

Toward Humanitarian Competition: A New Current in History

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The impact of the "once-in-a-century" financial meltdown, which started with defaults in the subprime mortgage market in the United States and the bankruptcy of the investment bank Lehman Brothers, has now spread to engulf the whole world.

The crisis inevitably provokes associations with the nightmare of the 1930s, when a severe economic depression set the stage for the violent conflagration of World War II. Even as policymakers struggle to find effective responses, there are growing signs that the current financial turmoil is undermining the real economy, bringing about a global recession and driving up unemployment. If we remember that the Great Depression only fully set in two years after the 1929 stock market crash, the gravity of the current situation becomes even more apparent.

People have the right to live in peace and humane conditions, and to that end, they exert themselves assiduously day after day. It is unacceptable that the foundations of people's livelihoods should be disrupted and devastated by the effects of "tsunami" that they could not foresee and which originated in realms far beyond their control.

I hope that, to prevent a further worsening of the situation, governments will strengthen coordination of fiscal and monetary policy, pooling their wisdom and taking prompt and appropriate action.

The main cause of the crisis can be traced to the rampant dominance of speculative financial assets, whose scale has been variously estimated at four times the cumulative value of world GDP. The financial markets, whose true function is to support and facilitate other economic activities, have thrust themselves to center stage; dealers and traders who single-mindedly pursue earnings and profit, often with no thought for the impact on others, have become celebrated stars of the era. The runaway avarice of present-day capitalism is a widely documented phenomenon.

As I have pointed out in these proposals on a number of occasions, the deepest root of the crisis is an unhealthy fixation on the abstract and ultimately insubstantial signifier of wealth--currency. This is the underlying pathology of contemporary civilization. It might be stated figuratively that the hopes people embraced for a post-Cold War non-ideological world have disappeared into the sneering maw of all-conquering Mammon.

Currency itself--the scraps of paper and metal and, most recently, bits of electronic information that rule market economies--has, of course, virtually no use value; it has only exchange value. And exchange value stands on the foundation of understanding and agreement among people; in essence, currency is both abstract and anonymous. The financial markets divest it of any meaningful connection to concrete (and therefore finite) goods and services; thus, as an object of human desire, it has no real or inherent limits. Herein lies the particular characteristic, the fateful pathology, of our fixation on currency.

The ceaseless pursuit of efficiency in order to raise profits, coupled with the instability of currency lacking a basis in the real economy--these two elements indeed represent the state of market economies that have developed around the axis of the unfettered economic activities of individuals. It is this that has led the economist Katsuhito Iwai to note the "fundamental incompatibility" [\[1\]](#) of efficiency and stability not only in financial markets but in market economies generally.

The spirit of abstraction

Gabriel Marcel

Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) was a French philosopher who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1929. Greatly influenced by the philosophical works of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55), Marcel became a leading Christian existentialist. Unlike other existentialists of his time, he believed that "essence precedes existence" and this formed the basis for his understanding of human dignity. Marcel argued that one's first contact with the world is not mediated by innate ideas and, as a result, he saw philosophy as a personal reflection of society, rather than as a system of abstractions and formulas. He emphasized the need for philosophers to be engaged with their surroundings and with people, stressing the importance of one-to-one dialogue.

Soon after the end of World War II, the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) offered a penetrating analysis in an essay titled "The Spirit of Abstraction, as a Factor Making for War." While the ability to develop and manipulate abstract concepts is indispensable to human intellectual activity, the resulting abstractions are ultimately without substance. Thus the idea of the "human being," for example, must be understood in some sense to be a fiction. The reality is that we are women or men, Japanese or American, older or younger, originating from some particular place. The greater the care with which we observe people, the more we come to recognize them as distinct and unique. This is the world of concrete reality. Any discussion of "human beings" or "humanity" that fails to take these differences fully into account will generate abstract concepts that take on a life of their own.

Marcel uses the term "the spirit of abstraction" to define the essentially destructive process by which our conceptions of things are alienated from concrete realities. He notes, for example, that it is only possible to participate in war if we first deny the individual character and humanity of the opponent--reducing him or her to an abstract concept such as fascist, communist, Zionist,

Islamic fundamentalist, etc. As Marcel puts it:

[A]s soon as people ... claim of me that I commit myself to a warlike action against other human beings whom I must, as a consequence of my commitment, be ready to destroy, it is very necessary from the point of view of those who are influencing me that I lose all awareness of the individual reality of the being whom I may be led to destroy. In order to transform him into a mere impersonal target, it is absolutely necessary to convert him into an abstraction. [2]

Without this kind of reductionism, it would be impossible to justify or find meaning in one's participation in war.

In other words, the spirit of abstraction is not value-neutral. Marcel notes that it is invariably accompanied by a "passional character" [3] of rejection and resentment (*ressentiment*) that brings about "depreciatory reduction." [4] That is, as soon as people are transformed into abstract concepts, they can be treated as valueless and inferior, even as something harmful to be eradicated. People, in the fullness of their humanity, no longer exist.

As Marcel himself put it, "the spirit of abstraction is essentially of the order of the passions, and ... on the other hand, it is passion, not intelligence, which forges the most dangerous abstractions." [5] It was for this reason that he considered the entirety of his work as a philosopher to be "an obstinate and untiring battle against the spirit of abstraction." [6]

Turning again to the present financial crisis, we have to ask if we as a society have not been caught up in this spirit of abstraction. Have we not fallen prey to the Medusa-like spell of the abstract and anonymous world of currency, losing our essential human capacity to see through to the fact that--however necessary it may be to the functioning of society--currency is nothing other than a convention, a kind of virtual reality?

The worship of money goes beyond desire for the merely material. It entraps and mesmerizes us, drawing us into modes of action we would otherwise avoid. For example, a corporation that loses sight of its social responsibility and responds only to the private interests of its stockholders--their insistence on short-term profit--will relegate to secondary or even tertiary importance its concrete connections with the real world of real people, whether they be management, employees, customers or consumers. Throughout the world, we hear the remorseful voices of otherwise conscientious businesspeople who felt they had no choice but to play this distasteful role.

Indeed, finance-centered globalization has produced such people in great numbers. Ensnared by the spirit of abstraction, we have lost sight of the fact that our genuine humanity exists only in the totality of our personhood. To a greater or lesser degree, we have all become *Homo economicus*, incapable of recognizing any value other than the monetary.

People everywhere seem to be in the grip of a sense of claustrophobic powerlessness--a sense that deepens in direct proportion to the advance of globalization. This is, in my view, an inevitable outcome of the arrogance and egotism that pursues profit blindly, imagining that human society can continue to exist even as it destroys the natural and cultural environment. We ignore at our peril the timeless words of José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) regarding the essential unity of our lives and our surroundings--"I am myself plus my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I cannot save myself." [7]

Of course, *Homo economicus* is the product of a vector that is intrinsic to capitalism. The more "pure" the form of capitalism preached, the more forcefully we are--in our capacity as shareholders, managers and employees, customers and consumers--compelled to pursue this vector. Unless we do so, we will, at least in the short term, suffer loss.

Robert B. Reich, secretary of labor during the administration of U.S. President Bill Clinton, has for some time been warning of the pitfalls of the "new economy." In his recent work *Supercapitalism: The Transformation of Business, Democracy, and Everyday Life*, he condenses the multifaceted aspects of our personhood into our respective roles as investors and consumers, and as citizens. He writes: "The awkward truth is that most of us are of two minds: As consumers and investors we want the great deals. As citizens we don't like many of the social consequences that flow from them." [8]

The critical challenge is to strike the proper balance, to recover our human wholeness. But under supercapitalism, "Consumers and investors gain power; citizens lose it." [9] The concerns of capitalism take precedence over the concerns of democracy.

The predominance of monetary interests has accentuated the negative aspects of capitalism such as global income disparity, unstable labor markets and environmental destruction. Nor does it stop there. The ongoing financial and economic downturn has cast serious doubt on what is generally recognized as the positive aspect of capitalism--its ability to create wealth--as the wealth generated has often proven to be illusory.

The processes of globalization, buoyed by deregulation and technological innovation, have encountered a fierce backlash in the form of globalized recession. It is now apparent that the faith in free competition and markets to resolve all problems was misplaced; nothing in the world is so neatly preordained.

The global financial system requires some regulatory framework, and this is where governments and political processes must play a major role. Political leaders should exercise their talents for the greater good and from a broad and impartial perspective. We need swift and bold measures, such as providing fiscal and financial support and strengthening social safety nets, in order to respond to the dramatic slump in corporate performance and the accompanying rise in unemployment.

It is especially important to keep in mind the global dimensions of poverty, which robs people of opportunities for dignified and meaningful work. Such work is an essential human activity; on it hinge the purpose and hope that are vital to personal fulfillment and social flourishing. We must put all our energies into engaging with this critical issue.

At the same time, we must absolutely heed the lesson of the 1930s, when an excessive reliance on state control was intertwined with the rise of fascism. And it is in this sense also that I believe we must take to heart Marcel's warning against the dangers of the spirit of abstraction.

"Winners" and "losers"

In Japan, such phrases as "the stratified society (*kakusa shakai*)" and "the winning team (*kachigumi*) and the losing team (*makegumi*)" have become popular ways of describing the negative effects of globalization.

We should, however, be aware of the propensity of such language to paint diverse phenomena with the same brush, obscuring the world of concrete actuality and denigrating people's individual efforts. This terminology is far estranged from the reality of people's lives as they rouse themselves to struggle and overcome the many obstacles presented by harsh social and economic conditions.

Neither victory nor defeat is a permanent condition, and to label people "winners" and "losers" as is the present trend in Japan is to judge everything from the perspective of economic supremacism. Such terms entirely fail to account for the totality of our personhood.

Society is filled with countless examples of people who live life with a steady calmness, neither elated by their triumphs nor downcast by their setbacks, who remain unswayed by the praise or criticism of others. When a term that presumes to sum up such complex realities in a single phrase is used with great frequency, it tends to denigrate the value and dignity of individual human beings and to throw cold water on their efforts to meet challenges with courage and ingenuity.

We must beware of becoming what Marcel described as "people of feeble spirit" who see external events as "something like a last judgment in miniature," [10] reading into them messages of redemption or apocalypse. This is a turning away from humanity, a relinquishing of autonomy, and can even open the path toward violence.

Under a system of economic and monetary supremacism, where human values are measured by the single yardstick of material wealth and income, no sense of sufficiency or satisfaction is, in principle, possible. In the mid-1990s, the journalist Robert Samuelson wrote of the incipient dissatisfaction that imbued American society even when its economy was at its heights. [11] The constant presence of dissatisfaction and envy gives rise to a society made stagnant by negative passions.

The excesses of ideology

Here I am reminded of the heartfelt words of my late friend Chingiz Aitmatov, the great Kyrgyz novelist who passed away last year. Responding to my request that he share with readers his advice as a father, he stated:

I would urge young people not to expect too much of social revolution. Revolution is violence and riot, a collective madness. It is mass violence that brings enormous suffering to a whole society, a people or a nation. ... I would urge them to look for a means of bloodless evolution, ways of reforming society in the light of reason. [12]

When Marcel called for people to overcome the "feeble spirit," he was warning first and foremost against the dangers of communism. He wrote those words in 1951, when fascism had already been defeated but communism maintained its appeal. He sought most intently to warn people against the way that such abstract slogans as "having nothing to lose but one's chains" or "the expropriators are expropriated" can take on the air of historical inevitability, inciting resentment and inviting the horrors of violence and bloodshed in the name of revolution. The more than seventy-year tale of the rise and fall of Soviet communism eloquently testifies to the accuracy of Marcel's insight. And one of the poignant lessons of that history is how communism, despite an avowed hatred for the value system of material acquisitiveness symbolized by currency, was unable in the end to overcome it.

To ensure that any legal or institutional measures to rein in the excesses of capitalism do not remain on the level of the remedial but are part of a long-term vision, it is absolutely imperative that we seek out a new way of thinking, a paradigm shift that will reach to the very foundation of human civilization.

During the Great Depression eighty years ago, socialism--and even communism and national socialism--each offered their own alternatives to capitalism, but today there is no obvious source for such a paradigm.

Jacques Attali, a key adviser to French President Nicolas Sarkozy, offers the following analysis: "The reality is very simple: the power of the market covers the entire globe. The increased power of money is the ultimate proof of the triumph of individualism. This is the core of the great change in modern history." [13] In other words, the abstract universality of currency and the abstract universality of the individual as labor power commodity are two sides of the same coin.

To the degree that the universal principles of freedom and human rights were elaborated on the basis of this same individualism, there is a considerable overlap between capitalism and modern democracy. Thus, if the current crisis is indeed a crisis of the modern Western social system with capitalism and democracy at its heart, it becomes all the more imperative to discover alternative universal perspectives and principles (while avoiding the past mistakes of proletarian internationalism).

We must take a macro perspective and work to configure a new spirit of the age. For better or worse, the processes of globalization have reached the point where this kind of fundamental response is required. Here the words of Max Weber (1864-1920) are instructive:

Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the "world images" that have been created by "ideas" have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest. [14]

Chingiz Aitmatov

Kyrgyz author Chingiz Aitmatov (1928-2008) became a prominent literary figure in both Russia and Kyrgyzstan, winning a number of literary awards during the Soviet era. His literature gave voice to the minority Kyrgyz people, often portraying life in a society dominated by collective thought, while looking critically at the status of women in traditional society. His works have been translated into numerous languages and include *Jamila* (1958), *The White Ship* (1972), *The Ascent of Mt. Fuji* (1973) and *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (1980).

Aitmatov became an adviser to the Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev, supporting the campaign for democratic restructuring known as "perestroika." In 1990, he was named Soviet ambassador to Luxemburg and was later Kyrgyzstan's envoy to the European Union, NATO and UNESCO.

Humanitarian competition

In this connection, I would like to explore certain ideas set out by the founding president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), in his 1903 work *The Geography of Human Life*, which I feel can serve as a fresh paradigm to guide us out of the present deadlock. Specifically, I would like to explore the possibilities to be found in his idea of "humanitarian competition."

In the closing chapters of this work, published when he was just thirty-two, Makiguchi surveyed the grand flow of human history and identified the forms of competition--military, political and economic--that have prevailed in different periods.

These are not clear and distinct historical demarcations. For example, economic competition often has a military backdrop, and the reverse is also true. In other words, these different forms of competition overlap and intertwine as they undergo gradual transformation. If we follow this process with both care and boldness, the trajectory of humanity's development becomes clear.

Makiguchi concludes with a call for us to set our sights on the goal of engaging in what he termed humanitarian competition. He did not reach this conclusion from a suprahistorical perspective but rather by tracing the inner logic of historical development. Makiguchi describes humanitarian competition thus:

To achieve the goals that would otherwise be pursued by military or political force through the intangible power that naturally exerts a moral influence; in other words, to be respected rather than feared. [\[15\]](#)

I am reminded here of nothing so much as the concept of "soft power," which has been defined by Joseph S. Nye, Jr., of Harvard University, whom I have had the privilege of meeting on several occasions, as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion." [\[16\]](#)

Likewise, there are resonances between the concept of a "win-win world" put forward by the American futurist Hazel Henderson and the views Makiguchi expresses in the following passage:

What is important is to set aside egotistical motives, striving to protect and improve not only one's own life, but also the lives of others. One should do things for the sake of others, because by benefiting others, we benefit ourselves. [\[17\]](#)

I am fully convinced that the time has now arrived, a hundred years after it was originally proposed, for us to turn our attention to humanitarian competition as a guiding principle for the new era.

One reason is that social justice and equality, proposed by socialism as an antidote to the ills of capitalism, are indeed rooted in humanistic principles. These ideals should not be allowed to perish along with the systemic failure of communism. For to do so would be to condemn to the oblivion of forgetfulness one of the crucial experiences of the twentieth century--how the socialist movement attracted the allegiance of so many people, especially the young, across such large swathes of the planet.

The question remains then as to why, if socialism is informed with valid principles, it has generally failed as a system. Here it is valuable to reference Makiguchi's insight: "When free competition is hampered, whether by natural or man-made influences, this results in stagnation, stasis and regression." [\[18\]](#) The failure of socialism can be attributed to the failure to adequately take into account the value of competition as a source of energy and vitality. There was an all too optimistic faith that if we could only eliminate social classes and establish the right conditions, a genuinely humane society would inevitably result.

Free competition driven by the unrestrained impulses of selfishness can descend into the kind of social Darwinism in which the strong prey on the weak. But competition conducted within an appropriate framework of rules and conventions brings forth the energies of individuals and revitalizes society.

Herein lies the value of humanitarian competition. As a concept, it compels us to confront the reality of competition while ensuring that it is conducted firmly on the basis of humane values, thus bringing forth a synergistic reaction between humanitarian concerns and competitive energies. It is this that qualifies humanitarian competition to be a key paradigm for the twenty-first century.

It is crucial here that we heed Gabriel Marcel's warning always to keep concrete realities firmly in view. People who, in their impatience and arrogance, think they know all the answers and are ready to offer a grand design toward which human history should advance have fallen victim to the negative aspects of the spirit of abstraction.

Former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev warns that this is one of the great spiritual lessons of the twentieth century. He offers many examples, including this insight from the world-renowned opera singer Fyodor Chaliapin (1873-1938):

The trouble was that our Russian builders simply could not lower themselves to think about ordinary human beings in terms of a sensible, human-scale architectural plan. Instead, they absolutely had to raise a tower to the skies--a Tower of Babel. They could not be satisfied with the ordinary, healthy, bold stride with which a man walks to work and home again. They had to dash into the future with seven-league steps.

"Let's break with the past!" And all at once it becomes necessary to sweep away the whole world, leaving not a trace behind. And most important--all our Russian smart guys surprisingly know all about everything. ... They know how to train a rabbit to light matches. They know what the rabbit needs to be happy. And they know what it will take to make the rabbit's offspring happy in two hundred years. [\[19\]](#)

This lyrical passage offers a lively depiction of the monstrous caricature into which people ensnared by the spirit of abstraction fall, the unbridgeable gulf between their ideas and the lived realities of ordinary people. When we allow disembodied ideas to distract and divorce us from this world of concrete actualities, we end up paying an unexpected and heavy price.

The abstractions of ideology can overwhelm even the ties of love between parent and child. In my dialogue with Chingiz Aitmatov, he introduced the infamous episode from the Stalinist era of Pavlik Morozov, a young boy who denounced his father to the Soviet authorities for his sympathies with kulaks (rich peasants resisting collectivization). His father was arrested and died in prison, and Pavlik himself was murdered by his outraged relatives. The authorities, however, lauded the young boy as a heroic socialist youth, upholding him as a model and raising statues in his honor.

Inner universality

Gabriel Marcel was equally unsparing in his critique of industrial, mechanized civilization as represented by the United States: "But can one fail to see that technocracy consists precisely of making an abstraction of one's neighbor and, in the long run, denying him?" [\[20\]](#)

A half-century later, we can imagine how clinically Marcel would have put the scalpel to the handful of super-rich who pursue massive profits through high-tech financial instruments; who, obsessed with the abstractions of currency, remain indifferent to the plight of the poor. Prosperity predicated on the denial of one's neighbors is inexcusable and ultimately unsustainable.

In a proposal written twenty years ago when the Soviet Union was still in existence, I urged that our approach to universal perspectives and principles should not be external and transcendent but must be immanent, indwelling. This perspective was welcomed and supported by many intellectuals around the world.

The universality claimed by ideology and currency has a corrosive effect on real people in real society precisely because ideology and currency are external and transcendent, the products of the spirit of abstraction. In contrast, the perspectives and principles that constitute what I refer to as "inner universality" are rooted in the world of concrete realities and can only be developed from within. The truly important questions are always close at hand, in our tangible and immediate circumstances.

A new Japanese-language translation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* became a best seller here several years ago, sparking a renewed interest in this classic. At one point, the atheist among the brothers, Ivan, addresses his younger brother, Alyosha, with the following words:

There is a certain confession I have to make... I have never been able to understand how it is possible to love one's neighbor. In my opinion, the people it is impossible to love are precisely those near to one, while one can really love only those who are far away. [\[21\]](#)

This is, of course, meant ironically, to stress how much less resistance we feel about directing love at a distant and abstract object. Love is not nearly so easy when the person in question is close at hand and on some level incompatible.

To love such people requires the kind of spiritual struggle that engages our entire being, a dramatic metanoia or turning of the soul such as is called for in the New Testament Sermon on the Mount. The single individual, undeniably present in our immediate circumstances, represents the crucible in which the true value of our commitment to love humanity is tested.

Our inability to love our immediate neighbors is Ivan's paradox and irony. Teaching that "the equality of all living beings is represented in the example of the single individual," [\[22\]](#) Buddhism warns us against the pitfalls that accompany the spirit of abstraction.

In this context, the method adopted by Makiguchi in *The Geography of Human Life* merits our careful attention. This is apparent from the very title. Compared to natural geography or even human geography, "the geography of human life" suggests a world of concrete reality comprising politics, economics, culture, education, religion, etc.--the scope of human activities in their full depth and richness. Makiguchi cites the words of the influential mid-nineteenth-century Japanese thinker Yoshida Shoin (1830-59): "People do not exist separate from the land. Events are inseparable from people. If we wish to discuss human affairs, we must first investigate geography with care." [\[23\]](#)

Even more importantly, Makiguchi's approach is rooted in the kind of inner universality I have been discussing, in which we plant our feet firmly in the actualities of the local community and seek to develop all larger perspectives from that starting point. For him, the conditions of great expanses of the Earth are generally observable in a tiny patch of land (literally, "the size of a cat's forehead"). In that sense, the outlines of the vast and complex phenomena of world geography can be explained using the examples of a single town or rural village. [\[24\]](#)

If we pay careful attention to the particular characteristics present in even a tiny patch of land, observing and analyzing them within the processes of living there, we can develop the ability to grasp the characteristics of the entire country or even the world.

Makiguchi introduces the following story about the early Edo-period politician Doi Toshikatsu (1573-1644) to illustrate how the extension and expansion of our awareness can lead from and be based on concrete examples. One day, Doi picked up a discarded scrap of Chinese silk and handed it to one of his samurai retainers. Many laughed at this seemingly insignificant gesture. Several years later, when Doi asked the samurai about the piece of silk, he produced it, having carefully stored it. Doi praised the samurai and increased his annual stipend by 300 *koku* (the standard unit of wealth in Japan at the time). Doi then explained his actions.

This fabric was produced by Chinese farmers who plucked mulberry leaves to raise silkworms and spin thread. It came into the hands of Chinese traders, crossed over the great distance of sea to reach Japan, passed through the hands of the people of Nagasaki, was purchased by merchants in Kyoto or Osaka, and finally reached Edo [present-day Tokyo]. One cannot but be struck by the enormous human effort by which it reached us, and thus to discard it as a worthless scrap is a fearful thing inviting the rebuke of heaven. [\[25\]](#)

To empathetically connect, through a scrap of fabric, with the lives of farmers working in mulberry fields in distant China--this is precisely what I am referring to as inner universality.

In other words, rather than making the great leap to the vast and complex phenomena of life, we should start from the concrete realities of the tiny patch of land where we are now. It is only by paying relentless attention to those realities that we can freely direct our thoughts and associations to the larger dimension. If we develop such fresh and vital imagination, a keen sensitivity to daily life and to life itself, we will be able to experience not only close friends but even the inhabitants of distant lands whom we have never met--and even the cultures and products of those lands--as neighbors.

For a person who has developed these capacities, war, which ravages the land and lays waste to life, is something only to be abhorred. And yet the rich expressions of a robust humanity with deep roots in the great earth can manifest in any time or place, even the battlefield, as the following story illustrates.

Early in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), two Russian soldiers were captured. This was the first such occasion, and they were paraded about for all to see. Among the Japanese soldiers, however, there were some who did not want to be part of this. When the company commander asked the reason why, one of the soldiers responded: "Back in

my home village, I was a craftsman. When I put on my uniform, I became a fighter for my country. I don't know what kind of people these men are, but even though they are our enemies, they are also soldiers fighting for their country. Now they've had the misfortune to be captured, it must be wretched for them to be taken from one place to the other and made a spectacle of. I feel very sorry for them and have no wish to further insult or humiliate them by gawking at them." [26]

I introduced this episode in a lecture I delivered at the University of Bucharest, Romania, in 1983. Undergirding the Japanese soldier's empathy is his sensitivity to daily life as a craftsman. This healthy awareness of daily life and the humanity that resides therein can transform even a foreign enemy into a neighbor.

Likewise, to the peasants of Siberia, whose love for humanity is so powerfully portrayed by Dostoyevsky in *The House of the Dead*, the political exiles in their midst were not bad people to be avoided and disdained, but neighbors. These peasants refused to treat the exiles as criminals, referring to them instead as "unfortunates."

To set out from immediate and concrete realities, creating with every step new neighbors in an expanding network of human solidarity--this is the true path to peace. Without the steady accumulation of such efforts, the ideal of a perpetual peace will remain forever out of reach. To share with others this kind of awareness and sensitivity--unpoisoned by what Marcel calls the spirit of abstraction--is to nurture and cultivate inner universality.

This is the most effective antidote to the pathologies of our age. It is our most certain guarantee against the kinds of inversion in which people are sacrificed to ideology, all means being justified in the achievement of ends and the tangible present forgotten in the quest for a utopian future. I am confident that the key to bringing about an enduring era overflowing with humanity lies in the pursuit of such inner universality.

Sharing the future

I would next like to offer some specific proposals, based on the concept of humanitarian competition, for responding to the current complex of global issues.

In addition to the global economic downturn, the world is also facing the intertwined crises of climate change, environmental degradation, energy and food shortages and poverty. Viewed from a historical perspective, the current situation seems to combine some of the most alarming characteristics of both the 1930s and the early 1970s.

In the 1930s, in response to the Great Depression, efforts were made to achieve intergovernmental policy coordination to lower tariff barriers and stabilize exchange rates. However, these negotiations ended in failure, and each country turned to protectionist economic policies designed only to defend its own interests without consideration for others. This resulted in a further worsening of the global economic crisis, in a demonstration of the destructive nature of mutual mistrust described in the famous game-theory model of the "Prisoner's Dilemma." Regrettably, it was only in the wake of the horrific tragedy of World War II that the lessons of the Great Depression were applied by the international community.

In the first half of the 1970s, abrupt changes in U.S. economic and currency policies known as the Nixon shock were followed by the oil crisis. These years also marked the emergence of a series of new global challenges. In response, the first international conferences on environmental and food issues were organized under the auspices of the United Nations, and the world's major industrialized democracies held their first summit meeting (G6) in Rambouillet, France. Although these events marked the origins of important international cooperation frameworks that continue until the present day, it is all too evident that they have not functioned effectively in the face of conflicting national interests. This is evidenced by the fact that the problems that emerged at that time remain largely unresolved.

Today we need to act with far greater boldness and on the basis of a much broader vision than was demonstrated during the crises of past decades.

In the United States, which is the epicenter of the global financial crisis, "change" was the central theme of the presidential campaign of recently inaugurated President Barack Obama. In his inaugural address he stated, "[T]he world has changed, and we must change with it. ... What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility." [27] The challenge to bring about change confronts not only the U.S. but the entire world.

Here I would like to suggest three pillars to serve as the mainstays for transforming the unfolding global crisis into a catalyst for opening a new future for humanity through stimulating the kind of humanitarian competition that will create a global community of peace and coexistence.

The first of these pillars is the sharing of action through tackling environmental problems. The second is the sharing of responsibility through international cooperation on global public goods. The third is the sharing of efforts for peace toward the abolition of nuclear arms.

Shared action on environmental problems

I would like to discuss the first of these pillars with specific reference to climate change.

Global warming is having profound impacts on ecosystems everywhere. In addition to causing meteorological disasters, it has the potential to aggravate armed conflicts and the problems of poverty and hunger. It epitomizes the twenty-first-century crisis of human civilization.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has identified climate change as one of the key issues for the UN to address, has warned: "Yet, in the longer run, no one--rich or poor--can remain immune from the dangers brought by climate change." [28] None of us, in other words, can be a bystander: We must all see this issue as our own.

Climate change is both an ongoing multidimensional crisis and a threat to the future of humankind, in that it burdens future generations with immense challenges of dire consequence.

Regrettably, no conspicuous progress was made in negotiations on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions last year. It is imperative that constructive discussions take place in the lead-up to this December, the deadline to agree upon a successor framework to the Kyoto Protocol whose first commitment period ends in 2012. It is vital that developing and emerging countries be committed participants in any new framework, in addition to renewed efforts by the developed countries.

Date	Conference/Event	Goal/Issue
2009 Nov. 11-Dec. 12	United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen	Determine successor framework to Kyoto Protocol
2009 Dec. 5	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty 1 (START 1) expires	Successor treaty with deep mutual cuts in U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals
2010 Jan.	Global Zero political and civil society summit	Raise public awareness toward a legally binding, verifiable agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons
2010	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference	Good faith disarmament moves by nuclear-weapons states; bringing in states presently not party to NPT
2011	Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries	Build momentum for achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
2012 Dec. 31	First commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires	Global and comprehensive successor framework
2015	Target date for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)	Eight goals, including: halving extreme poverty, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education

The critical question, therefore, is in what way can we achieve a genuine sharing of action?

Energy policy is clearly an area around which international cooperation can be built. Not only is securing adequate sources of energy a critical issue for developing and emerging countries; energy issues are also key to any effort by developed countries to effect the transition to a low-carbon no-waste society.

In view of the fact that nearly 60 percent of greenhouse gas emissions originate in consumption of fossil fuels, global shared action on energy policy would be a highly effective approach in combating climate change.

U.S. President Barack Obama's economic stimulus and job creation strategy has a focus on new industries and jobs in areas such as alternative energy resource development, and might be called a "Green New Deal." In like manner, an increasing number of countries--Japan and South Korea among them--are now either considering or implementing emergency economic measures that promote investment in the energy and environmental sectors.

In my peace proposal last year, I called for humanitarian competition to be at the heart of efforts to solve the global environmental crisis, urging the promotion of renewable energy measures and energy efficiency initiatives as a way to realize a transition from dependence on fossil fuels to a low-carbon no-waste society. Recent developments suggest movement in this direction.

One example is the establishment of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) with the support of more than fifty countries. The intergovernmental organization was founded in Bonn, Germany, on January 26 this year, setting in motion an international effort to promote the use of renewable energy that embraces industrialized,

developing and emerging countries alike. Having called for a convention for the promotion of renewable energy sources in a proposal seven years ago, I welcome the establishment of this new international agency.

There has also been a new initiative in the area of energy efficiency. In December 2008, energy ministers from a group of countries including the G8, China, India and Brazil issued a joint statement calling for an International Partnership for Energy Efficiency Cooperation (IPEEC) to be established during 2009 with its secretariat located within the International Energy Agency (IEA).

These new initiatives need to be functioning by the end of 2012, when the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ends. Going forward, they can serve as a focus for building international cooperation and play key roles in the implementation of the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

In addition to these measures, I would propose that in the future an international sustainable energy agency be created under the aegis of the UN to further the work of these two organizations--IRENA and IPEEC--so that international cooperation on energy policy may take firm and universal root throughout the global community.

Some may express concern over these initiatives, arguing that technology transfer could undermine the economic competitiveness of individual countries and that financial cooperation further adds to the burden on their taxpayers. But international cooperation toward the common goal of reversing the trend of global warming can be framed by the principle Makiguchi considered central to humanitarian competition, that "by benefiting others, we benefit ourselves." From this broad perspective, efforts to benefit the whole of humanity ultimately serve the national interest.

Further, this new agency could serve as a locus for bolstering solidarity, embracing input from local governments, the private sector and NGOs, for the building of a sustainable global society. Its functions could, for example, include an open registration system whereby any interested organization could freely document its activities and best practices, which would then be made available in an open database on the Internet, providing a platform for information exchange and the facilitation of partnerships.

The SGI-affiliated Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research held a conference titled "Facing Climate Change with a Renewed Environmental Ethic" in November 2008. A focal point was the need to form a synergistic alliance among governments, the private sector and civil society based on a shared sense of responsibility to future generations. The conference also underlined the importance of gaining the broad-based support and active participation of the public in such an alliance.

Since 2002, the SGI has held the exhibition "Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter and Human Potential," developed in collaboration with the Earth Charter Initiative, in twenty countries and eight languages. The SGI has also organized environmental activities such as afforestation projects in several countries working with other like-minded organizations. While each individual environmental initiative has a great significance of its own, collaborative efforts generate important multiplier effects.

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development reaches its midpoint this year, a fact that highlights the need for ordinary citizens to become even more vigorously engaged in education and awareness-raising activities.

Shared responsibility for development

The second pillar is the sharing of responsibility through international cooperation on global public goods, a key element of which would be the creation of a world food bank.

In my proposal last year, I referred to access to safe water as an integral element of promoting human development and human security. Likewise, securing stable food supplies is essential to sustaining human life and human dignity, and must be the starting point for all our efforts to combat poverty.

Starting in the fall of 2006, a sharp rise in grain prices led to simultaneous food crises in numerous countries around the world, pushing an additional 40 million people into hunger. It is estimated that 963 million people now suffer from malnutrition worldwide.

The further tragedy is that this is largely a man-made disaster resulting from market speculation and increased biofuel production. As a result of the U.S. subprime mortgage crisis, a huge volume of speculative capital poured into the grain market, causing a sharp rise in prices. The jump in grain prices also reflected a dramatic drop in grain production for food due to increased demand for biofuels as an energy source.

To ensure secure access to food for all the world's people, we need to design a mechanism to keep a certain amount of grain in reserve at all times as a global public good. These reserves could be distributed as emergency relief during a food crisis or released onto the market to stabilize prices.

I first called for the establishment of a world food bank in 1974, worried that national interests were taking precedence over humanitarian concerns in the response to global hunger and based on my conviction that life-sustaining commodities must not be politicized. Of course, it is vital for any country to guarantee stable supplies of food for its own people, but this should not be achieved at the expense of other countries. What we need to establish is global food security.

The food crisis was one of the points discussed at the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit held in July 2008. In the G8 Leaders Statement on Global Food Security, they for the first time undertook to "explore options on a coordinated approach on stock management, including the pros and cons of building a 'virtual' internationally coordinated reserve system for humanitarian purposes." [29] Prior to the G8 summit, World Bank President Robert Zoellick called on the G8 leaders to study the value of establishing such a reserve system. [30] The time has come to move forward with these initiatives.

I also would like to call for the expanded use of innovative financing mechanisms such as international solidarity levies to raise funds toward overcoming poverty and improving health care and sanitation in line with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The effort to develop innovative funding mechanisms can be thought of as a type of humanitarian competition, as various states constructively vie with one another to develop the most effective ideas and proposals.

The idea of such innovative financing mechanisms initially gained prominence at the first International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2002, and since then several new mechanisms have been introduced, mainly in health-related fields.

Among already established mechanisms of this kind are the International Finance Facility for Immunization (IFFIm) to support programs that save millions of lives, and the Air Ticket Levy to help provide funds for the treatment of such infectious diseases as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Interest in these mechanisms has continued to grow, to the point that more than fifty countries participated in the launch of the Leading Group on Solidarity Levies to Fund Development in 2006.

Possibilities for other mechanisms such as a currency transaction tax and a carbon tax are currently being explored. It is hoped that many more states will actively become involved. Such funding is essential to the humanitarian imperatives of the twenty-first century, which demand cooperation on a global scale equivalent to the Marshall Plan of the twentieth.

There is an urgent need to energize preparatory discussions toward the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries scheduled for 2011 and to build momentum toward the achievement of the MDGs. And we must construct tightly knit safety net systems to protect the most vulnerable members of global society beyond 2015, the target date for the MDGs.

"The bottom billion" [31]--the poorest of the poor in fifty-eight countries, who have long been left behind by global economic growth--were one focus of debate at the UN last year. The stark disparity in the value of human life and dignity, virtually predetermined by where one is born, is an unconscionable injustice in global society that must be corrected.

If we are to lay any claim to human dignity--to manifest the feelings of compassion that Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) assures us were at the heart of even the earliest human communities--we must take steps to remedy this situation.

Nobel laureate in economics Amartya Sen has astutely pointed out that "[P]overty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes." [32] For people in the bottom billion, what is urgently needed is the kind of support from the international community that will empower them to take steps out of difficult and often degrading circumstances.

Japan was able to make a rapid and remarkable recovery from the devastation of defeat in World War II. It is my earnest hope that Japan will put this experience to good use, demonstrating active leadership in the effort to establish, as a global common good for the twenty-first century, the right of all people to live in peace and humane conditions.

Shared efforts for nuclear abolition

The third pillar I would like to discuss is the creation of international frameworks that facilitate the sharing of efforts for peace toward the abolition of nuclear arms.

I would first like to urge the U.S. and Russia, which between them account for 95 percent of the world's nuclear arsenal, to immediately resume bilateral talks on nuclear disarmament.

We must always bear in mind the fact that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) does not give the five nuclear-weapon states the right to retain their "special" status indefinitely.

Regarding the significance of Article VI of the NPT, which sets out the obligation for good faith negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament, I would like to quote remarks made last year by Judge Mohammed Bedjaoui, who served as the presiding judge on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) when the court issued its advisory opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons in 1996.

Good faith is a fundamental principle of international law, without which all international law would collapse. [33]

Good faith requires each state party to take, individually and in concert with every other state, whether or not party to the NPT, all positive measures likely to bring the international community closer to the purpose of the NPT, nuclear disarmament. [34]

The credibility of the NPT depends ultimately on the good faith actions of the nuclear-weapon states. And thus, to use the words of Judge Bedjaoui, "A manifestly unjustified breaking off of negotiations is radically incompatible with good faith." [35]

For two consecutive years, former secretary of state Henry Kissinger and other prominent U.S. political figures have been calling for a world free of nuclear weapons, and there has been increasingly active discussion within the nuclear-weapon states themselves regarding nuclear disarmament.

During his presidential campaign last year, then-Senator Obama stated: "[W]e need to work with Russia to take U.S. and Russian ballistic missiles off hair-trigger alert; to dramatically reduce the stockpiles of our nuclear weapons and material...." [36]

As for Russia, President Dmitry Medvedev has stressed the "exceptional importance" [37] his government places on concluding a new, legally binding Russian-American agreement to replace the START 1 (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) that expires in December 2009. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin also expressed his support for nuclear disarmament by stating: "We should close this Pandora's Box." [38]

We cannot afford to waste this momentum. I call for the prompt holding of a U.S.-Russia summit to discuss bold new nuclear arms reductions. If the two nations could reach a basic agreement, this would clearly demonstrate to the world their commitment to disarmament ahead of the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

In concrete terms, the two countries need to conclude a new nuclear disarmament treaty that will make far deeper cuts than those realized by START 1--working, for example, from proposals floated by the Russians in 2000 for mutual reductions in strategic arsenals to around the 1,000-warhead level.

In addition, the two countries should make immediate efforts to address long-pending issues such as U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the initiation of talks on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT).

Then, building on a U.S.-Russia consensus, a five-state summit for nuclear disarmament, including the other nuclear-weapon states and the UN Secretary-General, should be convened regularly to start drawing up a roadmap of specific measures to fulfill their disarmament obligations under Article VI of the NPT.

Only when the nuclear-weapon states firmly set into motion good faith efforts toward disarmament will it be possible to obtain commitments from countries outside of the NPT framework on freezing nuclear weapon development programs and embarking on disarmament.

A parallel challenge that needs to be pursued is that of a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC), which would comprehensively prohibit the development, testing, manufacture, possession, transfer, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons. A Model Nuclear Weapons Convention was drafted through the initiative of NGOs and submitted to the UN by Costa Rica in 1997; a revised version was circulated as a UN document in 2007. Last year, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon added his voice, urging governments to consider an NWC.

The policy of deterrence, to which the nuclear-weapon states continue to cling, has served as a justification for other states to seek nuclear weapons capability; it is vital to establish international norms that prohibit nuclear arms with no exception for any state.

My mentor Josei Toda (1900-58), the second president of the Soka Gakkai, condemned anyone who would use nuclear weapons, irrespective of nationality, in his declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons issued in September 1957, the year before his passing. He perceived the national egoism that underlies the drive to possess nuclear weapons as a dire threat to the future of humankind.

Concerns have been voiced that it will be difficult to obtain the participation of the nuclear-weapon states in an NWC, and that without this it would lack all substance. There is room for hope, however, as some governments, India and the United Kingdom among them, have now officially acknowledged, although with various conditions and reservations, the need to eliminate nuclear weapons.

U.K. and Indian Statements on Nuclear Weapons

At the Chamber of Commerce in Delhi, India, on January 21, 2008, Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the U.K. stated, "we must send a powerful signal to all members of the international community that the race for more and bigger stockpiles of nuclear destruction is over." Prime Minister Brown pledged: "We will be at the forefront of the international campaign to accelerate disarmament amongst possessor states, to prevent proliferation to new states and to ultimately achieve a world that is free from nuclear weapons."

Similarly, on June 9, 2008, in New Delhi, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made a statement at the International Conference on "Towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons," declaring that "India has no intention to engage in an arms race with anyone," and that "India is fully committed to nuclear disarmament that is global, universal and non-discriminatory in nature."

Despite the fact that it has yet to enter into force, the CTBT has led even states not party to the treaty to announce a moratorium on nuclear testing. Likewise, an NWC could function as an international norm exerting substantial influence on the behavior of the nuclear-weapon states.

Even if the nuclear-weapon states find it impossible to enter into immediate negotiations for an NWC, they can take actions on a regional basis that demonstrate a good faith adherence to the trend toward the outlawing of nuclear weapons. To this end, they could, for example, complete ratification of all outstanding protocols to Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) Treaties, and start addressing the establishment of an Arctic NWFZ, as I called for in my 2008 peace proposal.

Public support for nuclear abolition is gathering momentum. A poll conducted last year in twenty-one countries, including the nuclear-weapon states, showed that on average 76 percent of respondents favored an international agreement to eliminate all nuclear weapons. [\[39\]](#)

Drawing on the experience of the initiatives taken by civil society in the campaigns for the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which opened a new chapter in the history of disarmament treaties, the calls for an NWC provide the opportunity for the people of the world to join in solidarity to lay siege to the very concept of nuclear weapons.

It was a surge in international public opinion against cluster munitions, a singularly inhumane class of weapons, that led to the adoption of the convention banning them within an exceptionally short period of time last year. Nuclear arms are the most inhumane of all weapons; once again, the humanitarian imperative must prevail over the militarist principle.

With former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev among its signatories, Global Zero, a campaign to eliminate nuclear weapons worldwide, was launched in Paris in December 2008. Rooted in the awareness that the broad-based mobilization of international public opinion is essential if a world free of nuclear weapons is to be realized, the campaign is planning to convene a World Summit in January 2010, bringing together political and civil society leaders.

As a long-time advocate of disarmament summitry, I hope for a successful outcome. The Global Zero World Summit and the NPT Review Conference to be held next year can serve as a springboard for negotiations toward an NWC.

When I conducted a dialogue with the British historian Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975), I was deeply impressed by his statement that the crucial elements required for the resolution of the nuclear issue are powerful initiatives on the part of people and a "self-imposed veto" [\[40\]](#) on the possession of nuclear weapons on the part of governments.

An NWC would express and embody this self-imposed veto. Nuclear weapons epitomize an absolute evil that threatens humankind's right to live; they are incompatible with the interests not only of national security but of human security--the pursuit of peace and dignity for all people on Earth. This conviction must form the foundation for a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

I am convinced that such steps are indispensable to bringing to meaningful fruition the global sharing of efforts for peace--a commitment never to build one's peace and security upon the terror and misery of others.

There is continuing concern about the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea, and I believe that we must make tenacious efforts to reduce tensions and build confidence in their respective regions in order to put an end to the destructive spirals of threat and mistrust.

With Josei Toda's declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons as our guiding principle, members of the SGI have consistently engaged in efforts to encourage people to see the problem of nuclear weapons as their own. In 2007, which marked the fiftieth anniversary of his declaration, we launched the exhibition "From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit" as one concrete step to promote a People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition. Toward the same end, the Soka Gakkai Women's Peace Committee has produced a five-language DVD documenting the experiences of atomic bomb survivors, "Testimonies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Women Speak Out for Peace."

The year 2010 will mark the 110th anniversary of the birth of Josei Toda; an NWC would give concrete expression to his call for nuclear abolition. Working closely with other NGOs such as International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), who have launched the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), we are determined to galvanize global public opinion toward the adoption of an NWC, with particular emphasis on activities initiated by women and young people.

Envisioning the future

I would next like to make some proposals for strengthening the United Nations, which was created out of the experience of two world wars and must serve as the hub of humanity's common struggle to address the global problems I have discussed here.

The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations by the historian Paul Kennedy is a remarkable work that depicts what the world organization really stands for, illuminating its six decades of history. I was particularly struck by the fact that the history of the UN is narrated not just as one facet of international politics, but as "a story of human beings groping toward a common end, a future of mutual dignity, prosperity, and tolerance through shared control of international instruments." [41]

In other words, what Kennedy offers is a contemporary history of humankind with the UN as the pivot. I would go even further and say that this can be understood as a history of humanitarian competition--with all its challenges and tribulations--in pursuit of the realization of the ideals of the UN Charter.

The key question facing the UN as it seeks to fulfill the mission mandated in its Charter is, according to Kennedy: "Can we modify our fears and egoisms to the common good and our own long-term advantage? Much of the history of the twenty-first century may depend on our collective response to that challenge." [42]

When we consider the future of the UN from this perspective, the key issue is to build a robust partnership with civil society which would be a source of support and empowerment for generations to come.

As a step toward that goal, I would like to call for the creation of a post of under-secretary-general for civil society relations. This should be a permanent post specifically dedicated to enhancing the standing of NGOs within the UN system and the promotion of partnership with them. The under-secretary-general could, for example, participate in deliberations on primary UN themes such as peace and security, economic and social affairs, development and cooperation, humanitarian affairs and human rights to ensure that the views and concerns of civil society are represented.

A similar proposal was made by the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations chaired by the former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 2004. As the panel's report stressed, "Civil society is now so vital to the United Nations that engaging with it well is a necessity, not an option." [43] It is crucial that NGOs

People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition

With the motto, "Act to make a difference!" the People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition aims to raise public awareness about the realities of nuclear weapons and to provide a platform for people, especially youth, to take concrete action to rid the world of these heinous weapons. As the first step toward empowerment is awareness and knowledge, the Decade promotes three things: 1) Learn about the reality of nuclear weapons; 2) Reflect on means to abolish them; 3) Empower individuals to engage in dialogue and take action. Through its resource of educational tools, the Decade hopes to build a network of people around the world committed to creating a culture of peace.

For more information, visit:
www.peoplesdecade.org (site opens on April 2).

not be confined to the role of observers, but be recognized as indispensable partners in the work of the UN. The importance of their contributions is likely only to grow as the twenty-first century progresses.

We cannot allow the opening words of the UN Charter "We, the peoples..." to be a mere rhetorical flourish but must work to bring about a UN in which the concerns and lives of real people are always central. These reforms would constitute a step toward that goal.

Another proposal I wish to make is for the creation of an office of global visioning within the UN Secretariat in order to enable the international body to project and anticipate future trends and developments and focus its energies on these.

Commenting on a lecture I delivered on the theme of soft power at Harvard University in 1991, economist Dr. Kenneth E. Boulding (1910-93) noted the power of legitimacy in realizing integration. [\[44\]](#) Elsewhere he observed that while nation states derive their legitimacy from past glories, the UN must seek legitimacy in the vision it offers for humanity's future.

Constrained in part by its nature as an intergovernmental body, the UN has tended to react only after problems have arisen. Former UN under-secretary-general Anwarul K. Chowdhury, with whom I am currently engaged in a dialogue, has also expressed his concern that the UN lacks a section dedicated to anticipating the challenges that will confront humankind in the future.

I fully concur. It is essential that the UN be equipped with an organizational unit with think-tank functions capable of offering future-oriented vision and action strategies based on what the world will look like fifty or a hundred years from now. I would like to stress that ample attention should be paid to reflecting women's perspectives and the voices of young people in the operations of such a unit, and discussions should always have a focus on the empowerment of youth and children.

Strengthening of the UN has been one of the consistent research themes of the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research since I established it in 1996, the year after the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the UN. The Toda Institute will continue to develop research programs and activities that support the UN in this key function of identifying trends and developing a clear outlook for the human future.

Similarly, the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy will continue their efforts to pool the wisdom of humanity through active promotion of dialogue among religions and civilizations toward the resolution of issues that rank high on the UN's agenda.

Even when the challenges confronting us seem overwhelmingly difficult, the first step must be dialogue. Grounded in a faith in our shared humanity, frank discourse can transcend all differences of background, values and perspectives.

Dialogue has been at the very heart of the UN since its inception. According to Paul Kennedy, the UN was from the start likened to a three-legged stool: the first leg represented measures to guarantee international security, the second leg improvement of economic conditions globally, and the third leg enhancement of understanding among the world's peoples. He stresses, "[H]owever strongly the first two legs were constructed, the system would fold--would collapse--if it did not produce ways of improving political and cultural understandings among peoples." [\[45\]](#)

Enhancing mutual understanding remains an urgent challenge today. The UN designated this year as the International Year of Reconciliation, and 2010 the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures. This attests to the degree to which the UN values tolerance and dialogue as indispensable to truth and justice.

Such efforts are needed now more than ever, given the number of critical problems the world is facing. In addition to the recent bloodshed in Gaza and other complex conflicts such as those in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, globally the numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue to rise, and the threat of terror remains undiminished.

While the UN must play a leading role in tackling these entrenched problems, cooperation among states and tenacious diplomatic efforts are also crucial.

At the most fundamental level, we must take initiatives to disrupt the cycle of violence and hatred and, in its place, build a robust and pervasive culture of peace. We must ensure that every individual can enjoy in full the right to live in peace and dignity. For only this will serve as a solid safeguard for the world of the twenty-first century.

Dialogue: a source of new creativity

Dialogue presents infinite possibilities; it is a challenge that can be taken up by anyone--any time--in order to realize the transformation from a culture of violence to a culture of peace.

It was based on this belief in the power of dialogue that, during the period 1974-75 as Cold War hostilities were intensifying, I made successive trips to China, the Soviet Union and the United States. As a concerned private citizen, I met with top-level leaders in each country in an effort to reduce and defuse tensions. Since that time, I have sought to counteract the forces of division by building bridges of friendship and trust around the world.

Dr. Toynbee warmly encouraged me to pursue dialogue when I met with him in 1972 and 1973. Viewing human history in terms of "challenge and response" with a perspective spanning centuries or millennia, he focused on the possibilities of dialogue rooted in our shared humanity as the driving force for creating a new era.

Toynbee discussed the problem of human freedom in a lecture titled "Uniqueness and Recurrence in History" which he delivered in Japan in 1956. He noted that there appear to be laws governing the repetitive patterns in human history and extended this observation to the idea that civilizations have a life-cycle of approximately 800 years. However, he also emphatically asserted that certain human phenomena do not conform to such fixed patterns, concluding:

Of all human phenomena, the one for which no set pattern in fact exists is the field of encounter and contact between one personality and another. It is from such encounter and contact that truly new creativity arises. [\[46\]](#)

If we allow ourselves to become confined within a certain ideology, ethnicity or religion--caught up in the kind of spirit of abstraction I discussed at the outset of this proposal--we will find ourselves at the mercy of the ebb and flow, stranded in the shallows of history, unable to make progress. In contrast, if we search beyond the arbitrary, surface labels and engage with each other as individuals in dialogue, generating spontaneous and intense interactions of heart and mind, we will be able to give rise to the "deeper, slower movements" [\[47\]](#) which Toynbee considered to ultimately shape human history.

With this conviction, I have actively pursued dialogue with leaders and thinkers in various fields. Refusing to be deterred by the barriers dividing people, I have traveled between sometimes antagonistic societies, seeking to open lines of dialogue and communication where none had existed. Out of the desire to share the lessons learned through these dialogues as widely as possible, many of them have been published in book form (fifty thus far, with another twenty in preparation).

The Soka Gakkai was born in 1930, in the midst of global crisis. The SGI was launched in 1975, also a time of crisis. Since then, we have consistently promoted initiatives to support the UN and have engaged in steadfast efforts, as contributing members of our respective societies, to build a culture of peace through grassroots dialogue. These efforts draw inspiration from Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's vision of humanitarian competition and Josei Toda's frequently voiced call to eliminate misery from the face of the planet.

Bound by a shared commitment to humanism and the greater good, our citizens' network has now expanded to 192 countries and territories around the world. The prospect Josei Toda shared with me in the course of our interactions--that the Soka Gakkai would develop into a magnificent vehicle for nurturing and empowering people--is steadily becoming a reality.

Aiming toward the eightieth anniversary of the Soka Gakkai and the thirty-fifth anniversary of the SGI in 2010, we are determined to continue working in solidarity with people of good will everywhere toward the goal of a new era of peace and human flourishing.

Notes

- 1 Iwai, "Shihonshugi."
- 2 Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society*, 117.
- 3 Ibid., 116.
- 4 Ibid., 116.
- 5 Ibid., 3.
- 6 Ibid., 1.
- 7 Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations*, 45.
- 8 Reich, *Supercapitalism*, 89.
- 9 Ibid., 56.
- 10 Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society*, 176.
- 11 Samuelson, "Great Expectations."
- 12 Aitmatov and Ikeda, *Oinaru tamashii no uta*, 81.
- 13 Attali, *Une brève histoire de l'avenir*, 9.
- 14 Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, 280.
- 15 Makiguchi, *Complete Works*, 2:399.
- 16 Nye, *Soft Power*, x.
- 17 Makiguchi, *Complete Works*, 2:399.
- 18 Ibid., 402.
- 19 Gorbachev and Ikeda, *Moral Lessons*, 3. (c.f. Chaliapin, *Man and Mask*, 292-93.)
- 20 Marcel, *Man Against Mass Society*, 199.
- 21 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 309.
- 22 Nichiren, *Nichiren Daishonin*, 564.
- 23 Makiguchi, *Complete Works*, 1:28.
- 24 Ibid., 23.
- 25 Ibid., 17.
- 26 Ikeda, *A New Humanism*, 93. (c.f. Stancu, *Barefoot*, 266.)
- 27 Obama, "Inaugural Address."
- 28 Ban, "Fighting Climate Change," 23.
- 29 G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit, "Global Food Security."
- 30 Zoellick, "Letter to Prime Minister."
- 31 Collier, *The Bottom Billion*.
- 32 Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 87.
- 33 Bedjaoui, "Steps Toward a Nuclear Weapons Convention," 17.
- 34 Ibid., 20.
- 35 Ibid., 21.
- 36 Obama, "New Strategy for a New World."
- 37 Medvedev, "Speech at World Policy Conference."
- 38 Timesonline, "Putin Tells Britain."
- 39 Global Zero, "100 International Leaders Launch."
- 40 Toynbee and Ikeda, *Choose Life*, 194.
- 41 Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man*, xv.
- 42 Ibid., xvii.
- 43 UN, "We the Peoples," 9.
- 44 Boulding, "*Chikyu runesansu*."
- 45 Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man*, 31-32.
- 46 Toynbee, *Rekishii no kyokun*, 79-80.
- 47 Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, 213.

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