

Revitalise UN Through the Power Of Youth

By Daisaku Ikeda

Give me a lever and a firm place to stand," Archimedes is reported to have said some 2,200 years ago, "and I will move the Earth." His words go beyond an explanation of the principle of the lever. They indicate confidence in the potentialities of humankind, an assertion that, whatever crises we face, humans have without fail the wisdom to find a solution.

The metaphor of Archimedes and the lever was famously cited by US President John F. Kennedy in his 1963 address to the United Nations General Assembly: *"My fellow inhabitants of this planet: Let us take our stand here in this Assembly of Nations. And let us see if we, in our own time, can move the world to a just and lasting peace."*

The UN provides us with "a place to stand" for the great challenge of moving the Earth, using our commitment to the welfare of all humankind as a lever. Our world today is weighed down by a bewildering range of global issues - from climate change, economic crisis, poverty and wealth disparities, to terrorism and food shortages.

Maximising the potential

How do we begin to untangle this complex of interwoven problems? I believe that the fundamental avenue for resolving these challenges is maximising the potential of the UN, the framework of solidarity that was born out of the tragic experience of two world wars. What alternative site is there for pooling our resources, for transforming our way of thinking from the pursuit of narrow national goals to working together for the benefit of humanity?

This planet does not exist to serve the interests of any particular state. Rather, each state exists to contribute to the common interests of the planet. There is a great need for all nations to reaffirm this self-evident truth. Of course, the UN faces numerous problems. If it is to fulfil its promise, it needs to be powerfully revitalised and rejuvenated.

To function in the 21st century the UN must be supported by three pillars that transcend national borders: a shared sense of purpose, a shared sense of responsibility, and shared action.

I believe it is the creative engagement and innovativeness of young people around the world that holds the key to breaking existing moulds and affirming these principles. The world's youth increasingly have a sense of global identity. They are united by a common concern for the fate of our planet, and are connected and networked through new communications technologies.

Young people under 24, as defined by the UN as "youth and children" now constitute nearly 50 percent of the world's population. Youth represent a source of limitless promise and potential for change. If we neglect the issues facing us today, it is the next generation that will have to face the tragic consequences. No one has a greater right to speak out. And it is the special privilege



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of youth to rise beyond the narrow limits of short-term gain, to burn with the fervour of justice and strive toward long-term goals.

I believe it is vitally important that we establish further structures for the active participation of young people in UN deliberations and in the activities carried out by its specialised agencies around the world. Participation in decision-making is one of the key priority areas of the UN's agenda on youth. This year as many as 14 countries included youth representatives in their delegations to the General Assembly, a sign of hope and an acknowledgement of the valuable perspectives youth can bring. Such initiatives should be encouraged and expanded. *I would like to propose that steps be taken to enhance the status of youth within the structures of the UN. At present, there is a "focal point for youth" within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) that handles issues related to youth. This could be upgraded into an Office for Youth. Another suggestion would be for the appointment of a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, or of a UN High Representative for Youth.*

In recent years, there has been an increasing stress on the participation and role of youth at international conferences and meetings organised by the UN, as well as the Annual DPI/NGO Conference.

I would also like to support the strengthening of the annual Youth Assembly, which brings together representatives of the world's youth, so that its deliberations feed directly into the UN General Assembly. More opportunities must be created for young people to bring their concerns to the attention of the world's leaders. I have faith in young people.

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