

PRINCE OF JORDAN RECEIVES FIRST COMMUNITY BUILDERS PRIZE BY ANGELA HARRIS, BEVERLY REMLAND AND LISA WATTS ATLANTA CORRESPONDENTS

On April 8, at the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College, the first Gandhi, King, Ikeda Community Builders Prize was awarded to His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan. Nearly 2,000 people filled the chapel with cheers and high spirits, inaugurating what will be an annual event.

SGI-USA was a co-sponsor of the ceremony, titled Century Sunday. More than 1,300 SGI-USA members gathered from all over the Southern Zone, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina and Tennessee.

Larry Draper, an SGI-USA member from Memphis, Tenn., commented that “this wonderful event is a fitting tribute to three great leaders. That one of them is SGI President Ikeda makes me even more proud to be an SGI member.”

The prize was created by Dr. Lawrence E. Carter Sr., dean of the King Chapel, to reflect the common vision of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and SGI President Ikeda, and to encourage others striving toward peace to continue their valuable work. After his meeting with President Ikeda in September 2000, Dean Carter said he realized that President Ikeda was “the living embodiment of the ideals of Gandhi and King.”

Prince Hassan, the prize’s first recipient, is widely recognized as a world leader in the areas of peace, human rights and inter-cultural dialogue. He is a pioneer of peace efforts in the Middle East, bringing together Muslims, Jews and Christians to discuss peaceful solutions to the problems facing humanity. He is also the third president of the Club of Rome, of which President Ikeda is an honorary member.

In his acceptance address, titled “On the Ethics of Reconciliation and Tolerance,” Prince Hassan expressed the realization that “possibly the longest distance in the world is from the mind to the heart.” He asked the audience if they, through their own efforts, can help society “move from a culture of existing to a culture of participating. The cornerstones of such a movement are surely the respect for life, a responsibility towards future generations, protection of the human habitat and, most of all, to move from acquisitiveness to altruism.... We must stop working against something and start working *for* something, working *for* a sharing of cultures and perceptions.”

Also celebrated was the induction of a portrait of President and Mrs. Ikeda to the Martin Luther King Jr. International Hall of Honor. “We do this today,” said Dean Carter, “in recognition of the fact that Dr. Ikeda is now widely believed to be the world’s leading proponent of international peace.”

Attending the ceremony on behalf of President and Mrs. Ikeda was SGI Vice President Hiromasa Ikeda, the couple’s eldest son. Vice President Ikeda commented that the Gandhi, King, Ikeda prize and traveling exhibition “represent a concrete and viable way to continue the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. King through public education toward nonviolence and reconciliation. We feel it is our mission to advance always the cause of equality and freedom, wherever there is injustice, oppression and racism.”

Outside the chapel, high-energy Taiko drummers, SGI-USA members from New Orleans, greeted the crowd with beats from the Far East. Dressed in traditional Japanese outfits called *happi* coats, the drummers were invited by Dean Carter and have been challenging themselves to win in their daily lives through this activity.

At the close of the gathering, Sharon Pesante, an SGI-USA member from Tallahassee,

Fla., summed up the feelings of the majority of the attendees: “The Prince of Jordan was wonderful. He spoke about things President Ikeda has been talking about for a long time. For me, personally, it was a real wake-up call. No wonder President Ikeda can talk about the 23rd century! This is how large his vision is. I realized that I need to widen my own vision for the future.”

The event was a significant milestone for the members of SGI-USA’s Southern Zone. At an April 9 meeting at the Atlanta Community Center celebrating the members’ remarkable achievements of the previous two weeks, SGI North America Bureau Director Norimasa Saito commented that “President Ikeda has often stated the center of kosen-rufu is found in America. So, if we are able to achieve kosen-rufu here in Atlanta, doesn’t it follow that we will be able to achieve kosen-rufu anywhere in the world?”

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima congratulated the members on “opening a new era where people can see how powerful Buddhism is and learn something tremendous. You have opened up a beautiful community filled with friendship and trust.”

—*Nicole D. Collier, Eleanor Hunter and Quan Sullivan contributed to this article.*