



"CULTURE OF PEACE : IN OUR LIVES AND FOR OUR WORLD"

ADDRESS BY

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**FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, LANDLOCKED
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING
STATES**

AT THE

INAUGURAL COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

OF

THE SOKA UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

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My wife and I are deeply touched by the warmth of your cordial reception since our arrival at the beautifully-set surroundings of this fine institution. I am particularly delighted for the presence in our midst of Mr. Hiromasa Ikeda, who is representing the great man of peace and founder of this University, his father President Daisaku Ikeda.

I'm honored to be with you on the very first commencement ceremony as you all become proud alumni of the Soka University of America inculcated with the principles of peace, respect for diversity, human rights and the sanctity of life. These are the principles that have certainly brought you here in the first place and those, I trust, have by now become an integral part of you.

Today is a day of significant achievement, a day of celebration for this vanguard graduating class. You have put your energies and talents to good use. You are seeing the rewards of your hard work. You have been particularly privileged as your learning had the benefit of comparative education of Eastern and Western perspectives and was aimed at fostering a global humanism. My warmest congratulations to each one of you.

I would also like to congratulate the men and women who gave their best to help you attain your best - the dedicated professors of the Soka University of America. And I join the graduates and their teachers in thanking the people whose love and sacrifice made this day possible - the enduring parents and guardians of the graduates of the inaugural Class of 2005.

You are about to become an active and responsible part of the economic, social and cultural forces that contribute to the progress of humanity. You will encounter a world that is full of new hopes, but also one that is filled with injustice, inequity and discrimination. We have stepped into the third millennium with eager anticipation and high expectation. The United Nations designated the final year of the last century as the "International Year of the Culture of Peace" and the first year of the twenty-first century as "the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations". These noble intentions, unfortunately, continue to face new challenges as the world is engulfed by immense tragedies, grave concerns and endless violence.

This is, in a big way, inherent in the paradox that we perceive in the level of development reached by the modern world. On one hand, through the process of globalization, an irreversible trend toward a global village has been established, while on the other, divisions and distrust have increased. Progress in the fields of science and technology, trade and communications, has boosted global wealth to levels that seemed unreachable few decades ago. We can see immense possibilities. We have the power to change the world for the better. However, great differences still exist between peoples and regions -- disparities and inequalities have, over the years, only augmented, causing the world to enter into a new era of insecurity and uncertainty.

We are living in years when people fear deadly attacks by terrorists, suffer from genocide or massive violations of human rights carried out by, on many occasions, their own governments. Despite the great advances in science and medicine, millions are dying from HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Despite all the progress, too many people live in extreme poverty and hunger, or do not have access to as basic things as clean water or education and health. Unfortunately worst victims in this everywhere are the women and children.

Poverty and lack of opportunities deprive people of their dignity as human beings, leaving them hopeless and incapable of pursuing the kind of life they may deserve. Marginalization and abuse because of ethnicity, gender or religion, repression or bias, violence or intolerance are all closely linked to poverty and the concurrent lack of basic human rights and opportunity. We must not forget that it is not only morally unsupportable but also practically unrealistic to achieve sustainable peace without addressing squarely the crushing problems of poverty and human insecurity. There will be no development without peace, and no peace without development.

History has shown us that differences trigger conflicts - always and everywhere. I, however, believe difference is not a threat. It should be perceived as ever-energizing diversity that has fuelled human progress. In today's world, more so, it should be seen as the essence of a new humanity, a new global civilization based on inner oneness and outer diversity. The flourishing of culture of peace will generate the mindset in us that is

a prerequisite for the transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace. Culture of peace will provide the bedrock to support a stable, progressing and prospering world - a world that is finally at peace with itself.

The journey that we commenced into the new millennium will demand strength, dedication and sacrifice from each of us. As the great advocate for peace SGI President Daisaku Ikeda has exhorted, "Path to peace has not been and will not be easy, but never be defeated". We have to keep striving with all of our intellectual and spiritual energy and determination for a better world, based on principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, respect for diversity, dialogue and understanding. And there is no doubt that the most effective way to make a difference, to bring a change is to work together, building on trust and collaboration among individuals, within the family, in larger communities, in our societies and, at the same time, also at global levels.

It is in this context, I take immense pride that our beloved and sometimes unduly maligned world body, the United Nations, has been at the forefront in building a culture of peace throughout the world, particularly with the broad-based support of civil society. We are now at the mid-point of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non Violence for the Children of the World, proclaimed by the United Nations. This Decade covering the period 2001 to 2010 is spearheading a global movement for culture of peace. The Soka Gakkai International has been taking laudable initiatives in advancing this movement. They mobilized millions of pledges in support of the Manifesto 2000 at the outset of the Decade. I would particularly commend their earlier grassroots campaign "Victory over violence" to raise awareness against violence, and now their remarkably beautiful and inspiring traveling exhibition, entitled "Building a Culture of Peace for the Children of the World", which has already been shown in many cities of the United States, that include the landmark, record-setting display at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in February 2004, and the most recent one at the World Bank in Washington DC. Everywhere the exhibition has had a grand success and its hundreds of visitors have been reminded of our shared individual and collective responsibility for promoting peace.

The adoption in 1999, by the UN General Assembly, of the Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace was a watershed event. It was an honor for me to Chair the nine-month long negotiations that led to the adoption of this historic norm-setting document that is considered as one of the most significant legacies of the United Nations that would endure generations.

A key ingredient in building culture of peace is education. Peace education needs to be accepted in all parts of the world, in all societies and countries as an essential element in creating culture of peace. To meet effectively the challenges posed by the present complexity of our time, the young of today deserves a radically different education –“one that does not glorify war but educates for peace, non-violence and international cooperation.” They need the skills and knowledge to create and nurture peace for their individual selves as well as for the world they belong to. Peace studies should be incorporated in all educational institutions as part of their curricula, and should become an essential part of our educational process as reading and writing.

Young people like you should mobilize support in your own spheres of activities for peace education. In this context, I would encourage you to support the Global Campaign for Peace Education which has been launched in May 1999 by a highly-respected global non-governmental organization - the Hague Appeal for Peace. You should remember that peace education does not simply mean learning about conflicts and how to resolve them peacefully. It should also involve participation of young people in expressing their own ideas and cooperating with each other in order to eliminate violence in our societies. In its essence, peace education as articulated by the Hague Agenda encourages reflection, critical thinking, cooperation, and responsible action. It promotes multiculturalism and values of dignity and equality. Their campaign rightly emphasizes that “...culture of peace will be achieved when citizens of the world understand global problems; have the skills to resolve conflicts constructively; know and live by international standards of human rights, gender and racial equality; appreciate cultural diversity; and respect the integrity of the Earth. Such learning cannot be achieved without intentional, sustained, and systematic education for peace.”

We must realize that cycles of vengeance and counter-vengeance would destroy societies involved. This suicidal trend must be reversed. I believe strongly that it is possible to create a social space between vengeance and forgiveness, so that those who have been enemies can learn to live together again. Here I would underscore that President Ikeda particularly emphasizes the positive, active pursuit of peace as opposed to the absence of war that he calls "passive peace". Recognizing the challenging realities of the present day world, he has been focusing on the need for promoting culture of peace - peace through dialogue - peace through non-violence. He has been emphasizing that culture of peace should be the foundation of the new global society. He very appropriately underscores that peace is not something which is distant but it is something which can be pursued through day-to-day efforts by cultivating care and consideration for others. He has highlighted empowerment of people as a major element in building culture of peace and very eloquently emphasized the emergence of women in leading the way for that. I am proud to recognize that involvement of women in the peace process in various conflict-ridden parts of the world has contributed immensely to ensuring longer term benefits for their present as well as future generations

Dear graduates:

Seed of peace exists in all of us. It must be nurtured, cared for and promoted by us all to flourish. Peace cannot be imposed from outside; it must be realized from within.

Before I conclude I would ask you to look into yourselves, with all your faults as well as the many, many strengths – some not even fully realized by you. I am convinced that only if we are able to see and accept our own weaknesses and inadequacies, we will be in a position to understand and appreciate our fellow men and women better. This will bring good and enduring results. That is, I believe, just the first step towards building a culture of peace.

Let us remember that the work for peace is a continuous process. Each of us can make a difference in that process. This is especially true of young people like you. You should take the initiative in your hands without waiting for the others to tell you what to

do. Listen to the voice inside of you. Your personal actions and your cooperative efforts will lay the foundations of the world where culture of peace reigns. And remember that you will always find in the United Nations a valuable partner in promoting culture of peace around the world.

I am confident that you will make every effort to rid yourselves and your fellow men and women of the evils of intolerance and prejudice, ignorance and selfishness that compel us to repeat the cycle of violence. Launching the global movement for peace and non-violence in the year 2000, millions of us pledged to:

- ❖ Respect all life
- ❖ Reject violence
- ❖ Share with others
- ❖ Listen to understand
- ❖ Preserve the planet, and
- ❖ Rediscover solidarity.

These pledges still hold good for all of us, more so for you as you begin a new and more challenging phase of your life. When you would make these clear and specific actions a part of your active life, then and then only our movement for culture of peace would have achieved its objective. Only then, the world will be a better place to live for us, for our children and for our grandchildren. As the great apostle of peace Mahatma Gandhi has said, “We must be the change we wish to see.”

Again, my heartfelt congratulations to each one of you!
