



The Japan Conference of Religious Representatives

Hieizan's Message of 2017

This year commemorates the 30th anniversary of the Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei, the Interreligious Gathering of Prayer for World Peace. In August 1987 we people of faith, ignored the invisible barriers of religious differences and gathered on Mt. Hiei for the first time, to pray together for world peace. We succeeded in continuing in the open-minded spirit of the first “World Day of Prayer” held in Assisi, where leaders of world religions had gathered in October of the previous year. Since that time, numerous gatherings of similar intention have been organized around the world by people of faith who share this same spirit. The idea and practice of interreligious prayer, dialogue and cooperation have spread. We participants of this 30th Anniversary of the Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei send out the following heartfelt message with sincere prayers of good intention.

We would like to express our serious concern that currently, the world is dominated by exclusionist policies and is fractured by serious confrontations. In the past, natural disasters threatened to throw us into despair, for example with the earthquakes and tsunamis in 2004 in Sumatra-Andaman, and again in 2011 in northeastern Japan. At those times, governments and international organizations, as well as volunteers and people of faith from both within and beyond the affected areas came to the aid of those in need. The devotion and solidarity we witnessed at that time are still fresh in our memory. We were feeling hopeful about humanity.

Since that time, however, terrorist attacks have been perpetrated in many places such as Europe, and have even targeted spots of recreation and relaxation. Those attacks were aimed not only at governments or public

institutions, but also at innocent citizens. The attackers seem to express resentment toward the glorification of ravenous consumption in modern civilization. In the Middle East and other areas, battles and air raids have continued for many years, with great cost to people in the area, many of whom have been forced to become refugees. Despair pervades in communities where the inability to stop terrorism, and sometimes violence on the part of their own governments, has worsened.

As people of faith, we cannot allow violence that takes the precious gift of life lightly, under any circumstances. We must never forget the hardships of people marginalized and oppressed in our unequal societies. We resolve to build strong connections with civic society in order to realize a society without discrimination or injustice. As people of faith, we must be aware of this responsibility.

In considering respect for life, we must realize the importance of environmental issues. The earth nurtures all life. The earth has fallen victim to the greed of mankind. If we do nothing, climate change will accelerate beyond a point of no return. We would like to issue a grave warning in this regard.

In addition, we must promote the abolition of nuclear weapons even more strongly now, while the remaining victims of World War II nuclear attacks are still living and can rejoice in the news of a ban. The human race has experienced disasters and environmental contamination from nuclear accidents not once, but several times. We must become aware of the limits of nuclear energy and how it will burden future generations. Because of the issues with its waste, we maintain that there is no future for nuclear energy.

We must acknowledge the systemic political and economic problems indirectly jeopardizing our precious lives today. In recent years, in combination with economic mechanisms, science and technology have fueled people's desires. Profits and market gains have priority over human welfare. For example, although genetic modification is advancing, there are serious concerns about how it may alter our species. Our ethical consciousness has not caught up with developments in science and technology. This has become

even more true in the world after nuclear development. Thus, because priorities are with profits, directing science and technology toward the welfare or benefit of the human race has become even more difficult. We demand the development of science and technology be in accord with the ethics and wisdom of world religions.

In 2015 the United Nations unanimously adopted “Sustainable Development Goals.” They began taking various steps and have committed to focusing on these goals for a period of 15 years, showing their strong sense of crisis and the belief that the world may be unsustainable if no measures are taken. This also shows their strong determination to change the world. The policy of “not leaving any individual behind” during the process of these efforts is in complete alignment with our attitude as people of faith. Thus, we strongly support the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.

A primary focus of these goals is aiming for high-quality equal education for all. We regard education as the first step of character building, indispensable to the foundation of peace of mind. Educational foundations nurtured in tandem with religious ones are essential to building an exuberant humanity filled with love and good will and in correcting the distortions of justice and lack of ethical perspectives that threaten peace. Education and religion provide the training needed to control immoral or unethical desires. We maintain this is the area we religious communities are best at and the one in which we can provide the most support and cooperation. Concretely, we will be responsible for engaging with and patiently persuading any religious community that forces traditional conventions to obstruct equal education or the values of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.

Until now, most countries have coordinated solutions to the problems facing mankind by following various treaties and guidelines created by international institutions such as the UN. However, even within developed countries inequality has become a serious problem due to structural economic changes. More countries are now asserting egocentrism over international solidarity. However, we should not forget that the prosperity developed countries enjoy could not have been achieved without the labor and resources from developing countries. When we think about peace, what

is vital is to accept others and have consideration for persons in positions less advantaged than our own.

Thirty years ago, in Hieizan's message of 1987, we recommended to the world that religious people create "preferential options for the poor." However, we must be honest and admit that we have not done enough to meet our obligation. Therefore, we now renew our resolution to strengthen solidarity among people of faith and pledge to dedicate ourselves to world peace, following the spirit of "selfless devotion to the service of others."

As is well documented, marginalization, hatred and the ruthless elimination of people with different views only produce more conflict. We strongly assert that the shortcut to peace is patient dialogue and continued efforts to accept others. Finally, we pledge both to take action and to continue to pray to our Supreme Beings for the most beneficial outcomes for our efforts toward world peace.

August 4, 2017

From all the participants of the Interreligious Gathering of Prayer for World Peace.