

Message for G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit
World Conference of Religions for Peace
July 2, 2008

With the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit commencing on the seventh of this month, it is my hope that we as representatives of the world's religions, who have gathered here in Sapporo, will be able to take a stand in speaking out to the summit leaders, as well as to the rest of the world, in realizing world peace and overcoming various global problems. The role of religion for this purpose is not as clear as that of economics or military. However, it is religion that supports the foundation of human life and carries a great deal of influence within our society. If we mishandle our role, we would be adding fuel to the fire of conflict.

We must, therefore, humbly recognize the past mistakes of our religious institutions and make efforts to prevent any future conflicts by following the aims of each of our religious traditions. At the same time we must make sure that religion is not misused politically. It is also our duty to provide leadership for a life of moderation that enables all life, from humans to flora and fauna, to be cherished and to live peacefully.

First of all, I would like to call attention to the need for a set of ethical values which can be shared by religious and non-religious people. When it comes to conflicts, people's attention is often focused on the religious differences among the involved parties. However, many religions can share in most of the ethical values for living in the world.

An example of such ethical value is the "Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities" issued by the InterAction Council, which is an international association comprised of former presidents and prime ministers of various countries.¹ It was founded on the suggestion made after his retirement by the late Japanese Prime-minister Takeo Fukuda, the father of the present Prime-minister Yasuo Fukuda.

The InterAction Council issued the "Universal Declaration of Human Responsibility" in 1997, based on the insights of various religious traditions and the wisdom of philosophers in history. It advocated non-violence and respect for life, justice and harmony, truth and tolerance, as well as mutual respect and cooperation. The declaration calls for the necessity of balancing freedom and responsibility, and rights and duties in the present era when many parties and nations are concerned only for their own benefits. While maintaining the distinctiveness of each religion, we must find common grounds in order to work together.

I would, next, like to consider matters from the perspective of actual reality. Although it is not easy to unite or realize cooperation among the various religions, I am convinced that we can find a way to transcend religious differences when facing real problems that are actually taking place in society. For instance, the great earthquake that occurred in Sichuan province in May generated in many people's hearts a desire to help, regardless of nationality or religion.

In the case of Iraqi War, however, those who are saddened by the loss of life on their side are indifferent to the losses on the opposite side, and in fact, some even applaud them. Yet many of the victims are innocent civilians and the weak. If we put aside the notions of friend or foe, we cannot help but to feel pain in our hearts when we witness this horrible reality. We must start by viewing reality, such as disasters and conflicts, and famine and hunger, without any prejudice.

It is a fact that those who are powerless and the most vulnerable sometimes protest by taking extreme measures, which only delays in finding solutions. And the plants and animals do not even have ways to protest the damages they incur. Thus, we as religious leaders must take the lead in realizing this tragic reality, while political and business leaders must admit the truth even if it is to their disadvantage for them to do so.

In Japan, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were devastated by atomic bombs, but rather than seeking revenge, a broad-based anti-nuclear movement was born. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still continuing this movement by leading the Mayors for Peace, which is promoting the “2020 Vision Campaign” to eliminate nuclear weapons by the year 2020.² Today, most of the southern hemisphere is already nuclear weapon free.³

At the 8th World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace convened in Kyoto two years ago, the delegates issued a statement called the “Kyoto Declaration on Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security.”⁴ The statement emphasized “shared security” because placing effort only on protecting one’s own life would merely make the world more insecure. Therefore, the statement addressed issues such as poverty, starvation, and diseases like HIV and AIDS as serious problems, as well as violent acts themselves. It also calls for us to acknowledge our common “vulnerabilities” and our shared responsibility in responding to them. The issues of global environment and nuclear weapons, in particular, are deeply related to the attitudes of each religious person, because on these issues we have a common responsibility to our descendants that transcends national boundaries.

When observing the tragic events of the world from a Buddhist viewpoint, we sense a deep connection between these matters and human greed. Without desire, it would be impossible for humans to live and for the world to develop. However, if some indulge excessively in their desire – which is called “greed” – conflicts arise among people and also lead to environmental pollution and destruction of plants and animals. Humans are, indeed, part of the intricately interrelated global network!

I would like to conclude my message with the words of Sakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism.
“Everyone fears violence, life is dear to everyone.” (*Dhammapada* 130)

OHTANI Koshin

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, InterAction Council 1997 <http://www.interactioncouncil.org>

² <http://mayorsforpeace.org/jp>

³ Non-profit Institution Peace Depot <http://www.peacedepot.org>

⁴ <http://www.wcrp.or.jp/wcrp/generalassembly.html>