

THE CULTURE OF PEACE: AGENDA FOR A NEW GLOBAL CIVILIZATION

at the Soka University, Tokyo, Japan 18 March 2016

Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury

I am honored to be with you on the occasion of the 42nd commencement ceremony of the Soka University and the 30th commencement of the Soka Women's College, which have been holding their commencements jointly for the last two decades.

The Soka University is truly “a fortress of peace for humankind” and “the highest seat of learning for humanistic education.”

At the outset, allow me to pay tribute to the Founder of the University President Daisaku Ikeda for his visionary leadership in advancing the value-creating and humanistic education as a significant contribution to the global community. My wife and I felt deeply honored to receive a warm-hearted welcoming message on our arrival in Tokyo from President and Kaneko Ikeda.

As graduating students, you should be proud that your alma mater was selected two years ago as one of the 37 universities in Japan to take part in the Top Global University Project initiated by the Ministry of Education with the objective of enhancing the international compatibility and competitiveness of higher education in this country. Your university now bears an important social responsibility to serve as a model institution to lead the internationalization of Japanese universities and, in turn, its society as a whole. In realizing this commendable initiative, I will always be on your side as a friend and well-wisher.

I am delighted to present my felicitations in advance as in five years' time you will celebrate the 50th anniversary of your University in 2021 as it redoubles efforts to advance the education for global citizenship.

It is so nostalgic for Mrs. Chowdhury and me to recall our first visit to this University exactly thirteen years ago on 19 March 2003 when I had honor of receiving the doctorate honoris causa

Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury (Former Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations)

and presenting the keynote address at the University's commencement. The current visit marks the tenth year since my last visit in 2006 when President Ikeda personally handed over to me the Proposal for UN Reforms authored by him for transmission to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Today is a day of significant achievement, a day of celebration for nearly 2600 graduating students. You have put your energies to good use and honed your talents. You are seeing the rewards of your hard work. You have been particularly privileged as your learning prepared you well to be concerned and compassionate citizens with a global perspective in today's interdependent and interconnected world.

My very warm congratulations to each one of you.

I would also like to congratulate the women and men who gave their best to help you attain your best - the dedicated educators and administrators of the Soka University. Here I pay a special tribute to the wise stewardship of University President Yoshihisa Baba. And I join all of you in thanking the people whose love and sacrifice made this day possible – your supportive parents and guardians. Let us give them all whole-hearted recognition.

As the graduating students, you are honored and privileged to be empowered by the spirit of the Founder of your University. President Ikeda's own life is a brilliant manifestation of his whole-hearted dedication and commitment to the good of humanity. His universal call to us all "to sow the seeds of peace throughout the world" and his own contribution to the promotion of the culture of peace have earned our deep admiration and gratitude.

Recognizing the challenging realities of the present day world, President Ikeda has focused on the need for promoting the culture of peace - peace through dialogue - peace through non-violence. His profound reiteration that "the use of the hard power of military force never produces real stability" should invariably be a guiding principle for the world powers and their leaders.

I recall President Ikeda's unshakable faith in the United Nations, expressed to me in our dialogues and communications over the years, underscoring that to protect the United Nations is to protect our nations, ourselves, our children, and our future. I know of no one who has highlighted the role and responsibility of our world body so consistently, relentlessly and substantively for such a long period of time. More significantly, he has evolved a consistent philosophy of support and

encouragement for multilateralism with the UN system at its core. We feel truly proud of that.

President Ikeda's continued and unrelenting support to the United Nations and its principles and objectives as reflected in his Peace Proposals since 1983 has received appreciative recognition from all parts of the world. I had the honor of chairing the launch at the UN headquarters of his milestone publication "A Forum for Peace" in 2014. The distinctiveness of this compendium of his thirty annual proposals stands out when we find that these not only relate to humanity as a whole but are relevant for the good of every one of us as individuals.

President Ikeda has highlighted empowerment of people as a major element in building the culture of peace and very eloquently emphasized the emergence of women in leading the way for that. In his 2010 Peace Proposal, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the historic UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women and Peace and Security" which I had honor to initiate in March 2000, he had stressed the importance of women's equal participation in all efforts for peace and security.

I call upon all of you – women and men – to work together with sincerity and determination to make the equality and empowerment of women, who constitute fifty percent of our world, a reality.

2016 presents another commemorative occasion. This year is the 20th anniversary of President Ikeda's landmark speech on Education for Global Citizenship at Columbia University's Teachers College on 13 June 1996 in New York. The value and significance of that speech have been embraced by the international community. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has highlighted it as one of the objectives of his Global Education First Initiative in 2012.

I am confident that President Ikeda is enormously happy that last September the United Nations agreed to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 global goals. Goal 4 focusing on education aims to "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning." More encouraging is the fact that target 7 of this particular Goal mentions that all learners should acquire knowledge to promote, among others, the "culture of peace and non-violence" and "global citizenship" - both of which he has repeatedly highlighted. President Ikeda has asserted that the UN is the soul and lifeblood of global citizenship. I am absolutely delighted to see that this lasting contribution of him has prepared well a crop of fine young people to be true global citizens.

I commend the initiative by the students and faculty of the Soka University of America to commemorate the 20th anniversary of President Ikeda's Columbia University speech by convening a world summit of educators this year on exactly the same date. Further, I am privileged to continue teaching my course on "The Culture of Peace" at SUA every January for last few years.

I recall President Ikeda's remarkable words expressing that "real happiness is not the absence of any problems, difficulties, or suffering, rather whenever you find yourself beset by some new harsh trial, adopt a positive attitude and face it bravely as an opportunity to strengthen yourself". Those words by him have instilled such courage and forbearance in so many of us.

It has been an honour for me to know President Ikeda up close and appreciate his unflinching commitment to peace. My meetings with him over the years have again and again strengthened my belief that our world needs the wisdom, dedication, compassion and guidance of a personality like him to spread the message of the culture of peace and human development for the benefit of humankind.

My own life has been shaped over the last half century by various realities, particularly my challenges, struggles and difficulties. Throughout, my family has been my greatest strength. Defying all obstacles as a young Pakistani diplomat, I was inspired to join the liberation war of Bangladesh and engaged as a freedom-fighter to mobilize global support for our sovereign existence as a nation. I am deeply humbled by the opportunity to represent and lead my country at the United Nations and thereafter become the first Under-Secretary-General from Bangladesh at the UN headquarters.

My life's experience has taught me to value peace and equality as the essential components of our existence. They unleash the positive forces of good that are so needed for human progress. My initiatives at the United Nations General Assembly in 1999 on the Culture of Peace, in the Security Council in 2000 on equality of women's participation and in leading the UN system's prioritization of the needs of the world's most vulnerable countries as their champion for six years - all show that when head and heart join together to do something big and worthwhile for humanity no obstacle is insurmountable. If I, as a representative of a vulnerable and impoverished country, can accomplish that, each and every one of you can do even better.

My work has taken me to the farthest corners of the world. From Sierra Leone to Sri Lanka, from Mongolia to Mauritius, from Paraguay to the Philippines, from Kosovo to Kazakhstan, from

Bhutan to the Bahamas to Burkina Faso, I have seen time and again the centrality of the culture of peace and women's equality in our lives. This realization has now become more pertinent in the midst of the ever-increasing militarism and militarization that is destroying both the humanity and our planet.

Peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men. We should never forget that when women are marginalized, there is no chance for our world to get sustainable peace in the real sense. Women bring a new breadth, quality and balance of vision to a common effort of moving away from the cult of war towards the culture of peace. Women's equality makes our planet safe and secure.

Peace is integral to human existence — in everything we do, in everything we say and in every thought we have, there is a place for peace. Do not isolate peace as something separate. We should know how to relate to one another without being unpleasant, without being violent, without being disrespectful, without neglect, without prejudice. Once we are able to do that, we are able to take the next step forward in building the culture of peace. We need to focus on empowering the individual so that each one of us becomes individually an agent of peace and nonviolence. Begin with yourself!

Let us remember that the work for peace is a continuous process. Each one of us can make a difference in that process. Peace cannot be imposed from outside; it must be realized from within.

Seeds of peace exist in all of us. They must be nurtured, cared for, and promoted by us all to flourish and flower.

Before I conclude I would ask you to look into yourselves. In a world where material pursuits seem the be-all and end-all of human endeavor, find a real space for spirituality in your life. In your eagerness to get something quickly, never ever sell your soul. 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.

Your positive goals for yourself should not be pursued at the expense of other people. Recognize and value the positive in others. Recognize your mistakes and take responsibility for those. Do not find a scapegoat for your own failures.

Confidence is essential, but it should not be misplaced. Do not be dogmatic to stagnate. Be

flexible to move ahead.

Remember that each person has her or his own individual cause and mission. Whatever that is, give it your unparalleled devotion and do the best you can in service of humanity. I am always inspired by the human spirit and its resilience and capacity to overcome any adversity. What impresses me most is the individual's determination to better one's own condition.

You are all aware that the hardest problems on the planet will not have singular solutions, nor will they be resolved with singular attempts. The hardest problems facing the world must be worked on - and worked on diligently, collaboratively, with perseverance and patience. Each setback must be a springboard for the next attempt that you will embark on with renewed vigor. It's your mission, your passion fueled by the knowledge you've gained here that will keep moving you forward.

Let me end by saying to you all:

Omedeto-gozaïmasu!

And to the graduating students:

Gambatte-Kudasai !!!