

Address At the Forty-second Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the many distinguished guests in attendance today for the Forty-second Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony.

It is a great honor to present this year's Niwano Peace Prize to the members of Musawah. I would like to express my deepest respect to all of the members of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee, especially Chairman Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, who were involved in the selection process.

Regarding this year's selection process, as was just mentioned in Chairman Shafiq's report, Musawah is a global movement, inspired by and grounded in the Islamic view of equality, that is building societies in which men and women are treated equally.

Through engaging in dialogue with leaders of different religious organizations around the world, I have come to feel strongly that at the foundation of all religious faiths are the same, shared universal truths.

True religions have in common the teaching that the world is one and that the lives of all living beings are equally sacred.

I once exchanged business cards with an eminent Japanese monk. His card had the following message on it: "There is no hierarchy in the beauty of flowers. Let's stop valuing people by class or rank."

I think that in this case, "flowers" do not simply refer to the flowers of plants, but to all people and all forms of life. In other words, there is no hierarchy in the sanctity of life. The essence of religion is contained in this short phrase, which deeply moved me.

The world of religion is a world of peace of mind, where we do not compare ourselves to other people or compete with one another. In this world, we are aware of each other's dignity—that is, the absolute value of every life—and so we press our palms together in prayer to revere one another.

And it is precisely because all of the members of Musawah are fully aware of this core tenet of religious faith that they are now advancing their movement to foster peaceful coexistence and support human rights.

In human society, women often play extremely important roles in keeping families together. Not only do they raise children and maintain homes, they also support the spiritual wellbeing of the entire family. All day long, they are constantly attentive to and pouring their energy into various tasks.

This kind of work is modest and often goes unnoticed. Society gives it scant recognition. But this noble endeavor of women is, so to speak, a great undertaking for humanity, and I believe we should sing its praises wholeheartedly.

Masahiro Yasuoka, a well-known authority on Eastern philosophy, once said something to this effect: “There is nothing in the world more cherished and worthy of respect than a mother’s virtues. Mothers give birth to children, raise them, and teach them. Mothers willingly take on hardships for their children’s sake and provide for their children with no expectation of reward. They grieve with their children and rejoice with their children, completely unaware of the ego.”

I think that all of you can deeply agree with Yasuoka’s words. In classical Japanese, the character for “love” (pronounced “ai”), is read “kanashi” (which means “sadness” in modern Japanese). This is because in ancient Japan, “love” was comparable to the feelings of a grieving mother who loves her children so much that she worries deeply about what might happen to them. In fact, feeling sad for others is said to be the most noble function of human emotions. We are taught that only when we can feel sadness for the people we are closest to, including our own children, as well as for the people in our local community, the world, and our country, can we truly become members of a civilized people and a civilized nation.

It goes without saying that women’s minds are full of kindness, warmth, consideration for others, and sharing. Such characteristics are extremely important in a competitive society that emphasizes productivity and efficiency. I believe that only when these virtues are fully mobilized can a society and a country be harmonious and spiritual

oases be built in local communities.

I therefore would like to again express my heartfelt respect to all members of Musawah, who are working tirelessly to create societies that truly value women and treat them fairly.

I hope that today's presentation ceremony will serve as an opportunity for as many people as possible to share Musawah's goals and join their programs. In closing, please allow me to offer my sincere prayers that the important work of all members of Musawah continues to meet with even greater success.

Thank you very much.