

**Message to the Civil Society Peace Forum held at
The Cooper Union, New York City
September 8, 2007**

On September 8, 1957, Josei Toda, the second president of the Soka Gakkai and the man I look to as my mentor in life, issued a declaration calling for the complete abolition of nuclear weapons. This was just months before his death; he poured his entire being into making this declaration.

This was at the height of the Cold War, and the competition to develop and deploy nuclear weapons was heating up. Yet Toda condemned—in powerful, even strident, language—the destructive human impulses that underlie these weapons. Rooted in the perspective of Buddhism, which seeks to shed light on the inner workings of life itself, Toda denounced anyone who would use these weapons to jeopardize people’s fundamental right to live as “a devil incarnate, a fiend, a monster.” Toda had the insight to understand that the logic that justifies the possession of nuclear weapons grows from the most extreme form of human desire—the desire to dominate and bend others to our will, the readiness to annihilate them, destroying their lives and livelihoods, should they resist. Toda solemnly entrusted the mission of achieving the abolition of nuclear weapons to the 50,000 young people who had gathered in Yokohama to hear him on that day.

Fifty years have passed since Toda issued this declaration. While humanity managed to avert the global cataclysm that was an immediate danger throughout the Cold War, efforts toward nuclear disarmament are now stalled, and the threat posed by the continued spread of nuclear weapons has become critical. Now is the time, in the midst of this deepening crisis, for ordinary citizens to raise our voices in a united call for nuclear abolition. Now is the time to forge a new culture of peace in which the human dignity of all can truly shine.

In the teachings of Buddhism we find these words: Life is the foremost of all treasures. Even the treasures that fill the entire universe are no substitute for life.

From this perspective, the life of each individual is an inestimable treasure filled with infinite possibilities. Nothing is more precious or of greater value. No one has the right to rob others of this most precious treasure of life. The injunction against killing, present in all spiritual traditions, must be the eternal guiding principle for humankind.

Nuclear weapons can instantly and brutally slaughter vast numbers of people. The survivors are condemned to a lifetime of suffering from the aftereffects of radiation—a lasting burden of misery that will be visited on subsequent generations. What are nuclear weapons, if not a barbarous and unmitigated evil that denies and tramples the inherent dignity of life itself?

It is vital that humankind develop a shared consciousness that nuclear weapons are an absolute evil whose existence can never be justified—for any reason or under any circumstance. We must free ourselves of the notion that they somehow serve as a necessarily evil deterring conflict or war. We must promote the understanding that it is impossible to construct one’s own happiness and security on the fear and suffering of others; and this understanding must be coupled with the compassion, empathy and courage to resist all attempts to do so. This same outlook is

fundamental to efforts to resolve the global issues of poverty, ecological degradation and grave abuses of human rights.

Today, many people have given up on the possibility of nuclear abolition. But peace is always a competition between resignation and hope. Indifference and acquiescence in the face of evil must be recognized as negative, destructive functions of life; to submit to such impulses is, ultimately, to side with the forces of destruction.

It was human beings who gave rise to nuclear weapons. It cannot therefore be beyond the power of human wisdom to eliminate them. Buddhism asserts that human life holds within it sources of wisdom and compassion powerful enough to rise above any temptation or threat. I believe that humankind's continued survival hinges on the success of our efforts to bring forth these positive, creative capacities in all people and forge from them a new solidarity.

This is a challenge of epic significance in human history. The greatest single force to achieve this on a global scale is the power of dialogue—dialogue among individual human beings and through expanding friendship and exchange among the world's peoples.

Dialogue starts from the courageous willingness to know and be known by others. It is the painstaking and persistent effort to remove all obstacles that obscure our common humanity. Genuine dialogue is a ceaseless and profound spiritual exertion that seeks to effect a fundamental human transformation in both ourselves and others. Dialogue challenges us to confront and transform the destructive impulses inherent in human life. I earnestly believe that the energy generated by this courageous effort can break the chains of resignation and apathy that bind the human heart, unleashing renewed confidence and vision for the future.

The hope-filled leaders at the forefront of this great struggle are always young people. "The new era will be created by the power and passion of youth." This was the unchanging, lifelong conviction of Josei Toda, who himself waged an uncompromising struggle of resistance against Japanese militarism during World War II. Deeply partaking of my mentor's conviction, I am determined to dedicate my life, alongside the youth of the world and together with our distinguished friends gathered here today, to the cause of nuclear abolition and the peaceful coexistence of humankind.

It is my hope that we will make today, September 8, a day of reaffirming our shared vow, as people living into the 21st century, to create a society in which all people may fully and consistently experience the joys of human dignity.

In closing, I would like to recall these words of Abraham Lincoln, spoken here at The Cooper Union in 1860, as an expression of my best wishes for the continued health and well-being of all our friends gathered here today.

"Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

Daisaku Ikeda
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