

Transforming Human History: The Light of Peace and Dignity

Daisaku Ikeda

President, Soka Gakkai International (SGI)

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Even as we approach the second anniversary of the official declaration of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, variants continue to emerge, causing new waves of infection and creating challenging conditions in many countries. It is distressing to contemplate the reality of people around the world who, without solace or support, carry the wounds of lost health, livelihoods and purpose, or who anguish at the loss of family members or friends.

Daily life continues without a clear view of the way forward, and the impacts of the pandemic are likely to be long term. It has even been suggested that history will be demarcated into pre- and post-COVID periods. While it is undeniable that the pandemic represents an unprecedented threat, when we consider the events and trends that mark historical periods, it is equally clear that we cannot allow this story to be one only of devastating loss undergone and endured. I say this because I firmly believe that the key factor determining the direction of history will prove to be we humans ourselves, and not a virus.

Confused and at a loss as previously unimaginable conditions continue to arise, it is only natural that people tend to focus on the negative. But it is crucial that we find sources of hope in the positive actions being taken to resolve the crisis, and that we strive to support and expand these.

While the nature of the threat differed, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), the Soka Gakkai's founding president, offered the following thoughts in November 1942—the depths of the crisis of World War II—as a key to dispelling the impenetrable miasma and turmoil of that time. We must avoid, at one extreme, the kind of “close focus” that leaves us so taken up with immediate realities that we ignore all else; and at the other, the kind of “distant focus” that is characterized by empty slogans unaccompanied by action to transform reality. Instead, he called for society to adopt a “balanced, clear-sighted focus” by which people take action from within their present circumstances with a firm sense of purpose regarding who and what they are working for. [1] Makiguchi argued that this kind of balanced, clear-sighted focus is also necessary in daily life, but this is not something that requires special knowledge and understanding, or unique capabilities, to achieve.

I believe that through our present-day experience of this global maelstrom of disruption and displacement wrought by the pandemic, many people have come to the following realizations:

- That our lives are not possible without the support of many others and the proper functioning of society, and that the deeper joys of life are realized through our connections with others.

- That the problems of the world are deeply and mutually connected; threats and challenges besetting people in distant places will quickly find their way to our local communities.
- That the grief of suddenly losing family members or being shut out from the things that give meaning to life is the same for people in any country, and that while the specific circumstances may vary, the tragedy is in its essence the same.

The most crucial thing then is to forge bonds of solidarity from the realizations of connectedness that have come to us deeply and intensely during this unprecedented crisis and make these the basis for shared efforts to find a way out of the storm.

Makiguchi treasured the Buddhist maxim “When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated” [\[2\]](#) because he firmly believed that people inherently possess the ability to dispel the seemingly impenetrable gloom that hangs over the world and to light the way to a hopeful future.

Here I would like to discuss, from three different perspectives, the things that I see as essential to overcoming not only the COVID-19 crisis but also the other challenges that confront our world, thus opening a new chapter in human history.

Reweaving the social fabric

The first challenge is to face head-on the issues the pandemic has exposed and reweave the social fabric so that it can support people’s lives in the years and decades to come.

While COVID-19 has impacted all sectors and aspects of society, the degree of that impact has differed depending on the conditions in which people find themselves. People who were already in vulnerable positions have found their circumstances becoming even more desperate. The difficulties they face are greater than can be borne by any one person alone, and this is true even for many who were previously able to live relatively stable lives.

The intensity of impact people experience depends on a number of factors. Can they, for example, count on people in their immediate surroundings for support if they fall ill? Are they able to secure the means to continue working even if strict measures are put in place to contain the contagion? Do they have the capacity to respond to rapid and dramatic changes in their living environment?

While it is urgent that social life be reconstituted as quickly as possible, if interest is focused solely on statistical data such as the number of people infected or economic indices, this can give rise to ethical blind spots that result in large numbers of people being left behind. The concern is that such blind spots can compound disparities in impacts with disparities in the pace and completeness of recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the whole of human society; this means that unlike disasters in which the negative impacts are geographically concentrated or contained, the people requiring assistance are not gathered in a single visible space such as an evacuation site. There is a risk that, in addition to a new, almost visceral awareness of our contacts and interactions that has arisen through

our efforts to prevent the spread of infection, the need to protect ourselves has created a kind of “awareness lockdown.” This in turn has made it more difficult for us to engage with things beyond our immediate surroundings.

In looking for ways to eliminate these disparities in impact and recovery, I would like to reference a lecture given by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in July 2020, some four months after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Speaking at an event celebrating the birth anniversary of the late South African president Nelson Mandela (1918–2013), whose life was dedicated to the causes of human rights and social justice, the Secretary-General focused his analysis not on the dangers and threats posed by the pandemic but on the people who are actually impacted. He noted that the virus poses the greatest risk to the most marginalized, including those living in poverty, older people and people with disabilities and pre-existing conditions. [3]

Describing how COVID-19 can be “likened to an x-ray, revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built,” he called for the development of a new social contract for a new era. [4] The Secretary-General cited the following words President Mandela addressed to the people of South Africa, which offer a direction for the realization of that vision: “One of the challenges of our time . . . is to re-instill in the consciousness of our people that sense of human solidarity, of being in the world for one another and because of and through others.” [5]

I had the privilege of meeting with President Mandela on two occasions, and these words bring to mind his visage, which exuded a spring-like warmth.

Social contract theory

A social contract is an actual or hypothetical agreement, made between citizens or between the ruled and their ruler, that establishes moral and political rules for a given society. Based on the condition that all others will also consent to relinquish some freedoms to a sovereign or central authority, individuals are guaranteed their safety, security and equal rights. Though the early proponents of social contract theory differed in their views of human nature, they generally agreed that without a social contract of some form, conflict between people will inevitably arise. By accepting our obligation to also protect the rights of others, they argued, we gain civil rights. Social contract theorists demonstrated that it would be rational to enter into such a contract, for mutual advantage, and voluntarily surrender some of one’s individual freedoms.

In my 2015 proposal, I considered the limitations of the social contract theory that is part of the deeper sustaining currents of modern political thought. In doing so, I referenced its problematic aspects as argued by the American political philosopher Martha Nussbaum.

Social contract theory has its origins in the ideas of such thinkers as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704). In her work *Frontiers of Justice*, Nussbaum notes: “The classical theorists all assumed that their contracting agents were men who were roughly equal in capacity, and capable of productive economic activity.” [6] As a result, while great stress has been given to the idea of mutual advantage, in reality not only were women, children and the elderly excluded but little progress has been made in fully including others, such as people with disabilities, in the life of society. It is profoundly regrettable that, even in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, this entrenched way of thinking continues to exert a powerful influence.

In the decision-making spaces established to respond to the pandemic, the participation of women has been limited and there has been criticism that many of the responses have been developed without consideration of gender issues. Children’s interests rarely get the attention they deserve, and COVID-19

has caused major losses of educational opportunities even as many children have been deprived of support as a result of the unemployment, illness or death of parents, guardians or family members.

Emergency responses have likewise failed to prioritize the needs of the elderly and infirm, and many have been unable to receive essential services or have been forced to live in isolation for extended periods. Even under non-emergency conditions, people with disabilities have difficulty accessing medical services and necessary information; these and other aspects of their lives have become even more challenging during the pandemic.

It is crucial to improve conditions for all these vulnerable populations with an attentive focus on each individual. The time has come, as we squarely face these realities, to break free from the classical idea of mutual advantage.

In considering this paradigm shift, I think it is worth attending to the words of Secretary-General Guterres on the occasion of World Refugee Day last June: “We heal together when we all get the care we need.” [\[7\]](#)

At present, more than 82.4 million people worldwide have been forced to flee their homes and even their countries in order to escape the interrelated dangers of conflict, persecution and climate change, [\[8\]](#) and now find themselves living in situations where they are excluded from the social welfare systems of the host country. The Secretary-General served for many years as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and his appeal on behalf of refugees and internally displaced persons, whose precarious situations have further deteriorated in the COVID-19 crisis, carries a particular poignancy and weight.

I likewise cannot but sense a commonality of spirit with the way of life that is the ideal of the SGI—a commitment to realizing dignity and happiness for both oneself and others.

The Mahayana Buddhist text the Vimalakirti Sutra includes an episode that resonates with this worldview and sensitivity to life.

On one occasion, Vimalakirti, a disciple of Shakyamuni (the historical Buddha) deeply respected for the way he interacted with people in various conditions of life with no sense of difference or distance, fell ill. Learning of this, Shakyamuni had a large contingent of followers led by his close disciple Manjushri visit Vimalakirti. After conveying Shakyamuni’s concern and well-wishes for his recovery, Manjushri asked Vimalakirti how he had fallen ill, how long he had been ill and what might bring about a cure.

Vimalakirti replied: “Because all living beings are sick, therefore I am sick,” and then offered the following analogy to fully communicate what he meant: “It is like the case of a rich man who has only one child. If the child falls ill, then the father and mother too will be ill, but if the child’s illness is cured, the father and mother too will be cured.” As someone committed to living his life as a bodhisattva, he explained, his feelings for other people were like those of a parent. Thus, “If living beings are sick, the bodhisattva will be sick, but if living beings are cured, the bodhisattva too will be cured.” [\[9\]](#)

As it turns out, Vimalakirti was not actually suffering from any specific illness. Rather, his empathy—his feelings of shared pain that could not be extinguished so long as others suffered without relief—manifested itself in the form of illness. For Vimalakirti, this sharing of pain with those in distress was not something experienced as a weight or burden, but was evidence that he was continuing to live as

his authentic self. He was attuned to the vital truth that our individual security cannot be realized in isolation from the conditions of privation faced by others.

When we consider the COVID-19 crisis in the light of this Buddhist perspective, it naturally leads us to question what it means to live in happiness and health at a time when so many people throughout the world are being severely impacted by illness and its accompanying effects.

In this context, I recall the words shared with me in a dialogue I conducted with the economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1908–2006). A scholar of great renown, Professor Galbraith had direct experience of a number of global crises, including the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War. He was deeply affected by the persistent wounds he witnessed in people’s lives, and this brought him to continually question not only the economic order but the organization of society itself.

When I asked him how we should shape the world of the twenty-first century, he replied that we should aim to create “a century in which people can say, ‘I enjoy living in this world.’” [\[10\]](#)

In our dialogue, we also discussed the Buddhist worldview—expressed by the phrase from the Lotus Sutra “living beings enjoy themselves at ease,” [\[11\]](#)—that we are born into this life in order to savor joy. Our dialogue was conducted in 2003, and over the intervening years, my sense of the truth contained in Professor Galbraith’s words has only deepened: Now more than ever, we need to construct a society where people can confront and together overcome even the most severe challenges and together share a sense of the joy of being alive.

This year marks seven years since the adoption by the UN of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with their target year of 2030. Progress toward the realization of the SDGs has been greatly hampered by the pandemic and, in order to restart and accelerate that progress, I think it is important to flesh out the core spirit of the SDGs—the determination to leave no one behind—by adding a further vision of building a society where all can savor the joys of being alive.

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, the spirit of leaving no one behind tends to be shared spontaneously. However, as reconstruction efforts proceed, it is often the case that this sentiment fades from people’s consciousness. Further, the greater the scale of the challenge—as in a pandemic or climate change—the greater the danger that we will remain focused exclusively on the threat and, even though we know it is important not to leave anyone behind, our commitment to do so may weaken over time.

In this regard, we should center our efforts on ensuring that those who are exposed to great danger have people in their immediate surroundings on whom they can call for support. Here I would like to revisit the lecture delivered by Makiguchi that I cited earlier, in which he discussed the importance of maintaining a balanced, clear-sighted focus on life.

Concerning what qualifies as an act of “Great Good” that members of society can perform, Makiguchi stressed that while traditionally it had been assumed that unless one does something that has a significant impact on a national scale it would not qualify as “Great Good,” in fact it is not the size or scale of one’s actions that matters. If you could save someone’s life by giving them a glass of water, would this not be something that no amount of money can buy? In this example, we can sense Makiguchi’s conviction that “value is not found in things, but in relations.” [\[12\]](#)

There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution to the diverse spectrum of problems people face. As such, the crucial question we must ask ourselves is how each of us can become that hand of support extended to those facing hardship, how we can strengthen the kind of relationships where we can share in each other’s joy at having overcome our respective ordeals. In the Lotus Sutra, the teaching in which the essence of Buddhism is expounded, we find these analogies: “like a fire to one who is cold, . . . finding a ship in which to cross the water, . . . someone in darkness finding a lamp. . .” [13]

The feelings of relief and even joy that well up in a person who is aided in passage to safe haven after having been caught in the undertow of life’s trials and having given in to despair. . . We must aim to construct a society in which such feelings—the palpable sense that it is, indeed, good to be alive—are shared by all.

A global consciousness of solidarity

The second challenge I would like to consider is that of creating a consciousness of solidarity that extends to the entire world.

It is said that the shared sense of crisis that has marked the reaction to this pandemic in each country is largely without precedent. In contrast, the scale of international cooperation has been inadequate, and there is a glaring disparity in vaccine access globally. While many countries are instituting booster vaccinations, at the end of last year only half of the 194 member states of WHO had fully vaccinated 40 percent or more of their populations. [14] Great difficulty in obtaining vaccines persists in Africa, where only 8 percent of the continent’s population has been fully vaccinated. [15] It is crucial that the shortfalls in international cooperation that have left people in many countries still awaiting access to vaccines be resolved with all haste.

I believe the words of the physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955) express the thoughts that have occurred to many people of conscience in the face of present circumstances. In 1947, as the Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union surfaced and intensified following the end of World War II, Einstein called on the world to reject division and advance on the path of solidarity:

It would be different, for instance, if an epidemic of bubonic plague were threatening the entire world. In such a case conscientious and expert persons would be brought together and they would work out an intelligent plan to combat the plague. After having reached agreement upon the right ways and means, they would submit their plan to the governments. Those would hardly raise serious objections but rather agree speedily on the measures to be taken. They certainly would never think of trying to handle the matter in such a way that their own nation would be spared whereas the next one would be decimated. [16]

Today, an intelligent plan and right ways and means have been developed and given concrete form as the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, an internationally coordinated response launched in April 2020, just a month after WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic. Within this, the COVAX facility has the goal of ensuring equitable access to vaccines in low- and middle-income countries.

While more than 1 billion doses of vaccine have been supplied in 144 countries and territories since then, [17] this number falls far short of the goal of 2 billion doses originally planned for by COVAX, a deficit that is the result of delays in funding cooperation and competition for supplies. It is crucial that support for COVAX be rapidly strengthened.

At the G20 summit held in Rome last October, agreement was reached to accelerate the flow of vaccines and medical supplies to developing countries. As was stressed in the Report of the G20 High Level Independent Panel on Financing the Global Commons for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, in global terms the capacity and resources required to reduce the risk posed by pandemics are not lacking, nor do we lack the scientific know-how and funding sources needed to mount an effective response to COVID-19. [18]

With the intelligent plan and right ways and means that Einstein imagined clearly apparent in the activities of COVAX and the consensus of the G20, the final missing element for overcoming this crisis is the kind of global solidarity where countries seek to protect not only themselves but all others from the threat.

The formation of WHO can be traced back to discussions held during the San Francisco Conference, when government representatives met between April and June 1945 to agree upon the Charter of the United Nations. Public health was not originally on the agenda, but it was raised as an important area of concern, resulting in its inclusion in Article 55 of the UN Charter as one of the areas for which international cooperation would be promoted; as well as in Article 57 where it is identified as a field in which a specialized UN agency would be established. [19]

At the conference held the following year to set up WHO, governments, including those of former Axis countries Japan, Germany and Italy, were invited to attend as observers, based on the idea that

The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai

The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society) was founded by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda in Tokyo in 1930. This small group of educators dedicated to educational reform gradually developed into an organization with a broader membership that promoted Nichiren Buddhism as a means to reform not only education but society as a whole. The group came into conflict with the militarist government of the time, which saw education as a means of molding people into servants of the state and imposed State Shinto ideology as a way of justifying its wartime aggression.

During the late 1930s and World War II, members of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai were subject to increasing police surveillance and harassment, and the organization was effectively crushed. Both Makiguchi and Toda were arrested as “thought criminals” in 1943, and Makiguchi died in prison in 1944. Toda was released from prison in 1945 and rebuilt the organization as today’s Soka Gakkai.

involving all states, regardless of World War II alliances, would best serve the interests of the agency. It is also notable that, in the process of forming WHO, a path was established for the many territories that were still under colonial rule and had not yet gained independence to be admitted by the agency under the separate category of Associate Members. [20]

Further, it was decided that the word “World” would be used in the name of the new specialized agency, as opposed to “United Nations,” in order to avoid the implication that its scope would be limited to UN member states. The World Health Organization was officially launched in April 1948.

In March 1993, I had the opportunity to visit and speak at the venue of the historic San Francisco Conference. At that time, I highlighted the SGI’s efforts to support the UN and the convictions expressed by my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900–58), that undergird them.

Soon after the text of the UN Charter was finalized, Mr. Toda

emerged from a two-year imprisonment at the hands of the Japanese militarist authorities and set about rebuilding the Soka Gakkai as a new kind of people’s movement championing humanism. My mentor’s ideals had deep parallels with those of the UN Charter, for they had grown out of his burning desire to effect a fundamental transformation in human history by breaking the seemingly endless cycle of violence and war. Inspired by his spirit, the Soka Gakkai has continued to expand its global network of ordinary people awakened to a philosophy of peace and respect for the dignity of life.

I closed my remarks in San Francisco by noting that Mr. Toda had bequeathed to us the work of supporting the UN—a crystallization of the twentieth century’s finest wisdom—that must be resolutely protected and nurtured as a fortress of hope for the coming century.

Chikyu minzokushugi

The term *chikyu minzokushugi* can be directly translated as “global nationalism” and indicates a belief in the underlying unity of the world’s peoples. It was first used by second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda at a Soka Gakkai Youth Division meeting in 1952. The term corresponds to what today is known as “global citizenship.”

Toda’s strong determination to consider people’s happiness as his first principle at all times was the wellspring of his ideal of global citizenship. Based on his experience of the tragedies wrought by Japanese ultranationalism, Toda sought to liberate people from the chains of narrow-minded nationalism, to enable them to transcend the limitations of a vision confined to just one state or people. He called for an awareness that humankind is one, ultimately sharing a common destiny. Toda was convinced that wars among states and peoples would end and a peaceful global society be constructed when people realized this ideal and took full responsibility as members of a single human community.

Reflecting on the lessons of his wartime experience, Mr. Toda earnestly wished to bring about a transformation in the trajectory not only of a single nation but of the world as a whole. This vision was propounded seventy years ago, in February 1952. At that time, he distilled his conviction into the phrase *chikyu minzokushugi*, which can be directly translated as “global nationalism” and corresponds to what we would call “global citizenship” today. [21]

In a period when escalating global tensions had erupted in the Korean War and other conflicts, Mr. Toda put forth this vision as a means of enabling humankind to free itself from the tragic cycles of history. He sought to convey the determination that the people of no nation should be forced to suffer, the determination that all the world’s people must be able to experience joy and prosperity together.

Today, in the midst of a prolonged pandemic, as I reflect on the history of WHO’s founding, it strikes me just how closely Mr. Toda’s vision of global citizenship overlaps with the agency’s founding spirit, as expressed in the use of “World” in its name.

The importance of global solidarity in today’s world was unequivocally affirmed in the Political Declaration on Equitable Global Access to COVID-19 Vaccines, adopted by the UN General Assembly last year and endorsed by 181 Member States:

We commit to solidarity and intensified international cooperation, giving equal regard to the needs of all human beings, especially people in vulnerable situations, to be protected from the coronavirus disease, regardless of nationality, or location and without any kind of discrimination. [22]

The focus of pandemic response measures needs to be on how governments can work together to overcome the threat, not on how each individual state can escape the crisis.

In my proposal last year, I wrote that when attention is directed at the negative data of increasing

numbers of infections, a narrow concern with defending only one's own country may take precedence over solidarity with others. Rather, it is important to maintain a positive focus on how many lives we can save by working together; if all countries keep this in sight, it will open the way toward resolution.

In the teachings of Buddhism, we find the following:

When one lights a torch for someone at night, one brings light not only to another person but to oneself as well. Likewise, when one livens other people's complexions, one livens one's own too, when one gives them strength, one gives oneself strength too, when one prolongs their lives, one prolongs one's own life as well. [\[23\]](#)

When this kind of virtuous cycle is generated from a shared concern for both self and others, and as more countries take up the work of cooperation and assistance, it will help drive away the mounting gloom. This is the path toward establishing a consciousness of global solidarity. What is needed is precisely the spirit shared and clarified in the words of the political declaration quoted above—that of protecting the lives of all people equally, regardless of nationality or location and without any kind of discrimination.

Buddhist texts also articulate that when it comes to saving a person's life, no distinctions should ever be made between one life and another. This is expressed in accounts of the dedicated efforts of a physician named Jivaka, who lived in the kingdom of Magadha in ancient India during Shakyamuni's lifetime.

In his youth, having learned of an exceptional physician in the kingdom of Taxila, Jivaka traveled there to train under him, studying everything he could about the art of medicine. Returning home, he put his skills to use saving many lives. After healing an illness of his king, Jivaka came to be so highly prized that he was ordered not to travel to treat others but to remain by the king's side and provide his services to only a select few. In spite of this, when he learned of someone who was sick in the city, Jivaka would ask for the king's permission and visit their home to treat them. When a child in the kingdom of Kaushambi fell ill, Jivaka is said to have rushed to his side to perform surgery. And when a certain king whom he had cured of headaches implored him to stay with the promise of handsome wages, Jivaka declined the offer. He went on to heal countless people, earning great respect. [\[24\]](#)

In this way, after studying medicine in one kingdom, Jivaka committed his life to healing people of different cities, villages and even kingdoms, never limiting his services to select individuals. Jivaka has the meaning of "life" in Sanskrit and, true to his name, he saved people's lives without discrimination or regard to difference in nation or location. Nichiren (1222–82), who expounded and spread Buddhism in thirteenth-century Japan and whose teachings inspire the practice of members of the SGI, extolled Jivaka, calling him a treasure of his times. [\[25\]](#)

Our appreciation for the countless medical professionals and healthcare workers who exert themselves day after day with utter dedication in the midst of the ongoing pandemic knows no bounds. While wholeheartedly supporting these genuine treasures of our times, we must strengthen global cooperation in the field of health security based on the spirit of giving equal protection to all, regardless of nationality or location and without any kind of discrimination.

In my proposal last year, I called for the adoption of international guidelines that would not only serve

as the basis for a coordinated COVID-19 response but would also be sufficiently robust to defend against future outbreaks of infectious disease.

Last month, during a special session of the World Health Assembly, a resolution was unanimously adopted establishing an intergovernmental negotiating body, open to all member states and associate members, for the formulation of international rules on pandemic preparedness. [26] Based on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, the assembly agreed to start work on language for a treaty or other instrument on such measures as equitable access to vaccines and the sharing of information. The first meeting of the negotiating body is to be held by March 1 of this year.

Many experts have pointed out that it is not a matter of *if* another pandemic will occur, but *when*. In light of this reality, I strongly urge the early drafting of such a system of international rules, followed by steps to ensure its adoption and implementation.

COVID-19 has shown how a threat that intensifies in one part of the world will, in short order, become a threat everywhere. This is the reality of the world we live in today. In their shared agenda for global action, leaders at the G7 Summit in the United Kingdom last June stressed that threats to human health respect no borders in an interconnected world and agreed that one of their particular roles and responsibilities is “improving the speed of response by developing global protocols which trigger collective action in the event of a future pandemic.” [27] On the basis of this shared agenda, the G7 countries should lead efforts to negotiate a pandemic treaty that will establish international protocols for responding to future pandemics, and proactively develop the frameworks of international cooperation that can serve as a basis for such a treaty.

In the past, I have suggested that the G7 grouping be expanded to include Russia, India and China as a “summit of responsible states.” In this, I am not referring to their obligations as world powers, but rather, to their commitment to respond in solidarity to the concerns and aspirations of the world’s peoples who seek ways to overcome the common crises of humankind.

If the primary approach to the crises we face is “risk management,” countries will adopt a narrow perspective, their concerns limited to the impacts they experience directly. But what the world needs most is for governments to work together to develop and forge the kind of resilience that will allow us to unite to overcome the severe challenges we all face.

Moreover, such a spirit of solidarity will provide the driving energy and basis for meeting the full spectrum of our challenges, including the climate crisis. I am certain that by rooting our actions in this spirit of solidarity and by making progress in the construction of a global society that can remain undefeated before any threat, we will leave something of immense value to future generations.

An economy that offers hope and dignity

The third challenge is to build an economy that inspires hope in young people and enables women to shine with dignity.

It is estimated that the equivalent of 255 million jobs have been lost as a result of COVID-19 and its devastating effects on the global economy. [28] One matter of particular concern is how gravely young

people have been impacted. Latest International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates indicate that employment for young people worldwide has declined at a greater rate than for those aged twenty-five years and above, [29] with youth employment in the G20 countries dropping by 11 percent. [30]

Recent trends suggest a greater likelihood that youth who gained employment during the crisis will experience job-related stress and anxiety as a result of rapid changes in the workplace due to COVID-19. Increasing numbers of young people have started new jobs remotely or in settings other than the traditional work environment and continue to work without anyone in their surroundings to rely on for support. With the pandemic having brought greater financial hardship to many households, young people are also finding themselves further burdened by student debt or unable to gain opportunities to develop the skills they need for the careers they desire. Further, studies indicate that future career prospects are looking bleak for more and more students, with 40 percent expressing uncertainty and 14 percent harboring actual fear about what the future might hold. [31]

Economic recovery is an urgent demand, but unless we can ease the sense of fear and uncertainty felt by so many young people and spark the light of hope in their hearts, not only the economic outlook but all hopes for healthy social development will remain dim.

In thinking about this issue, I would like to refer to observations made by Massachusetts Institute of Technology professors Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, whose work was recognized with a Nobel Prize in Economics in 2019, which they shared with Professor Michael Kremer of Harvard University.

In their book *Good Economics for Hard Times*, they reflect on the real meaning of such indices as Gross Domestic Product (GDP): “The key ultimately is to not lose sight of the fact that GDP is a means and not an end.” [32]

Warning that focusing on income alone is a “distorting lens” that has often led to wrong policy decisions, they argue: “Restoring human dignity to its central place . . . sets off a profound rethinking of economic priorities and the ways in which societies care for their members, particularly when they are in need.” [33] This work was published the year before the pandemic, but I believe the issue of building an economy that sustains human dignity is more relevant than ever.

The importance of having a job cannot be overstated when we consider economic priorities with a balanced, clear-sighted focus on how they can enhance human dignity, a theme that was starkly highlighted by Banerjee and Duflo.

The book describes how Banerjee, while serving on a UN Panel of Eminent Persons to help draw up the SDGs, met and was inspired by the activities of a member of an international NGO. He and Duflo then attended one of its meetings aimed at providing employment opportunities for people who had experienced poverty. Those who had gathered for this particular meeting included a nurse who found herself seriously disabled and unable to work for a number of years after an accident; a person who had experienced severe depression; and a man who had lost custody of his son due to ADHD-related behaviors. [34]

This NGO and its activities offered the professors a number of insights into how to think about social policy. One was that “work is not necessarily what follows *after* all the other problems have been solved and people are ‘ready,’ but is part of the recovery process itself.” [35] They recount how the father they

had met had been able to regain custody of his son after finding a job and was inspired by the pride his son took in him now that he was working. In this way, a change in the man's situation sent ripples of happiness through the entire family. One of the SDGs is to realize decent work for all, including persons with disabilities, and the example of this family represents precisely the kind of hopeful change the SDGs are meant to promote.

In the proposal I authored in 2012, when Banerjee was serving on the UN Panel of Eminent Persons, I stressed that the effort to achieve the SDGs must be focused not only on meeting targets but also on restoring smiles to the faces of those who now suffer in anguish. This is a priority we cannot lose sight of as we strive for economic recovery from the pandemic.

Citing the need to change the way we view people who find themselves ignored and neglected by society, Banerjee and Duflo argue:

While they may *have* problems, they are not *the* problem. They are entitled to be seen for who they are and to not be defined by the difficulties besieging them. Time and again, we have seen in our travels in developing countries that hope is the fuel that makes people go. [\[36\]](#)

I couldn't agree more. When people gain access to the kind of work or place of belonging that enables them to give full play to their unique potential, the way is opened for our communities and societies to be illuminated with the light of dignity.

The ILO is scheduled to convene a multilateral forum for a human-centered recovery this year. I propose that this occasion serve as a platform for countries to share best practices and lessons learned from COVID-19 as well as to prioritize efforts to ensure decent, humane work for all, with a particular focus on improving employment conditions for young people.

In like manner, the work of rebuilding the economy must be grounded in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

The pandemic has placed an unprecedented burden on healthcare systems; globally, women comprise 70 percent of people working in this field. [\[37\]](#) The crisis has also forced many women to put their careers on hold or take a leave of absence in order to care for sick family members and others close to them. In addition, a vast proportion of those who have lost jobs have been women, with the greatest impact felt by working mothers with young children.

Gender inequality has long been an issue of critical importance. The pandemic has exacerbated this inequality and intensified calls for fundamental reform. An important initiative in this regard has been the Generation Equality Forum convened by UN Women and other stakeholders on two occasions last year.

The meeting in Mexico last March was attended by some ten thousand people from eighty-five countries including online participants who engaged in discussions on how best to accelerate action and movements for gender equality. [\[38\]](#) The follow-up forum in France in June and July saw the unveiling of a five-year Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality.

In addition to five areas for urgent action including gender-based violence and technology and

innovation for gender equality, the plan identifies economic justice and rights as a key priority. Noting such issues as income disparity between women and men, it addresses gender-responsive economic reforms to reduce the number of women living in poverty. It also places particular emphasis on improving conditions for women working in the care economy.

The reality in many countries is that care work, such as caring for elders or other family members, is often unpaid labor primarily carried out by women. Amid rising concern that care workers have borne the brunt of this pandemic, the Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality urges countries to adopt comprehensive reforms, through measures such as investing 3 to 10 percent of their national income to expand opportunities and improve conditions for paid care work. [39]

This point was also emphasized in the Feminist Plan launched by UN Women last September, which called for care to be placed at the center of a sustainable and just economy. [40] Studies show that a vast number of people in the world today are in need of some form of care in order to lead their daily lives. This includes the estimated 1.9 billion children under the age of fifteen, [41] the 1 billion people over the age of sixty [42] and the 1.2 billion with disabilities. [43] Public investment in care work will not only reduce the burden that has been placed on women but also generate far-reaching impacts, improving the lives of many other demographic groups, including children, older persons and those with disabilities.

Let us also not forget the essential role that care work plays in bringing the indispensable experience of happiness and dignity to those who receive care. A rising tide of economic growth cannot lift boats that have sustained severe damage. Nevertheless, I am certain that by enhancing care work in ways that directly support gender equality and women's empowerment, we can construct societies that bolster the livelihoods, happiness and dignity of countless people.

Based on the spirit of Buddhism, a philosophy that places utmost importance on the happiness and dignity of all, the SGI has been steadfast in efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

In January 2020, when UN Women launched the Generation Equality campaign, the SGI and other faith-based organizations held their annual New York symposium, organized in collaboration with UN agencies, where they discussed ways in which faith communities can more effectively contribute to advancing gender equality. During the same symposium held in January 2021, participants stressed that overcoming gender inequalities, including through economic policy measures, will be essential in rebuilding and recovering from COVID-19.

The SGI is currently supporting efforts to empower women living in impoverished communities in Togo through reforestation. The project, which was initiated last January in cooperation with the International Tropical Timber Organization, supports afforestation and the protection of forest resources in places where there has been rapid loss of tree cover, while also enabling women to gain a livelihood and financial independence. Plans are currently underway to roll out a second phase, in which program participants will visit other communities to engage in mutual learning and exchange of experiences and best practices on shared challenges. [44]

No matter how critical the times or adverse their circumstances, human beings are inherently capable of working together to bring forth positive value and generate waves of change that can transform

the era. I am thoroughly convinced that gender equality and women’s empowerment are the keys to overcoming the COVID-19 crisis and building an economy and society that sustains human dignity.

The SGI Charter was adopted in November of 1995, the same year as the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which marked the starting point of efforts toward making gender equality and women’s empowerment the defining currents of our time. Based on the purposes and principles of the SGI Charter—including the commitment to “safeguard fundamental human rights and not discriminate against any individual on any grounds” [45]—we have continued to work toward the resolution of global issues.

Last November, we adopted a new and updated Soka Gakkai Charter. Its purposes and principles articulate ten points, including that, based on the Buddhist spirit of tolerance, we will “respect other religious and philosophical traditions, engaging in dialogue and working together with them toward the resolution of the fundamental challenges confronting humankind.” It further expresses our commitment to “contribute to the achievement of gender equality and promote the empowerment of women.” [46]

As a Buddhist people’s movement spanning 192 countries and territories, we are determined to continue expanding circles of trust and friendship as contributing citizens in order to build a world of happiness and dignity for all.

A UN-centered effort to overcome the climate crisis

Next, I would like to offer concrete proposals regarding three key issue areas that require prompt resolution for the sake of current and future generations.

The first is climate change. Despite countless warnings through the years, the pace of climate change continues to accelerate. [47] With every passing year, the damage caused by extreme weather events has intensified and become more widespread. Droughts and wildfires have become frequent in many parts of the world. This, coupled with rising seawater temperatures and acidification, has resulted in a deterioration in the ability of both land and ocean ecosystems to absorb greenhouse gases. [48]

With action urgently required to respond to this situation, the twenty-sixth Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) convened in Glasgow in October and November last year. Although the conference had to be extended by a day as differences in policy stances resulted in an inability to reach consensus, the parties finally adopted a resolution on the need to work toward limiting the rise in the global average temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. This new target is a significant step forward from the Paris Agreement adopted in 2015, where the agreed goal was to limit the rise in global temperatures to less than 2 degrees Celsius. [49] Meeting this new target, however, will be challenging. According to experts, it will not be enough for each country to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by the levels they have promised. Further robust measures will be required. [50]

As COP26 came to a close, its president, Alok Sharma, warned, “We have kept 1.5 alive. . . But I would still say that the pulse of 1.5 is weak.” He also stressed that while the parties did reach a historic agreement, the success of their actions will not be based on whether they signed the accord, “but on whether they meet and deliver on the commitments.” [51]

While the situation remains critical, there is still hope that ways to overcome this crisis can be found. According to a report by the World Resources Institute, if the G20 countries, which are responsible for 75 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, set ambitious 1.5 degree-aligned emission reduction targets for 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050, the global temperature rise could be limited to 1.7 degrees [52]—just under the 2 degree goal of the Paris Agreement.

During COP26, the US and China agreed to strengthen measures for cooperation on climate action, and I strongly urge Japan and China to reach a similar agreement, together developing proactive scenarios in their joint efforts to address this crisis.

In their joint declaration on enhancing climate action, the US and China state their intention to cooperate in such areas as reducing methane emissions, which make a significant contribution to the rise in temperatures, as well as promoting renewable energy and preventing illegal deforestation. [53]

In recent years, US-China relations have often been tense. That is why it is all the more meaningful that the two nations—which account for more than 40 percent of overall greenhouse gas emissions [54]—have committed to working together to address this common crisis of humankind. In like manner, Japan and China should move quickly to reach an agreement that will strengthen cooperation on climate change.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic ties between Japan and China. I believe that this is an opportune moment for the two countries to formulate a joint pledge for climate action and deepen solidarity for the sake of a sustainable global society, thereby marking a new point of departure toward the next fifty years of bilateral relations.

Japan and China have a long track record of collaboration when it comes to issues concerning the environment. These efforts began in 1981, when they signed an agreement to protect migratory birds and their habitats. In 1994, the Japan-China Environmental Conservation Cooperation Agreement was signed, and, in 1996, the Sino-Japan Friendship Center for Environmental Protection was established in Beijing. The two countries have continued to work together over the years, achieving considerable progress in addressing a variety of issues including air pollution, forest conservation, afforestation and energy and waste management.

In 2006, ten years after the establishment of the Sino-Japan Friendship Center for Environmental Protection, I was awarded an honorary professorship from Beijing Normal University. In my acceptance speech, I reflected on the history of collaborative efforts to protect the environment.

We need to intensify the pace of these commendable efforts. To that end, I emphatically urge the establishment of a comprehensive and effective environmental partnership between Japan and China, looking ahead 100 years into the future. . .

If Japan and China join together with their vital neighbor South Korea and all three countries invest even greater energies into environmental research, technological cooperation, personnel exchanges and fostering experts in the field, I am confident that their efforts will have a ripple effect throughout Asia and, eventually, the entire world.

The benefits of Japan-China cooperation have been far-reaching. With the Sino-Japan Friendship

Center for Environmental Protection as a hub for their joint efforts, the two countries have collaborated on projects with the US, Russia and EU member states, and have provided training programs for environmental policymakers from over one hundred developing countries.

I hope that Japan and China will continue to build on the legacy they have created and intensify their collaborative efforts to respond to the climate crisis, while further strengthening the network of cooperation with South Korea and other Asian countries. It is my strong conviction that such collaboration will spur bold action, generating waves of hope and change throughout the world.

In addition to these proposals regarding inter-state cooperation, I would also like to call for strengthening the framework of partnership between the UN and civil society.

Global commons

International law recognizes the Atmosphere, the High Seas, Antarctica and Outer Space as global commons, seen as the common heritage of humankind. More broadly, global commons are taken to include the Earth's shared natural resources that are beyond national jurisdiction and to which all nations have access, such as the oceans, the climate, biodiversity, forests, and ice sheets and glaciers. Threats to the global commons include overexploitation or unintended degradation of resources caused by increased demand for resources.

The resources we all require in order to survive and flourish are together known as the “global commons.” These include the climate and biodiversity. I would like to propose the establishment of a venue within the UN system where civil society, led by youth, can freely discuss the comprehensive protection of the global commons.

This year marks thirty years since the UN Conference on Environment and Development, popularly known as the Earth Summit took place in Rio de Janeiro. The summit was an important milestone that saw the opening for signature of both the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity. It was also the impetus for adoption of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

In 2001, a Joint Liaison Group was set up to enhance cooperation in the implementation of the three conventions by facilitating information sharing and the coordination of activities. I believe it is time to expand this alliance to include and enlist the support of civil society. I am convinced that this would open new paths toward successfully addressing climate change. The problems of climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification are deeply intertwined, and solutions are likewise interconnected. Creative approaches can inspire fresh momentum to break through what may appear to be insurmountable challenges.

The global commons encompass the high seas and the North and South Poles, none of which fall under the sovereign purview of any single nation, as well as the atmosphere and global ecosystem, resources that are essential for humanity to survive and thrive. Their protection for the sake of present and future generations must be a matter of highest priority.

Last year, the UN launched the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. I believe this presents an opportunity to enhance coordination of efforts not only in the fields covered by the three above-mentioned conventions but also in areas that lie outside their scope, catalyzing positive chain reactions that can spur progress in resolving the environmental issues we face.

In March, a Special Session of the UN Environment Assembly will be held in Nairobi to commemorate

the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). I urge the adoption at this special session of a declaration that will delineate steps to strengthen a comprehensive approach to environmental issues from the perspective of safeguarding the global commons.

In addition, I would like to see intensive deliberations at the UN on problems related to the global commons. In my proposal last year, I discussed the great potential value of a UN youth council, whose role would be to communicate to the UN leadership ideas and proposals developed from the perspective of young people. A youth council would be a perfect venue for the kind of deliberations on the global commons I am suggesting.

Last September, the Pre-COP26 international conference “Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition” was held in Milan. Following the 2019 Youth Climate Summit, this meeting provided a platform for young people to come together and convey their concerns to those engaged in intergovernmental negotiations. It evoked precisely the kind of UN youth council I am advocating. Some 400 young people from 186 countries—nearly every signatory to the Paris Agreement—including one youth member of the Soka Gakkai in Japan, participated in the conference.

The Youth4Climate Manifesto made the following appeal for meaningful youth participation, calling on the UN to:

Establish a body within the UNFCCC to enhance youth participation and provide a permanent setting for young people to engage in formal, periodical discussions with UNFCCC Party representatives and among themselves. . .

Enhance opportunities for youth interventions during sessions, including by ensuring youth interventions are presented at the beginning or middle of the plenaries, rather than at the end. [\[55\]](#)

Youth around the world are demanding a greater role in global efforts to address the climate crisis, an issue that directly threatens their lives and futures. They are proactively working to establish a framework within which they can consistently participate in discussions and decision-making processes.

In the same manner as the Milan meeting, the UN youth council I am proposing should be open to participation from all countries. Regular sessions and meetings could be held online, with face-to-face plenary sessions for important decisions held in various locations on, for example, a biannual basis. The outcome of each plenary session would then be forwarded to the UN for incorporation into its decision-making processes.

When the newly established UN was in search of a location for its headquarters, several cities around the world offered to serve as hosts. However, it was difficult to decide on a particular city as the home for the global organization. There was even a proposal to locate the headquarters onboard a ship, which could constantly move around the world. In the end, the first UN General Assembly was held in London and the third in Paris, with sessions held in a number of other cities before the permanent headquarters in New York was finally completed. Even at the time, it must have seemed a sensational concept to set up the UN headquarters on a ship that traveled the oceans, but the high seas, which are not under the

sovereignty of any one country, are a symbol of the global commons, and the idea recalls the vision of the United Nations as the parliament of humanity.

This history would seem to support the idea of rotating the plenary sessions of a UN youth council among various countries rather than basing it at UN Headquarters in New York. When selecting venues, priority should be given to locations that are accessible to civil society representatives from areas where loss and damage and ecological degradation caused by climate change have been most severe.

In this regard, the Toda Peace Institute, which I founded, has often chosen to hold its conferences in areas critically affected by the issue under discussion. This is based on its principle of listening to the voices of those who are suffering, and standing with them. Rooted in this commitment, the institute is currently working on a climate change research program focused on Pacific Island communities, which are experiencing the severe effects of rising sea levels. [56] I firmly believe that the creation of a UN youth council that meets in or near the places most affected by the issues under discussion would be a breakthrough in strengthening partnership between the UN and civil society.

In that context, I would like to note an important undertaking by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. The committee is currently drafting a General Comment on Children’s Rights and the Environment with a Special Focus on Climate Change (General Comment No. 26). Having already sought input from NGOs and people of all age groups, from next month the committee will be actively seeking the views of the world’s children. It then plans to launch a Children’s Advisory Team to engage children in the drafting of General Comment No. 26, which will represent an invaluable opportunity for the voices of children to be reflected in global processes. [57]

The SGI has consistently centered youth in our activities to tackle environmental issues. Last year, when COP26 was held in Glasgow, “Seeds of Hope & Action: Making the SDGs a Reality,” an exhibition newly co-created by the Earth Charter International and the SGI, was launched. Additionally, the following statement was issued by the SGI at a press conference held during the conference:

Listening to the voices of young people is not optional; it is the only logical path forward if we are genuinely concerned about the future of our world. [58]

Human beings inherently possess the strength to overcome any challenge. When youth stand up in solidarity, confident that they can determine the future, this fresh awareness and momentum will surely become the driving force toward a brighter future.

A healthy learning environment for children

The second issue area that deserves our immediate attention and action is education, and I would like to advance some proposals to ensure and enhance the provision of learning opportunities for children and adolescents.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global focus has been on public health and economic recovery. However, alongside these issues, another serious predicament has emerged across the globe—the pandemic’s impact on children and youth in the form of disrupted educational services and

the loss of learning opportunities due to school closures. One study shows that as many as 1.6 billion students have been impacted. [\[59\]](#)

The loss of learning hours is not the only consequence of school closures. Because of the abrupt termination of daily interactions with friends, countless children are finding it hard to feel a tangible sense of progress and hope for the future, resulting in emotional and psychological distress as they become ensnared in an epidemic of loneliness and loss of motivation.

School closures also result in suspension of the provision of school meals, a lifeline that provides children from economically distressed families and communities with a much-needed source of nutrition. There are growing concerns that there will be an increase in the number of children suffering from the effects of malnutrition, outcomes such as anemia and low body weight, due to the prolonged absence of school meals. This kind of wide-ranging and long-term disruption to classroom learning being experienced simultaneously around the globe is without parallel in the history of the modern school education system.

While the governments of many countries have taken measures to provide remote learning in an effort to minimize the loss of education and to ensure opportunities for students, there are still enormous numbers of young learners stranded on the wrong side of the digital divide, unable to access the necessary means for distance learning.

Education Cannot Wait, a global fund active in providing emergency education responses to regions affected by conflict, natural disaster and other humanitarian crises, has instituted additional support in response to the COVID-19 emergency. This includes support for distance-learning solutions reaching 29.2 million girls and boys. [\[60\]](#) I cannot stress strongly enough the importance of strengthening international cooperation in this area in order to ensure uninterrupted education for all children.

In order to restore lost educational opportunities to the greatest number of children as quickly as possible, it is also important to learn from the examples of success in countries where distance schooling has been provided without relying on access to the Internet.

For instance, following the outbreak of COVID-19, the government of Sierra Leone launched an interactive radio teaching program, enabling 2.6 million students to continue learning while they were out of school. [\[61\]](#) What made such a prompt response possible was the experience gained facing repeated outbreaks of Ebola, when the government chose to deliver lessons by radio. Other innovative solutions can be seen in South Sudan, which has distributed radios with solar-powered chargers to the children of impoverished households, [\[62\]](#) and Sudan, which has had homework assignments carried in newspapers. [\[63\]](#)

Such creative and flexible responses that accord highest priority to children's learning are of great significance. They demonstrate the importance of ensuring that the light of learning shines upon all children, at all times, regardless of the circumstances in which they live.

This crucial role of education was once summed up by UN Secretary-General Guterres based on his own experience as a teacher providing free mathematics instruction to children in low-income neighborhoods in Portugal: "In the slums of Lisbon, I saw that education is an engine for poverty eradication and a force for peace." [\[64\]](#)

This same spirit underpins the network of Soka schools and universities, which it has been my honor to establish. Their history finds its roots almost one hundred years ago in the educational practices and endeavors of two devoted educators, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, who later became the first and second presidents of the Soka Gakkai.

As the principal of an elementary school for the children of lower-income families in Tokyo, Makiguchi, while living on the school premises, worked hard day in and day out to provide his students with the best learning environment possible. Among many measures he introduced were free school meals for undernourished students. He also made visits to the homes of children who were unable to attend school due to illness.

One observer, following a visit to the school premises, which consisted of a building whose broken windows were patched with cardboard against the elements, wrote: “What struck me most was the enthusiasm and energy with which Makiguchi devoted himself to the task of doing everything he could for the education and well-being of these children from impoverished households.” [\[65\]](#)

Makiguchi’s disciple and successor Josei Toda taught at the same elementary school and joined him in his efforts to bring the light of learning to children who were living in the most challenging conditions of the day in a small corner of Tokyo.

Carrying on the spirit of these two educators, the Soka schools from elementary through tertiary levels have been expanding and enhancing their scholarship programs in support of students from financially distressed families.

Not limiting its economic support to Japanese or international students, under the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-Refugee Higher Education Program which it joined in 2016, Soka University in Japan has provided scholarships to applicants with refugee status. From 2017, it has participated in the Japanese Initiative for the future of Syrian Refugees (JSIR) of the Japan International Cooperation Agency. In addition, last year it signed an agreement with UNHCR to support graduate students, making Soka University the first institution in Japan to accept refugees to both undergraduate and graduate programs.

It is estimated that only 5 percent of refugees across the globe have managed to find their way into university or other programs of higher education. [\[66\]](#) Against the backdrop of this harsh reality, we must always remind ourselves that the aspirations of forcibly displaced youth to pursue their education and achieve their goals are at least as strong as those of their peers living in less challenging environments.

The Soka Gakkai has long supported the activities of UNHCR. Further, in January last year, we launched a new project in collaboration with Musicians Without Borders. [\[67\]](#) This joint undertaking, initiated in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, uses music as a vehicle for bringing hope to refugee children and children of the host country. Based in Jordan, the project aims to inspire the hope and strength to overcome difficulties through music education and training. To date, the program has fostered people capable of carrying out musical education, and these trainees have gone on to hold summer workshops in various locations across the country.

Tareq Jundi, a musician and local partner of the project, likened its activities to sowing seeds, stating that although the outcome may not be apparent immediately, changes are definitely beginning to

emerge. [68] I, too, believe that the essence of education is to be found in the patient effort of sowing seeds of possibility in the hearts of children and wholeheartedly working toward their full flowering.

Along with ensuring the availability of educational opportunities during emergencies, another matter of key importance throughout the world is to accelerate the provision of inclusive education, which guarantees the right to learning and education for children and young people with disabilities.

According to a UNICEF report released last November, the number of children with disabilities globally is estimated at almost 240 million, meaning that one in ten children is living with some form of disability. [69] Even if, under the principle of inclusivity and embracing all people equally, such children seek assurance of the rights enjoyed by others, this is made difficult because little progress has been made in countering discrimination and other hurdles in society.

The situation confronting these children has been further exacerbated by COVID-19. Even when online learning infrastructures and services are in place, without specific assistance tailored to individual needs, learners with disabilities find it particularly difficult to participate in remote education. This often means that intensive support from family members or other caregivers is required.

With the goal to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education” [70] for all, the SDGs call for action to secure equal access to all levels of education and to provide learning facilities that meet the needs of persons with disabilities. Taking action to achieve these targets, and responding to related issues that have been brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic, is a matter of urgent priority.

Education was one of the subjects of the most vigorous deliberation in the lead-up to the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol (CRPD) at the UN General Assembly in 2006. As a result, the convention stipulates that states parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels for the realization of equal educational opportunities. [71]

The CRPD also sets out the principle that failure to provide persons with disabilities with “reasonable accommodation” that addresses their individual requirements constitutes discrimination. [72] Further, it specifies that reasonable accommodation shall be ensured in education. [73]

The convention established the concept that disability should not be considered an individual matter, but must be accommodated through changes in social systems. Underlying this new understanding was a crucial breakthrough in the negotiation process. NGOs working in the field of disabilities made a powerful appeal to governments under the slogan of “Nothing about us without us,” [74] and the participation of their representatives was secured.

The CRPD has been ratified by 114 countries and territories to date. [75] Recalling the determination and resolve of the great number of people involved in its drafting and adoption, I urge even greater efforts to make inclusive education a reality.

Nujeen Mustafa, a Syrian refugee, was born with cerebral palsy and is now active as a youth advocate and champion for children with disabilities for UNHCR. Drawing on her own experience, she stresses:

Inclusive education means not just enrolling someone with a disability in a school, it’s about accommodating their needs without making them feel isolated or separated or something different than the other students who may not have a disability. It’s

not just about making the restroom or making the building accessible, it's about capacity building. [\[76\]](#)

When she was sixteen years old, Ms. Mustafa was forced to flee from her native land, which was ravaged by civil war. After making a 3,500 mile (6,000 km) journey in a wheelchair, she found a new home in Germany where she was interviewed about her thoughts on inclusive education. Speaking on behalf of those with disabilities, she stresses the need for a radical transformation in people's perceptions and attitudes toward disability:

Where I grew up, disability meant that you were expected to just live on the sidelines and not grow at all as a person—be it academically or personally. . .

So, I think the biggest misconception that society has of these people is that it expects us not to have any ambitions or dreams. That the mere fact of us having a disability should eradicate any glimmer of hope inside of us that these dreams might come true. [\[77\]](#)

As Ms. Mustafa points out, it is wrong that children's hopes for the future should be extinguished by society's misconceptions about, and prejudice toward, disability.

In September this year, the UN will convene the Transforming Education Summit. This summit aims to build on the findings of a UNESCO report delivered last November that presents a vision for the future of education. In an effort to rethink the role of education at key moments of societal transformation, UNESCO published similar reports in 1972 and 1996. This new report follows these and is the first of its kind in twenty-five years.

Informed by input from over a million people gained through a two-year global consultation process, the report considers the following questions:

Extreme future scenarios also include a world where quality education is a privilege of elites, and where vast groups of people live in misery because they lack access to essential goods and services. Will current educational inequalities only worsen with time until curricula become irrelevant? How will these possible changes impact on our basic humanity? [\[78\]](#)

Based on this perspective, the report highlights the importance of global cooperation in support of refugees and those in difficult circumstances, along with ensuring the right to quality education for all regardless of disability status. Further, the report calls for collective efforts to explore what role education can play as we look to 2050 and beyond.

In light of this, I believe that the Transforming Education Summit in September presents a perfect opportunity for productive discussions on such themes as education in emergencies and inclusive education. The agenda could also include learning for global citizenship as a crucial means of fostering the kind of consciousness of global solidarity I called for in the first half of this proposal. I further encourage those involved to develop and adopt a global action plan for the learning, growth and happiness of all children.

Conflicts, disasters and pandemics present threats that far exceed the coping capacities of children. Prioritizing global preparedness for educational assistance in emergencies manifests a clear

commitment not to leave any child behind. Enhancing the inclusivity of education at all levels, from primary to tertiary, will improve the learning environment for all children facing various forms of hardship and discrimination.

Finally, I am confident that learning for global citizenship will serve as a shared basis for tackling the common crises facing humankind. As mentioned earlier, my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, expressed the idea of global citizenship using the term *chikyu minzokushugi*, and I have devoted myself to education that promotes this. It has also been a consistent focus of the SGI's efforts.

By the end of this century, the world's population is projected to reach 10.9 billion. [79] I strongly believe that the adoption of a global action plan for the learning, growth and happiness of all children at the Transforming Education Summit this September will constitute a vital foundation for safeguarding the dreams and hopes of children of today, and all those yet to be born.

Nuclear weapons abolition: The key to a sustainable global future

The third key issue area to be addressed is the imperative to realize the abolition of nuclear weapons. Toward this end, I would like to make two proposals.

The first regards steps to free the world from security doctrines that are dependent on nuclear weapons.

This January 3, the leaders of the five nuclear-weapon states—the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France—issued a statement on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races. While subject to various interpretations, the statement clearly declares that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” and expresses the will to jointly seek ways of avoiding military confrontations. [80] It must be hoped that this will lead to positive action toward those ends.

Here, I call on the UN Security Council to use this joint statement, with its recognition of the importance of self-restraint, as the basis for a resolution urging the five nuclear-weapon states to take concrete measures to fulfill their obligations to nuclear disarmament stipulated by Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

I further urge that language calling for a high-level meeting on the reduction of the role of nuclear weapons be agreed to and included in the final statement of the NPT Review Conference scheduled to be held this year. This high-level meeting should invite the participation of states that possess nuclear weapons but are outside the NPT framework, thus materially advancing progress on nuclear disarmament.

Even in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, the world's military expenditures have continued to grow. [81] There are more than 13,000 nuclear warheads in current stockpiles, and modernization continues with no end in sight. [82] There is grave concern that we may see a further buildup of the global nuclear arsenal.

The pandemic has also brought to light new risks surrounding nuclear weapons by creating situations that could disrupt the chain of command: political leaders of nuclear-weapon states have had to temporarily transfer power to their deputies due to COVID-19 infection. There were also major outbreaks aboard a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and a guided missile destroyer.

In remarks on the nuclear weapons issue made last September, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, highlighted another issue that has been brought into focus by the pandemic: “[It] has taught us that seemingly low-probability events can actually occur with little warning but with catastrophic global effect.” [\[83\]](#)

I, too, would like to warn against the danger of continuing to embrace an overconfidence that we will be spared the catastrophe of nuclear weapons use. As Ms. Nakamitsu stressed in her speech, it is only thanks to a combination of good luck and certain individuals preventing incidents from escalating disastrously that we have not seen another instance of the use of nuclear weapons since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Today, in “a fluid international environment, where guardrails have either been eroded or are completely absent,” [\[84\]](#) we can no longer afford to rely solely on such human factors or good luck.

At present, the only remaining bilateral framework for nuclear disarmament is the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), which Russia and the United States agreed to extend in February 2021.

The NPT Review Conference previously scheduled for this month has been postponed due to the impact of the pandemic. A rescheduled meeting to be held this coming August is now being considered. The last Review Conference, held in 2015, failed to adopt a final document, and this failure must not be repeated. I urge the parties to agree on concrete measures to comply with the pledge in the preamble of the NPT: “to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war.” [\[85\]](#)

The spirit reaffirmed by the joint statement of the five nuclear-weapon states—that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” [\[86\]](#)—was first enunciated during the Cold War when US President Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev met in Geneva in November 1985. The importance of the spirit that animated the 1985 Geneva summit was also referenced in the statement issued after the US-Russia summit held last June.

The UN Security Council should create an opportunity to discuss the steps needed to bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end, adopting the outcome of those deliberations in a resolution, thereby initiating a process of fundamental transformation.

The joint Soviet-US statement on the Geneva summit in 1985 is widely acknowledged as heralding the beginning of nuclear disarmament negotiations beneficial to not only the two superpowers but all humankind. Former President Gorbachev later reflected on his decision to engage in nuclear disarmament as follows:

Imagine rolling a stone from the top of a mountain, assuming it would not, on its own, cause the mountain to collapse. Then, triggered by that single stone, stones all over the mountain start rolling, causing complete collapse.

A nuclear war can be triggered in the same way. The launch of a single missile can set everything in motion. Today, the command and control systems of strategic nuclear arms are almost completely computerized. The more nuclear weapons, the greater possibility of accidental nuclear war. [\[87\]](#)

Nuclear weapons development continues, and the constant stream of new means of confronting

other countries may be a reflection of the assumption that no single one of these actions will cause the mountain to collapse. Nuclear-weapon states and nuclear-dependent states need to face the stark reality that they are condemning themselves and the world to conditions of extreme and unending precariousness so long as they rely on nuclear deterrence rooted in mutual threat.

In a dialogue former President Gorbachev and I conducted, he emphasized: “It is becoming ever more clear that nuclear weapons cannot be a means for achieving national security. In fact, with each passing year, nuclear weapons put our security even more in question.” [\[88\]](#)

In order to break out of the current impasse, marked by the heightened risk that nuclear weapons will be used, I believe that it is most urgent to find a way of “detoxifying” ourselves from current nuclear-dependent security doctrines.

The stated goal of nuclear deterrence policy is to keep the opposing country from initiating use of nuclear weapons. This policy carries the contradiction, however, that a deterrent stance, even for the purpose of preventing nuclear weapons use, requires continuously demonstrating readiness to use them. In order to overcome this contradiction and remove nuclear weapons from security policy, renewed consideration must be given to the kinds of steps that are now required, including those that will create more conducive conditions in international society.

National security may be a concern of overriding importance. But what meaning can there possibly be in continued dependence on nuclear weapons when they are capable of causing such devastating damage to both the opposing country and one’s own, and can irrevocably undermine the very foundations of humanity’s survival?

From this standpoint, we must begin the process of detoxification by redirecting our focus from the actions of other countries to those of our own. In this way, states can start to fulfill the pledge in the preamble of the NPT and truly “make every effort to avert the danger of such a war.”

It should be clear that the aim of the NPT does not lie in making permanent a state of interlocking nuclear threats as the ineluctable destiny of humankind. We cannot forget that the obligation to achieve nuclear disarmament was stipulated by Article VI as an essential pillar of the NPT in order to reflect the shared understanding that this is an issue that must be fundamentally resolved.

Unlike during the Cold War, we now live in an era when political leaders can meet online even in the midst of a crisis, confirming each other’s facial expressions in real time. And yet, they continue to anticipate each other’s moves through a veil of distrust and suspicion, all the while keeping their nuclear arsenals on launch-ready status.

The joint statement of the five nuclear-weapon states declares: “We reiterate the validity of our previous statements on de-targeting, reaffirming that none of our nuclear weapons are targeted at each other or at any other State.” [\[89\]](#) Based on this kind of self-restraint, it is now time for the nuclear-weapon states to effect a fundamental reorientation in their security policies and remove the nuclear threat that has existed since the start of the Cold War. To foster such an environment, negotiations must be initiated on measures including: reducing the role of nuclear weapons in security policies; defusing conflict and minimizing the risk of their accidental use; and ceasing new nuclear weapons development.

Japan will host the G7 Summit in 2023. I propose that a high-level meeting on reducing the role of

nuclear weapons be held concurrently in Hiroshima, in which the leaders of non-G7 countries could also participate, to engage in intensive deliberations on ways to further such concrete measures.

This past January 21, Japan and the United States issued a joint statement on the NPT. In it, the two governments declare that, “The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, forever ingrained in the world’s memory, serve as stark reminders that the 76-year record of non-use of nuclear weapons must be maintained.” [\[90\]](#) They also call on political leaders, youth and others to visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki to increase awareness of the horrors of nuclear weapons use.

I have long stressed the importance of political leaders visiting the sites of the atomic bombings. A summit meeting held in Hiroshima would be an excellent opportunity to realize this.

In addition to fostering an environment conducive to establishing the principle of comprehensive non-use of nuclear weapons as a step toward their global abolition, this high-level meeting should discuss prohibitions against cyberattacks directed at nuclear weapons-related systems and against integrating AI into the operation of such systems, points which I addressed in my 2020 proposal.

I strongly urge that, through such efforts, negotiations to ensure the fulfillment of the disarmament obligations stipulated by Article VI of the NPT be shifted into high gear, generating irreversible momentum toward the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Our shared responsibility to the future

My second proposal regarding the nuclear weapons issue pertains to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and here once again I strongly call both for Japan and other nuclear-dependent states and for the nuclear-weapon states to participate as observers in the first meeting of states parties (1MSP) to the TPNW when it is held in Vienna in March. I also suggest that a commitment be made at this meeting to create a permanent secretariat to ensure fulfillment of the obligations and international cooperation stipulated in the TPNW.

Switzerland, Sweden and Finland, non-signatories to the TPNW, as well as Norway and Germany, members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), have already indicated that they will

ICAN Cities Appeal

Launched in November 2018, the Cities Appeal of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is a grassroots campaign to raise awareness and build local civil and political support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). It aims to expand solidarity among local governments that support the TPNW, while also enabling individual citizens to become proactively engaged by reaching out to their local city council or elected representatives. By using social media and the #ICANSave hashtag, people can state their conviction that they have the right to live in a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons.

participate in the meeting as observers. NATO has a history of allowing member states to choose their own path with regard to nuclear weapons. The TPNW, for its part, includes no specific prohibition against states parties being in alliance relationships with nuclear-weapon states.

The significance of Norway and Germany seeking observer status in the first meeting of the states parties is truly profound, as many cities in NATO member countries have joined hundreds of municipalities around the world in signing the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) Cities Appeal, by which cities express their support for the TPNW and encourage their respective governments to join the treaty. The list of cities endorsing the

ICAN Cities Appeal includes those in countries possessing nuclear weapons such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France and India, as well as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. [\[91\]](#)

The agenda of the TPNW 1MSP will include providing assistance to victims of nuclear weapon use and testing, as well as remediating contaminated environments. Japan should participate in the discussions, making its contribution through sharing the realities of the devastation experienced in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the lessons of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident.

In a recent interview, Dr. Oliver Meier, Senior Researcher at the Berlin office of the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, said Germany's commitment to participate as an observer in the first meeting could contribute to reinforcing multilateralism and nuclear disarmament. When asked about Japan's wish to serve as a bridge between nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states, he responded that, with observer participation, Japan could play a role that could only be played by a country that has experienced atomic attack, noting that a "bridge" cannot fulfill its function without directly engaging in discussions on both sides. [\[92\]](#)

In 2017, Japan organized the Group of Eminent Persons for Substantive Advancement of Nuclear Disarmament (SAG), inviting experts from both nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states. Follow-up meetings have also been held, and the deliberations of the TPNW 1MSP could be made more constructive if Japan were to participate as an observer and report on the findings of the SAG process. I urge Japan to make such efforts as it works toward the early signing and ratification of the treaty.

The first meeting of states parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, for example, saw thirty-four states participate as observers, many of which later became states parties. [\[93\]](#) In a similar way, it is essential for as many countries as possible to participate as observers in the TPNW 1MSP in order to experience directly the earnest efforts and powerful determination of the states parties and civil society to realize the abolition of nuclear weapons. This will help build shared appreciation for how the TPNW opens new horizons of possibility for our world.

The significance of the TPNW goes beyond the framework of a conventional disarmament treaty in that it has at its core the commitment to the norms of humanitarianism—preventing catastrophic destruction—and of human rights—safeguarding the right of the world's people to live. In terms of the global commons, which I mentioned earlier in relation to the problem of climate change, the TPNW is indispensable to protecting the peace of humankind as a whole and the preservation of the global ecosystem, the basis of life for present and future generations.

Bearing in mind the full significance of the TPNW, earnest discussions should be entered into regarding the negative impacts of nuclear dependent security on the world now, in our lifetimes and into the future.

This first meeting can serve as an opportunity for dialogue across differences. As the number of states parties grows and more countries that presently feel they cannot sign or ratify the TPNW begin to positively acknowledge its true value and significance, I am confident that this will catalyze the energy and political will needed to put an end to the era of nuclear weapons.

It is for this reason that I call for the establishment of a permanent secretariat to serve as a vehicle for uniting the efforts of governments and civil society to universalize the ideals and commitments of the TPNW.

Through the People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition campaign, first launched by the SGI in 2007, we have worked with ICAN and other groups to advocate for the adoption of a nuclear weapons ban treaty. The second People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition began in 2018, the year after the TPNW came into being. The second decade focuses on universalizing the ideals of the TPNW through the work of civil society actors. This year we are committed to furthering momentum in this direction because we are convinced that the support of the world's people is an essential foundation for strengthening the treaty's efficacy.

Here I am reminded of the way Professor Galbraith placed critical emphasis on the removal of the nuclear threat as one thing we all must work together to achieve—a conclusion reflecting his direct experience of the many crises of the tumultuous twentieth century. At the conclusion of his memoir *A Life in Our Times*, he wrote, “I have noticed that those who write their memoirs have difficulty in knowing when, on public matters, they should stop.” [\[94\]](#) For his part, he closed his book with a topic other than economics, his field of expertise, choosing instead to conclude with the issue of nuclear weapons, the reality of which had never left his mind since he first visited Japan in the fall of 1945, soon after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

To that end, he quoted a speech he had given in 1980:

If we fail in the control of the nuclear arms race, all of the other matters we debate in these days will be without meaning. There will be no question of civil rights, for there will be no one to enjoy them. There will be no problem of urban decay, for our cities will be gone. So let us disagree, I trust with good humor, on the other issues. . . But let us agree that we will tell all of our countrymen, all of our allies, all human beings, that we will work to have an end to this nuclear horror that now hovers as a cloud over all humankind. [\[95\]](#)

As Professor Galbraith so trenchantly observed, the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons is not limited to the catastrophic consequences of their use. No matter how many people strive for a better world and society, or for how long, once an exchange of nuclear forces begins, all will have been for naught. The reality of the nuclear age is that we are compelled to live in constant company with the worst—the most incomprehensible and absurd—danger imaginable.

The SGI's commitment to nuclear abolition traces back to President Toda's 1957 declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. In the midst of an intensifying arms race among nuclear-armed states, the Soviet Union had successfully tested an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) the month before, creating a new reality in which all parts of the globe were now exposed to the possibility of nuclear attack.

In the face of this chilling reality, Mr. Toda stressed that the use of nuclear weapons by any state must be absolutely condemned, voicing his outrage at the underlying thinking that justifies their possession: “I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons.” [\[96\]](#)

I remember as if it were yesterday my mentor's indignation at the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons, which can rob each of us of the meaning and dignity of our lives and can destroy the workings of human society root and branch. As his disciple, determined to realize his vision, I felt his righteous anger in the depths of my very being.

With the conviction that the destiny of humankind cannot be transformed without resolving the challenge of nuclear weapons, the fundamental evil of modern civilization, I have consistently

addressed this issue in my annual proposals since 1983 and have worked for the outlawing of nuclear weapons.

Several decades later, the TPNW, a treaty resonant with the spirit of Mr. Toda's declaration, has entered into force, and the first meeting of states parties is about to take place. The crucial stage has now been reached in efforts to abolish nuclear weapons, the keenly sought goal of so many of the world's people, starting with the hibakusha—both the victims of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and those impacted by the development and testing of these weapons around the world.

Completing this task is how we can fulfill our responsibility to the future. Firm in this belief, the SGI will continue to advance, growing the solidarity of civil society with a special focus on youth, toward the creation of a culture of peace where all can enjoy the right to live in authentic security.

Notes

- [1] See Makiguchi, *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu*, 10:149–50, 155.
- [2] Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1:376.
- [3] Guterres, “Secretary-General’s Nelson Mandela Lecture.”
- [4] *Ibid.*
- [5] Mandela, “5th Steve Biko Lecture.”
- [6] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 14.
- [7] Guterres, “Secretary-General’s Message.”
- [8] UNHCR, “UNHCR: Conflict, Violence, Climate Change.”
- [9] Watson, trans., *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, 65–66.
- [10] (trans. from) Ikeda and Galbraith, *Ningenshugi no daiseiki o*, 67.
- [11] Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra*, 272.
- [12] (trans. from) Makiguchi, *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu*, 10:157.
- [13] Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra*, 328.
- [14] Ghebreyesus, “WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks,” December 22.
- [15] Ghebreyesus, “WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks,” December 9.
- [16] Einstein, *Out of My Later Years*, 204.
- [17] Gavi, “COVAX Vaccine Roll-out.”
- [18] G20 HLIP, *A Global Deal for Our Pandemic Age*, 1.
- [19] UN, United Nations Charter, Article 55, 57.
- [20] WHO, Constitution of the World Health Organization, Article 8.
- [21] See Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu*, 3:460.
- [22] UN, “Political Declaration on Equitable Global Access to COVID-19 Vaccines.”
- [23] Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 2:1066.
- [24] See Horner, trans., *The Book of the Discipline*, 4:381–94.
- [25] See Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 1:937.
- [26] See WHO, “The World Together.”
- [27] G7 Summit, “Carbis Bay G7 Summit Communiqué,” 6.
- [28] ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook*, 11.
- [29] *Ibid.*, 24.
- [30] ILO, “Invest in Youth.”
- [31] ILO, *Youth & COVID-19*, 26.
- [32] Banerjee and Duflo, *Good Economics for Hard Times*, 205.
- [33] *Ibid.*, 9.
- [34] See Banerjee and Duflo, *Good Economics for Hard Times*, 315–16.
- [35] *Ibid.*, 318.
- [36] *Ibid.*, 322.
- [37] See UN Women, *Beyond COVID-19*, 37.
- [38] Generation Equality Forum, “Activism and Commitments.”

- [39] See UN Women, *Action Coalitions*, 19.
- [40] See UN Women, *Beyond COVID-19*, 12.
- [41] UN, “Secretary-General’s Policy Brief,” 15.
- [42] WHO, “Ageing and Health.”
- [43] WeThe15, “A Global Human Rights Movement.”
- [44] See ITTO, “Togolese Women Are Becoming Restoration Leaders.”
- [45] Soka Gakkai, SGI Charter.
- [46] Soka Gakkai, Soka Gakkai Charter.
- [47] See IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers,” 5.
- [48] See WMO, “WMO Greenhouse Gas Bulletin,” 1.
- [49] UN Climate Change, “COP26 Reaches Consensus.”
- [50] See UNEP, “Updated Climate Commitments.”
- [51] Sharma, “COP President Concluding Media Statement.”
- [52] Climate Analytics and World Resources Institute, *Closing the Gap*, 4.
- [53] See “U.S.-China Joint Glasgow Declaration.”
- [54] See Crippa et al., “Fossil CO2 Emissions,” 11.
- [55] Youth4Climate, “Youth4Climate Manifesto,” 2.
- [56] See Toda Peace Institute, “Vanishing Homelands.”
- [57] See CRC, “General Comment No. 26.”
- [58] Soka Gakkai, “Sowing Seeds of Hope.”
- [59] International Commission, *Reimagining Our Futures Together*, v.
- [60] See ECW, *Winning the Human Race*, 38.
- [61] See UNICEF, “Covid-19 in Sierra Leone.”
- [62] See UNICEF, “32,000 USAID-funded Solar-powered Radios.”
- [63] See GEM Report, “COVID-19 Has Prompted Countries to Adjust.”
- [64] Guterres, “Education Cannot Wait Interviews.”
- [65] (trans. from) Sato, “*Tokyo-shi no shogakko o miru*,” 35:42.
- [66] UNHCR, *Staying the Course*, 9.
- [67] See Musicians Without Borders, “Al-Musiqa Tajm’ana.”
- [68] (trans. from) Jundi, “*Soka Gakkai to Kokkyo naki ongakuka*.”
- [69] UNICEF, *Seen, Counted, Included*, 18.
- [70] UN GA, “Transforming Our World,” 14.
- [71] See UN, Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24.
- [72] *Ibid.*, Article 2.
- [73] *Ibid.*, Article 24.
- [74] OHCHR, “UN Leads the Way on Disability Rights.”
- [75] UN Treaty Collection, “Status of Treaties.”
- [76] Mustafa, “ECW Interviews.”
- [77] *Ibid.*
- [78] International Commission, *Reimagining Our Futures Together*, 3.
- [79] UN DESA, *World Population Prospects 2019*, 5.
- [80] “Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States.”
- [81] See SIPRI, *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, 12.
- [82] *Ibid.*, 16.
- [83] Nakamitsu, “Eliminating the Existential Threat of Nuclear Weapons,” 3.
- [84] *Ibid.*, 4.
- [85] UN GA, “Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,” Preamble.
- [86] “Joint Soviet-United States Statement.”
- [87] (trans. from) Yoshida, *Kaku no Amerika*, 151.
- [88] (trans. from) Ikeda and Gorbachev, “*Shinseiki no akebono*,” 170–71.
- [89] “Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States.”
- [90] “Japan-U.S. Joint Statement.”
- [91] See ICAN, “ICAN Cities Appeal.”
- [92] See Meier, “*Doku, kaku kinshi joyaku kaigi obuzaba sanku*.”

- [93] See ICAN, “Observing the First Meeting of States Parties,” 2.
- [94] Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, 537.
- [95] Ibid.
- [96] Toda, “Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons.”

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