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My Understanding of Peace and Conflict

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Summary:

- This paper is a transcription of Dr. Ogata's speech during a ceremony held at UPEACE headquarters in May 2017, during which Dr. Ogata was granted a *Doctor Honoris Causa* degree in recognition of his leadership and philanthropic efforts for Peace, with particular emphasis in Southeast Asia, as well as his extraordinary accomplishments as President of one of the preeminent international foundations in social innovation for Peace, the Nippon Foundation.

Ideas for peace



My Understanding of Peace and Conflict

Dr. Takeju Ogata is the current President of The Nippon Foundation, where he laid the cornerstone of the Foundation's international cooperative efforts by directing the creation of bi-national foundations between Japan and Great Britain, France, the Scandinavian countries, and the United States as its Director of the International Affairs Department before rising within the organization to become its President. Before that, he was Director of the General Affairs Department at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, where he guided its initial efforts as Director of General Affairs. There, he initiated and operated the Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund, the Sasakawa Central Europe Fund, the Sasakawa Pan Asia Fund, and the Sasakawa China-Japan Friendship Fund.

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I first visited the University for Peace 34 years ago. I have just seen the picture from 34 years ago and I feel very nostalgic about my previous visit to Costa Rica. As the person in charge of The Nippon Foundation, which currently funds the University for Peace's Asian Peacebuilders Scholarship Programme (APS), I would like to reflect on my understanding of peace and conflict. I will have to mention that, unfortunately, I am not a researcher nor an academic, so these reflections are not based on any academic research or studies. However, having worked in this international field for more than 35 years, I would like to share my thoughts based on my experience at The Nippon Foundation.

I sometimes ponder on whether conflicts exist in the world of wildlife and animals. Then I conclude that they must, as they need to protect their own lives. However, that is a very natural phenomenon as an expression of the right to life. I believe that the system and the figure of community are rather simple amongst wildlife. We human beings are one of the species that coexist in nature, but one that seems to take very different actions from others.

Ever since humans beings have possessed and learnt how to use fire and tools, we have always been working to improve these tools. Perhaps, the main objective to do so was so that our lives would be more convenient, to ensure a sufficient supply of food, they must have kept improving and inventing tools. I believe the same goes for farmers: upon the harvest season, differences in the quantity and quality of crops amongst the famers became the trigger for fights and conflicts.

In addition, in order to fight back in times of conflict, people started using tools for protection, although they were initially invented to save people's lives, not take them away. I believe society began with an equal organization, but as subgroups were formed within a community, this created disparity and hierarchy within society. Perhaps the procedure differed slightly, but I believe this is how nations were born. In other words, it has become normal for human beings to possess tools and weapons. Since they came to own weapons, human beings have not let go of them. This is an element that defines human beings.

A single person can never live on his/her own. Just like smaller species, such as ants, bees and monkeys, human beings exist within a community. The smallest unit of a society is a couple, whether it be man/woman, man/man, or woman/woman. A couple creates a family. A collection of families makes a village, a town or a city, which is the smallest administrative structure in Japan. Collective cities define a prefecture, which in turn, define a nation. Once communities are formed, various families are under the condition of coexistence. This means that each family that has different rules, must adhere to certain common rules within each community. However, even within families, there are different values and rules. If we see this on a bigger scale, such as on a national level, there are more levels of interactions with various stakeholders, whose interests will be very diverse.

As human beings, in order to keep the societal system running steadily, we must all be self-disciplined and, to a certain extent, make sacrifices. In other words, I believe we can only claim our rights when we clarify the rules and then fulfill our responsibilities to society. Therefore, in my opinion, a nation is society's biggest unit.

When we consider that the rights of human beings are granted by God, I can only conclude that perhaps we can only have one nation. However, looking at the way nations are composed, due to difference in cultures and civilizations, nations with different values exist. I believe that sometimes, these differences create misunderstandings and consequently, become a cause of conflicts. In addition, situations may become further complicated when religious elements are involved.

Please let me define a "nation-state". A nation-state is a political entity under which a relatively homogeneous people inhabits a sovereign state. In recent years the three main components of the concept are territory, people, and authority. What I would very much like to emphasize is that a nation-state has a responsibility to protect the lives and assets of the people who belong to its community. This means that, in order to fulfill our responsibility, we would need rules in the form of a constitution.

I have just mentioned that the nation-state has the responsibility to protect the lives and assets of the people in its community. Former President of the United States, Robert F. Kennedy, once mentioned the following idea, which has become iconic: the important thing is to ask not what a nation can do for its citizens, but rather what the citizens can do for their nation. I still consider this one of the most important messages that I have heard in my life. In order to maintain a nation, we need assets and funds. Shared facilities must be built, and the citizens' lives and assets must be protected. However, in order to do so, we must collect money. This is done through a taxation system. If nations didn't need to collect money to protecting their citizens from other countries, citizens' satisfaction would probably increase. However, this is an impossible reality in the current world.

It is a natural phenomenon that human beings create and belong to a community. In other words, human beings remain shaped by the communities that they belong to and the natural world in which they live. Human beings, as homo sapiens, evolved from apes, but unlike wild creatures and animals, we are under a mind in which we believe we can control and change the circumstances, even natural phenomena, by our own hands. I wonder to what extent human beings have become so, from my perspective, overconfident. I believe this to be due to the fact that God has given us skills for critical thinking and various egoistic feelings such as jealousy and a desire to conquer, as well as the fact that there is no critical real enemy against human beings on earth. Human beings, at some point, have entered the field of God. To me, it seems that they want to maximize their potential, or what I like to call "the power of God", even though they are aware that they are causing harm to others.

We have destroyed our environment, as well as extinguishing species. We are going against the law of nature without any hesitation, while simultaneously working hard trying to protect endangered and threatened species. We are even trying to revitalize our own species, that of human beings, through scientific and technological advancements. This is far beyond our capabilities, but rather in the hands and responsibilities of God. I have come to wonder since when and to what extent we have become so full of ourselves that we have started to

portray ourselves as magnificent. I believe we are getting to a point where we need to reevaluate ourselves.

Now, I would like to give a little thought to the concept of peace. When we look this word up in the dictionary, a few definitions appear: 1. A state in which calmness and quietness is remained; 2. A state without a war. On April 18, 2017, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence visited Japan. During his visit, he mentioned that “peace comes through strength”. I personally am not sure whether he used the word “force” or “strength”, but I think he might have meant both. If peace is defined by “a world without a war” and a “state of calmness and quietness”, I think it would be wise to aim for a society without weapons, which could also define peacebuilding. Please allow me to repeat that if we define peace as “a state without a war in which calmness and quietness remain”, this is a direct reference to a state in which weapons are eliminated. However, considering human characteristics and their essence, the elimination of weapons does not necessarily lead to the end of conflicts. This means that weapons will continue to exist unless conflicts and wars come to an end. Of course, wars and their outcome very much depend on whether or not weapons are used. However, in my opinion, human beings don’t let go of their weapons once they have them. Realistically speaking, it is impossible to eliminate all the weapons that exist in our society, as proven by our history over the past 3,000 years.

Eight years ago, when former President of the United States Barack Obama mentioned the elimination of nuclear weapons, we all thought it was possible. However, eight years later, nothing has changed and North Korea continues to produce nuclear weapons. While I do believe that temporary peace may be achieved, it is far from a real solution. Our world is still filled with those affected by war, who are often irrelevant ordinary individuals in the grand scheme of things. Of course, those affected by war are not limited to individuals within a conflict-ridden environment. Many people have lost their families, homes and way of life to natural disasters. I would say that it is pretty impossible to eradicate calamities completely. It may not even be possible to rescue every single individual who has been affected by such disasters. However, I firmly believe that we can at least extend our hand to those individuals. Our global

mission is to save as many people as possible by working together, hands together, with as many people as possible and in any way that we can.

The first chairman of the Nippon Foundation, Mr. Ryoichi Sasakawa, for whom I have the utmost respect, once said: “work for good – do not work only for your own benefit. Those who have the financial assets must use them for good; those who have the knowledge must share it for good; and those who are able to physically help others must do so for good. Even if you do not have any of these things, you must at least have a mindset to help others”. Our strength may be small as a single unit, but when we come together, this bigger unit can make a difference in the world.

It is this last point that I would like to emphasize in these pages. I am committed to continuing in my mission towards peace. However, and although my time on this earth is limited, I do not feel the need to rush through the time I have left. I believe the most important aspect of peacebuilding is working together, which is what I emphatically encourage you to do.

