Forty-First Niwano Peace Prize Ceremony Address

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Greetings, everyone, and welcome to the forty-first Niwano Peace Prize presentation ceremony.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the many people participating in today's ceremony, starting with this year's prize recipient, as well as members of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee, and experts and leaders in various fields and affiliated organizations.

The recipient of this year's Niwano Peace Prize is Dr. Mohammed Abu-Nimer of American University in Washington D.C.

His wife, Dr. Ilham Nasser, and his family are also in attendance today. Thank you all for making the long trip to join us here.

I would also like to express my profound respect and deep gratitude to all members of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee for undertaking the selection process.

To this day, Dr. Abu-Nimer has tirelessly devoted himself to changing the reality of people trapped in a cycle of violence or hatred, due to such divisions as ethnicity, nationality, or religious faith.

At present, Dr. Abu-Nimer is not only conducting research in conflict resolution and peace-building, but at the same time, engaging in actual conflict mediation. Furthermore, he is an active promoter of interreligious dialogue and an educator, showing the next generation a path forward to coexistence that transcends conflict.

I have heard that Dr. Abu-Nimer's diverse activities are grounded in the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation that comes from the teachings of Islam. He has clearly demonstrated that the Islamic teaching of forgiveness and reconciliation is derived from the holistic view of peace intrinsic to Islam, and is effectively applying this in practice.

In my understanding, this spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation is an important universal value that all religious faiths have in common.

As a Buddhist, I would like to speak a little about how this spirit is expressed in Buddhism.

To cite a passage from the Dhammapada, an early Buddhist scripture, "When hatred is repaid with hatred, there is no end to hatred. Only by letting go of hatred does hatred cease to be." There is a story, passed down to us since ancient times, that illustrates this teaching; it goes something like this:

One day, a monk committed an act that violated the precepts. This led to a conflict between one group that insisted on his innocence, and another group demanding that his transgression should not go unpunished. Violence even broke out between the two groups. At that point, Shakyamuni intervened.

Shakyamuni had everyone gather, and told them the following story.

"A long time ago, in the country of Kosala, there was a wise king, named Dighiti. His kingdom was very prosperous. In contrast, the neighboring country of Varanasi was in turmoil, due to its king's tyrannical governance. Eventually, Varanasi plotted to invade Kosala.

"King Dighiti argued against fighting Varanasi, saying, 'If we go to war, our country will be devastated and many people will die.' His insistence was in vain, though, and the country fell into a state of fighting.

"King Dighiti thought that if he disappeared, the fighting would end, so he hid in the mountains. Thanks to this, the conflict ended without becoming a full-scale war. However, Kosala became a vassal state of Varanasi, and King Dighiti was captured and executed.

"King Dighiti had a child named Prince Dighavu. When King Dighiti was about to be publicly executed, he saw Prince Dighavu looking at him and, thinking that his son would one day seek vengeance, looked up to the heavens and cried out:

"'I am willing to die, in order to protect the lives of my people. Should any of you have the intention of avenging my death, remember that retaliation only begets further retaliation, and so it will never end. For my sake, you must not kill anyone.'

"Even so, Prince Dighayu's hatred did not leave him. Eventually, the prince managed to form a close connection to the enemy king, and win his trust. One day, he was accompanying the king on a hunting trip, but on the way, the tired king fell asleep. Seeing his opportunity, the prince pulled out his blade and was about to stab the king. However, his father's final words weighed heavily on his mind, and he could not bring myself to kill the king.

"Later, when the king woke up, he said, 'I had a strange dream. King Dighiti's son was about to stab me to death, but for some reason he threw down his blade.'

"Hearing this, Prince Dighayu revealed his true identity and truthfully confessed to what he had intended to do.

"Then the king said, 'Prince Dighayu, I must apologize to you, for having ordered the execution of such a noble king as Dighiti. Your mind of filial piety and tolerance have caused me to be reborn, both physically and spiritually.' From the bottom of their hearts, the two men forgave each other and clasped each other's hands.

"In time, the king returned the land of Kosala to Prince Dighayu, and since then, the two countries are said to have become as close as brothers."

Having finished this story, Shakyamuni admonished the monks, saying, "Hatred only goes away when you let go of hatred." And so we are told that the dispute between the two groups was resolved.

I have just recounted a somewhat long story that symbolically shows us that eventually, there will be a day when even those who have repeatedly fought against and hated each other, come to understand and appreciate each other. Although this is a Buddhist story, I think people of other faiths can easily understand its message.

Islam is the teaching of forgiveness and reconciliation, as Dr. Abu-Nimer has indicated. Christians place great importance on living through God's love. And we Buddhists practice our faith diligently in order to fill the world with compassion.

Therefore, I believe that at the foundation of every religious faith, there is the truth about reality and shared, universal values, and so essentially, the path we are all following is one and the same.

In a region where conflict is ongoing, a permanent cease-fire may be reached, but as long as anger and hatred are still smoldering in the hearts of the people, there is no telling when the embers of conflict will flare up again.

Isn't it true, though, that a global movement centered on the aforementioned mind of forgiveness, mind of love, and mind of compassion could become an essential force leading to peace in this world?

Therefore, it is especially meaningful that Dr. Abu-Nimer is providing young people, who will be responsible for future generations, with peace education based on forgiveness and reconciliation, and showing them a path to coexistence that transcends conflict.

Dr. Abu-Nimer has continued to pursue this path, steadfastly and passionately, and so once again, I would like to express my heartfelt praise and deep respect for him.

Since last October, fighting between Israel and Hamas, an Islamic organization, has continued in the Gaza Strip, a Palestinian autonomous region.

Many of the victims of this conflict have been women and children. As Dr. Abu-Nimer was born and raised in Israel, it is hard to imagine how deep and heavy his grief must be.

Especially at a crucial time like this, though, I hope and pray that Dr. Abu-Nimer will share his experience and wisdom with many people everywhere, and play an even greater role in the realization of a world of coexistence.

I sincerely hope that today's presentation ceremony will serve as an opportunity for as many people as possible to share in Dr. Abu-Nimer's hopes and activities, and conclude this address with my heartfelt wishes that hereafter he will continue, in good health, his extremely important work.

Thank you very much.