

The 40th Soka University, the 28th Soka Womens Junior College
graduation ceremony congratulatory address March 20, 2014
Be Students of Life, and Teachers of Peace

Óscar Arias Sánchez

Esteemed faculty, graduates, and families:

Friendship is one of the most beautiful and mysterious secrets in life. It takes people as different as can be, and ties them together with an unbreakable bond. It can unite us across divisions of age, gender, race, nationality and class. And it has united a young man who grew up among the seaweed farms of Tokyo, with a young man who grew up among the coffee fields of Costa Rica. I am honored to call Daisaku Ikeda my friend, and to have had several opportunities over the years to benefit from his support, inspiration and collaboration. In the universe of human accomplishment, art, philosophy and wisdom, the nation of Japan is one of the brightest galaxies in the firmament; Daisaku Ikeda is one of the brightest corners of that galaxy; and in the remarkable constellation that is his life work, Soka University, without any doubt, is one of the brightest stars. I am honored to have been invited to visit, once more, this extraordinary place, a beacon of peace and progress for the world.

At first glance, one would say that my friendship with your founder is not based on a shared nationality, or a shared language, or a shared job. But in a way, it is based on all those things. Our friendship is based on the shared job of making the world a more peaceful place. It is based on the shared language of peace. It is based on the shared nationality that belongs to all those of us who recognize that borders are only lines sketched by humans on the world map; who place our common identity as humans before all others; and who call ourselves citizens of the world.

This is a job, and a language, and a nationality that all of you join today when you receive your degree. The mission of this institution is one I wish that more educators would take on as their own mission. It is a goal that echoes a belief I have expressed for many years at schools and universities all over the world: the belief that if we are to create a more peaceful world, that process must begin in our classrooms and lecture halls.

Óscar Arias Sánchez (元コスタリカ共和国大統領)

The novel *“Love and Pedagogy,”* by Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno, tells the story of a father obsessed with educating a genius. This tragic work makes no attempt to hide its message. It shows us what happens when education is a simple compendium of facts without values, ideas without emotions. When we form scholars, but not wise men. When we form experts, but not human beings.

Dr. Ikeda has said that *“a great Human Revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a society and further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind.”* Education must create just this kind of human revolution, or it is not worth the effort. It must be the greatest agent of change in the destiny of humankind, or it has failed in its mission. Education is not an end in itself—it is a path. It is a way to overcome a kind of eternal adolescence that has struggled for millennia to reach maturity. It is not enough to say, *“We educate,”* or *“We have been educated.”* We must ask, *“To what end?”* We must ask what kind of society we are building through our arts and sciences.

When we look at today’s leading universities and colleges, it seems obvious that we are educating in order to create more prosperous societies. The twentieth century was, without a doubt, the most prolific multiplier of wealth in history. Hundreds of millions of people emerged from poverty in the last few decades. For the first time in memory, more than half of the world population belongs to the middle class. A planet that is growing at an exponential rate has managed, with surprising ingenuity, the lack of resources that this growth implies. Technology has connected every corner of the world. In material terms, we have never been better off. But we can see that this material development, while essential to human development, is not the only thing we need.

That same twentieth century, generator of fortunes and opportunities, was also the birthplace of unprecedented barbarity. Never before has humankind killed on such a scale. Never before has hate poisoned our words to such a degree. Never before has death reigned with such impunity over all races. Never before have so many tears been shed because of man-made tragedies. Never before have so many minds, so many ideas, been wasted in the name of torture and violence.

What was the role of education in all of this? How did the academy contribute to the decline of the human spirit? Were illiterates responsible for the worst genocide in history? Was ignorance or lack of access to the texts and thoughts of wise men to blame for the civil wars in which millions of brothers killed each other? Did we have too few teachers? Or could it be that we had too many soldiers?

The answer is that education was not enough. The world forgot to add an essential course to the curriculum that it teaches its young. The world forgot to add a course that brings heart

to our thoughts, and soul to our studies. That course is one that I like to think of as “*Peace and Pedagogy*.” And it is one that is found on the curriculum of Soka University.

Peace and Pedagogy means education for peace, and with peace. There is no point in forming learned men and women who do not understand the value of a life. There is no point in forming professors for whom war is justified. There is no point in graduating students who do not care if dozens of people die every day in the most cruel and absurd violation of human rights: armed conflict. No student, of any discipline, in any country, should be unaware of the cries of the victims of Iraq and Afghanistan, of Colombia and Sudan, of Somalia and Myanmar. No student, of any discipline, in any country, should be unaware of the fact that most casualties in wars today consist of innocent civilians, and not soldiers who have chosen to fight. No student, of any discipline, in any country, should be unaware that there are 17,000 nuclear warheads watching over us as we sleep, waiting for any moment of insanity or carelessness to strike. No student, of any discipline, in any country, should be unaware that the world spent 1.75 trillion dollars on weapons and war in 2012 alone, at a time when tiny fractions of that sum could eliminate preventable diseases, hunger, and illiteracy from the face of the earth. No student, of any discipline, in any country, should be unaware that 640 million small arms and light weapons flow uncontrolled across borders every day while we await the ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty that was approved last year by the United Nations.

One does not need to subscribe to any particular ideology to understand that this is absurd, and that it is entirely within our power as humans to change our course. If our universities cannot teach this, if our elementary and secondary schools fail to transmit this basic concern for human rights, then education fails as an instrument of peace. It fails as a way to heal the pain of humanity.

Educating for peace and with peace means recognizing all of this. It also means building in our classrooms the world we seek to see in the street. So often, our schools are home to a competitive, even violent environment. Students are allowed to carry out a war of words that is the prologue to a war of weapons. They are taught patriotic values that border on xenophobia. They are brought up in a world divided by borders and nationalities, where success is measured in triumphant military campaigns. Nowhere is this more clear than in my own region, Latin America, where students are better able to narrate the glories of soldiers than the accomplishments of those who have struggled for world peace. If we make peace an extracurricular subject, it becomes an extracurricular attitude. It becomes the strange whim of bohemians and dreamers, not the mission of academics and doctors.

This is the challenge that each of you will face when you leave this unique institution, where Peace and Pedagogy really is a part of the curriculum. You will face being written off as

unrealistic, naïve, or out of touch with reality. I have said that Soka University is a bright star in the human firmament. It follows that when you leave here, you will, at least sometimes, go from light into darkness. You will go from the fellowship of the student, to the loneliness of the peacemaker in a world that still prizes war. If everyone on the globe were represented by 100 people, only seven of those people would possess a university education—and of those seven, not even one would possess a degree like yours. Not even one would possess a degree that represents not only a grasp of facts and figures, not only mastery of data and disciplines, but also a profound commitment to nonviolence, to negotiation, to changing the misplaced priorities and twisted paradigms that have for too long cast a shadow over human history.

But that is no reason to fear. This is the quest for which your studies have prepared you. I urge you not to falter. I urge you not to fail. I urge you to look back, every day of your lives, to the determination you feel at this moment, and to draw from it the strength you need.

My friends:

It is in the spirit of friendship that I have come here today. The spirit of the friendship between our countries; the spirit of the friendship I share with your founder; and the spirit of the friendship that unites all those who seek peace. That is the friendship that will sustain you through the challenges ahead. Never forget the words of Mahatma Gandhi: *“A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history. Nonviolence of the strong is any day stronger than that of the bravest soldier fully armed or a whole host.”*

The determined spirits I see before me have been students in these hallowed halls. Now that you are moving into the world beyond, you must be more than that. You must be professors. You must prepare yourselves to bring these lessons of peace and pedagogy to a greater audience. When you pass through these doors, become students of life, and teachers of peace—to continue learning how to heal our planet, as you share the lessons you have learned here with the world.

Thank you very much.