

32nd Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony Address

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I would like to sincerely thank Mr. Shin'ichi Yamanaka, Japan's Vice Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; His Excellency Godwin N. Agbo, Nigerian Ambassador to Japan; Mr. Hidetane Hozumi, Chair of Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, and our many distinguished guests, for attending today's presentation ceremony of the thirty-second Niwano Peace Prize.

We are greatly honored to present this year's Niwano Peace Prize to a pastor of the Nigerian Pentecostal Church, the founder and president of the "Women Without Walls Initiative," Reverend Esther Abimiku Ibanga.

I think that the name of Rev. Ibanga's organization, "Women Without Walls Initiative," has a wonderful meaning.

In this world, there are differences of nations, peoples, religions, history, culture and language, and in not a few cases, they become "walls" and cause friction.

However, Rev. Ibanga said, about these mutual differences, that,

"As God has given each and every one of us some 'difference' so that we can develop all of the dimensions of wisdom, our differences are manifestations of God's grace."

Based on her firm religious faith, and desiring that the spirit of the sacrifices made by women and the loving-kindness of mothers be positively reflected in a process of peacemaking, she is the splendid symbol of the Women Without Walls Initiative.

As was explained earlier, in Nigeria, the civil strife coming from religious differences has devolved into a cycle of brutal fighting. The extremist group "Boko Haram" has been abducting large numbers of women and children, which has become a grave social crisis.

The people of Nigeria are spiraling into a whirlpool of fear, hatred, and a fervent desire for revenge. They do not know when the next tragedy will occur, and the current situation is volatile.

In these circumstances, the Women Without Walls Initiative has employed completely nonviolent means to promote its programs, including peaceful resolution in conflict-affected communities, assistance to internal refugees and the impoverished, and training women to work for peace.

Rev. Ibangá says that, "Loving all people is my duty as a pastor." She has done extraordinary work to build a society in which people can, without friend or foe, transcend their differences and live together, and for that I would like to again express my profound respect.

An ancient Buddhist scripture, the Dhammapada, tells us that "Responding to hatred with hatred, the cycle will never end. By compassion alone does it end, and this is an eternal truth."

History proves that retribution provokes further retribution. As it only increases hatred and deepens bitterness, this chain reaction continues endlessly.

The mindset of retaliating "for what has been done to me" is particularly strong among men. And speaking in very general terms, that trend is certainly apparent.

Therefore, I think it is certainly no exaggeration to say that the wisdom and hard work of all of the female members of the Women Without Walls Initiative will go on to change the world, because it represents something pivotal.

I am reminded of the following passage of Buddhist scripture from the Suttanipada:

"Just as a mother will risk her own life to protect her only child, you should think of all living beings in the same way, and give rise to the mind of unconditional love for them."

In other words, this expresses the spirit of compassion through the symbol of a mother's love for her child.

Women are endowed with plentiful spiritual riches, such as kindness, consoling, caring, tolerance, cooperation, and sharing. These female characteristics found in the religious spirit are the starting point from which we can transcend the hatred and resentment in the human heart and create a truly peaceful world.

And in fact, women support local societies and families, which are the foundations of humanity. When we receive life in this world, the first thing we come into contact with is our mother. Shakyamuni Buddha also stated that one important factor in developing human beings is “a mother’s inspiration.” We all receive tremendous influence from our mothers, which forms the basis of our personalities.

Recently, there has been an increase in the number of young people around the world who, feeling dissatisfied with the situation they find themselves in, have taken an interest in extremist organizations. The point of divergence, between whether or not they run toward extremism, and whether or not they condone the use of violence, may heavily depend upon their upbringing.

In the past ten years, half of the recipients of the Niwano Peace Prize have been women. Is this simply a coincidence? I do not think so. I think this shows that the members of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee are aware of just how important a role that women are playing in peace-building.

This is especially true of Rev. Ibanga, who has experience shouldering great responsibilities at the Nigerian Central Bank. In managing the Women Without Walls Initiative, she has shown herself to be extremely skillful in leading and negotiating. My fervent hope is that while she continues to put these strengths to good use, she will send out the “voice of women” and the “voice of mothers” for peace, not only in Nigeria, but throughout the world.

I would like to conclude my address by expressing my hope that today’s Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony will become the opportunity for as many people as possible to share in the purpose and programs of Rev. Ibanga, and that she will, in good health, continue to pursue her important mission with the same determination.

Thank you very much.