

DISARMAMENT EFFORTS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

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Humankind now faces many problems such as environmental destruction, population explosion, and the threat of nuclear war. Every one of these problems must be addressed from a global standpoint if we are to find a comprehensive solution.

With regard to the disarmament issue there has been an easing of tension between the United States and the Soviet Union and it appears that the current is changing from one of arms expansion to arms reduction. The signing of the treaty eliminating intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) by the USA and the USSR generated this current.

Responding to a number of positive disarmament proposals from Moscow, US President George Bush explicitly announced the end of the containment policy toward the Soviet Union. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), at a meeting of leaders of its member-nations, has also worked out a disarmament plan for Western European countries and concerted efforts are being made to move from East-West confrontation toward rapprochement and harmony.

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It is true that both the USA., troubled by an enormous fiscal deficit, and the Soviet Union, now in the midst of promoting its perestroika reform program, had no other choice than to curb military spending and turn toward disarmament. Nevertheless, it would be overly optimistic to conclude that this disarmament current is firmly established merely on account of the prevailing domestic conditions of the two countries. If we look only at the circumstances surrounding disarmament negotiations then the trend toward disarmament seems more present than in fact it is. I believe it is more correct to view arms expansion and disarmament as still at loggerheads with each other. There still is a preponderance of nuclear weapons in the world and should nuclear war break out there can be no change at all in the reality that humankind will be annihilated.

The destruction that nuclear war would cause has been clarified in various reports. In 1983, a report on the so-called "nuclear winter" phenomenon by a group of scientists in the U.S.A. attracted great attention. The report observed that if the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union should engage in a total nuclear war the entire globe would be enveloped by a long gloomy winter. Owing to climactic changes, a food crisis would occur and an epidemic would spread--the people being forced to live a very severe life. There was agreement that a "nuclear winter" cannot be averted in the event of a nuclear war at the "Tokyo Seminar on Nuclear Danger," organized in 1985 by the United Nations University in cooperation with the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment/Environmental Consequences of Nuclear War, a special group appointed by the International Council of Scientific Unions. In the spring of 1982 the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences' journal on environmental problems *Ambio* reported on the consequences of nuclear war. According to the journal 750 million persons would be killed instantly in the northern hemisphere alone. Radiation diseases such as cancer would last for one hundred years and a billion persons in the Third World would die from hunger. It was also

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assumed that the global environment would change drastically bringing about devastating consequences.

Our concern here is whether such a threat of nuclear war would act to promote antinuclear awareness among the people, to serve as a springboard for a genuine movement for disarmament and to establish a prospect for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

However difficult it is to achieve the goal of abolishing nuclear arms it is important to press for the resolve of leaders of nuclear powers by mobilizing the sound will of people who desire the elimination of nuclear weapons. As a lay-Buddhist organization dedicated to the promotion of peace and culture and under the leadership of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) president Daisaku Ikeda, the Soka Gakkai has been dedicated to the promotion of peace and culture. SGI has carried out wide-ranging peace activities in its desire to establish a world without war. Our course of action is based on people-to-people intercourse in hopes of expanding the circle of solidarity of like-minded people who desire lasting peace. This approach may seem roundabout but we have continued to work for the cause of peace with persevering effort from the most fundamental and cardinal standpoint.

It has been pointed out in the past that compared to Christianity, Buddhism is lukewarm in practical action to reform society. For example, the eminent European thinkers and philosophers, Karl Jaspers and Henri Bergson, who had deep knowledge of Buddhism, also pointed out Buddhism's shortcomings in its will to promote social reform, apparently because of their intuitive reasoning. To be sure, this tendency can indeed be observed in Buddhist history.

Nevertheless, the Lotus Sutra, widely recognized as the quintessence of Mahayana Buddhism, sees in the depths of

Shakyamuni's enlightenment a "universal eternal life." It reveals the supreme law that pervades the universe and human existence. The eternal life is what can be called the "greater (universal) self" or "non-self" (selflessness) in contrast to the "lesser (individual) self." On the basis of this "greater self," the *bodhisattvas* of the Lotus Sutra, truly and freely displaying creative vitality of life and prompted by the passion of joy, go forth in high spirits to wage a spiritual campaign to reform from the roots the actual society which is filled with suffering. In this way, Buddhism essentially directs itself to create infinite value in life and society, based on the life condition of the "greater self," the true self. In other words, the ideal human image pictured in the Lotus Sutra is of one who does not turn his back upon reality but rather of one who involves himself positively and actively in the world. Therein lies the intrinsic value of Buddhism.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the quintessence of Mahayana Buddhism, consistently expounds the dignity of human life, the equality of all sentient beings, and the building of a peaceful society in accordance with Buddhist philosophy.

Since its establishment in 1930, the Soka Gakkai has consistently taken the position of promoting peace, culture and education on the basis of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Even in the period overcast with militarism, the first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi refused to yield to the suppression by the state authority and firmly stood by his principles of dedicating himself to the happiness of the people and to peace. Together with the general director Josei Toda, who later became the second president, Mr. Makiguchi was imprisoned in 1943 on false charges. He died in prison about a year and a half later.

The second president Josei Toda carried on the intentions and work of Mr. Makiguchi and built the foundation of Soka Gakkai as a people's movement. On September 8, 1956, a year before his death, he issued a declaration advocating the abolition

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of atomic and hydrogen bombs. He said: "Whatever the reason, the use of atomic and hydrogen bombs is an infringement on the dignity of life, and it must never be allowed because it suppresses the people's right of existence." Taking the position that anything that threatens the "right of existence" of the peoples of the world is a devil, a satan and a monster, he condemned the use of nuclear weapons as an "absolute evil," and entrusted to youth the carrying out of a movement to eliminate nuclear weapons. The spirit of this declaration, a firm resolution to establish lasting peace, is being carried on as the basic principle of the Soka Gakkai's peace movement.

During the period of the third president Daisaku Ikeda (now honorary president) the peace movement was steadily promoted and it spread from the Soka Gakkai to sister organizations in other countries. In 1975, the Soka Gakkai International was inaugurated at a world peace conference. Attended by 158 representatives from fifty-one countries, the conference adopted a "Declaration of Peace" under the leadership of Mr. Ikeda.

Now, fourteen years since its establishment, the SGI has grown to embrace both member-organizations and individual members in 115 countries. The guiding principles of the organization are:

To respect the culture, social customs and laws of one's country and contribute to the prosperity of society as good citizens.

To promote the realization of lasting peace and the advancement of humanistic culture and education on the basis of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, which intrinsically expounds the dignity of life.

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To reject war and all other forms of violence and endeavor to promote the happiness of mankind and the prosperity of the world. For that purpose, the major goal is the elimination of nuclear weapons and the realization of a warless world by upholding the spirit of the United Nations Charter and cooperating with the UN effort to maintain world peace.

SGI president Ikeda has taken the initiative to put this spirit into practice personally and to lead the way for other members. He has promoted personal diplomacy by visiting forty countries so far and by conferring with government leaders, intellectuals and cultural figures. He has devoted himself single-heartedly to spreading the current for a warless world.

In addition, he has made numerous proposals for peace such as advocating an early conclusion of a peace and friendship treaty between Japan and China, presenting concrete plans to eliminate nuclear weapons and to strengthen the functions of the UN which he called the "parliament of humanity," and emphasizing the importance of direct dialogues between top leaders of the world (in particular the need for frequent summit meetings between those of the USA. and the Soviet Union).

These proposals have been substantiated by his own peace endeavors and have received favorable comments from many intellectuals as having realistic value. In particular, the following positive and bold proposals, based upon poignant comprehension of the world, have been widely recognized as constructive contributions to disarmament and peace:

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- Proposal for Nuclear Disarmament (May 1978)
- A New Proposal for Disarmament and the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (June 1982)
- A New Proposal for Peace and Disarmament (January 1983)
- Building a United Movement for a World Without War (January 1984)
- New Waves of Peace Toward the Twenty-First Century (January 1985)
- Toward a Global Movement for a Lasting Peace (January 1986)
- Spreading the Brilliance of Peace Toward the Century of the People (January 1987)
- Cultural Understanding and Disarmament: The Building Blocks of World Peace (January 1988)
- Complete Disarmament as a Global Movement (June 1988)
- Toward a New Globalism (January 1989)

For his dedicated peace efforts and actions to support the UN Mr. Ikeda received the United Nations Peace Award in 1983 and a special commendation from UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar in 1988.

In concert with the SGI's peace actions, the Soka Gakkai organized antiwar and antinuclear programs in Japan and other countries. In 1973, it carried out a street campaign and collected ten million signatures calling for abolition of nuclear weapons. The following year, the list of signatures was presented to the then UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim when Mr. Ikeda visited the UN. Other peace-promoting activities undertaken by Soka Gakkai youths include fundraising campaigns for relief of Asian and African refugees, a campaign for relief of the starving population in Africa, publication of antiwar books, antiwar and peace gatherings, antiwar exhibitions and peace seminars.

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The publication of antiwar books, under the overall title of "For Generations Who Do Not Know War," was started in 1973 by the Soka Gakkai youth division to convey to future generations the tragedy and horrors of war through first-person accounts of war experiences. The series was completed in 1985, with the publication of the eightieth volume. A total of more than 2,200 persons contributed accounts of their wartime experiences, all serving as precious messages to future generations. Also, about four thousand Soka Gakkai youth division members engaged in collecting, editing and compiling the accounts, a work which promoted antiwar sentiments among its members. English, German, French and Romanian editions containing selected chapters from the Japanese edition have also been published. In addition, the Soka Gakkai women's division is engaged in publishing antiwar books and has so far compiled seventeen volumes of war-experience accounts of women.

The exhibit "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World" which was organized by the Soka Gakkai youth division gained much international attention. Presented with the cooperation of the UN and the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the exhibit showed the destruction of the two cities and presented from various perspectives a study of the effects of radiation, the arms race between the superpowers, and the threat of nuclear war. It was first shown in 1982 at the UN headquarters in New York on the occasion of the Second Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament. Held as one of the programs to mark the UN "World Disarmament Decade," the exhibit was shown in a total of eighteen cities in fifteen countries outside of Japan--in Europe, China, the Soviet Union, India and Thailand. An estimated total of more than a million persons visited the exhibit and, as many intellectuals have pointed out, it served to arouse peace awareness and antinuclear sentiments. It aroused a strong international opinion against war.

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Cooperative support of the United Nations is central to the task of the SGI in seeking disarmament, peace and the betterment of world conditions. It has been pointed out on the international political scene that the UN lacks competence to carry out its assigned functions and that it continues to face severe times. Despite its problems, the UN has performed a prominent role in maintaining world peace and security. Particular mention must be made of its mediation efforts since 1988 which resulted in the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and a cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq war. In order that the UN may fully demonstrate its ability to create and maintain world peace it is essential to strengthen a worldwide effort to support this international organization. In this connection the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is particularly important. The wide-ranging participation of private organizations means that ordinary citizens will be taking part in UN activities. Since the opinions of the people will be heard, there will be new energy in the UN.

As an NGO registered with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the SGI proposes to promote the realization of world peace and the advancement of culture. The Soka Gakkai also is registered as an NGO of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Department of Public Information.

I have given an outline of the activities of the Soka Gakkai and the Soka Gakkai International to show how Mahayana Buddhism is being applied in modern society. It is significant that through these activities the high spirituality of Buddhism can address the salvation of the people. World politics now stands at a turning point. Will it truly move toward disarmament? I feel that the world awaits a movement that will manifest the spirit of nonviolence and the compassion of Buddhism.