

THE INTERNATIONAL SHINTO FOUNDATION, INC—ISF

(Special Consultative Status granted in 2001)

QUADRENNIAL REPORT (2005-2008)

The International Shinto Foundation, Inc. (ISF) was formally approved as an NGO associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) on December 8, 1997, and formally granted Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2001. Herewith we present the ISF's Quadrennial Report of organizational information and activities summary from 2005 to 2008

PART I : ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

As an indigenous faith tradition, Shinto contains values and elements common to the majority of the world's ethnographical cultures, and thus has much to contribute in the sharing of inter-cultural dialogue and exchange. ISF assists scholarly research in aspects of culture and religion at academic institutions internationally and cooperates with them in sponsoring projects and events. ISF has been cooperating harmoniously with other non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies in promoting human welfare and environmental sustainability.

ISF is a Not-for-Profit Corporation, accredited by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in Japan as well as by the State of New York in the United States of America, under Section 501 (c) (3) of Internal Revenue Code. ISF is headquartered in Tokyo, Japan with the New York Center functioning as an international center. In addition, ISF maintains liaison offices in London, U.K.; Moscow, Russia; Hangzhou, China, and Washington DC, USA.

As an international organization, ISF's membership currently stands at 795 individual members and 15 institutional members, distributed over nine countries: the United States, China, Japan, France, Norway, Russia, Spain, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. Membership is open to any sympathetic organization or individual who wishes to participate in the philosophy, purpose and goals of ISF. Current members generally are associated with other cultural organizations, and tend to be scholars and researchers in the field of cultural studies.

ISF maintains cooperative relationships with Institutions of Japanese Cultural Studies associated with various universities (SOAS, University of London, U.K.; Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy; University of Oslo, Norway; Moscow State University Institute of Afro-Asian Studies, Russia; University of California, Santa Barbara and Columbia University, U.S.A.; and Zhejiang Gongshang University, China).

The financial status of ISF is based on membership fees, and corporate and individual contributions. ISF has received no contribution, in money or in kind, from a government or from an intergovernmental source directly or indirectly. Although worldwide economic stagnation in the last few years has also affected ISF's financial status, the average yearly income and expenditures during fiscal years 2005 through 2008 are as follows:

Income: Membership dues and contributions = US\$ 720,000

Expenditures: Administrations = US\$250,000; Projects = US\$470,000

PART II : ACTIVITIES SUMMARY

As subjects/areas of interest ISF develops its activities on Culture, Education, Environment, Food, Human Rights, Indigenous Peoples, International Peace and Security, Religion (Freedom of Beliefs and Inter-religious Dialogues and Cooperation), Social Development, Sustainable Development and Water.

As in preceding years, ISF has endeavored to promote the significance and importance of the various International Years proclaimed by the United Nations from 2005 through 2008 by organizing symposia and workshops.

In 2005, the International Year of Sport and Physical Education, ISF organized events in three major cities: Tokyo, New York, and Moscow.

On 7th July, 2005, three hundred people gathered in the Japan Youth Hall in Tokyo for an international symposium entitled “Spiritual and Practical Values of Martial Arts as a Means of Physical Education” which was organized by ISF and supported by the United Nations Information Center in Tokyo, Embassy of Israel in Japan, Embassy of the Republic of Tunisia in Japan, Embassy of Mongolia in Japan, Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Japan, and Shumpukan Martial Arts Society. Martial arts, developed from warriors’ skills for fighting in earlier times, are now more emphasized as a means of mental and spiritual training and have long been taught and practiced around the world. Two key note speeches were delivered by His Excellency Mr. Eli Cohen, Israeli Ambassador in Japan, and His Excellency Mr. Salah Hannachi, Tunisian Ambassador in Japan. Mr. Cohen explained the importance of the spiritual and practical values of martial arts on the basis of his own long practice of Karate. Dr. Rentsendoo Jigjid, Minister of Mongolian Embassy and Dr. Jadwiga Rodowicz, Minister of Polish Embassy also joined the panel session along with ISF’s leaders. As distinguished diplomats and researchers of Japanese culture, they discoursed on their experience of martial arts in education, health, development and peace.

In New York, on 9th September, 2005, over a hundred people attended a workshop on “Spiritual Values of Martial Arts as a Means of Physical Education” held as an off-site event of 58th DPI/NGO Conference at the Japan Society of New York, organized by ISF New York Center and supported by the Japan Society. Teachers and practitioners of various kinds of martial arts in the New York area demonstrated the achievements of their physical training and explained how martial arts brought them spiritual proficiency.

On 20th December, 2005, another symposium on “Spiritual and Practical Values of Martial Arts” took place in Moscow with a hundred people organized by the ISF Moscow Office and Russian Martial Arts Sport Corporation under the auspices of the United Nations Information Center in Moscow. This symposium consisted of two program parts: First part as panel session at Russian National Library Oriental Annex where Mr. C. V. Kirienko, former Russian Prime Minister and Co-chairperson of Russian Martial Arts Federation, made opening remarks whom followed ten distinguished leading figures of Russian Martial Arts Federation presented various topics, such as “Spiritual Heritage of Martial Arts in Globalization”, “Shinto Tradition and Spiritual and Practical Values”, and so on. In the second half, the participants moved to the Moscow Martial Arts Hall to witness the demonstration and practice of various kinds of martial arts.

Since its accreditation as an NGO associated with the UN/DPI, ISF has been sending its representatives to the Annual DPI/NGO Conferences and contributing to support the work of the NGO/DPI Executive Committee every

year. ISF has maintained a good relationship with the United Nations Information Center in Tokyo and in Moscow to disseminate various and important information on UN activities. Currently ISF endeavors to make the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations known as widely as possible among Japanese people by publicizing related articles in its journals. ISF's website (<http://www.shinto.org>) is regularly updated with UN-related reports under the section "UN & ISF".

In 2006, ISF was honored to be selected as one of the sponsors of 32 Midday Interactive Workshops for the 59th Annual DPI/NGO Conference on 6th-8th September, 2006. In conjunction with the 2006 International Year of Desert and Desertification proclaimed by the United Nations, this workshop aimed at presenting how sacred forests and groves of Shinto shrines have been protected and developed as important assets of human life in Japan and the rest of the world by showing concrete achievements on the basis of long experiences of the sponsoring parties of this workshop, which was entitled "Globalization of the Sacred Forests and Groves", sponsored by ISF, and co-sponsored by The Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement-International (OISCA), and Religions for Peace-USA.

Professor Yoshimi Umeda, ISF Director-General, opened the workshop with a DVD presentation "Japan, Land of Forests" which illustrated the essential coexistence that the Sacred Forests and Groves of Shinto shrines are maintained in Japan. It also included stories of reforestation and the symbiotic relationship of humans and the natural world.

The Very Reverend Minoru Sonoda, ISF Board Chairperson, discussed the deep spiritual principles behind the sacred forests and groves of the Shinto shrine. He presented the "Deep ecological philosophy" which was first coined in 1973 by a Swedish scholar and developed in Europe and America, but whose roots can be found in values held by Asian traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Popular Taoism, which also influenced Japan's ancient religion of Shinto. He stated that many spiritual traditions believe that humans as well as plants and animals share equal rights to live on earth. In keeping with religious foundations, Sonoda made an appeal to preserve the sanctity of deity power which exists vividly in nature throughout the world and concluded that all religions in the world should reconsider the spiritual life held within their creed and cooperate with each other to foster the betterment of all creatures.

Dr. Yoshiko Y. Nakano, President of OISCA, presented her foundation's achievements towards agricultural development, forestation, and education since 1961. OISCA-International's Children's Forest Program is an environmental program organized in 25 countries and regions, involving 2600 schools. Aid to education constitutes an important field within OISCA. Training of youth to nurture their technical ability and leadership has been the core program of her organization. She discussed her projects in Indonesia where OISCA constructed eight schools that collapsed in the earthquake. Nakano stated that local governments and international institutions should play leading roles. She emphasized people's love for their homes. She stated that to some extent, all traditional worldviews uphold that Nature is either itself divine or sacred as all things are made by the Creator.

Rev. Bud Heckman, Executive Director of Religions for Peace-USA, stated that we must not neglect the effect of human behaviors on individual forests and groves. We must also pay attention to the environment's place in the scale of events and the possibility of religions working together collectively to protect them. Rev. Heckman pointed to many signs of hope and that we still have time to reverse environmental degradation. Heckman also exemplified

the successful convening of leaders of various religions at the 8th World Assembly of the Religions for Peace held in Kyoto, Japan, late August 2006, from which he just returned.

Numerous comments and questions on the above papers were presented from the floor. Some thanked the speakers for their valuable achievements, and others offered their own experiences of similar tree-planting and green-keeping activities in various countries, such as Armenia, Germany, United Kingdom, the United States and other parts of the world. In closing the workshop, the moderator recommended everyone to share those experiences and achievements by contacting each other through internet.

ISF feels greatly honored to have sponsored a special Gagaku concert in New York City on 28th November, 2006, at the auditorium of the Japan Society of New York under the joint auspices of the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations and the Japan Society commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Japan's membership in the United Nations. The concert was performed by select members of Ono Gagaku-kai Society from Tokyo. Gagaku, which literally means elegant or refined music, has been under the continual patronage of the Japanese imperial court since the 6th century; this music is often said to be the oldest extant orchestral music in the world, and one of the main forms of Japanese orchestral music. The essential core of the Gagaku musical tradition managed to survive through the vicissitudes of Japanese imperial history; today we can still listen to music that is over a thousand years old played in a style close to the original.

ISF has been a member of the NGO Committee for the Decade of Indigenous People since 1998 and regularly attends its meetings in New York to assist in planning activities. ISF Director-General Yoshimi Umeda has also submitted statements each year on behalf of Shinto in the panel sessions and supported the establishment of the "Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues", as a new advisory body to ECOSOC with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues relating to ECOSOC concerns.

ISF has been a member of the Committee of Religious NGOs as well as a member of Conference of NGOs with Consultative Status with ECOSOC (CONGO). ISF has been supporting and participating in the Annual Interfaith Service of Commitment to the Work of the United Nations to mark the opening of the Annual Session of the UN General Assembly in September every year.

Since 2000 ISF has been organizing the International Children's Day Celebration (ICDC) in New York City as a Shinto cultural presentation in accordance with the traditional Japanese custom of blessing for children's growth and future happiness. Children aged 7, 5, and 3 years old, regardless of their nationality and religious affiliation, are invited to join this blessing. Every year the number of participating children and their parents has increased, reaching 250 families in 2008. UNICEF is the beneficiary of this event as a portion of contributions received from participants is donated to UNICEF-USA.

As ISF's activities have expanded a Liaison Office was opened in Washington DC in 2008 with couple of voluntary representatives, who have begun making contact with civil society in the metropolitan area.

This quadrennial report is prepared by Yoshimi Umeda, in his authority as ISF Director-General on 14th May, 2009.

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