

## From the Symposium with Wellesley College

### Opening Remarks

Victor Kazanjian

**W**ELCOME to Wellesley College faculty friends from the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, Soka University, Soka University for Women, and the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century. Today marks another moment in the longstanding partnership between Wellesley College and the Boston Research Center. It was a decade ago, when we were in the organizing phase of a conference which we hoped would bring together faculty, chaplains, students and others to explore the impact of religious diversity on higher education, that The Boston Research Center and their director Virginia Benson stepped in to partner with us when others were reluctant to take on this controversial topic. The conference proved to be a landmark moment in American Higher Education that catalyzed a movement that has reshaped religious and spiritual life on college and university campuses across the country as more than a thousand educators and students gathered on that October weekend. That conference also birthed a new national organization, Education as Transformation under the leadership of its director Dr. Peter Laurence, my dear friend and colleague, who is with us today.

There have been many moments of partnership between then and now. The Boston Research Center has held numerous important gatherings over the years on a variety of issues concerning the pursuit of peace in this world. And I had the pleasure of visiting Soka University in California, and then traveling to Japan some years ago, to meet with Dr. Kawada and President Ikeda and learn more about value-centered education and the important peace work in which they are engaged. It was very inspiring and meaningful for me and I am very grateful to have had this opportunity. And here we are together again ... at another October gathering. When my friend Masao Yakota called me to suggest that we might co-host another gathering, I could not pass up the opportunity... and how fitting it is that the first conference in Wellesley's newly renovated Multifaith Center is one that we should host together.

This Center has been more than a decade in the planning and is the result of a dialogue process among a diverse group of people at Wellesley representing the world's religious traditions and spiritual practices. It is our hope that the Center not only provides a place of practice for all religious communities but also encourages encounter and dialogue around the many vexing issues that relate to the role of religion in the world today. It is our hope that this effort at Wellesley, like the work of the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, contributes to the building of a new global commons ... a global commons in which people of different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds make a commitment to a shared responsibility for the resources of the world, resources that include the economic, environmental, political, intellectual and social capital that constitutes the world in which we live.

Today's dialogue on the theme of Religious Perspectives on Global Issues is part of that effort to build a new global commons by moving beyond the enclaves that so often have marked the role of religion in society, and create connection through scholarly discourse on issues that challenge the world.

I am so pleased that Wellesley scholars David Bernat, Jim Kodera, Sharon Elkins and Neelima Shukla-Bhatt will be part of this day, and also Pat Mische, a long time friend of Wellesley and the Boston Research Center. I know that you will appreciate their words of wisdom as I have over the years and continue to have as I consider each a teacher in my own ongoing learning about religion and the world.

They are joined today by Drs. Kawada, Kanno, Kurihara, and Yamamoto. I had the pleasure of sharing a meal this past Thursday evening with this outstanding group of scholars and found myself filled with the insight and inspiration that resonated around the table. I look forward to each of their presentations today.

Our conference today is divided into three parts—at each session there will be a series of presentations from a panel of scholars. Following each panel we will ask you to engage in a conversation at your table in which your task is to identify key questions in response to what you just heard from the panelists. We will then reconvene as a whole group and pose some of these questions to our panel. After our first panel (Religion, Conflict and Community), we will share lunch together and then reconvene for our second panel on Religion and Women and third panel on Religion and the Environment.