI member who moved to Poland from Italy in 1995, has set up his own automobile accessory company and now employs 12 people. He is now developing business with large-scale supermarkets, building a fine reputation in the sector as well as within his local community. Paolo’s home is now the meeting place for the local members. Meanwhile, Dorota Zdun, a young woman, has worked her way through college and is now a sales and marketing manger in a worldwide marketing company. Although she is very busy, she always finds time to visit other members and attend study meetings.

As for me, shortly after the SGI-Poland Chapter was formed, I found a job as a reporter for a women’s magazine and have been able to interview numerous famous people. Although my husband and I eventually divorced, my job has given me many wonderful opportunities to meet and learn directly from people in various walks of life, and it has also given me a chance to introduce other people to Buddhism. In September of 1999, the Polish-language version of *Choose Life*, the dialogue between SGI President Ikeda and Dr. Arnold Toynbee, was published by Polish scientific Publishers PWN. The publication has been featured in a major daily newspaper and academic periodicals and has attracted wide readership in educational circles.

Although SGI-Poland has only had a short history, the organization is discovering its potential in a variety of ways, and each member is deepening his or her determination to become a person who can make an active contribution to society. Since the collapse of socialism, we in Poland have had to change our value system. Regardless of differences in nationality, and political system, culture and race, all people need to find practical answers to questions such as “How should I live my life?” and “What sort of life should I lead in the future?” I am certain that the spirit of compassion as embodied in the SGI—the desire to find ways to help others—is the key to the transformation of the new century into a true Century of Humanity.

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