

Remarks at awards ceremony of
Eisaku Sato Essay Contest

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Miss Sato, Mr. Matsukawa, Distinguished Winners of this year's Eisaku Sato essay contest, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It has become a very pleasant annual custom for me to have the opportunity to say a few words at this annual awards ceremony. From the United Nations University, including the members of our governing Council here with us tonight, I bring our heartiest congratulations to this year's prize winners.

The theme for this fifth annual Sato essay contest is, "How education should be oriented towards promoting international understanding and co-operation in response to the growing interdependence between nations." I think, Miss Sato, that this theme very much helps to keep alive the inspiring aspirations and dreams of your grandfather which were so fittingly recognized by his 1974 Nobel Peace Prize - a vision, put simply, that one day the world might be one.

It was H. G. Wells who remarked, early in this century, that "human history is a race between education and catastrophe - and I believe that need for learning and understanding lest we plunge into chaos and destruction has never been more compelling than it is today during our final few steps toward the end of the 20th century.

The question is, however, what kind of education and learning must we encourage to bring about the necessary degree of understanding for coping with the immense complexities of modern interdependence? Here I think the fact that this contest is open to essayists of all ages has particular pertinence (and, indeed, tonight's winners range in age from 24 to 60). For it emphasizes that, in a time of rapid change fundamentally touching all our lives, education must be a lifelong, ongoing process.

As the lacings of our interdependence grow tighter day by day, the modern world's swirling power configurations, restless upsurges of new values, and overnight obsolescence of the latest technologies demand our daily refreshment from many sources - not only lecture halls and textbooks.

While change is a constant companion everywhere around the world, it comes in many guises that vary locale by locale and culture by culture. The challenge to learning is really the challenge of these many faces of change that touch every facet of the global society. It goes far beyond the field of education proper, demanding the expansion of the learning capacity of the nation as a whole - and this is particularly true of prosperous nations like Japan whose international outreach is felt so widely.

If we are going to be able to survive in civility and harmony in this interdependent world, we will need much deeper levels of mutual understanding between all cultures. The new learning need of our interwoven planetary society is the need to think and feel globally - but within the context of one's own society and culture. This will very much call into play our capacity to listen and to relate to one another.

All of this means that we need to think about new modes of education, learning and sharing of knowledge - and this challenge is one to all of us. To paraphrase the old maxim, education is too centrally important to all our survival to be left to the educators. This is in no way to denigrate the efforts of hard-working and dedicated teachers, but only to enlist all of us in the lifelong necessity of educating ourselves.

I have only had the opportunity thus far of reading resumes of the prize-winning essays - but from them I can discern that the reasoning of the essayists about the importance of education for interdependence recognizes this central fact.

Let me, in conclusion, again congratulate the winners - for first prize, Ms. Okada, Ms. Siebert and Ms. Mochizuki; for second, Mr. Aikawa, Mr. Someya, Mr. Tezuka, and Mr. Yuzawa.

Each of tonight's first prize-winners has drawn on her own life experience to help make the point that this world must be one in human solidarity: Ms. Okada from her meeting with a young Cambodian refugee; Ms. Siebert from her cross-cultural activities which have shown her that we truly live in a "global village"; and Ms. Mochizuki who, as a teacher, has come to realize how much the world's problems are the responsibility of each and every one of us.

On a final note, I cannot help but observe that the three first prize winners this year are all women - which is perhaps not surprising with a theme which essentially asked the essayists how men and women might best equip themselves to cope with a rapidly changing world. It is increasingly recognized that women, in many societies and cultures, are key agents of social change - determining what is or is not acceptable. We do well to heed their voices therefore.

Thank you very much.

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