

Opening remarks from Hayley Ramsay-Jones, Geneva Director, SGI OUNA

Humanitarian Disarmament Forum

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Delivered by Hayley Ramsay-Jones

Hello my name is Hayley Ramsay-Jones, I'd like to thank you all for joining us at the Humanitarian Disarmament Forum on intersectionality with a focus on racism. For some of you, you're joining us extremely early in the morning and others very late at night. So, we'd like to especially thank you for your commitment to being present.

My organization, Soka Gakkai International, is delighted to be co-hosting this very different looking HDF alongside the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. One of the reasons why SGI wanted to convene a meeting on racism and intersectionality is because we believe that at the heart of all forms of oppression is the radical negation of others—of their humanity, their dignity and their equal right to happiness and life.

But we also recognise that like the organisations and campaigns here today, we have a long way to go to stamp out inequalities within our own organisation. So, the purpose of this event is not about pointing the finger at others or relishing in their wrong-doings, but rather to look at ourselves, our places of work; and to create spaces where we can truly be honest and courageous to face our ethical disconnect between what we are trying to achieve in this world, and how we go about getting there.

So, for my organisation, our work here today is guided by our desire to uphold the dignity of life for all people and we are excited to go on this journey together with any organisation that wishes to do so too.

For me personally, this means a lot. I've been working on human rights and disarmament issues for 9 years, and very early on it became painfully obvious that the power disparities between states at the UN often show up between former colonial powers and those who were colonized.

Additionally, I saw a lack of NGOs from the global south operating at the UN on a permanent basis and that very few permanent NGOs in Geneva from the global North had people of colour in leadership positions, or in their staff teams at all. In fact, in all my time in Geneva, I know of only two other European people of colour working fulltime there.

So, what does that tell us about our own organisations, about our international policy making, about colonial legacies, or about how the lives and experiences of people of colour are valued? It tells us that structural and systemic racism are 'alive and well' and function to keep the status quo. So, on the surface whilst we demand change, equality, human rights, and human security, we do so whilst simultaneously upholding the same structures and systems that ensures white supremacy and dominance remain intact. That white power and privilege remain intact goes without challenge or more significantly without notice.

So, I'm full of hope that you've all chosen to be here, that we are taking this step to find out more about these issues, how they affect us all, and how they affect our activism.

As a planning team, we wanted to share with you one of our own failures and blindspots during the process of planning this event... Because we all speak English fluently, we didn't think to add a question about language in the registration. One of the impacts of this failure is that many of you who speak English as a 2nd or even 3rd language, or those of you who have a hearing impairment, won't be able to access this space as well as others.

Regardless of our intention to create an accessible space, we overlooked this and that has a real impact for some, and for that we are sorry! I mention this because we think it's important to admit and acknowledge our failures in this space, so we can all learn and do better moving forward.

In the meantime, for the plenaries, we've provided captions, subtitles and transcripts on some of the elements. The affinity groups will have automated captions and some of the resources on our webpage have been translated into French and Spanish. But if there's specific content that you want translated into your language, please contact us directly and we will try to facilitate this.

For now, I'd like to thank you once again for joining us, I'll pass you over to Mary.