We are filled with the deepest pride.

For we are building a magnificent citadel of hope and truth more splendid than that of any monarch or ruler.

We have an incomparable sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

It is because we are living our lives in accord with the great law of the universe—

a law that even the most brilliant scholars cannot fathom.

And because we are striving tirelessly for world peace and the happiness of humanity.

Those who lack a guiding purpose are easily swayed; unknowingly they may lose sight of the difference between right and wrong, good and evil.

Dedicated to a great vow, our lives always brim with shining joy!

For we are surrounded by the love and appreciation of hardworking, ordinary people and showered with eternal accolades from the heavens—all far surpassing the adulation enjoyed by celebrities.

O how noble you are, as you work and strive to realize the goal of kosen-rufu true to the Buddha’s instructions!

The Great Teacher Dengyo
hailed those who seek and courageously practice the correct teaching and doctrines as the “treasure of the nation.” Likewise, he said, those who exert themselves in a single corner of the land illuminate a thousand miles, and this qualifies them also as the “treasure of the nation.”

This holds true even today. You are without a doubt the foremost “treasure of the nation” and “treasure of the world.”

Worthy men’s district leaders and noble women’s district leaders! How beautiful and admirable you are as you earnestly emulate the Buddha’s behavior!

True happiness is found neither in wealth nor in gaining social status; nor is it found in the superficial trappings of popularity or celebrity.

“It is the heart that is important”—this is the most essential truth of Buddhism. This is the fundamental principle of life and of human existence.

Nichiren Daishonin declared with affection and sternness to a disciple striving valiantly in Suruga Province: “I entrust you with the propagation of Buddhism in your province.”

He placed his confidence not in a priest but in a lay leader.

He put his faith not in a powerful figure far away but in a person of upright character residing in the local community.

Undertaking this mission set forth by the Daishonin, you are playing a pivotal role as district leaders. Your actions are those of Buddhas, praiseworthy beyond measure.

All of you are Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who have been entrusted with “your province”—or, in today’s terms, “your district”—directly by the Buddha of the Latter Day.

The Daishonin also says: “In this defiled age, you should always talk together and never cease to pray [to attain enlightenment].”

With strict compassion, he clearly states that the more turbulent and troubled the times, the more important it is for his disciples to gather together and talk with each other.

Encourage one another, he urges, and together triumphantly attain Buddhahood in this lifetime, together victoriously achieve kosen-rufu!

This is the essence of the harmonious body of believers, many in body but one in mind—so declared the Daishonin, solemnly leaving his words behind for posterity.

Our citadel of Soka perfectly embodies this fundamental teaching of Buddhism—a citadel in which our dependable men’s district leaders and our beloved women’s district leaders shine as the leading lights.

The German poet Goethe, who made such a fine and vibrant contribution to his own tempestuous times, said: “Stand firm where you are—a maxim...more necessary than ever.”

I have loved this quote since my youth. When I shared it with my mentor, Josei Toda, he declared that it resonated with the spirit of Buddhism.

Mr. Toda said: “We live in a tumultuous age, in do-or-die times. Those who build a solid foundation will succeed. Those who strengthen their local areas will triumph. This is an iron rule; it is the unvarying law for survival.”

He also said: “Without steady effort, nothing great can be achieved. Without steady effort, an invincible citadel cannot be built.”

I, a youth at the time,
fully agreed,
and engraved his words
in my heart.

Day after day,
rain or shine,
you continue to carry out the most
essential and down-to-earth tasks
of your mission.

Even if your efforts go unnoticed,
even if you encounter slander
and abuse,
even if you receive no word of praise,
you continue to brim with hope
and staunchly press forward,
one step at a time,
actively advancing
our movement for kosen-rufu,
just as the Daishonin teaches.

The innumerable protective forces
of the universe
will definitely protect you.
The Buddhas and bodhisattvas
of the three existences and
ten directions
will surely laud you.
That is the Daishonin’s firm promise.

In this age of the Latter Day of
the Law,
an evil age defiled by the five
impurities,
we are,
you are,
striving and practicing correctly,
faithful to the Buddha’s words.

It is no one else.
Not priests
nor slaves to status and prestige.
It is none but you.

You are setting
a shining example
of the great Buddhist principle
of faith manifesting in one’s
practice.

You are unerringly following
the same way of the Law
as the Buddha.

Benefit in faith
is not determined
by one’s organizational
position.

Benefit
will clearly accrue
to those who strive in faith
correctly and steadfastly,
courageously and earnestly,
in accord with the Daishonin’s
teachings.

Buddhism
solemnly teaches us
how to live correctly
as human beings.
It fully reveals
the correct path—
and, indeed, the law—
of human life.

We must never stray from this path
and lose sight of
the most important human quality
of recognizing and repaying
our debts of gratitude.

The people need
to become wise
and courageous,
and form an alliance
dedicated to good
that can eliminate
all corruption and injustice.

“Since the Law is wonderful,
the person is worthy of respect;
since the person is worthy
of respect,
the land is sacred.”

The priesthood,
in wild delusion,
arrogant and authoritarian,
sought to cut off
and destroy the Soka Gakkai,
which is propagating
this great Law far and wide.

Exploiting Buddhism
for impure ends,
the priests degenerated into
vile, money-hungry,
Law-devouring demons,
rulled by the world of Hell.

No matter what the times,
our noble districts
are a source of inspiration—
the eternal starting point
of all our victories
for kosen-rufu.
Our warm, friendly districts
are ever-victorious families
contributing positively
to their communities.

Cuban independence hero
José Martí
stressed the vital importance
of being thoroughly familiar
with the area under one’s
responsibility.

We must care deeply
about our local areas.
Victory is impossible
if we forget this point.

My long meeting
and shared dialogue
with Cuban President
Fidel Castro
remain with me
a vivid memory.

Today, in Cuba,
I am pleased to say,
a new district has been born,
dedicated to promoting
peace, culture and education based on Nichiren Buddhism.

David Rossi, hero of The Eternal City, a novel I studied with Mr. Toda, called for the establishment of a “Republic of Man... first here and then there.”

Striving for the continued positive growth of our Soka districts is the surest path to transforming the troubled history of the human race.

I, too, in my youth fought hard as a men’s district leader, and my wife strove wholeheartedly as a women’s district leader.

On that sunny May 3 of 1951, having triumphed over all obstacles through the shared struggle of mentor and disciple, Josei Toda was inaugurated as the second president of the Soka Gakkai.

At that time, I, his disciple, was appointed the leader of Omori District, Kamata Chapter, in my hometown.

I vowed to achieve Mr. Toda’s cherished goal of 750,000 member households. While continuing single-handedly to support his business enterprises, I launched a fresh groundswell for kosen-rufu from the front lines of my district, sharing my mentor’s resolve.

I was utterly determined to be a district leader directly connected to my mentor.

As a young man, I wrote in my diary: “Sensei,...I will definitely make our district advance.” “I keep worrying about Omori District. Will pray to the Gohonzon for it to become a perfect district.” “Our district must also try its best... In any case, I myself must strive, I must be responsible.”

Day after day, I began to create a history of unforgettable struggle in the district for the sake of kosen-rufu.

I was fully aware that the district is the Soka Gakkai’s most crucial linchpin.

The district is the central foundation of the entire organization. I knew that the district, though ordinary and everyday, was all-important — that it was the place that we most earnestly needed to support and protect.

Mr. Toda also knew this well. As mentor and disciple, we were always perfectly in tune; we were deeply united.

In The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings, Nichiren Daishonin discusses the term lion’s roar. Lion is written with the Chinese characters for teacher and child. They respectively indicate the Mystic Law as it is passed on by the teacher and as it is received by the disciples. Thus the “lion’s roar,” is the sound of teacher and disciples chanting the Mystic Law in unison.

Some senior leaders arrogantly disparaged the position of district leader. When Mr. Toda learned of this, he was outraged: “Aren’t our districts the vital core working hardest to support the Soka Gakkai?”

Both Mr. Toda and I deeply appreciated and often discussed the fact that districts, the unseen, unheralded pillars of the Soka Gakkai, face the greatest challenges of any level of the organization.

The districts are like the lower back of the body. They are the key foundation for our continued survival, for our continued activity, for our continued success.

Serving also as a group leader in Meguro — the equivalent of today’s women’s district leader — my wife devoted herself earnestly to Soka Gakkai activities, taking along our three small
children—two holding her hands and one strapped to her back. This is one of our family’s everlasting “memories of our present life in this human world.”

I never gave any heed to those who were arrogant and filled with self-importance at being leaders. I just got on with my life; I fought tirelessly and won, making the spirit of Mr. Toda my own.

When leaders are domineering and authoritarian, it points to their lack of faith. Compassion and caring for others are the heart of Buddhism. Leaders should be such that members feel they can trust them and seek guidance from them with complete confidence.

Leaders must never berate or intimidate others, or adopt an unpleasant, haughty attitude. Such leaders are certain to incur the negative effects of their actions.

During the Soka Gakkai’s long history, those leaders who were arrogant and overbearing eventually departed. They experienced hellish suffering and later deeply regretted their actions, sadly trailing in our wake.

Even now, the fighting spirit of a men’s district leader courses in my veins.

At all times, the dedicated spirit of a women’s district leader beats within my wife’s heart.

My wife and I are always and forever one and united with the hard-working district leaders, who are the Soka Gakkai’s pivotal core. This is our greatest honor and pride in this lifetime.

During World War II, my four older brothers were drafted and sent to China and Southeast Asia to fight in the war.

My eldest brother was sent to Burma, where he died in the fighting. He was 29 years old.

When the war ended, discharged soldiers in Japan, shouldering heavy loads, made their way directly to their homes.

But another year or two passed before my three brothers, narrowly escaping with their lives, returned from across the seas to our family fold.

Viewed in light of the pain and wretchedness of war, how important is the presence of ordinary Soka Gakkai members, who cherish an earnest wish for peace and make it their personal responsibility to realize that goal! Failing to value them represents a frightening degree of arrogance.

Ordinary Soka Gakkai members are truly noble and precious. Leaders who look down on them or are arrogant toward them, are frauds who hold their positions under false pretenses; they demonstrate the spirit of the basest and most foolish sort of “robber of the Law.”

The English philosopher John Stuart Mill clearly stated: “Conduct, and conduct alone, entitles [one] to respect: ...not what men are, but what they do, constitutes their claim to deference.”

Your life, your faith, the strength of your practice, are not determined by your organizational position. Nothing is mightier or nobler than the fortitude of those exerting themselves on the front lines of the organization.

The reality of attaining Buddhahood shines there. There is no place in the Soka Gakkai, or in the realm of Buddhism, for a high-handed, bureaucratic attitude.

Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first president, who led his people in their struggle for independence, valued above all “the ability to communicate with the people.”
I always created an unstoppable momentum for kosen-rufu from the district level.

This was true of the February Campaign of Kamata Chapter, too. I worked hard for kosen-rufu not only in the districts in Ota Ward, but also in the vibrant districts of Kawasaki across the Tama River. And I gave lectures on Nichiren's writings in Kawagoe District, part of Shiki Chapter in Saitama Prefecture, setting in motion a new wave of progress.

The district was the catalyst for the remarkable advances we achieved in Bunkyo Chapter. Likewise, the tremendous strides we made in places such as Sapporo in Hokkaido and in Yamaguchi in the Chugoku region all followed this same formula.

The district is the starting point. The district is the driving force. The district is the main bastion. The district is the power source. The district is the lifeline. The district is the deciding point.

It was at the year's first district leaders meeting in 1956 that I began to lead our great campaign in Kansai.

Taking to heart Nichiren's injunction to pray "as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground," the Kansai members and I chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo at the Kansai Headquarters before the Gohonzon bearing the inscription "For the Prosperity of the Great Law and the Fulfillment of All Prayers."

We all united together on our fresh departure, determined to "employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other."

In the midst of our challenge that led to the golden achievement of introducing Nichiren Buddhism to 11,111 new member-households in a single month, one district held a kickoff meeting attended by 3,000 members at the Central Civic Hall in Osaka's Nakanoshima area.

The men's district leader declared: "The sleeping lion has risen!" Responding to that energetic spirit, I said, "The unity of lions is the greatest strength there is."

Soka districts are gatherings of lions, are citadels of lions united in a shared cause. Their mission, therefore, is to strive, work, speak out and win with lionlike courage.

In a letter to the lay nun Sennichi, who was striving earnestly on the front lines of kosen-rufu while supporting her comrades in faith, the Daishonin wrote that when the lion king roars, his hundred cubs will feel emboldened, and the heads of all the beasts and birds of prey that seek to attack them will be split into seven pieces.

The high-spirited voices of our district leaders have an invincible resonance, opening the way to victory in our struggle for truth.

You, our district leaders, have forged ahead valiantly through even the bitterest storms and most painful challenges, persevering undefeated. You have thoroughly protected the citadel of Soka, heir to the Buddha's decree, from the insidious "worms born of the lion's body."

Even after you hand over your positions to your juniors, the glorious history you have achieved during your time as district leaders will shine on forever as a brilliant badge of honor adorning not only your own lives but those of your descendents into the eternal future.

Buddhism is not some abstract theory. The principle of transforming places into Buddha lands is found in your determined efforts to positively transform your communities.

The principle of changing poison into medicine is found in your wholehearted encouragement, driven by the wish to bring happiness to those who are suffering.
Mr. Toda said: “Thinking hard how best to spread the Law and help others become happy, pondering and racking one’s brains based on the correct teaching of Buddhism for the sake of the Law, for others’ welfare, and for kosen-rufu—there are no more wonderful concerns that could occupy one’s mind than these. They are the concerns of the Buddha, who seeks to lead all people to enlightenment.”

You are admirable humanistic leaders, treasuring each person and once again today taking thoughtful and careful action for the development of our movement.

Our sincerity and honest concern for people, our desire for their happiness and our belief in their potential, are what inspires people to action. This is Buddhism.

“What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being.”

You, the district leaders, are the ones who are practicing the heart of this teaching.

Paying no heed to know-it-all opinions, undaunted by others’ irresponsible indifference, I hasten to where I’m needed most, plunging into the midst of the fiercest struggle, fighting with joy and courage.

To transform the negative cycle of ordinary people suffering at the hands of destiny, to transform the history of the people oppressed by authoritarian powers—raise high the victory banner of kosen-rufu without fail in the place of your mission that you have sought since the eternal past!

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda declared: “The Soka Gakkai is an organization of the highest good. We must therefore win without fail. I’d like you to triumph. I’d like you to lead lives of eternal victory and glory.”

Our kosen-rufu movement, not only in Japan but all around the world, is advancing dynamically, centered on the efforts of our district leaders. In countries everywhere, district leaders stand in the vanguard and open the way forward.

One women’s district leader in Africa has served as a vice minister of the national government. Another elsewhere has served as her country’s ambassador to the United Nations.

And still another in America has served as the chair of a national association for public hospitals.

Also in America, a world-class jazz artist and a former sports star are active as men’s district leaders.

The district is an oasis of equality and friendship. It is a realm without airs or pretensions. Buddhism teaches the innate dignity of our lives—“inherent, unadorned, just as it originally is.”

The French philosopher Montaigne noted that great-souled individuals are relaxed and approachable, which is most honorable and befitting.

Truly noble are those who remain natural and sincere, sharing happiness and sorrow as well as the joy of victory, with the honest, down-to-earth, ordinary people.

In the “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra that we recite each morning and evening, there is the phrase ekka shushin, meaning “able to delight the hearts of the assembly.” When you fill everyone’s hearts with delight, charge their spirits with hope, and infuse them with vitality and enthusiasm, the momentum of our movement dedicated to the highest good...
grows and multiplies.

The microbiologist René Dubos, with whom I conducted a dialogue at Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee’s suggestion, said: “Optimism and cheerfulness are true social virtues.... The best insurance against bad circumstances is to take life with a smile.”

The smiles of the women’s division and young women’s division members are so important, so wonderful.

Women must be accorded the highest praise and respect; failing to do so hinders kosen-rufu and violates the spirit of Buddhism.

And the bright voices raised in song of the youth and future division members are very important, too. How inspiring is that sound!

We must foster our juniors with the greatest respect; failing to do so will prevent the perpetuation of the Law and put an end to the flow of the correct teaching of Buddhism.

The “Parable of the Phantom City” chapter of the Lotus Sutra states that as the Buddha was about to attain enlightenment, flowers rained down from the heavens, and a fragrant wind blew from time to time to sweep away the withered blossoms, whereupon new ones would rain down.

The realm of Soka is always perfumed by the breezes of eternity, happiness, true self and purity, which dispel all apathy and stagnation and promote the blossoming of vibrant flowers of happiness, creative talent and victory.

It doesn’t matter how many people come to a district meeting. There’s no need to feel bad if attendance is low.

If you can form a strong bond of deep shared commitment with even one or two members who attend, it is the same as if hundreds or thousands had come.

If you treat the district level lightly, you’re missing the most basic and crucial point. Only when you make the district your foundation can you set forth into the realm of limitless possibilities.

Thinkers from around the globe who have attended our friendly, high-spirited district discussion meetings all express their sincere admiration.

Peace scholar Dr. Elise Boulding, who has been dedicated to building a culture of peace, highly praised the activities of Soka women contributing to their communities, saying, “I have long believed that a wholesome, peaceful world is possible if we devote all-out effort to the development of each member of the community.”

You are beacons of hope breaking through the pervasive darkness of our times and illuminating your communities.

Sociologist of religion Dr. Bryan Wilson, with whom I published a dialogue, cited the positive attributes of the SGI as: liberation from clerical authority, ideals firmly rooted in daily life, a practice dedicated to the happiness of self and others, and the affirmation of benefit in this present existence.

He also observed that members living in the same community encourage and support each other through such gatherings as the discussion meeting, and that the SGI is open to society instead of closed in its own religious shell.

Our districts are creating and presenting an inspiring cutting-edge model of 21st-century communities to the world.

We are all human beings; no one is superior to anyone else, nor should they be. Our districts are places of hope where people can shine with true human dignity and happiness.
The joyful reverberations of our districts are spreading out powerfully and deeply from local communities to the global community, from neighbors and friends to the world’s great intellects.

Mahatma Gandhi remained hopeful that the spirit of service to one’s neighbors “would spread like the proverbial snowball gathering strength in geometrical progression, encircling the whole earth.”

The districts are openhearted families. The districts are the community itself. The districts are places of human solidarity, where friends and neighbors can also join in freely and unreservedly, sharing in conversation and our circle of mutual support.

When the districts advance vigorously and triumph, the community itself will also be enlivened, enjoying unfailing growth and prosperity.

I hope that you, our men and women district leaders—dealing with pressures from above and demands from below and confidently striving to spread understanding for our movement in society—will take pride in the fact that you are also carrying out the most important endeavor of your own personal human revolution.

The challenges are surely many, but please be confident that each day dedicated to positive change is leading you toward wonderful happiness and glory that will forever adorn your lives.

Please be proud that your deep, persevering faith will become an eternal source of victory throughout the three existences.

I would like all of our members in every part of our organization to unite in a shared pledge that no individual who has never personally undertaken the struggles and challenges of a district leader will ever be allowed to be appointed as a future top leader of kosen-rufu.

Ordinary, hardworking leaders of the people, not petty, conceited, arrogant leaders! Leaders who live and strive all out among the people!

These are genuine leaders of faith. These are our men and women district leaders, as well as our men and women chapter leaders, who support our organization.

If, as a top leader, you cannot value and respect these front-line leaders, you are not a true Soka Gakkai leader dedicated to kosen-rufu.

I want everyone to remember this essential point. This is the spirit of first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and the stern view of second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda.

Now is the time for all leaders to go out to the districts, to learn from the districts, to listen to the districts, to unite in action together with the districts, to stir up a groundswell of victory from the districts!

Talking self importantly and offering guidance to great crowds of members at big meetings isn’t what matters. That’s just performing.

Mr. Toda outlined the keys to a growing organization—first, “advancing with the unity of ‘many in body, one in mind’ and a beautiful camaraderie,” and second, “each person overflowing with the Soka Gakkai spirit based on unshakable pride and confidence in being a Soka Gakkai member.”

United men and women vice district leaders! Noble front-line men and women group leaders! Young men and young women district leaders, our brilliant successors!
Launch a fresh advance with wonderful unity from your districts!
The day before my second address at Harvard University, my wife and I visited the local center of district activities, situated near the house where President John F. Kennedy was born.

I bestowed the name President District on this community of SGI members. Everyone was happy. Deeply touched, they applauded and cheered.

You are the presidents of republics of humanity, each in the chosen place

of your mission. You are brilliant conductors of symphony orchestras of happiness.
You are the foremost envoys of good-neighborliness. You are rectors of humanistic education.
You are the bright builders of peace and prosperity throughout the land based on the Law.

In high spirits once again today, please forge your districts into eternal citadels, among the people, together with the people, for the sake of the people!

Noble heroes of kosen-rufu! Monarchs of the people who possess a profound mission!

Take care of your health!

Enveloped in immeasurable benefit, fulfill your vow of this existence! You are certain to enjoy the protection of the Buddhas and heavenly deities.

Champions of the people, wondrous and exalted, who chant and propagate the Mystic Law! How overjoyed Nichiren Daishonin must be!

Win victory after victory in your district, spreading Buddhism to the best of your ability and enjoying great benefit.

Feb. 20, 2007
Shin’ichi Yamamoto
Mentor-Disciple Hall
Soka Gakkai Headquarters

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda wrote this poem under his pen name Shin’ichi Yamamoto. This portion was published in the Feb. 22, 23 and 24 Seikyo Shim bun, the Soka Gakkai’s daily newspaper.