

## The 36<sup>th</sup> Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony Address

Nichiko Niwano

Honorary Chairperson, the Niwano Peace Foundation

I would like to offer my sincerest expression of gratitude to Mr. Makoto Fujiwara, Japan's Administrative Vice-Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Rev. Kōō Okada, member of the Board of Directors of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations; Monsignor Veceslav Tumir, Apostolic Nuncio Ad Interim of the Holy See in Japan; and the many other distinguished guests in attendance here today at the thirty-sixth Niwano Peace Prize presentation ceremony.

It is a great honor to present this year's Niwano Peace Prize to Dr. John Paul Lederach, who is professor emeritus of international peacebuilding at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies in the United States. I would like to express my profound respect to Chairperson Rev. Dr. Ahn Jae Woong and the entire Niwano Peace Prize selection committee, for making this year's selection.

We just heard from Chairperson Rev. Dr. Ahn about the reasons for awarding this year's prize to Dr. Lederach. As he mentioned, Dr. Lederach, firmly grounded in the nonviolent pacifism of his Mennonite faith, has developed his own theory of conflict transformation and applied it to actual conflict settlement and peace-building programs around the world.

In order to learn more about his theory of conflict transformation, I read the Japanese translation of Dr. Lederach's *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*.

The concept of conflict transformation proposed by Dr. Lederach is not only effective in addressing regional conflict and its attendant violence; it is also an inspired suggestion regarding the friction and discord that we sometimes see occurring between ourselves, one human being to another. I think this is an

important message for all of us gathered here today in this hall, one that we should engrave in our hearts.

Generally speaking, we use the phrase “conflict resolution.” Dr. Lederach, on the other hand, advocates “conflict transformation.” What, then, is the difference between “resolution” and “transformation?”

At the end of the Japanese translation of Dr. Lederach’s book is an afterword written by Rev. Atsuhiko Katano, director of the Mennonite Peace Missionary Center, that includes an example that is quite easy to understand.

Rev. Katano makes an example of a student who refuses to go to school and writes that the “conflict resolution” approach posits the question, “How can we make that student go to school?”

In contrast, the “conflict transformation” approach means that we avoid becoming narrowly fixated solely upon the event of truancy and instead, we take a broader look at issues in the background such as bullying, faculty, family dynamics, and systematic problems in society at large—that is to say, we holistically treat the event of truancy.

Without becoming obsessed with the matter directly in front of us, we should try to take the longest possible view of it. Rather than focusing closely on one aspect of an issue, we should try to see its many aspects and if possible, see it in its entirety. Instead of getting caught up in trifling details, we should, as much as possible, think about the essentials—this is an important perspective that we should never forget in any situation.

One element of Dr. Lederach’s concept of conflict transformation that really caught my attention is its understanding that “conflict and clashes are, for human beings, an entirely normal part of relationship dynamics.”

In my own Buddhist faith, there is the teaching, “each of the ten realms mutually contains the other nine.” This means that we human beings simultaneously possess all mental states, ranging from the mind like that of the Buddha to the mind like that of a demon in hell.

Intolerance toward other people and harboring violent tendencies toward each other can only be a problem inherent to our own selves. At the same time, Buddhism teaches us that from birth, all human beings have the ability to attain the Buddha's enlightenment and become aware of the truth of the universe, as we are all children of the Buddha—that is to say, the buddha-nature resides within us all.

Therefore, as long as we make no distinction between ourselves and others and see others' problems as our own, we can advance from a mind of resenting others, rejecting them, and attacking them to a mind that trusts others, is compassionate toward them, and respects them. These are concrete steps toward conflict transformation, which is firmly rooted in and supported by the spiritual power of the Mennonite faith.

After all, it is precisely because human beings have delusions and want to do something to resolve them that they aspire to supreme enlightenment. Buddhism expresses this through the teaching, "delusions are inseparable from enlightenment." In other words, the mind seeking enlightenment and the delusions blocking enlightenment are two sides of the same coin, as they are both intrinsically human functions. Thus delusions eventually become the catalyst that turn the mind on to enlightenment.

Regarding this matter, Dr. Lederach has commented that "social clashes can be called life's opportunities, as they are gifts that produce constructive change." I am deeply impressed by his words, which are as imaginative as they are full of loving-kindness, and I would like to once again express my profound respect for him.

I have heard that this is Dr. Lederach's first trip to Japan and that, quite surprisingly, he is quite interested in the poet Matsuo Basho as he himself writes haiku poems.

He has said that Basho's haiku, which discern the essential in the midst of complicated phenomena and express it in simple words, provide us with an important perspective on conflict transformation.

Now I would like to recite for you a haiku written by Dr. Lederach. The time was the 1990s, when he went to visit a conflict-torn region of Myanmar. He was deeply impressed by that land's rich history and long traditions, and struck by the importance of knowing the thinking and values of the people there. Indeed, he keenly felt that he must never try to change other people or force something upon them.

Here is Dr. Lederach's haiku:

**Don't ask the mountain to move,  
just take a pebble each time you visit.**

Looking at the Japanese translation of this haiku, I think I understand it.

His haiku succinctly expresses how very steadfast and patient he has been in pursuing conflict transformation.

In fact, to date Dr. Lederach has contributed to bringing reconciliation and peaceful settlement to conflicts in thirty-five countries.

Based on this experience, he has been appointed to professorships at University of Notre Dame and Eastern Mennonite University, among others. He has lectured extensively in European and Central American universities, educating many followers. He is also mentoring youth leaders in every region of the world.

Dr. Lederach has developed hundreds of programs promoting the concept of conflict transformation and at present, they are being implemented in thirty-five countries. All twenty-four publications he has authored aim at educating his successors in how to continue to pursue conflict transformation. He himself has said about this, "Instead of thinking of peace as a static, final state, we should think of it as something that allows the quality of our relationships to continually evolve."

Continuing to properly transform the conflicts and clashes that may occur in eras to come is the most realistic peace and, in order to realize this goal, we absolutely must raise human beings who, with hearts full of loving kindness, seek peace.

I hope that today's presentation ceremony will serve as an opportunity for many more people to share Dr. Lederach's vision and become engaged in his programs. I would like to conclude my address by offering my heartfelt prayers that Dr. Lederach will, in good health, continue to pursue his important work.

Thank you very much.