

Address to the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony  
President Emeritus Rev. Nichiko Niwano

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Yoshimasa Hayashi, Mr. Kazuo Todani, Vice Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Rev. Masanori Yoshimura, President of Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, Ms. Ayaka Hashimoto, Attache of Communication of the Lebanese Embassy and the many distinguished guests in attendance today for the thirty-fifth annual Niwano Peace Prize presentation ceremony.

It is a great honored to present this year's Niwano Peace Prize to the Adyan Foundation, a Lebanese non-governmental organization. I would like to offer my most profound expression of respect to Ms. Nomfundo Walaza, Chairperson of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee, and to all of the committee members for selecting this year's recipient.

As Chairperson Walaza just told us in her report about this year's selection process, the Adyan Foundation, an organization located in Lebanon, has done pioneering work in peace-building and coexistence. The Adyan Foundation, which has given serious consideration to the circumstances in which religion has been used as "a tool of conflict," is making progress in promoting the correct understanding of one's own and others' religious faiths by increasing awareness of the fundamental teachings shared by all religious traditions.

Something that particularly caught my attention is the emphasis that the Adyan Foundation places on educational programs that stress diversity.

To quote from one of the Chinese classics, "For a one-year plan, plant grain. For a ten-year plan, plant trees. And for a lifetime plan, nothing is better than fostering the people."

In other words, from the long-term perspective, the most important

thing in nation-building is fostering the people.

I think that the Adyan Foundation is looking ahead and promoting educational programs not only for present-day Lebanon but for the Lebanon of twenty or thirty years from now.

Each of us learns things in youth—lessons that become etched into our minds—that wield great influence on how we conduct our lives later on. Furthermore, these lessons do not simply reside inside ourselves, because through our words and actions, they are communicated and spread to those around us. And with the passing of time, they may even be handed down to our children and our grandchildren.

Therefore, above all else, we should carefully examine the quality and substance of our systems of education.

In today's world, there is a growing trend toward justifying the position of one's own country, while intolerant education, critical of other peoples and other countries, is allowed to exist. It is important that we lend an ear to the history and way of thinking of each and every nation. Intolerant education can never bring about anything but an intolerant world and therefore, we must recognize one another's existence.

On this point, the Adyan Foundation has been addressing, in an extremely constructive fashion, the relationship between self and others and, in particular, diversity.

Diversity among people and in the community leads to enrichment, mutual understanding, creative development, and sustainable peace. That is to say, the Adyan Foundation has been striving for education that affirms that diversity is not a weakness, but a strength.

Moreover, the Adyan Foundation has been cooperating with Lebanese public and upper-level educational institutions on practical educational programs that are being implemented in the form of textbooks and official curriculum.

I would like to again express my profound respect for the splendid

work they are doing.

Each and every one of us has her or his own unique personality. Seen in relative terms, every human being has many differences, but fundamentally, each of us is a unique, irreplaceable existence, worthy of respect.

To illustrate this point, a tree has only one trunk, but as its branches spread out and its twigs become lush with leaves, finally some of its flowers bloom and even become fruit. The branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, and fruit have many shapes and forms and distinctive characteristics, but what brings them all to life is that together, they form a single tree.

This concept of life applies to human beings as well and therefore, we put our hands together reverently before each other and pay homage to one another. Buddhism teaches us the importance of transcending our superficial differences and praising each and every person.

Furthermore, among all of the things that exist in this world, there is not a single one that exists independently on its own, because everything is existing mutually in a state of interrelation. Therefore, we human beings are, of course, existing here and now thanks to the support we receive from sunlight, water, air, plant and animal life, and indeed, the totality of existence in the universe.

When we look squarely at this reality and see it just as it is, we can transcend merely seeing things from the perspective of one individual life and realize that everything belongs to one great life. This is the religious realization that ourselves and others are one and that we are all brothers and sisters.

I am describing the Buddhist understanding of things, which I am certain the members of the Adyan Foundation already understand, don't they?

In short, it is important that we are increasing, as much as possible, the number of human beings who have minds that show consideration for

others and who have hearts full of love and compassion. Such people are brothers and sisters who understand the other side's position and who are sincerely considerate of each other. They step into other people's shoes and share their suffering and sadness. And the foundation upon which we can cultivate such generous minds and warm hearts is peace education, isn't it?

Many people of different nationalities, ethnicities, and cultures are living on this earth. "Out of these differences are born our riches"—this is something I will think about in the same way as the members of the Adyan Foundation.

Encountering existence different from ourselves gives us the opportunity to offer something good to each other. By knowing the other, we can reflect upon ourselves. Learning about each other's merits, we can continue to better ourselves. By finding out what we have in common, we can cooperate with one another.

Some people are of the opinion that the more dedicated you are to your own religious faith, the more exclusive you become, but I have doubts about that. I believe that by deepening your own faith and arriving at its core tenets, you gain awareness of a universal hope and can share more with others. Then you are truly acknowledging the existence of others. I believe that this is the most authentic form of religious faith.

For some time, I have been closely watching the state of affairs in Lebanon. Through various inter-religious conferences, I have become friends with Lebanese people. I understand that Lebanon has an extremely complicated, difficult history.

In such circumstances, I am all the more deeply impressed and amazed that in the twelve years since its establishment, the Adyan Foundation has developed its programs to such a degree and spread them to neighboring countries.

This is proof that, under excellent leadership and staff, they are making real progress with their activities that are truly needed in Lebanon.

I am incessantly praying that the programs and activities of the Adyan Foundation will finally usher in an era of peace and coexistence in Lebanon.

I would like to conclude by expressing my hope that today's ceremony will become the opportunity for the goals and activities of the Adyan Foundation to be shared by as many people as possible, and by offering my heartfelt prayers that all of the members of the Adyan Foundation will, in good health and with the same vigor, continue their activities in the future.

Thank you very much.