

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MAY 13 SPEECH—PART 2 A FERVENT WISH FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

‘What is the fervent wish of humankind that history now entrusts to the youth of the 21st century?’ SGI President Ikeda asks. ‘It is to make it possible for those who have endured the greatest oppression, degradation and suffering to lead lives of supreme happiness.’

The conclusion of SGI President Ikeda’s speech at a Soka Gakkai Youth Division General Meeting, held at the Soka University Auditorium in Hachioji, Tokyo, May 13.

I first met and shook hands with former Nigerian Ambassador to Japan Mai-Bukar Garba Dogon-Yaro mni in April 1988 at the Seikyo Shimbun Building in Tokyo. I remember that dramatic meeting as if it were yesterday. On that occasion, Mr. Dogon-Yaro told me that his first creed was to realize equality among all human beings. He said that he was prepared to do whatever was necessary for the people of Africa to live with dignity and hold their heads high.

People and leaders who fight for their beliefs are charged with a powerful spiritual electricity and shine with a divine light. They are like a magnet — they draw others to them and keep them there. Mr. Dogon-Yaro is such a person. I want all of you, my youth division friends, to become such fighting leaders, too.

Nine years ago, the Association of the African Heads of Mission in Tokyo—a diplomatic association representing 26 African nations—honored me with a Certificate of Appreciation for my contributions to education, culture and humanism. I will never forget that tremendous honor. Thank you very much.

The ceremony took place on Nov. 29, 1991, the same day that we received the abrupt notification from the Nikken sect — part of its ongoing persecution of the Soka Gakkai — that it had “excommunicated” us. On this day, Mr. Dogon-Yaro and many other African ambassadors and diplomatic representatives visited us and commended our efforts. At a time of great trial, when the Soka Gakkai was in the midst of a storm of slander and abuse motivated by vicious jealousy, the leaders of Africa’s diplomatic community in Tokyo encouraged us and supported us. I ask the youth division members to never forget this fact. Let us vow together today that we will strive to repay this debt of gratitude to Africa throughout our lives!

Our SGI members in Nigeria—now some several hundred strong—are exerting themselves earnestly as good citizens of their country and communities. The central figure of SGI-Nigeria, Chapter Leader Boye Afolabi, is a doctor of medicine engaged in malaria research.

Freedom cannot be won by cowardice.

Through the kind efforts of Mr. Dogon-Yaro, I have had the good fortune to meet Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, a preeminent leader working for the realization of democracy in Africa, on three occasions — in April and October 1992 and in April 1999. I will never forget our discussion of the grand vision of a future “United States of Africa.”

Because of his work for truth and justice, President Obasanjo has been maligned and falsely accused, has had his life threatened and has been imprisoned. The same has happened to me. “There can be no freedom in fear”—this was President Obasanjo’s

courageous cry.

Freedom cannot be won by cowardice. Unless we fight at the risk of our lives, we can never accomplish undying achievements in the pages of history. “I am afraid of nothing!”—this is the spirit of a hero, a leader, a revolutionary. This is the Soka Gakkai spirit.

What is the fervent wish of humankind that history now entrusts to the youth of the 21st century? It is to make it possible for those who have endured the greatest oppression, degradation and suffering to lead lives of supreme happiness. To make this happen, young people who champion the cause of human justice must win in their struggle. Their victory will bring a new dawn of humanism.

Nelson Mandela, that indomitable crusader for human rights and former South African president, persevered through all with the conviction “Although evil may be on the rampage temporarily, the good must win the laurels in the end” (*Higher Than Hope—The Authorized Biography of Nelson Mandela*, p. 408). Turning a blind eye to arrogance and harboring contempt toward the people should be unthinkable for youth. To speak out bravely with youthful passion, to denounce injustice and to take action for the welfare of society and the people—this is the finest way a human being can live.

One has to patiently fight through the fiercest storms.

Tomorrow is Mother’s Day. There is a wise proverb from the region where Mr. Dogon-Yaro’s mother grew up: “With patience, one can dig a well with a needle.” Superficial appearances and popularity are not important. One has to patiently fight one’s way through the fiercest storms. All true hope, victory and progress spring from the one word *patience*. I want you to triumph with the power of patience.

I want to share with you several other Nigerian proverbs, all golden nuggets of wisdom: “However long the moon disappears, someday it must shine again.” This proverb tells us that we need to have the wisdom to wait for and create the time.

“A bird does not change its feathers because the weather is bad.” We must stick to our chosen path and see things through with determination.

“An oil lamp feels proud to give light, even though it wears itself away.” The passion to work for the sake of others is the noblest quality one can possess.

“A single tree cannot make a forest.” This tells us that the unity and cohesiveness that creates a whole forest of talented individuals is crucial. It’s important not to be isolated. We must expand our network of like-minded friends and unite in common purpose.

“Criticism is easy but it does not create.” Criticism alone produces nothing. Only when we act with a deep sense of responsibility can we create true value.

“If you tell a lie, you will break into a cold sweat even in the water.” Lies are always exposed. The truth always triumphs.

“He who does not look ahead always remains behind.” Life is continually moving forward. If you do not make an effort to press ahead and improve yourself—worrying only about what others do or say—you will be left behind. Please always advance, eyes firmly on the future.

“Courage is the father of success.” Courage is vital. Even compassion comes from courage. Mr. Toda used to say quite bluntly, “Let the cowards leave!” I hope that all of you, the youth division members, will embark today with fresh determination, with “Courage” as your first motto.

Everything starts from one person.

I recall that it was in the same month that Nigeria won its independence—in October 1960—that I embarked on my first journey outside Japan in pursuit of world peace. On that trip, I had the opportunity to observe the proceedings of the U.N. General Assembly in New York [Oct. 14, 1960]. It was during that regular session of the General Assembly that Nigeria [on Oct. 7] and several other newly independent African nations were admitted as U.N. members. From that time, I was certain that the 21st century would be the Century of Africa.

In the four decades since, I have cultivated close relations with the leaders of Nigeria, a country with which I feel a profound connection, and many other African nations. By building bonds of trust and friendship with one person and then another, I have worked to spread a human alliance of philosophy and culture across Africa, that continent of limitless hope.

Forming a genuine friendship, based on deep sincerity, with one individual links one to 1,000 and then 10,000 others. I am determined to continue to work, together with you, the youth who are my trusted heirs, with ever-increasing boldness and resolve for the glory and victory of the Century of Africa, which translates as a Century of Life.

One person is important. Everything starts from one person. I want each youth division member to bravely stand up—for the happiness of the people, for the prosperity of your country, for world peace!

In closing, I offer my sincerest prayers for the good health and happiness of all our distinguished guests. I also pray wholeheartedly that Nigeria, “a nation where peace and justice reign,” as your national anthem declares, will prosper eternally.

Thank you very much.

Na gode! (“Thank you” in Hausa, the official language of northern Nigeria.)

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS THE POWER OF PATIENCE

From This Speech:

There is a wise proverb from the region where former Nigerian Ambassador to Japan Mai-Bukar Garba Dogon-Yaro mni’s mother grew up: “With patience, one can dig a well with a needle.” Superficial appearances and popularity are not important. One has to patiently fight one’s way through the fiercest storms. All true hope, victory and progress spring from the one word *patience*. I want you to triumph with the power of patience.

- 1) Why does Buddhism teach that “superficial appearances and popularity are not important”? Why do people tend to seek various kinds of superficial happiness? And how does this lead them to suffering?
- 2) How does Buddhism help us to seek a greater kind of happiness?
- 3) Why is patience so important in seeking true happiness? Why is it impossible to achieve this happiness without a lot of patience? Why can’t it be achieved immediately?
- 4) What part of your life requires the most patience right now? What do you do to overcome your impatience?

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