

Remarks by Sergio Duarte

Opening of Soka Gakkai International Exhibit

From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit

DPI/NGO Conference, “For Peace and Development: Disarm Now!”

Mexico City, Mexico

10 September 2009

I am honoured to have been invited to open this Exhibit by Soka Gakkai International on ***From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit***. I wish in particular to congratulate the SGI President Daisaku Ikeda for his deep personal commitment and persistent efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. He and the many members of SGI throughout the world—including Hiro Sakurai from SGI’s UN liaison office— have significantly assisted the United Nations in pursuing this goal. I cannot imagine a better venue for this exhibit than a UN conference devoted to the role of non-governmental organizations in promoting disarmament, for the benefit of peace and development.

Anybody who has worked for many years in the field of disarmament is familiar with the old debate over which should come first: peace or disarmament. Those who believe that peace should come first argue that weapons are merely a symptom of a deeper security concerns or political conflicts—so they recommend that we must first solve those security concerns and resolve the political conflicts before we can have real progress in disarmament.

On the surface, this is a very persuasive argument. Unfortunately, it is also a formula for postponing disarmament indefinitely. The UN’s important work of promoting global public goods at the UN—including both development and disarmament—has not been put “on hold” pending the prior arrival of world peace. To the contrary, we believe that the many activities of the UN in these fields have their own important contributions to make to both peace and security. This view is shared by the overwhelming majority of our member states, if not all of them.

Clearly there is no one-way street between peace and disarmament. Instead, progress in these fields is mutually reinforcing. The world community must therefore pursue both peace and disarmament. Peacemaking can restore mutual trust and confidence, thereby eliminating some of the most common motives behind the pursuit of deadly weapons. Yet agreements to reduce stockpiles and to eliminate certain types of indiscriminate weapons can also promote peace, by strengthening that same sense of mutual trust and confidence. This is especially true when disarmament agreements conform to standards that UN member states have agreed are needed for real disarmament to occur—including transparency, irreversibility, verification, and binding authority. This is what makes disarmament work for peace.

Without doubt, as disarmament and development proceed, the ultimate beneficiaries are the people—individual human beings around the world. I believe that anybody who visits this exhibit and considers its messages will leave convinced that these are mutually reinforcing goals. I encourage everybody to visit this exhibit, contemplate its profound messages, and contribute—each in his or her own way—to building a culture of peace, in a world free of nuclear weapons.