



Soka Gakkai International

15-3 Samon-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0017 Japan

A Public Statement by Soka Gakkai International (SGI) to the United Nations General Assembly First Committee October 2019, New York

This year's session of the UNGA First Committee comes at a truly crucial time for global disarmament. Multilateral fora on disarmament have been marked by gridlock and threat of erosion, and there have been disturbing movements toward backtracking and undoing the progress made in bilateral disarmament.

Against this backdrop of deepening concern, we support and align ourselves with the core spirit of the Disarmament Agenda as delivered by Secretary-General Guterres: disarmament to save humanity, disarmament that saves lives and disarmament for future generations. In addition to recentering the human imperatives of disarmament, these goals highlight both the universal benefits of disarmament and our shared responsibility to achieve it.

In the words of the Secretary-General: “In the face of massive, existential threats to people and planet—but equally at a time of compelling opportunities for shared prosperity—there is no way forward but collective, common-sense action for the common good.”¹

Collective action does not, of course, mean waiting for others to act. Each state, all civil society actors, every individual has avenues for meaningful engagement and contribution. The willingness to act for the common good is, for example, embodied in the unflinching witness of the world's hibakusha. Through the sustained work of recollecting and recounting unimaginably painful events, the survivors of nuclear weapons production, testing and use have broken down barriers of silence and resignation, opening new realms of recognition, discourse and action. In this, they have been motivated by the determination to prevent anyone else from experiencing the agonies they have endured. Successive generations must inherit this commitment in solidarity with the hibakusha. Another powerful example of collective action is the recent momentum in climate action, largely led by young people, and the momentum toward the achievement of SDGs.

War and violence are pathologies to which humankind has become inured and whose inevitability we have learned to accept. Unlearning this wrong understanding and restoring our spiritual health must be our starting point.

The scale of violence—directed at human beings and at the natural world—was somehow seen as tolerable because it remained at a subcritical level that did not threaten our survival as a species. The advent of nuclear weapons in 1945 changed that. The momentum of human violence against nature also carries us toward the tipping point of systemic collapse and extinction. The weaponization of AI technologies threatens the foundations of human dignity and agency. The unsustainable nature of an international order founded on the threat and exercise of violence has now become undeniable. Frank recognition of the profound ill-health of our world is needed if we are join together in a shared search for a cure.

¹ António Guterres. “Address to the General Assembly.” United Nations Secretary-General. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-09-25/address-73rd-general-assembly> (accessed October 7, 2019).

Buddhism diagnoses human pathology in terms of the “Three Poisons” of greed, anger and ignorance. While these manifest in different forms, they share the common root of the failure to recognize our interconnection, interrelatedness and interdependence. This gives rise to the delusion that we can prosper at the expense of others, that we can gain our security by threatening the security of others or that our species can flourish while rending the fabric of planetary life. Awakening the wisdom to recognize our interrelatedness—and the courage and compassion to act on that recognition—is essential if we are to extricate ourselves from the quagmire of intimate, historical and systemic violence that threatens us all.

In the teachings of Buddhism we find these words: “If you light a lantern for another, it will also brighten your own way.” This aphorism is rooted in a teaching of ontological interdependence—that everything arises and exists within a web of interrelation and interdependence. At the same time, it describes the reality of much of our daily, social life, marked by innumerable acknowledgements of the needs of others, by actions that naturally benefit both self and other.

A clear focus on shared interests and mutual benefit can serve as the basis for a renewal of both bilateral and multilateral relations. Multilateral processes, in particular, require that we take in a broad scope of concerns and interests, that we see others in their multi-dimensional complexity. The distressing regression in bilateral disarmament in recent years must be responded to with a reinvigorated commitment to multilateral processes, processes that engage the energies of civil society to forge a more broadly-based and deeply-rooted consensus of human priorities. Peace and disarmament education that takes intersectional approaches is rooted in and strengthens awareness of interconnectedness.

In many ways, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) represents a new model for multilateral disarmament. It has emerged from a clear vision of the shared interests of humankind—most crucially, the need to prevent the catastrophic impacts of nuclear weapons use from being inflicted on any population or society. It recognizes that this is an imperative in which we are all—the nuclear, non-nuclear and nuclear-dependent states, their respective citizens, all inhabitants of Earth—stakeholders whose interests must be respected. It pays special attention to those already impacted and the most vulnerable among us. At the same time, it heeds the multi-decade efforts in both bilateral and multilateral arms control and disarmament, reinforcing, strengthening and protecting the results of those efforts even as it seeks to extend them to the goal of world free from nuclear weapons. Its entry into force and implementation will help bring humanity back from the brink of nuclear disaster and open the way to a more secure future for us.

Therefore, we urge the UN Member States Parties to:

1. Continue to heed the voices of civil society, especially those of the world’s hibakusha, so that the disarmament process will have a consistently human focus; and to declare the shared commitment of the world’s people that the suffering endured by the victims of the production, testing and use of nuclear weapons never be repeated;
2. Recommit to the unequivocal undertaking to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons, noting that the fundamental justification for the TPNW is the prevention of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of such weapons, thus necessitating its entry into force as early as possible;
3. Support proposals for substantive discussions in multilateral forums on a legally-binding instrument to prohibit LAWS;
4. Deepen commitment to supporting peace and disarmament education that takes an intersectional approach and implement the recommendations contained in the UN Secretary-General’s report (A/57/124) regarding the UN study on disarmament and non-proliferation education in order to advance the goals of achieving a world free from nuclear weapons.