

## Women's Roles in a World Without Nuclear Weapons

Toshie Kurihara

### 1. Introduction

THE year 2015 marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In response to this occasion, several significant international conferences for nuclear disarmament, including the review conference on the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons were held around the world.

In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the only places to have experienced the wartime use of nuclear weapons, several commemorative events, symposiums and lectures were organized. On August 6, a symposium on the 70th anniversary of the atomic bomb “WAR NEVER AGAIN” was held in Hiroshima. Many religious figures, Diet members, experts on nuclear abolishment and citizens of Hiroshima have gathered.

In November, a meeting between scientists and religious leaders in the anti-nuclear weapons movement was held at the Nagasaki Catholic Center, on the day following the 51st Pugwash Conference, aimed at eliminating nuclear weapons and wars. The meeting was organized by the World Conference of Religions for Peace Japan and the Nagasaki Religious Association. Some 120 people attended, including citizens of Nagasaki. Participants pledged to work together to abolish nuclear weapons. Religious figures, namely the head of the Jodo Shinshu (the True Pure Land Sect of Buddhism) temple, delivered speeches on peace. In addition, the antinuclear forum, “The 70th Anniversary of the Atomic Bombing: Gender Forum in Hiroshima” was also held in December.

It is safe to say that the realization of a world without nuclear weapons is the ardent desire of all humanity, thus making the role of religions increasingly significant. Today, I would like to introduce the activities of Soka Gakkai and Soka Gakkai International (SGI), and to examine

especially the activities of women who have been actively engaged in antinuclear movements.

## **2. Origin of the SGI's Peace Movement—Josei Toda's "Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons"**

On September 8, 1957, the second president of Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda, made a public declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, which initiated the SGI's Antinuclear Weapons Movement. In his declaration, he stated:

Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of atomic or nuclear weapons has arisen around the world, it is my wish to go further, to attack the problem at its root. I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons. I wish to declare that anyone who ventures to use nuclear weapons, irrespective of their nationality or whether their country is victorious or defeated, should be sentenced to death without exception. Why do I say this? Because we, the citizens of the world, have an inviolable right to live. Anyone who jeopardizes that right is a devil incarnate, a fiend, a monster.<sup>1</sup>

On September 8, 2009, 52 years after Josei Toda's declaration was issued, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda presented a lecture entitled, "Shared efforts toward nuclear abolition" to celebrate second president Toda's 110th anniversary. In his lecture, he remarked:

In an earlier era, when the competition to develop larger and more deadly nuclear arsenals was escalating, my mentor Josei Toda issued a historic call for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Toda delivered the speech in which this declaration was issued just seven months before his death, at a time when his health was extremely frail. It was, in fact, 52 year ago today, on September 8, 1957, that Toda addressed a gathering of some 50,000 people, principally young people, and declared the goal of eliminating all nuclear weapons from the face of Earth to be the foremost of his instructions to his followers.

In light of present-day realities, I think that three themes of particular relevance can be extracted from this speech. These are: the need for a transformation in the consciousness of political leaders; the need for a clearly shared vision toward the outlawing of nuclear weapons; and the

need to establish “human security” on a global scale.

Regarding the first theme, Toda stated: “We, the citizens of the world, have an inviolable right to live. Anyone who jeopardizes that right is a devil incarnate, a fiend, a monster.” This was a striking condemnation of the national egotism that underlies the urge to develop and possess nuclear weapons. With this very strong language, he sought to jolt political leaders out of their existing way of thinking and encourage a transformation in their worldview. While we may find such expressions as “devil incarnate,” “fiend” or “monster” disconcerting, Toda’s main intent in the use of such language was to expose the aberrant nature of nuclear deterrence. For at the heart of deterrence theory lies a cold and inhuman readiness to sacrifice vast numbers of people in order to realize one’s own security or dominance. He was, at the same time, pressing political leaders to reflect on their assumptions and attitudes.

...The second theme of Toda’s declaration is his assertion of the absolute inadmissibility of the use of nuclear weapons, whatever the rationale or justification. Here again, he used very strong language: “I wish to declare that anyone who ventures to use nuclear weapons, irrespective of their nationality or whether their country is victorious or defeated, should be sentenced to death without exception.”...

...The third theme of Toda’s declaration is expressed figuratively with this language: “Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of atomic or nuclear weapons has arisen around the world, it is my wish to go further, to attack the problem at its root. I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons.” My understanding of my mentor’s declaration is that the “hidden claws” underlying nuclear weapons represent any conception of security predicated on the suffering and sacrifice of ordinary citizens. He is urging us to confront and extirpate such ways of thinking because, without this, no solution is possible...<sup>2</sup>

President Ikeda then expressed his strong determination to eliminate nuclear weapons as follows:

Toda concluded with these words: “I ask those who consider themselves to be my students and disciples, to be heirs to the spirit of the declaration I have made today, and to make its meaning known throughout the entire world.” These words, which were burned into my mind that day, have remained with me and have inspired my actions in the more than half-century that has passed since then. I have never for even a single day forgotten his stirring call to action and have worked tirelessly to

create a rising tide of public opinion in favor of nuclear abolition....

In this way, we have taken action over the past five decades to bring the underlying spirit of Toda's call for nuclear abolition to the world and to generate a groundswell of popular opinion, making it the prevailing spirit of the new era. We are determined to continue to build a global solidarity toward the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons....

Let us abandon the habit of studiously ignoring the menace posed to Earth by nuclear weapons and instead demonstrate—clearly and through the power of people—that a world without nuclear weapons can indeed be realized in our lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

These statements by SGI President Ikeda provide an example of how he sees the inhumanity of nuclear weapons. Buddhism teaches that what underlies the lives of human beings and nature is a principle that we might call “universal life.” It was in this light that he stressed how nuclear weapons are the ultimate evil that destroys everything.

### **3. SGI's Antinuclear Weapons Movement**

Soka Gakkai succeeded Toda and has continued ever since to carry out activities, including exhibitions, petition drives, and publications for the elimination of nuclear weapons.<sup>4</sup>

In 1982, Soka Gakkai launched the “Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World” exhibition with the support of the United Nations Department of Public Information and the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It first presented at the UN Headquarters in New York, touring a total of 29 cities in 24 countries to date. Exhibits on display included photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the bombing, and items exposed to atomic radiation, reflecting the horror of the atomic bomb which had a significant impact on the decision to initiate the “Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament” at the UN Special Session on Disarmament conducted in the same year.

The exhibition toured cities in countries using nuclear power, including Beijing, Moscow, Vienna, Paris and Berlin. This helped to galvanize public opinion in countries with different ideologies and social systems. The exhibition attracted more than 170,000 visitors from around the world, creating a global grassroots network in support of nuclear arms reduction.

Another exhibition, “From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit” was launched in 2007. This exhibition was created in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of

Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda's Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, stressing the necessity of transforming the human spirit in order to abolish nuclear weapons. It has been viewed at several places in Japan, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and toured venues overseas, including showings at the UN Office at Geneva.

As for the petition drive, Soka Gakkai had gathered 10 million signatures for the abolishment of nuclear weapons and presented them to the UN Headquarters in New York in 1975. In 1998, Soka Gakkai also launched "Abolition 2000," a petition drive aiming to abolish nuclear weapons with the support of a global network to develop a treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework. Between the fall 1997 and the fall 1998, Soka Gakkai gathered over 130,000 signatures, and submitted them to the UN Headquarters in New York in response to an activity initiated by Dr. David Krieger, the founder and president of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.

Soka Gakkai also organized a petition drive for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) in 2010, which was led by youth members of the Soka Gakkai in response to SGI President Ikeda's antinuclear proposal issued in September 2009. In total, 2,270,000 signatures were collected and presented to the UN in May 2010. As a result, NWC was discussed for the first time at the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons held in the same month.

To commemorate the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, youth representatives from 23 countries who are actively engaged in peace activities gathered in Hiroshima to attend an "International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition" in August last year. Sponsors of the summit included the City of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Between the sessions, youth representatives from around the world visited the peace memorial park, the atomic bomb museum, and renewed their determination to eliminate nuclear weapons.

In addition, in conjunction with the International Meeting for Interfaith Dialogue and World Peace, Antinuclear Exhibition: "Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons" was held last October in Havana, Cuba. Since it was officially launched at the World Congress of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) in Hiroshima in August 2012, the exhibition has been touring around the world. Some 450 people, including religious figures, attended the opening ceremony. As can be seen from the above examples, SGI has been engaged in activities to eliminate nuclear weapons all

over the world to succeed in fulfilling second President Josei Toda's vision.

In response, many members and non-members of SGI have expressed their support and high expectations for SGI activities. Betty Reardo, the founding director emeritus of the International Institute on Peace Education, commented that there is so much to learn from SGI President Ikeda's proposals for nuclear arms reduction in his annual peace proposals for the UN. By studying his proposals, she said, youth can build a foundation to contribute to world peace. By learning from each other and supporting each other as global citizens, we can make a great contribution to the abolishment of nuclear weapons. She encouraged those who gathered there to build a new world, one without nuclear weapons, a world that cannot be destroyed by weapons, a world not bound by the fear of annihilation. In conclusion, she expressed her conviction that everyone's efforts to abolish nuclear weapons would bear fruit in the future.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. Women's Activities—Focusing the Soka Gakkai Women's Peace Committee Movement**

One especially remarkable aspect of the SGI's peace movement is how actively its women are engaged in peacemaking. Needless to say, creating peace is a challenge that both men and women need to be engaged in together. Since women are, however, more likely to work at home and often play a more direct role in caring for their families, they are better positioned to create new options for how society should be. Nevertheless, traditionally, women tend to be marginalized, and their ideas, opinions and actions frequently go unnoticed.

SGI President Ikeda pointed out this problem in his peace proposal in 2000 as follows:

I would especially like to stress the role that women can play in creating a culture of peace. Throughout the long history of humanity, women have suffered the most whenever society has been wracked by war, violence, oppression, abuse of human rights, disease and famine. It has been women, in spite of this, who have persevered in turning society in the direction of good, in the direction of hope and in the direction of peace.<sup>6</sup>

He continued:

It is equally essential to work to create in concrete, tangible ways a culture of peace in daily life. Elise Boulding, a renowned peace studies scholar, stresses that cultures of peace are to be found in each individual's process of tenaciously continuing peace-oriented behavior. She attaches particular importance to women's roles in this aspect. Peace is not something to be left to others in distant places. It is something we create day to day in our efforts to cultivate care and consideration for others, forging bonds of friendship and trust in our respective communities through our own actions and example. As we enhance our respect for the sanctity of life and human dignity through our daily behavior and steady efforts toward dialogue, the foundations for a culture of peace will deepen and strengthen, allowing a new global civilization to blossom.<sup>7</sup>

As illustrated above, President Ikeda has great expectations for women to strengthen the relations between people through dialogue and expand their communities of trust.

In his Peace Proposal 2010, President Ikeda also noted that SGI has been promoting women's engagement in the society. He wrote:

Women face many challenges and threats. Broader opportunities for education can empower them to stand up as self-reliant actors, able to break through crises and redirect their lives and societies toward the better future they envision. Planting the seeds of empowerment now will make this a reality. One hundred years ago, when the social standing of women in Japan was extremely low, the founding president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, worked passionately to expand advanced educational opportunities for women out of the belief that it is they who will build a better society...Women play a pivotal role in the SGI's global movement for peace. The exhibition "Women and a Culture of Peace" was created by the Women's Peace Committee of the Soka Gakkai in Japan in collaboration with peace scholar Elise Boulding, and forums on a culture of peace have been held to help raise awareness in many local communities. The message underlying these efforts is that women are the builders of peace; this represents a translation of Makiguchi's beliefs into contemporary contexts.

At the same time, these activities share the spirit of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted ten years ago in October 2000.<sup>8</sup>

President Ikeda further pointed out a characteristic of the SGI movement, which is rooted in this same thought. He states:

Raising one's voice or taking action is something we all can do. All that is required are the natural feelings shared by people everywhere: the desire to live in peace, the wish to protect those we love, the determination to spare the world's children needless suffering...

The members of the SGI in 192 countries and territories around the world have been working to build solidarity with and among our fellow citizens. Our efforts are based on the belief that it is dialogue, first and foremost, that opens one heart to another...

Based on the proud determination to make the struggle for nuclear abolition the foundation for a world without war, and convinced that participation in this unprecedented undertaking is the greatest gift we can offer the future, I call on people of goodwill everywhere to work together toward the realization of a world finally free from the menace of nuclear weapons.<sup>9</sup>

Responding to this call, women of SGI have steadily initiated a wide range of activities in their local communities and at their workplaces. Notably, the Soka Gakkai Women's Peace Committee has been actively engaged in peacemaking activities. The Committee has continuously promoted grassroots activities in the belief that "peace starts with the inner transformation of each individual." Toward the abolishment of nuclear weapons, the committee has been working on these activities as part of their mission: 1) Show the horror of nuclear weapons to the world, 2) Inspire people to help abolish nuclear weapons, and 3) Raise awareness of dialogue as a means of building peace.

The committee has been engaged in various activities, including publishing testimonies of the war, showing exhibitions, holding discussion meetings where people share their experiences, and organizing lectures and seminars by experts on nuclear disarmament.

Among those activities, the collection of atomic bomb survivors' testimonies published in 1981 was especially well received.

Each committee member visited survivors of the war and recorded their voices to ensure that their memory of the disaster is never forgotten. The collection, entitled "Wish for Peace" took over 10 years to complete 20 volumes. The main experiences of survivors are contained in volume 4 "The Heart of Hiroshima and Mother's Prayer: Episode After the Hiroshima Bombing" and volume 11, "When is the End? Episode of the 2nd generation of Nagasaki Bombing Survivors."

In 2005, the year which marked 60 years from the end of the WWII and the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the committee also began recording the experiences of atomic bomb survivors for posterity.



They filmed 180 survivors' testimonies and created a DVD entitled, "Wish for Peace: Women's War Experiences" based on 31 survivors' testimonies; 1) Radiation Exposure in Hiroshima, 2) Radiation Exposure in Nagasaki, 3) Battle of Okinawa, 4) Repatriation 5) Nurses in the War, 6) Women and Children in the Wartime and 7) An Air Raid.

Based on this DVD, another DVD entitled, "Wish for Peace: Women's War Experiences in Hiroshima and Nagasaki" was created, which can be seen in English, Spanish, French, and Chinese (both in traditional and simplified Chinese). The DVD was distributed to elementary and junior high schools, and seminars were held in local communities where the DVD was used as teaching material.

The first chapter of the DVD is on radiation exposure in Hiroshima and contains a testimony by Ms. Kikue Shiota who was exposed to the radiation of the atomic bomb when she was 21. In the video, she explains that she ran around the hell-like city of Hiroshima after the bombing. The next day, she found her younger sister's *monpe* pants burned in a fire. Her younger brother was also badly injured and her mother passed away one month later from the effects of the bomb.

In Chapter 2, on radiation exposure in Nagasaki, Ms. Toyomi Hashimoto shared her experience of being exposed to radiation together with her children and how they suffered from the effects of the atomic bomb. She later also gave birth to a child with birth defects caused by the bombing. As an atomic bomb survivor, Ms. Hashimoto was invited to the UN General Assembly. At the assembly, she urged everyone to never allow another atomic bombing.

In addition to the above activities, the Soka Gakkai Women's Peace Committee has invited a number of researchers and activists on peace and culture. Those invited held lectures on various topics from the perspective of peace movement. The topics included, women's roles in building peace, religions involvement with war in history, and how women can utilize their potential to prevent war.

The committee has also been active in holding exhibitions. The exhibition entitled "Culture of Peace and Women" was launched in 2002 in response to the UN's "Declaration on a Culture of Peace," which was renewed in 2007 and has since been touring in Japan. This exhibition was supervised by Professor Elise Boulding, and seen by more than 1.1 million people in over 50 cities across Japan.

I was also involved in creating this exhibition, and I had an opportunity to meet Professor Boulding in Boston. On that occasion, I presented her with an album covering the exhibition's content and voices of visitors. She looked at each page carefully and expressed her admiration.

She praised the activities of the committee as well as women of the SGI and said, "I'm glad I could support the exhibition." The interview with Professor Boulding remains deeply engraved in my heart.

## 5. Closing

Women of the SGI have been making remarkable contributions to peacebuilding activities. As SGI President Ikeda emphasizes, there is a tradition of respect and gender equality starting with the Buddha, reflected in the Lotus Sutra, as well as in the writings of Nichiren. This tradition marks a way of thinking about women's liberation in Buddhism, which is reflected in SGI President Ikeda's many works and initiatives.

Today, humanity faces an unprecedented mountain of global issues that need to be resolved. Thus, it is thus imperative that we change the direction of human destiny, that we make peace where there is confusion, and that we create a society that protects the dignity and value of life.

President Ikeda has long been driving initiatives to bring about this kind of change, and is calling on women to help usher in this new age. A person who knows pain can listen to others' sufferings, and empathize with them, and can better see things from their point of view. From this perspective, the role of women, which has gone largely overlooked until now, provides a rich source of possibilities for building a bright future. We cannot discuss global issues only from the perspective of gender; however, it is also impossible to discuss this matter without considering gender. The same thing can be said in regard to peace and the abolishment of nuclear weapons.

Rooted in the deep philosophy of Buddhism, a global network of women has responded to Ikeda's call, and continues to expand their efforts worldwide. Their aim is to make the twenty-first century a century in which all people can experience a sense of happiness, which comes from knowing that life is precious and that both men and women share responsibility in actualizing their full potential so that they can contribute to society.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Josei Toda, "Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons," 1957.9.8.
- <sup>2</sup> Daisaku Ikeda, "Shared efforts toward nuclear abolition," 2009. 9.8.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> See Soka Gakkai website, [www.sokanet.jp](http://www.sokanet.jp)
- <sup>5</sup> Betty Reardo, in *Seikyo Shimbun*, 2015. 8.31.
- <sup>6</sup> Daisaku Ikeda "Peace through Dialogue: A Time to Talk Thoughts on a Culture of Peace," 2000. 1.26.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Daisaku Ikeda, "Toward a New Era of Value Creation," 2010. 1.26.
- <sup>9</sup> Ikeda, 2009, op. cit.

### Author Biography

**Thoshie Kurihara** is a Senior Research Fellow, The Institute of Oriental Philosophy. She is an adjunct lecturer, Soka University. Her research areas include sociology of religion, women's studies. Her recent publications include *The Challenges of Women: Past, Present and Future* (Tokyo: Hokuju-shuppan, 2014), "Buddhism and Women: Soka Gakkai International's Viewpoint" in *The Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 48. no.1 (2009), "The Concept of Equality in the Lotus Sutra: The SGI's Viewpoint" in *The Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 48, no.2 (2009), "Women in Japanese Buddhist History: Focusing on the Theory of Enlightenment of Women in Nichiren's Teachings," in *The Challenge of Mahayana Buddhism*, ed. The Institute of Oriental Philosophy (2006), "The 21st Century Is a Century of Women: Buddhism and Women," in *The Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 43, no.2 (2004), and *Guidance to Happiness of Women* (Tokyo: Daisanbunmeisha, 2003).