

SGI and ICAN: Friendship and Collaboration

Soka Gakkai International (SGI), an international partner of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) since 2007, would like to wholeheartedly congratulate ICAN on their receiving of the Nobel Peace Prize 2017. In so doing, we offer this brief reflective account, looking at the past decade and at how SGI and ICAN have worked together toward our shared aim of nuclear abolition, and at how we have developed “a partnership underlined by friendship.”

The partnership between SGI and ICAN can be traced back to a long-time friendship and cooperation between SGI and IPPNW, which in turn stemmed from a friendship between SGI President Daisaku Ikeda and IPPNW Co-President Bernard Lown. Amidst their discussions they had agreed to initiate a collaborative endeavor toward their shared goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons. In September 1989, following such agreement, SGI and IPPNW cosponsored an exhibition titled *War and Peace* at the UN Headquarters in New York, in cooperation with the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs, and this was the first collaboration between these two organizations.

SGI has since engaged with ICAN in various collaborative projects and activities to raise global public awareness of nuclear weapons over the years. For example, we worked together to produce educational materials such as *Testimonies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Women Speak Out for Peace (2009)*¹, a DVD set of short interviews with women hibakusha, and also on an awareness-raising exhibition titled *Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons (2012)*², which has become a key educational tool in SGI’s global nuclear abolition efforts up until today. This exhibition was shown at the ICAN-organized Civil Society Forum which was held prior to the Oslo Conference in 2013 and at numerous other occasions spanning 81 cities in 19 countries around the world. In addition, following the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in July 2017, SGI in cooperation with ICAN produced and released the animation *Reshape History*³ as a tool to promote and raise awareness of the TPNW in order to gain wider acceptance and support for it from the general public.

In parallel with the contributions being made at the level of global public awareness-raising, SGI and ICAN also collaborated on international policy-making processes. ICAN took a lead role as a representative of civil society at the three international conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons (Oslo, 2013; Nayarit, 2014; and Vienna, 2014), the UN open-ended working group, and the UN negotiations on the TPNW. SGI, as an international partner of ICAN, attended and worked together with ICAN to make positive contributions to the debates as a Buddhist faith-based organization through addressing the conferences directly.

SGI has also been making efforts as a “faith communities member.” Based on the belief that the issue of nuclear weapons has an ethical and moral dimension, and that people of faith should play a proactive role in dealing with this issue, SGI has been working hard to strengthen solidarity and form consensus amongst faith communities around the world by issuing interfaith statements. These activities have consequently helped to contribute to the broadening of constituencies being engaged in the movement of ICAN.

SGI has also worked to ensure that the role that young people play in the movement for nuclear weapons abolition is recognized. In August 2015, an International Youth Summit for Nuclear Abolition was held in Hiroshima organized by a steering committee consisting of many organizations including SGI and ICAN. 30 young people representing various peace organizations from 24 countries attended the summit and discussed the issues, and called for further action toward the realization of a world free from nuclear weapons. As a follow-up, an international youth network named Amplify was launched the following year.

The challenge facing nuclear weapons abolition has now entered a new phase thanks to the adoption of the TPNW at the UN and the conferment of the Nobel Peace Prize 2017 to ICAN. Our next immediate challenge is now to inform and convince as many people as possible of the TPNW and to explain why it is relevant in order to win and strengthen broader support for the treaty in a more universalized way. Peace and disarmament education holds the key in this regard. This is where civil society is expected to play a role. In this sense, the collaboration between ICAN and SGI will only continue to be strengthened as we work together in our shared hope toward such a noble goal.

¹ SGI. 2009. “Testimonies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Women Speak Out for Peace.” April 2009. <http://www.peoplesdecade.org/decade/testimonies/>

² SGI. 2012. “Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons.” August 2012. <http://www.sgi.org/in-focus/2012/eyt-world-free-nuclear-weapons.html>

³ People’s Decade for Nuclear Abolition (website). *n.d.* Accessed November 7, 2017. <http://www.peoplesdecade.org/>