

DIALOGUES ON EDUCATION ORDINARY CITIZENS WILL CHANGE THE TIMES

On Oct. 27, 2000, SGI President Ikeda met with the noted American futurist and activist Hazel Henderson at the Seikyo Shimbun Building in Tokyo. At this meeting—their first since September 1998—the SGI leader and Dr. Henderson discussed the need to empower people and raise their awareness through grass-roots dialogue. They also agreed to carry on their dialogue with a view to future publication. Prior to their discussion, Dr. Henderson was awarded an honorary doctorate by Soka University.

Declaring that the 21st century will be the Century of Women, President Ikeda expressed his hope that men, who have been responsible for so much war, would become more humble. Women must play a more central role in society, he added, if we are to ensure peace and stability in the coming century. “When the lives of women and children shine radiantly, there is peace,” he stated. Dr. Henderson stressed the importance of partnership between the sexes, saying that when men and women join hands and work together, a global civic culture that transcends war will be realized.

A leading activist known for her innovative approach to economic and energy policies, sustainable development and environmental protection, Dr. Henderson has become an inspiration for grass-roots movements around the globe. In addition to serving on the boards of several distinguished research institutes worldwide, she is an advisor to governments and governmental agencies in more than 30 countries.

Dr. Henderson has taught at a number of prominent universities in the United States, including the University of California at Berkeley. She has contributed numerous articles to newspapers and magazines, and her editorials appear in 27 languages and more than 400 newspapers around the world. Her many books include *Paradigms in Progress: Life Beyond Economics*; *Creating Alternative Futures: The End of Economics*; and *Building a Win-Win World: Life Beyond Economic Warfare*. Dr. Henderson’s philosophy, which calls for a shift from “sovereignty of the nation” to “sovereignty of the people,” is today attracting widespread attention.

During her discussion with President Ikeda, the futurist explained what initially led to her interest in economics. She recounted how a minor incident over 30 years ago, when she was a housewife living in New York, had changed her life. One day her young daughter had some soot on her skin that would not rub off. Out of the simple desire to enable children to breathe clean air, she assembled some of the housewives in her neighborhood and started a citizen’s movement. As their cause developed, she came to believe that there was something profoundly wrong with the modern economic system. But when she voiced her concerns, she would receive only evasive replies from politicians and economists, who scoffed at the idea that a housewife could understand the principles of economics. Though she had no college education, Dr. Henderson was determined to acquire knowledge equal to that of her detractors. She engaged in self-study and eventually reached the point where she could refute the ideas of world-renowned scholars.

Reflecting on her early efforts in New York, Dr. Henderson explained that, with dialogue as the only means available to them, she and her colleagues were vocal about issues they felt needed to be addressed. People must be given more power, she asserted, adding that when ordinary citizens stand up, the times will change.

In response to a question on what she would do if she were president of her country, Dr.

Henderson stated that she would first of all invest greater resources in education. Next, she said she would eliminate all subsidies to industries that utilize outmoded and non-sustainable sources of energy, such as nuclear power, coal and oil. In addition, she suggested she would reform the tax system, levying taxes on individuals and entities that use non-renewable resources or that produce pollution or waste, and reduce income tax of ordinary citizens. The economist remarked that such initiatives would create jobs, promote recycling and protect natural resources.

Reflecting on her meeting the previous week with Czech President Vaclav Havel, who is also a well-known playwright, Dr. Henderson said that she came away from the exchange feeling that politicians must become poets. The SGI leader agreed, stating that power reflects the world of Animality, while poetry reflects that of Humanity. "Politicians must therefore possess a poetic spirit," he added. Dr. Henderson further remarked that many of today's leaders are simply "businessmen," but that what we need are more leaders who are poets. A poet, she said, is a person who has vision.

President Ikeda noted that Dr. Henderson's mentor, the renowned economist E.F. Schumacher, advocated a theory of Buddhist economics in his work *Small is Beautiful*. Published originally in 1973, the book warned people against the economics of greed and predicted an oil crisis; it also proposed as a solution an economic system that would strike a balance between spirituality and materialism. Asked what was Dr. Schumacher's main focus, Dr. Henderson replied that, in contrast to traditional economics that emphasizes the "result" of working hard to produce something, Dr. Schumacher placed more importance on the "spirit" that shines in that process.

She then talked about how, when she was living in Princeton, New Jersey, home to Princeton University and thus many influential thinkers, she would invite Dr. Schumacher to her house to hold informal seminars, inviting neighbors and local scholars. Noted intellectuals would come to those private meetings, she said, only because they wanted to meet with Dr. Schumacher out of the public eye, as he was not considered a true economist due to his emphasis on the spiritual. The SGI leader commented on the importance of such small gatherings and praised his guest's activism.

As the discussion came to a close, Dr. Henderson remarked that she was impressed with the wonderful achievements of SGI members around the world. Saying that she considers herself a partner of the SGI, she expressed her sincere hopes for the continued success of the SGI's activities.