

DIALOGUES ON PEACE FOSTERING HUMANITARIAN COMPETITION

‘The United Nations exists to encourage humanitarian competition—countries outdoing one another in terms of trustworthiness, sense of duty and benevolence.’

On March 6, SGI President Ikeda held a discussion with Dr. Ruud Lubbers, the new U.N. high commissioner for refugees at the Seikyo Shimbun Building in Shinanomachi, Tokyo. The two previously met in The Hague 18 years ago, in 1983, when Dr. Lubbers was prime minister of the Netherlands.

Dr. Lubbers assumed the top government post at the age of 43 and was in office for 12 years (from 1982–94), giving him the dual distinction of being both the youngest and longest-serving prime minister in Dutch history. Among his many achievements, he succeeded in reviving the Dutch economy. He also demonstrated outstanding leadership in such areas as environmental protection and European unification. Since retiring from politics in 1994, the former prime minister has been active in the international sphere.

President Ikeda congratulated Dr. Lubbers on his recent appointment as U.N. high commissioner for refugees, adding that he had been most impressed by the official’s inaugural speech. The high commissioner called for a “minimum of bureaucracy and a maximum of flexibility” in helping the world’s 22 million refugees, and made an appeal for refugees to be recognized for their individual and collective achievements. Mr. Ikeda commented on the fact that Albert Einstein had been a refugee, as had one of his recent guests, Mayor Le Hoa Lam of Auburn, Australia. Respect for refugees, he asserted, will be an important principle for effecting a transition from a “century of refugees” to a “century of world citizens.”

Calling attention to the unique predicament of refu-gees, Dr. Lubbers pointed out that while citizens have a government to look after their various needs, refugees do not enjoy the protection of any political body. Lamenting the tendency to view refugees as merely recipients of charity, he stressed that the life of each refugee is precious, and that each person possesses great latent strength and potential.

Dr. Lubbers has consistently lent his support to SGI activities. In April 1998, as a member of the Earth Council and the Earth Charter Commission, Dr. Lubbers delivered an address at the SGI-affiliated Boston Research Center for the 21st Century in the United States. In the same year, the research institute that Dr. Lubber chairs, Institute for Globalization and Sustainable Development at Tilburg University, bestowed a certificate of commendation on the SGI leader in recognition of his efforts to promote human rights.

Noting that Dr. Lubbers graduated from Erasmus University, Rotterdam, President Ikeda reflected that the school’s namesake, Dutch humanist Erasmus, articulates in his *Coloquia* a vision for the future in which power struggles based on military might are replaced by competition among countries to outdo one another in terms of trustworthiness, sense of duty and benevolence. The SGI leader described the United Nations as existing precisely in order to foster such humanitarian competition. Toward that end, he suggested that major summit conferences should be held under U.N. auspices, instead of being hosted by participant nations on a rotating basis.

The high commissioner affirmed the need to strengthen U.N. humanitarian activities. In

this connection, he emphasized that individuals have a vital role to play in supporting such efforts, and also expressed the hope to see Japan become more involved in the work of the UNHCR. President Ikeda concurred, stressing that Japan must show greater commitment to humanitarian activities. He said he is personally committed to spurring the Japanese public to action, adding that he feels doing so is his duty as a citizen.

The SGI leader recalled how, during World War II, Dutch historian Johan Huizinga condemned the excesses of nationalism and urged that the power of the nation be redirected into positive channels by means of building trust, reviving humanistic culture and promoting international spiritual exchange. Citing Huizinga's conclusion that this will require individual spiritual reformation, President Ikeda remarked: "This is exactly what the SGI is doing. We are putting this farsighted philosophy into practice."

Mr. Lubbers has said that economic value is not enough, and that the present age requires a new system of values based on the sanctity of life. Mr. Ikeda explained that this completely agrees with the ideals and convictions of the SGI, and is also consistent with the founding spirit of Soka University.

During his time as prime minister of the Netherlands, Mr. Lubbers played a key role in successfully drawing up the Maarstricht Treaty, which laid the groundwork for the European Union. Previously, the treaty, which provided for the introduction of a common currency, had reached an impasse due to disagreement among individual countries. President Ikeda noted that Mr. Lubbers had once compared negotiation to riding a bicycle, in the sense that you will fall down if you go either too fast or too slow. The SGI leader agreed that maintaining just the right balance is the secret to diplomacy. Mr. Ikeda further observed that we have entered a time when no country can thrive without actively cooperating with and earning the trust of the international community.