

Presentation speech at Kansai Soka Gymnasium

By Hans Jørgen Vodsgaard, General Secretary, Nordic-European Academy
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Dear rector, dear members of staff and representatives of the students, dear members of Askov-Ikeda-Study Circle. Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour and joy for me to be present today in your beautiful and inspiring School. Thank you very much for the warm welcome from you all, and a special thank to rector for the wise and inspiring speech.

It gives hope for the future of a humanistic education.

Today, on the international agenda of education there is a lot of talk about the need of education and knowledge, but not so much talk of the need of enlightenment and wisdom. This is not a new tendency. Already 150 years ago, the American writer Walter Thoreau in his book "Walden" said

*"We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate."
Thoreau, Walden, 1854*

I am convinced that you and other Soka Schools have something important to communicate.

As I understand the Soka Gakkai humanistic view, education must not be seen as a means for the state or the market, but exactly the other way round. The aim is human education, enlightenment and happiness of the individual and his or hers ability to create value together with other fellow beings. And only from this starting-point can a real involvement and a real responsibility for the national and global community be developed.

At the same time Soka Gakkai maintains a general view of education, culture, society and nature, and a universal perspective of global citizenship that includes a vision of the future, where nations are competing not primarily in the field of economy, but in culture.

This is a much needed vision. Because the dominating views of education today, in Denmark, in Europe, in USA, and probably also in Japan are instrumental: Education is seen as a mean to secure economic growth; it is seen as human capital that can strengthen the competition of the countries at the global market.

The international agenda of education is today dominated by an imperative that we may call: *Adaptation to the needs of the new global economy.*

Confronted with this development, we need an educational revolution; we need the new paradigm that President Dr Ikeda with untiring energy has called for, a new paradigm, which he describes in his book "Soka Education" from 2001 in this way:

"what we need most, is a shift of paradigm from education for the sake of society to a society that serves the fundamental needs of human education"

This great vision for the 21st. century, in our point of view, carries a deep response to the visions of our mentor Grundtvig and his disciples, and we have much to learn from it. Because the Japanese tradition of Soka Gakkai is evidently more conscious of the global challenge than the Nordic Grundtvigian tradition has been, at least so far.

I think that one of the most interesting and encouraging phenomena happening right now is that a global civil society is being constructed right before our eyes. More and more NGOs are working from a global perspective when they deal with issues such as human rights, women's liberty, ecology, and social justice. The global civil society is creating new narratives, which seek to reframe human activity and civilization by law, rights and responsibilities that are worldwide in their scope and universal in their principles.

We need a new concept of learning which builds upon the reality that today the global and the local are interconnected and interdependent in ways that humanity has not experienced so far.

Here Soka Gakkai International in its development since the sixties has come much further than the Nordic Grundtvigian movement both theoretically and practically - as the leading global NGO-organisation working with soft power in relation to the agendas of the United Nations for peace, culture and education with the perspective of global citizenship.

Consequently, you must have a lot of pride and joy in your work in this inspiring and spirited Soka School.

Thank you very much for the invitation to come here. I do hope that I shall meet some of you at our Askov-Ikeda Summer schools in Askov in the years to come. I wish you all good luck in your endeavours and in your future life.