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Preface

The Argentinian Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, once said: “Energies, in a way or another, communicate with each other through speech and thoughts: we are part and we must acknowledge that a single drop of water is the whole river, and that the whole river is inside that single drop of water. This is the same for the meeting and the shared path among people and peoples: their cultural, religious and linguistic differences are the richness of diversity within unity”.

Daisaku Ikeda, who wrote a joint *Appeal for Resilience and Hope* with Mr. Pérez Esquivel, with whom he shares a deep and constant commitment to world peace, can be considered one of the real pacifists of our time, that lives sowing hope for the future and sharing his experience of struggle for a more equitable and peaceful world. Starting from his strong belief in the Buddhist message and taking into high consideration the role of the education of the younger generations, Daisaku Ikeda has dedicated his whole life to the great project of a world united in diversity, and capable of finding richness and beauty in the peculiar differences of the various cultures and peoples of the world.

For years, he has been trying to stimulate in governments and societies the awareness that we have the same problems everywhere and that we are part of a common home, which we must care for and protect for the good of all. Daisaku Ikeda's vast activity aims to promote intercultural dialogue and understanding that human beings and peoples are part of a whole,

which doesn't mean losing that identity that gives meaning and belonging.

Ikeda, as a Buddhist, seeks, in his spiritual dimension, to live and share Compassion, teaching a way to become like an only great human family, and to learn to share dialogue and freedom. For those who experience faith from the point of view of Christianity, the path is instead that of love for one's neighbour. For the Western political world, rooted in the values of the Enlightenment, the political influence of religious denominations is often viewed in a negative sense. Especially in the last twenty years, the West has entrenched itself in defensive positions against religious movements with political inspirations, afraid of the religious fundamentalism that is the cause of so many tragic events that have bloodied international politics.

Carretta believes that the future of humanity depends on the ability of governments and international organizations to guarantee peace. It is not a mere absence of conflict, but a permanent dynamic between individuals and peoples. Peace is also social participation, it is education as a practice of freedom, and it is realized when people stop being passive spectators to become protagonists and build their life and their history.

In his work, Carretta approached Ikeda's thought and work, his philosophy and his spirituality, exploring his life path in search of those numerous points of contact between the Eastern thought model and the Western point of view, which is more familiar to us. His analysis takes root from the historical study of Buddhism as a religious form carrying a pacifist political message, which materialized in the foundation of Nichiren Buddhism in the twelfth century and, finally, in the creation of Sōka Gakkai in the early twentieth century.

The figure of Ikeda is seen as a key element for the expansion of the Buddhist pacifist message at the international level, through his message of dialogue and education for Peace. With its Peace Proposals to the United Nations, the Sōka Gakkai International founded by Ikeda has proposed itself for almost forty years as a

religious institution that propose concrete solutions to the most urgent world problems. Carretta's study highlights Ikeda's early concern for international political issues that are currently extremely hot, such as climate change, immigration management, the dismantling of nuclear weapons, and the achievement of an international society truly capable of preventing conflicts and promote growth across the globe.

Concerned about the same issues, Carretta went deep into Ikeda's thoughts and his contributions to society. He believes that international politics need to go deeper into holistic thinking, in order to understand the unity of the various social forms present in today's civilization. Learning to recognize problems and to understand their extent, to respect human rights, to understand the need for dialogue, peace, global governance and an adequate management of the environment: these are very vivid themes in today's diplomacy, and ever-pressing problems in the world, which can find useful reflections and possible solutions in the SGI Peace Proposals.

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Introduction

This study aims to analyse the Peace Proposals of Sōka Gakkai International, a Japanese Buddhist lay religious organization. Founded as *Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai* (in English: “Value Creating Educational Society”) in 1930 by the Japanese educator Tsunesaburō Makiguchi with the aim of revitalizing the Japanese educational system, after World War II it rose from its ashes as a secular religious organization under the leadership of Josei Toda. Affiliated to the Japanese branch of Mahayana Buddhism, Nichiren Buddhism, the reborn Sōka Gakkai evolved between 1945 and 1970 into an organization that was not only religious but also politically committed and the bearer of the ideals of so-called “Engaged Buddhism”. For Nichiren Buddhist, all people have the power to lead lives of great value and creativity and to positively influence their communities, society and the world. Nichiren Buddhism stresses that the greatest fulfilment in life is found in working for the happiness of others. Through its international branch, the Sōka Gakkai International (SGI), the organization strives to contribute to world society in significant ways. Areas of focus span culture, peace activism, disaster relief, sustainability, and education. This transformation from a simple religious organization into a political actor at the world stage begone in the 1950s under Josei Toda’s Presidency, but reached its peak thanks to the organization Third President, Daisaku Ikeda. Rose to power in 1960 after Toda’s death, the then 32 years old Ikeda shaped the organization into a strong, adaptable NGO capable to adapt to both the Japanese context and the inter-

national one, with the aim to spread the innovative and renovative message of Nichiren Buddhism.

Under Ikeda's Presidency, the Japanese branch of Sōka Gakkai started its political venture, founding the Kōmeitō Party in 1962 that became in few years the third largest party in Japanese political system. Ikeda also succeeded in converting millions of Japanese families to his cause, transforming the small religious organization into one of the most important lay Buddhist movements in Japan. This exponential growth, which today sees around 8 million Japanese families linked to the Sōka Gakkai, put the secular organization in contrast with its ecclesiastical counterpart, Nichiren Shōshū. Between 1970 and 1991, the internal clash between Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū was consummated precisely because of the political and international aspirations of Daisaku Ikeda, who intended to transform the organization into an actor of global importance, capable not only of engaging in religious but also to contribute to the transformation of international society in a progressive, multilateral and peaceful sense. After a showdown that ended in a schism with the monastic counterpart of Nichiren Shōshū, the Sōka Gakkai ended up constituting a completely autonomous subject capable of fusing in itself both the religious inspiration and the desire to shape Japanese society and international according to the pacifist teachings of Nichiren Buddhism.

In 1975 during an international conference on the island of Guam, Ikeda founded the international branch of the association, the aforementioned SGI, with the dual aim of coordinating the various national sections of the organization outside Japan and actively engaging in the international arena. In 1983 the SGI obtained the status of an NGO officially recognized by the United Nations and became part of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Since then, the organization has been committed to shaping international society in an ever more pacifist and multilateral sense, sending Peace Proposals annually to recommend actions to be taken to resolve the problems faced by the international community.