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Editorial Note **3**

Country Reports **4**

- Bhutan:** Buddhist Leader in Bhutan Fully Ordains 144 Women,
Resuming Ancient Tradition / *Haley Barker* **4**
- Burma/Myanmar:** As Myanmar Burns, Junta Pours Money Into
‘World’s Tallest’ Buddha Image / *The Irrawaddy* **6**
- Sri Lanka:** “Govt. used Sinhala-Buddhist Shield to its Maximum
Benefit,” says Ven. Galkande Dhammananda Thera
/ *Kamanthi Wickramasinghe* **11**
- Tibet:** Historic Moment for Tibet: Tibetan National Flag and
Buddhist Flag Hoisted at Parc du Tibet in Geneva
/ *Staff Reporter* **13**

INEB **14**

- INEB’s 2021 Annual Report / *INEB Staff* **14**
- Concept Note: The 20th Biennial INEB Conference Buddhism
in a Divided World **22**
- Community Campaigns to Reduce Demand for
Wildlife Products / *INEB Staff* **24**
- Regional Network for Peacebuilders Project (Sangha for Peace)
First Country Learning Mission, Thailand
/ *INEB Staff* **27**
- Statement from the Secretariat of the International Network of
Engaged Buddhists Calling for Solidarity and Preserving
the Sanctity of Life in Myanmar **29**

Sulak Sivaraksa **31**

- Through an Old Man’s Eyes: Thailand’s Long and Troubled Quest
for Democracy* / *Subel Rai Bhandari and Wilawan
Watcharasakwet* **31**
- In Praise of Sulak Sivaraksa at 90* / *Uthai Dulyakasem* **34**

Articles **35**

- “Making Peace in a Time of War,” acceptance speech for
the 39th Niwano Peace Prize by Michael Lapsley, SSM
..... **35**
- Ven. Pomnyun Sunim: Buddhism in a Divided World
/ *Craig C Lewis* **38**
- Metta in Action: Buddhist Nuns in Ladakh Fight Climate
Change / *Ema Lewis* **44**

Editorial Note

Gender, Sexuality, and Engaged Buddhism / Ouyporn Khuankaew	47
ALLY Project Closes with Final Advocacy Messages / Philip Gassert	57
Letters	58
Obituaries	58
Khunying Noi – M.R. Saisawasdee Sawatdiwat	58
Book Reviews	59
Silencing of a Laotian Son: The Life, Work, and Enforced Disappearance of Sombath Somphone / Melissa Storms	59

Editorial Note

We send our best wishes from Bangkok and are looking forward with great excitement to INEB's 20th International Conference in South Korea. This year's conference will be the first in-person meeting for our network members and kalyanamitta since the last international conference convened in Deer Park, Bir, India, in 2019. It will be a joyous occasion to reconnect as we experience South Korean culture together and are inspired by closely examining the conference theme of *Buddhism in a Divided World: Peace, Planet, Pandemic*. This conference will also have selected sessions available online to reach a wider audience.

This issue contains the usual contents with country reports, articles on diverse topics, and other interesting information from the world of Engaged Buddhism. Since INEB's 20th International conference is being held in S. Korea this year, the issue focuses on the conference and our work during 2021. The conference is a collaboration between INEB and the Korean based Jungto Society.

Jungto will be hosting participants at their beautiful mountain meditation center in Mungyeong, and brand new headquarters in the Gangnam district of Seoul. We deeply appreciate the Jungto team's welcoming way and generosity that has made this conference possible. Articles include the conference concept note describing its goals and objectives, an overview of INEB's activities in 2021, and an interview of Venerable Pomnyun Sunim by Craig Lewis of *Buddhist Door Global*. In the interview, Venerable discusses the conference theme, *Buddhism in a Divided World*.

Beginning with the country reports, the Bhutan Nun's Foundation helped organize the ordination of 144 women in Bhutan. The interview with Venerable Galkanda Dhannananda Thera of Sri Lanka contains many insights into reconciliation, the need to heal from domestic violence, harassment, child abuse, and how the government uses Sinhala Buddhists to its benefit. Our close friend, Ouyporn Khuankaew's article *Gender, Sexuality, and Engaged Buddhism* is the first of several articles by her. Another article describes how Buddhist nuns in Ladakh, India, are demonstrating the interconnection between dharma practice, environmental education and healthcare support to confront the negative impact of climate change. These efforts are under the leadership of our friend Venerable Dr. Tsering Palmo.

The Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation honors the memory of Khunying Noi – M.R. Saisawasdee Sawatdiwat, who together with her sisters donated the land on which the Wongsanit Ashram was built and continues to be a living and learning center. Please explore the book recommendations which include 2 books about our former advisor Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, as well as recent publications by our members Linda Buckley and Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo.

We look forward to seeing you in South Korea.

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Bhutan

Buddhist Leader in Bhutan Fully Ordains 144 Women, Resuming Ancient Tradition

Damcho Diana Finnegan, an American Tibetan Buddhist nun, called the ordination ceremony ‘a major step towards ending the institutionalized inequality between men and women in Tibetan Buddhism.’

21 June 2022

By **Haley Barker**

Source: Religion News Service - <https://religionnews.com/2022/06/21/buddhist-leader-in-bhutan-fully-ordains-144-women-resuming-ancient-tradition/>



(RNS) — On Tuesday (June 21), the Je Khenpo, the senior Buddhist authority in Bhutan, began ordaining a group of 144 women as bhikshunis, or female monks, at the Ramthangkha monastery in the tiny Himalayan country.

The ceremony “is of historical importance for all women in Buddhism and brings Tibetan Buddhism into the 21st century,” said Bhikshuni Jampa Tsedroen, a German Tibetan author. “For these nuns, it is a major opportunity

Buddhist nuns take ordination vows as bhikshunis, or female monks, June 21, 2022, at the Ramthangkha monastery in Bhutan.

Photo via Facebook/Zhung Dratshang གཞུང་བླ་མ་ལྷན་ཁག་ Central Monastic Body of Bhutan June 21, 2022 By Haley Barker

to demonstrate their abilities to contribute to Buddhism.”

Many of the new bhikshunis are Bhutanese, but some came to Bhutan

from other countries in Asia. They are all being ordained in the Tibetan lineage.

A Facebook post on the central monastic body of Bhutan page posted the news, which was confirmed by Damcho Diana Finnegan, an ordained Buddhist nun and co-founder of the Dharmadatta Nun’s Community in Virginia.

Asked about the ceremony, Finnegan called it a “major step towards ending the institutionalized inequality between men and women in Tibetan Buddhism.”

The ceremony is the culmination of a decades-long movement for full ordination for women in the Tibetan lineage, which has faced heavy resistance from top-level monks, scholars and political leaders across Asia. The bhikshuni movement has picked up steam in recent years as women worldwide have sought to restore a practice of ordaining women established, they say, by the Buddha himself, but which slowly disappeared from much of the Buddhist world until now.

After the death of the Buddha, female monks were commonly considered one of the key elements of the four-pronged ideal Buddhist community, consisting of lay men, lay women, male monks and female monks. However, over time, war, famine and disease took the lives of bhikshunis across Southeast Asia and Tibet.

Women have continued to live ascetic lives as nuns but have been barred from taking the next step to full ordination. Officially their status was held back by rules of the monastic code that require bhikshunis to be ordained



The Je Khenpo, seated left, the senior Buddhist authority in Bhutan, ordains a group of women as bhikshunis, or female monks, June 21, 2022, at the Ramthangkha monastery in Bhutan.

Photo via Facebook/Zhung Dratshang
འབྲུག་གཙུག་ལྷན་ཁག་ Central Monastic Body of Bhutan

by other bhikshunis, who didn't exist.

To break this bind, some women have taken other routes to full ordination. In 1996, a group of Sri Lankan nuns was ordained with help from Korean bhikshunis of the Mahayana lineage, which has never been broken. Since then, hundreds of bhikshunis have been ordained in Sri Lanka, in what Tsedroen describes as an "ecumenical ceremony," essentially reviving the population.

But in Bhutan, a handful of monks have taken ordination into their own hands and provided ordination to nuns without the presence of bhikshunis. Typically, this ceremony is only granted

to a small number of women, and never on the scale seen on Tuesday. According to Finnegan, an ordination this large guarantees a sangha, or bhikshuni community, that will persist well into the future.

"All other lineages of Buddhism have had sanghas of women fully ordain as monks. This is the first time Tibetan Buddhist women are given that opportunity," she said.

The current Dalai Lama has long encouraged bhikshuni ordination vows, and Bhikkhu Bodhi, a prominent monk in the Theravada lineage, practiced across India and Southeast Asia, has appealed to his legion of supporters to advocate for the bhikshuni movement. Influential Tibetan scholar-monk Geshe Lharampa Bhikshu Rinchen Ngudrup made a strong case for bhikshuni ordination in 2007 during a talk at the first International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha after years of research.

In addition, lay people across Asia have called attention to the excellent

behavior of nuns in comparison with male religious leaders. Scandals, such as fraud at Wat Dhammakaya in Thailand and an uptick in sexual assault charges against Tibetan lamas, have been rocking Buddhist communities around the world.

Thai journalist Sanitsuda Ekachai called attention to this dichotomy in her book *"Keeping the Faith: Thai Buddhism at the Crossroads,"* encouraging lay people to consider the future of the monastic order and how female monks could improve it.

Even with powerful voices and a clean track record behind the movement, gender equity in the Tibetan monastic order had yet to take off on the large scale that occurred today in Bhutan.

"This historic ordination ceremony may well create further pressure on other Buddhist communities in different countries to make full ordination available to nuns within Tibetan Buddhism," said Susanne Mrozik, associate professor of religion at Mount Holyoke College.

For some Buddhists, the fact that the ordinations began on the summer solstice is an auspicious sign, as are, according to the Facebook announcement, the appearance in Bhutan of "rainbows encircling the sun."

S

Burma/Myanmar

As Myanmar Burns, Junta Pours Money Into 'World's Tallest' Buddha Image

By *The Irrawaddy*, 27 June 2022

Source: *The Irrawaddy* - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/as-myanmar-burns-junta-pours-money-into-worlds-tallest-buddha-image.html>

While over 2,000 civilians have been killed in crackdowns and interrogations and 1.2 million more people displaced since the coup in Myanmar, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and his supporters are having a Buddha statue—touted as the world's biggest sitting Buddha image—built in Naypyitaw.

The 81-ft (24.69-m)-tall Buddha image known as Maravijaya is being constructed in a park of the same name in Dekkhinathiri Township along with more than 700 marble slabs inscribed with text from the Tripitaka, the entire

Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism. Through its media, the regime has been constantly urging people to make donations toward the construction of the Buddha image and stone inscriptions.

On Sunday, Min Aung Hlaing visited the construction site, and construction of the Buddha image is now 40-percent complete, junta media reported.

Among the biggest donors to the project are members of the current regime as well as former generals and

ministers of former military dictator Than Shwe and ex-general UThein Sein's administrations, according to the junta's announcement.

Donations were made in memory of late prime minister General Soe Win of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) regime, who allegedly masterminded the 2003 Tabayin Massacre in which junta-backed thugs attempted to assassinate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Sagaing.

U Nay Aung, U Pyi Aung and Navy chief Admiral Moe Aung also donated 60 million kyats (about US\$32,500) in memory of their late father U Aung Thaung, a henchman of U Than Shwe widely considered the most corrupt minister of the former regime.

U Nay Aung and U Pyi Aung are known to be arch-cronies of the current regime. U Pyi Aung is a son-in-law of General Maung Aye, who was the No. 2 man in Than Shwe's SPDC regime. U Moe Aung was promoted to Navy chief



(Clockwise from top left) Daw Thet Thet Khaing, U Aung Naing Oo, Min Aung Hlaing, Admiral Moe Aung, Daw Thidar Oo, U Tin Aung Myint, U Tin Aye, U Pyi Aung, U Aung Thaung.



shortly after last year's coup.

Vice-President U Tin Aung Myint Oo of U Thein Sein's administration, former Union Election Commission chairman former Lieutenant General Tin Aye, former information minister Brigadier-General Kyaw Hsan, former ministers at the President's Office former Vice Admiral Soe Thane and Thein Nyunt, former defense minister ex-general Wai Lwin, and former sports minister U Tint Hsan have also made contributions toward the building of the Buddha image to honor Min Aung Hlaing, who seized power from the National League for Democracy, which won two consecutive general elections in 2015 and 2020.

U Tin Aung Myint Oo donated 10 million kyats and ex-general U Tin Aye, who is U Thein Sein's friend and former chairman of military-owned Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd., handed out nearly 75 million kyats.

While the ex-generals of the previous regime have poured donations toward the building of the Maravijaya ("Victory over Mara") Buddha image, at

Regime chief Min Aung Hlaing in November 2021 with an architectural rendering of the pagoda compound where the world's largest Buddha image will be located.

least 20 regime minister including Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, Immigration Minister former Brig-Gen Khin Yi, Investment and Foreign Economic Relations and Social Welfare Minister Daw Thet Thet Khaing and Minister of Justice and Attorney-General Daw Thidar Oo also made contributions.

The majority of them lost to the NLD in the 2020 general election, but became ministers thanks to Min Aung Hlaing.

In the international arena, Wunna Maung Lwin who also served as foreign minister in U Thein Sein's administration is defending the atrocities of Min Aung Hlaing and his regime. U Khin Yi who served as the police chief in U Than Shwe's regime and immigration minister in U Thein Sein's quasi-civilian government, organized large-scale pro-

military rallies before Min Aung Hlaing's coup.

After being appointed as the minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Relations, former military officer U Aung Naing Oo sacked striking staff of his ministry. Daw Thet Thet Khaing, the former NLD lawmaker, is a turncoat who approached Min Aung Hlaing after she was defeated by her former party in the 2020 general election. Her husband Dr. Aung Kyaw Win, the owner of Golden Palace gold and jewelry shop, received an honorary title awarded by Min Aung Hlaing.

Union Attorney-General Daw Thidar Oo was concurrently appointed as minister of justice after she successfully adopted legislation designed to stifle dissidents in a way favorable to Min Aung Hlaing.

Meanwhile, Sitagu Sayadaw Bhaddanta Nyanissara and Ashin Chekinda, who are overseeing the construction of the Buddha statue, have also received promotions. After the coup, Sitagu Sayadaw, who was previously the joint head, became the head of the Shwekyin sect, the second largest monastic order of monks in Myanmar. Ashin Chekinda has also been promoted from a department head to acting rector at the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University in Yangon.

Obviously, retired and active generals are of one mind on perpetuating the military dictatorship in Myanmar, and they will definitely help the pagoda donor Min Aung Hlaing to become the country's president next year.

S

Sri Lanka

“Govt. used Sinhala-Buddhist Shield to its Maximum Benefit” says Ven. Galkande Dhammananda Thera

By **Kamanthi Wickramasinghe**

7 June 2022

Source: **Daily Mirror** - <https://www.dailymirror.lk/hard-talk/Govt-used-Sinhala-Buddhist-shield-to-its-maximum-benefit-Ven-Galkande-Dhammananda-Thera/334-23856422>

- This Govt. nurtured thug-like monks promoted them and deployed them in various places.
- Certain monks have severe psychological wounds.
- If society isn't healed cases of domestic violence, harassment and child abuse will be on the rise.
- Reconciliation was about having workshops, providing a report and earning dollars.
- Accountability has not been included in the Constitution or the Judicial system.
- Terrorism sprouts in a country that has no justice.

Ven. Galkande Dhammananda Thera who currently heads the Walpola Rahula Institute for Buddhist Studies has been addressing issues related to social justice and harmony while promoting an inclusive and plural society. Having gathered a wealth of experience during the height of war for instance and having encountered various incidents during his lifetime, Ven. Dhammananda Thera has been preaching on the practice of social healing for quite some time. He has also been quite vocal about conventional Buddhist approaches that most people tend to follow and the damage done to

society as a result of diverting from Buddha's teachings. “We are a wounded society. A society that doesn't have its wounds healed would only know to seek solutions through wounds,” he said in an interview with the Daily Mirror.

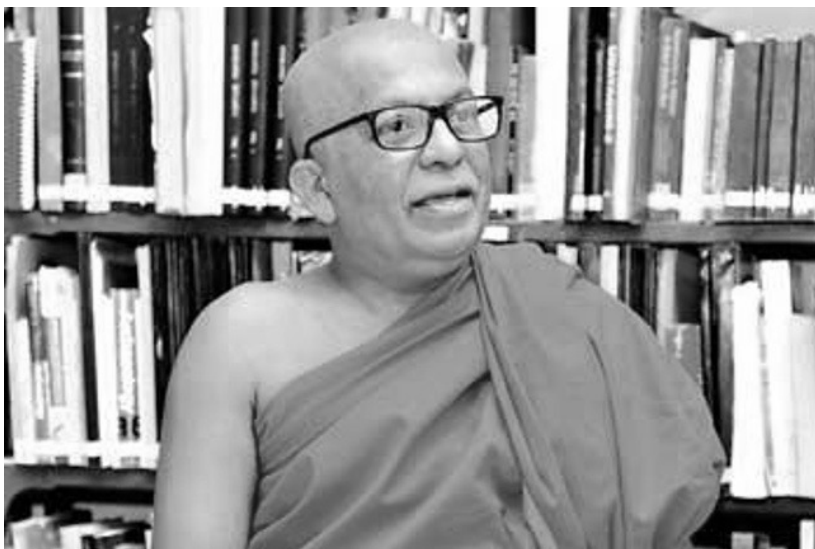
Excerpts :

Q The incumbent Government used the Sinhala-Buddhist ideology as a shield to win votes. What are your observations?

The incumbent regime and successive regimes have harped on the Sinhala-Buddhist ideology. But this time it was used dangerously and it was used against the Muslim community. They portrayed Muslims as a threat and tried to group Sinhala-Buddhists as one lot and the rest of the ethnicities as enemies. This government used the Sinhala-Buddhist shield to its maximum benefit.

Q We saw how the President took oaths at the Ruwanweli Seya, the day before May 9 the former Prime Minister visited Anuradhapura, they put pirith to distract slogans chanted by protesters in front of Temple Trees. Don't you think the Rajapaksas used Buddhism as a weapon?

How I see it is that they used religion without any respect or ethical consideration. In order to spread wrong information about the Muslim community, they held workshops for monks. At these workshops, they showed videos of Boko Haram and videos based on Islam extremism. Thereafter they would advise monks to



allocate around 10-15 minutes from their bana sermons to talk about Islam extremism. This was done several months before the election. Many monks in various outstation areas have complained to me about this and they confessed that they allocated some time from their sermons to talk about extremism. The sermon was never misused in this manner. A lay person invites a monk to his home to find some peace, but this Government spread hatred among people by compelling monks to talk about religious extremism. I have never seen Buddhism being used in such a violent manner ever before. They also nurtured thug-like monks, promoted them and deployed them in various places.

Q Many prominent Buddhist monks also supported the incumbent government...

Many Buddhist monks instilled fear among the people. Then the Easter Sunday attacks happened and what they were preaching became a reality. It happened at an unexpected moment. So there was fear and people needed security and someone to protect them.

Q Do you think that by entering politics, Buddhist monks have distorted Buddha's teachings or the philosophy itself?

Buddhist monks started doing politics way back in 1946. But here the situation was different. During the colonial era, Buddhists were an oppressed segment of people. Therefore, several monks representing the oppressed segments of society entered politics through the Vidyalankara

Pirivena. They brought a theoretical approach to it and said that it is the responsibility of the monks to give a voice to oppressed people, despite it being called politics or anything else. Their responsibility was to voice for the oppressed irrespective of taking positions or power or contest at an election. During the Free Education struggle, it was the monks who played a pivotal role in pushing the then Government to discuss the Free Education Act which was halted for three years. These monks had a newspaper called 'Kaalaya' (Time) and one of the resolutions passed during a meeting was that monks who did not engage in politics can continue to thrive from alms offered by the wealthy and that they are not eligible to receive alms offered by the poor. Therefore, politics for them was about voicing for the oppressed. However, this idea was later distorted to a point where it had no direction and monks started going after power and money. Today's monks don't have any idea about why monks joined politics back in 1946.

Q We are witnessing a people's struggle and a public uprising. How can monks contribute to politics from now onwards?

Monks should go beyond religiosity and extremism. Buddhism talks about an ecosystem that goes beyond the human species. If they cannot address the ecosystem they should concentrate on humans and keep in mind that nobody is superior to one another. That they cannot be differentiated based on race, religion, gender etc.

Q Let's talk about the war and its aftermath. You have always said that we are a wounded society. We suffer from trauma. But we don't see victims and survivors being remembered during so-called victory parades. The war has been glorified and most memories have been erased. What sort of impact do these kinds of events have on society like ours?

As I have said before, we are a society that has been wounded. These wounds can either be direct or inter-generationally transmitted wounds. My ancestors were displaced during the 1818 Uva-Wellassa rebellion and they moved towards forest areas in the Eastern Province. These would have been women and survivors of the rebellion and I always try to imagine how difficult it would have been to leave their ancestral homes behind. Since I haven't experienced this I don't know how their wounds were healed. But this society continues to live with sore wounds. A society that doesn't have its wounds healed would only know to seek solutions through wounds. If they come across a problem, they will resort to using their power to suppress another and resolve the matter. This was witnessed during 1971, '88/'89 insurrections and the 30-year ethnic conflict and after destroying everything with weapons, they are ready to pack and leave.

The funny part is that those war victors are now ruling this country and the country is now in dire straits, worse than Bangladesh. According to them,

the problem was the war and they said this country will be developed once it is over. Everybody talks about constructing highways, but we need to look at the progress of people first. It has to start with education, but this education system worsens the wounds further. Teachers should be healed first but this change doesn't come in the form of a document. It should be a continuous process that should span for around 10 years. We have a new Prime Minister, but bringing dollars alone won't resolve this problem. Healing is a must. If not, cases of domestic violence, harassment, workplace harassment and child abuse will be on the rise. With all these, there's no point in bringing dollars to the country.

Q Don't you think that the word 'reconciliation' has been misused?

Yes. During this process, we didn't have words in our vocabulary. They used English/foreign terms and concepts. The English term was translated to Sinhala, but they didn't even know the concept. As a result, they introduced foreign concepts and it was something completely new.

There were issues in the mechanism, but many NGO groups earned dollars through these projects. They would hold workshops, provide a report and get their dollars. This was what they called reconciliation. But our institute also got involved in this healing process, but we were of the stance that money is not important during the reconciliation process.

The programme we conducted was called the Rahula-Thangarajah Twin School programme. When Walpola

Rahula Thera was selected to University as the first Buddhist monk back in 1930, he was sidelined by the Buddhist community. It was a Tamil gentleman named Saravanamuttu Thangarajah who helped Ven. Rahula to continue his studies.

They were good friends and we named this programme in honour of their friendship. For this programme, we merged two schools, namely the Therankandal Tamil School, Thunukkai and Halmillawetiya Vidyalaya in Keithigollawa.

We worked in both schools for around six months and merged the schools. We travelled in buses, ate what they gave us and slept where we could. So, we were similar to them. We initially donated a water filter to the Therankandal School through the support of well-wishers. We subsequently brought these children to Horana for a workshop and we had collected around Rs. 375,000. The total budget was around Rs. 1.3 million. We had to bring them in five buses, provide accommodation, and meals and we had to pay for translators.

I wanted to do something practical and somebody suggested that we invite the owner of the Wasana Bakers. He was abducted during the height of the war and was taken away by the Army. Upon hearing his story the soldier had released him. After running for dear life, he later returned to his village during Chandrika Bandaranaike's tenure. He has subsequently started working at a bakery and had learned everything from scratch. Having commenced his journey by providing sponge cake to latex cultivators, Wasana

Bakers today is a flourishing business in the bakery industry.

Since I was impressed by this story I visited him and invited him to speak to the children. He was quite surprised because all that while he had had visitors coming to ask for money. Subsequently, he provided us with his wedding hall which was established to host functions of their staff. The programme was a success. Likewise, everybody who contributed had been affected by the war in many ways than one. One of the translators was a Muslim lady and she was a single mother too. She provided her support on a voluntary basis and therefore we were able to travel via Kandy as per the request of the children at Therankandal School. This was our reconciliation model. We have to solve an issue even if we are hungry. But we can't solve an issue just by taking money from a neighbour. Therefore, the reconciliation model in Sri Lanka is a money-making business, and therefore it's a failure.

Q When we talk about reconciliation we only talk about the North and East. Similar incidents happened in the South as well. But today, the Offices on Missing Persons etc., don't function efficiently. What are your thoughts?

Abductions and killings have been the order of the day. Three monks whom I knew were abducted this way. One of them was abducted in Dehiwela. An eyewitness told me that 'Podi Hamuduruwo' was abducted while on the bus. To date, I don't know his whereabouts. Two other monks by the names Denagama Pangnaloka,

Koradikumbure Gnanaloka had also been abducted and are missing to date. Nobody talks about them. If we can give a colour to the breath of people whose loved ones have gone missing, we'll be able to see how dark this atmosphere is.

This is like a mass grave, but we continue to light incense sticks and move forward. We are trying to forget these memories. Anybody can forget the incident, but they cannot forget the memories that resulted from the incident. We meet these wounded individuals as drivers, passengers, etc. These wounds result in aggression and violence.

Q Are we too late to introduce proper healing techniques to these individuals?

Since we are facing a socio-economic crisis at present, we should look at incorporating healing practices within a probable system change.

Q Even though religious places could give some kind of healing, we see people going to temples to post pictures of their offerings, mostly as a trend. Where have we gone wrong?

I believe that there are wounded individuals at religious institutions as well. Certain monks have severe psychological wounds. During the Imperial era, they lived in fear thinking that they would be extinct. During colonial invasions they become oppressed. Thereafter they have this oppressed mindset. Monks got involved during the insurrections and monks were targeted during the ethnic conflict as well. Therefore they fear whether

they would be extinct. Even in Mahavamsa monks have been attributed to protecting the country and the Sāsana. Whenever some monks establish an organisation, they have several keywords; either it's something to do with protecting the Sāsana or the motherland.

A farmer protects his paddy field from wild beasts. By saying that they are protecting the Sāsana itself shows that the Sāsana will end and that it has enemies. Then there are wounds when monks are ordained at a younger age, they have wounds since they don't have a chance to enjoy their youth. The temple is the place that has all these wounds. Someone with a wound goes to another person with a wound to tell their sorrows. I'm not blaming anyone. But I feel that monks should accept the fact that they have been wounded and heal themselves first. I feel that instead of healing a wounded society, they have transformed this society into a marketplace. Therefore, we can sell various things to this wounded society such as pirith nool, nisaka dathu wandana, etc. Religion includes teachings that bring about spiritual healing, but we can bring about healing only if monks accept that they too have been wounded.

Q Doesn't ordaining novice monks fall under harassment against children?

We have to understand that children are not in a position to make decisions about their life. On the other hand, children are safest when they are with their parents. If children are not safe with their parents, then they belong

to the State. If a child is being taken from a safe environment to another guardian, there has to be a mechanism in place. It should happen via the National Child Protection Authority. If I want to take a child under my custody then I should appeal to the NCPA and the NCPA should monitor whether I have sound mental health and whether a child would be safe around me and the environment in which he has to live in.

They should observe the visitors who come here, they should check if I have the time to attend to the child, etc. If all these eligibility criteria have been ticked then I'm eligible to have a child under my guardianship. Thereafter if two parents like to hand over a child this should happen in the presence of NCPA officials. Subsequently, these officers should visit every three months to see if he is in a secure environment until the child turns 18. Ordaining as a life decision. If the child wants to reverse his decision, he should be allowed to do so. If he has only studied Pali verses then he cannot face life afterwards. In the end, he should be able to make a healthy decision.

Q Do you think religious places are safe for children?

This depends from place to place. There's no place that can be a safer place for children than with their parents. When it comes to a religious place, religious leaders have less time to allocate to children. A child needs love, affection and care. But I know some places that look after novice monks and children very well. On the other hand, the family unit in a wounded society has been shattered in most instances.

Children are at the receiving end in situations like this and as a result, the child is insecure. Therefore, we cannot generalize based on whether a child ends up in a good place or a bad place. We need to put secure mechanisms in place so that children are brought up in safer environments.

Q Let's talk about the ongoing people's protests. This is perhaps the first non-violent, peaceful protest that happened in history. But things took a violent turn during the Vesak week. What are your thoughts?

The unprecedented socio-economic crisis brought people towards a common ground. People were inconvenienced due to a shortage of essential items, medicine, fuel etc. It is in this backdrop that people commenced this struggle. People started chanting slogans and it was a non-violent protest. But like during every other instance, the rulers used violence to disrupt the protest. This happened during the 1950s when people requested to include Tamil as an official language. The difference is that

this time due to advancements in technology, the whole of the citizenry witnessed the violence, thanks to social media. People knew that the peaceful protesters were voicing everyone's rights. Everybody felt like they were being attacked.

Q There are many discussions taking place at the Galle Face protest site. Is it a starting point to usher in a new era of governance?

Accountability has not been included in the Constitution or the Judicial system. No politician has been imprisoned for corruption. In that case, everybody should be corrupt. The Constitution should give power to the people. People are in fact like slaves and we have rulers. But we should be citizens and we send a representative to voice on behalf of citizens' rights. I think this started from GotaGoGama. I don't know where it is heading. Initially, there were people with various political mindsets and later on, people with extremist ideas too found their ground at the protest site. Therefore, I cannot say whether there is one common idea being resonated from the protest site.

But I appreciate its positive approaches.

Q We have always witnessed a political culture based on promises. Do you think these people's protests would bring about a shift in people's mindsets?

Nothing has been done to bring about a shift in people's mindsets. The incumbent regime doesn't care much about the Galle Face protest because their mandate is being decided by people who can be bought over a lunch packet or other short term incentive. The only progressive aspect is that this time people are more knowledgeable about politics thanks to social media. There could be certain changes in this regard in Colombo and suburbs, but in rural areas, people will still be faithful to those who rule their electorates.

Q Justice has become a buzzword. With all that is going on, can we heal ourselves in time to come?

Terrorism sprouts in a country that has no justice. This is what happened on May 9. When the mobsters attacked Galle Face protesters, violence emerged in other parts of the country. This is what happened throughout history. Nobody apologized for the 30-year ethnic conflict. Easter Sunday attacks were a terrible disaster that wounded the Christian and Catholic communities. They feel that they are accountable for the lives that have been lost. Without justice, we can't move forward. Even though we say this repeatedly we don't learn this lesson. We should accept that we have been wounded and that we need to heal together.



Recommended Reading

Gyari Rinpoche - Lodi Gyaltsen, 1949 - 2018, Memorial Book

Edited & Compiled: Dhondup Gonpo, Nyima Tsering, Agya Gonpo Tsering, Tsewang Gyatso

Design & Layout: Thinley Dorji, New York, 2020

Tibet

Historic Moment for Tibet: Tibetan National Flag and Buddhist Flag Hoisted at Parc du Tibet in Geneva

By **Staff Reporter**

7 June 2022

Source: **Central Tibetan Administration** - <https://tibet.net/historic-moment-for-tibet-tibetan-national-flag-and-buddhist-flag-hoisted-at-parc-du-tibet-in-geneva/>



Geneva: On the occasion of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 87th birthday, the Tibetan national flag and the Buddhist Flag were hoisted for the first time on 6 July 2022 at 10:30 am, at *Parc du Tibet, Geneva*.

The Tibetan national flag was hoisted by the Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Thinlay Chukki from Tibet Bureau, Geneva and the former Mayor of Onex and Swiss Parliamentarian Rene Longet, who is currently the Chief Coordinator of Swiss Tibet Friendship Association-French Speaking Section. The Buddhist Flag was hoisted by the Vice-President

Celebrating the 87th birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Parc du Tibet in front of Tibetan National Flag and Buddhist Flag

of Tibetan Community of Switzerland & Liechtenstein Tenzin Wangdu and Lama Kunsang from Drikung Kagyu Dorje Ling center in Switzerland. The flags will be permanently hoisted at the park.

Prior to the hoisting of the flags, a small Buddhist religious ceremony was held for the consecration of the stupa which was led by Lama Kunsang from Drikung Kagyu Dorje Ling center in

Switzerland. The holy statue of Buddha placed inside the stupa for consecration was bestowed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama's office last year.

Representative Thinlay Chukki of the Tibet Bureau- Geneva thanked the Geneva section of the Tibetan community of Switzerland and Liechtenstein for organising this important event. UN advocacy officer Kalden Tsomo of Tibet Bureau- Geneva, Vice-President of Tibetan Community of Switzerland & Liechtenstein Tenzin Wangdu, Co-representative of French speaking part of Swiss Tibetan Friendship Association, President of Tibetan community of Geneva section, Yonga Tsesutsang along with members of local Tibetan community and Tibet supporters gathered at this landmark event.

Celebrating the 87th birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Geneva local Tibetan community members and Tibet supporters prayed for the good health and longevity of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to continue to inspire peace and positivity for the entire humanity.

Parc du Tibet was inaugurated on 14 February 1998 by the Mayor of Bernex to support Tibetans and their non-violent struggle for freedom back in their home country, Tibet. Subsequently, a Buddhist stupa was constructed in the park which was inaugurated on 1 October 2001 by the Mayor and the Council of Bernex in the presence of officials from Tibet Bureau- Geneva and monks from the Rikon Monastery. The stupa is named as Stupa of Enlightenment.

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Overview of INEB's Activities in 2021

By INEB Staff

Content

Executive Summary

Overview and Update of Initiatives

- **Child Protection**
- **Climate and Ecology**
 - ECO Temple Community Development Projects
 - ICE - Inter-religious Climate and Ecology Network
 - INEB Protecting Wildlife - Reducing Demand for Wildlife Products
 - IUCN World Conservation Conference
- **Pandemic Emergency Response and Holistic Healthcare**
 - Mindful Action – COIVD-19 Emergency Relief Fund
 - Buddhist Psychotherapy and Chaplaincy Working Group
- **Humanitarian Response after the Myanmar Coup of February 2021 and for asylum seekers from Cambodia**
 - Political activists seeking asylum in Thailand
 - Monks and nuns
 - Asylum seekers from Cambodia
- **Peace and Interfaith Collaborations**
 - International Forum on Buddhist Muslim Relations (BMF)
 - Southeast Asia : Advancing Inter-Religious dialogue and Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) (SEA-AIR)
 - Regional Network for Peacebuilders Project - Sangha for Peace
- **INEB Institute for Transformative Learning**
 - SENS – School of English for Engaged Social Service
 - 3OM – One-on-One Mentoring
 - Young Bodhisattva and Digital Bodhisattva
- **Women and Gender Equality**
 - Female Sangha Initiative for Social Transformation in SEA
- **Networking and INEB's 20th International Biennial Conference Media**
 - *Seeds of Peace*
 - Publications
 - New expanded digital presence –communication strategy (website, social media – FB, monthly newsletter)
- **Secretariat**
 - Code of Conduct
 - Gender Equality and Social Inclusion - GESI lens
 - Annual retreat
 - Staff update

Executive Summary

The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) presents its annual report for 2021, which provides updates about the projects by category. INEB's members made substantial progress on their activities which are discussed within the report. Myanmar's military coup which took place on February 1, 2021, significantly impacted our partner's activities within the country, some of which we were able to respond with the support of INEB's partners in other parts of the world. Donors have also been very supportive and flexible as new projects were initiated under difficult circumstances.

Some highlights from 2021 include:

- Receiving funding for initiating 3 new programs managed by the Secretariat which are:
 - Regional Network for Peacebuilders Project or Sangha for Peace
 - Research study on the status violence against child protection in 5 Buddhist countries in the Mekong river sub-region
 - INEB's women's initiative expanded through the Female Sangha Initiative for Social Transformation in SEA
- Providing humanitarian support to Buddhist monks and nuns in Myanmar, as well as asylum seekers from Cambodia and activists from Myanmar that are seeking asylum in Thailand
- The Eco-Temple network staying connected through several Zoomcasts and expanding their activities in some countries where they are based such as India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Japan.
- Two programs offered through the INEB Institute, School of English for Engaged Social Service

and 3OM were successful despite the challenges presented by the pandemic and security concerns.

- The Buddhist Psychotherapy and Chaplaincy Working Group successfully conducted a series of Zoom meetings throughout the year which helped move their work forward
- 1st ICE Forum on Climate and Ecology was held in July, and ICE received observer status with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change which allows them to arrange side events and exhibitions at COP.
- INEB's digital presence expanded
- Planning for INEB's 20th international conference hosted by Jungto Society in South Korea

We really celebrate all the efforts of our members and partners which have contributed so much to increasing our capacity and presence throughout the network. By using diverse approaches their combined efforts are helping to bring about social change at many levels of society that will be long-lasting.

Overview and Update of Activities

Child Protection

INEB and Arigatou International collaborated on a research study which was conducted in five predominantly Buddhist countries of the Mekong sub-region of Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Lao PDR, and Thailand) with local researchers and experts based in each country. The purpose of this research study was to establish baseline data through assessing the mechanisms and impact of both protecting children and preventing violence against children, including online abuse or exploitation, in Buddhist educational institutions located in the 5 countries.

This research project is a step toward understanding the status of violence against children and whether and how protection mechanisms are being used by Buddhist educational institutions in the five countries

participating in this study. These mechanisms can be strengthened in Buddhist education institutions through the Arigatou and INEB networks, as well as their other partners' networks in the region. This research took place under difficult conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the aftermath of the February 1, 2021, military coup in Myanmar which added layers of complexity to gathering data by the local country researchers.

Outcomes and lessons learned from this initial research study will be the foundation for future activities as INEB and Arigatou International continue their collaboration. Preliminary findings show that although all the countries have mechanisms in place to protect children and prevent violence against them, children are still subjected to forms of psychological and physical violence.

Climate and Ecology

Eco-Temple Community Development Project Activity Report

Series of Zoomcasts during the pandemic:

- 1) February 26 - "Tera Energy: Inspirational Learning from a Japanese Buddhist Energy Community"
- 2) April 15 - "10 Years of Fall-out: Taking Nuclear to Court" concerning the Fukushima nuclear accident
- 3) July 29 - "Green Sustainable Livelihood & Compressed Stabilized Earth Bricks," Tamil Nadu, India
- 4) October 28 - "Metta Garden: A Space for All Beings while Practicing Loving Kindness" in Sri Lanka and New Delhi, India

The plan is to continue these on-line seminars in 2022 with hopefully some live field reporting.

Various members' activities are described below:

- *Small Sphere: Local Ecology through Food Security and Waste Management for Home & Community:* Atisha Dipankar Peace Trust, Bangladesh. Project to produce safe food for consumption with maintaining food security and sustainable food supplies through developing a local Good Market. This project is also intended to generate income.

- *Metta Garden Project, India & Sri Lanka:* at the Mahabodhi temple in Delhi. Sri Lanka, in mid-2021, 15 women from urban and suburban settings were selected to set up Metta Gardens. A handbook on making Metta Gardens is being written.

The focus for 2022 is to develop more networks with environmentally conscious monks in Sri Lanka to spread the practice of Metta Gardening in temples, as with the Delhi Mahabodhi temple.

- *Medium Sphere: Community & Regional Ecology through Land Restoration and Integrated Farming, “New Theory Agriculture” (Kok Nong Na) for Sufficiency Economy, Thailand.* 2021 was a great year for the KNN movement because King Rama X became interested through the influence of one of his royal consorts and has begun to financially support and promote it. The KNN system contributes to organic food, medicine, and clean ground water. Phra Sangkhom estimates that there are now over 10,000 such KNN projects in Thailand. At the end of 2021, he met the head of the military in Surin district to integrate KNN into the curriculum of 35,000 schools there.
- *Large Sphere: Regional & Trans-National Ecology: Wildlife Corridors, Forest Preservation, & Biodiversity, Thailand.* INEB is collaborating with the International Union on the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to develop a research project on wildlife corridors as a model for action research. The study will help develop and preserve the corridor that stretches along the Phukheio-Namnow and the World Heritage Dong Phrayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complexes in North-East Thailand, which serves as the backbone watershed for central Thailand and one also for the entire Mekong region connecting Laos and Cambodia. This will include the ground environmental work for reforestation supported through which Phra Phaisan's foundation.
- *Cross Sector Technology I: Clean, Sustainable Energy – Japan.* Rev. Okochi has been active in an ongoing court case with his group the Interfaith Forum for the Review of National Nuclear Policy, which has brought a legal case to close the giant nuclear fuel

reprocessing center in Aomori on the northern tip of Japan's main island. Rev. Masakazu Iwata, a minister of the United Church of Christ in Japan based in Aomori, a leader in the Interfaith Forum, and the chief plaintiff for this court case, passed away.

Vested interests in Japan called the Nuclear Village are fighting to revive nuclear power. They have been hiring PR companies to spread disinformation on solar energy. With the Japanese political leadership now in turmoil, there seems to be little chance for major changes in these energy policies. Under these conditions they are continuing to work at the community level.

- *Cross Sector Technology II Ecological Architecture through Compressed Stabilized Earth Blocks (CSEB), Sukhavati Eco-Temple, Tamil Nadu, India.* Gautham Prabhu has been working with innovators in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, to learn how to make CSEB and to procure the machines needed to make them for building his eco-temple, and also providing an income generating business of CSEB makers among Dalit communities. In March 2021, they received a two-year grant to procure such machines. Since then until October 2021, some workers at Auroville were trained to use these machines. Then in November, they began moving these new machines to a plot of land in their region to begin production with a focus on female Dalit women.
- *Cross Sector Social Enterprise I: Eco-Products, Atisha Dipankar Peace Trust, Bangladesh.* The project's goal is to end using plastic products, and improve people's health and well-being by making eco-friendly household and commercial products.

Inter-Religious Climate & Ecology (ICE) Network

Based in Seoul, South Korea

- *Interfaith Climate Justice & Regeneration Training* began holding regular monthly meetings in preparation for the training scheduled from April 23 to June 4, 2022, sponsored by Franciscan Family in S. Korea.

- *1st ICE Forum on Climate and Ecology* entitled Gross National Happiness: Advocacy to Grassroots Development was held on July 29, 2021. The forum focused on raising awareness about the significance of adopting and applying alternative indicators to GDP for measuring people's wellbeing. It also included the lessons drawn from Bhutan's GNH, as well as the application of GNH and lessons learnt in Thailand and South Korea.
- *Climate Adaptation Project for Takuu People* - ICE began supporting the Takuu climate refugees, who left their homeland, the Takuu Island of Papua New Guinea, and moved to Buka Island because of rising sea levels and salinization. There was a food shortage when the people could no longer grow their staple food crop of taro. Around 600 people, or 90 percent of the population, have moved to Buka without sufficient means to support their livelihood. In December 2021, the ICE Network fundraised 38,000 USD with the support of the Catholic organization, the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscan) JPIC. The fund would support their fishing and agricultural projects which ultimately contribute to their sovereignty as a people. The community also plans to build the Takuu Cultural and Resource Center.
- *ICE received observer status with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - UNFCCC* in November 2021, which allows them to arrange side events and exhibitions at COP.

INEB's Environmental Activities

Reducing Demand for Wildlife Products

INEB, in collaboration with USAID Wildlife Asia, organized two events in 2021, following a successful workshop at Wat Chak Daeng in 2020. The main objective was to increase spiritual leaders' (Buddhist monks, nuns, and interested laypersons) awareness and activities supporting reducing the demand for wildlife products, especially tiger fangs and elephant ivory.

- 1st event - 13 March 2021 - *Workshop for Spiritual Leaders on Reducing Demand for Wildlife Products* workshop, Phitsanulok Psychiatric Hospital

in Wang Thong district, Phitsanulok province. Participants included: 22 Buddhist monks and 6 lay representatives from 20 temples in 11 provinces including the Bodhiyalaya Foundation and the Sekhiyadhamma network. These participants are considered to be the key influencers to promote the message to stop using wildlife products and stop killing wildlife.

- 2nd event - 6 July 2021 - *Seminar for Spiritual Leaders to Reduce Demand for Wildlife Products* was broadcast online via Zoom and via Facebook Live. The workshops' objectives aimed to strengthen the capacity and commitment of Buddhist monks and nuns in key Thai temples to effectively reduce the demand for wildlife products through a strong campaign message led by USAID Wildlife Asia. The 39 participants included: 9 male monks, 3 female monks, and 27 laypeople.

INEB will continue collaborating with USAID on Reducing Demand for Wildlife Project in Thailand during 2022.

IUCN World Conservation Congress (3-11 September 2021, Marseille, France)

INEB, as an IUCN member, sent one staff member to participate in the congress which brings together IUCN's government, civil society and indigenous peoples' member organizations to take decisions related to major conservation issues.

Pandemic Emergency Response and Holistic Healthcare

- *Mindful Action* - Emergency COVID response fund April 2020 - June 2021 awarded 1,000 - 5,000 USD to partners in 5 countries - Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Myanmar, and Nepal. A total of 32,237 persons directly benefitted from the partner's activities that distributed food, traditional medicine, hygiene and sanitary supplies, psycho-social counseling, medical transportation, information to protect children from sexual violence, as well as COVID awareness campaigns and materials.

● *Buddhist Psychotherapy and Chaplaincy Working Group - 3rd Round 2021-22*

After a decade of researching, documenting, and promoting the work of suicide prevention Buddhist priests in Japan, the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC) @ Kodosan held two international conferences (Japan 2017 and Thailand 2019). Since the first conference, the themes have expanded to include Buddhist psychology and psychotherapy, as well as Buddhist chaplaincy. The working group moved forward in 2021 with a 3rd round of explorations on these issues based on the following questions:

- ▶ What are the contributions Buddhist teachings, its teachers, and its institutions can make to contribute to psycho-spiritual health?
- ▶ How this work can be done in various settings, such as within the family, the community, and the temple, as well as during natural disasters, as suicide prevention, as end-of-life care and grieving, for students and young adults, etc.?
- ▶ How can the ideas from the above two areas help to form a training system for professional chaplains, volunteers, ordained persons, and engaged lay persons?

General Goals:

- ▶ to deepen our understandings and practices through high-level mutual interaction
- ▶ to develop a sangha of high-level practitioners
- ▶ to clarify and reinforce Buddhist concepts and practices being used in mainstream society and the psycho-spiritual care movement
- ▶ to promote Buddhist chaplaincy in Asia (with INEB's support)
- ▶ to deepen Buddhist chaplaincy in the West

They developed a series of intimate, private zoom webinars among a group of thirteen practitioners from East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Europe, and North America. These webinars have been held once a month for 2-3 hours since October 2021 with participants sharing their work and interests and engaging in a lively exchange of opinions.

Humanitarian Response to Myanmar's Military Coup of February 2021 and for Asylum Seekers from Cambodia

INEB's humanitarian response following the Myanmar's military coup is a collaboration with the US-based Clear View Project that supports people from Myanmar in the following categories:

- *Political activists supporting the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) seeking asylum have arrived in Thailand.* Since December 2021, 6 persons (3 women and 3 men) have benefited from support for costs associated with living in Thailand including Thai visas, quarantine in an approved hotel and testing, health insurance, food and lodging, etc.
- *Buddhist monks and nuns within Myanmar that supported the CDM from July 2021 through January 2022.* A total of 42,259,300 Myanmar kyat supported 266 persons, including primarily monks, 3 nuns, one refugee from an ethnic state, several novices and orphans, from across Myanmar. The support provided included food, medicine, transportation, costs while in prison, and more.
- 42 persons from Cambodian seeking asylum in Thailand arrived in November and December for whom INEB helped to arrange safe accommodations, etc.

Peace and Interfaith Collaborations

- *The International Forum on Buddhist-Muslim Relations - BMF* – The most recent core group member meeting of the BMF was a Zoom meeting held on March 3, 2021, which had 8 participants. All previous meeting scheduled during the early months of the pandemic had been canceled. Action taken included appointing Somboon Chungprampree (Moo) to continue as the secretariat based in Bangkok for another two years. Discussion included: updates of the situation inside Myanmar, the Rohingyas, and the Sri Lankan country context; membership fees; reviewing the Terms of Reference; and an in depth reflection by Moo of the past year.
- *SEA AIR FoRB - Southeast Asia : Advancing Inter-Religious dialogue and Freedom of Religion or Belief*

(FoRB) (SEA-AIR) - The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, in collaboration with INEB and consortium partners, successfully completed the European Union-funded SEA-AIR project, despite a time of unprecedented challenges. From January 2019 to June 2021, SEA-AIR staff and fellows participated in a flurry of activities: conferences, research, workshops, social media campaigns, and dozens of community events to promote the right to freedom of religion or belief in communities across South and Southeast Asia.

During the project, International Forum on Buddhist Muslim Relations (BMF) developed a two-year strategic plan for the as a regional structure to advance interfaith cooperation, in Myanmar established cohorts of religious and traditional leaders, engaged hardline actors, conducted trainings for female religious leaders, and acted as key coordinating agents throughout the pandemic and in the immediate aftermath of the military coup. INEB's on-going presence and attempts to engage sensitively and constructively with 'hard-line' Buddhist nationalists resulted in a high level of trust with a wide range of actors. This enabled them to conduct ground-breaking efforts to enhance intrafaith dialogue and inclusive trainings with marginalized groups. These activities raised participants' gender awareness and confidence to address issues of discrimination and misconduct within the Sangha education system and to promote collaborative actions developed by nuns to foster equality.

Throughout the pandemic and the civil disobedience movement that began after the military coup of February 1, 2021, INEB adapted to community needs throughout Myanmar. With SEA-AIR support, staff coordinated with peacebuilders and religious actors to provide information and support who continue to face tremendous challenges.

The SEA-AIR project established a new network of peacebuilders in South and Southeast Asia. While the project has ended, these peacebuilders are equipped with the resources and expertise to continue their work, sharing their stories, and bravely promoting inclusiveness, human rights, and

freedom of religion or belief in their communities and countries for years to come.

- *The Regional Network for Peacebuilders Project* funded by USAID in collaboration with FHI360 began in March 2021. The project aims to create a learning platform for peacebuilders from Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand to become key influencers in their countries and in the region. Experiential country learning missions are the platform which is designed help form a learning community among project participants. The outcomes would contribute

INEB Institute for Transformative Learning

The INEB Institute offers these programs: the School of English for Engaged Social Service and 3OM – One-On-One Mentoring, in addition to Young Bodhisattva training and Digital Bodhisattva.

- *SENS 2021* was successful against very strong challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the program to be postponed until May, which included a smaller group of 9 students, and to limit the field trips. Quarantines and extra visa regulations also made bringing non-Thais far more expensive. However, the Myanmar coup made it impossible to bring the Myanmar partners.
- *3OM* grew out of difficulties in providing English and leadership training to minority ethnic groups living under repressive political conditions. One-on-one mentoring proved to be a way to continue providing instruction in English that was both responsive to individual needs and safe for the individual students. Offering such mentoring required assembling a team of tutors and finding students who wanted the kind of teaching being offered.

A number of the 3OM students were already English teachers who often worked in less-than-ideal conditions. In mid-2021 a four-week program in English Teacher Training was added to the regular tutoring.

While 3OM began as a way to respond to the needs of a particular ethnic group, it also included participants from the SENS alumni network and

from various parts of Asia. Several alumni of SENS and/or 3OM have gone on to design their own programs largely modelled after our own, but also modified to respond to local conditions and to their own vision of what is needed. This is a very welcome development, and hope that the programs can continue to create not only a stronger alumni network that engages with INEB, but also spin-off programs that carry on and extend INEB values and approaches to transformative learning.

● *Young Bodhisattva Program – YBP – and Digital Bodhisattva* - The pandemic has shifted the program to utilize the digital technology that's readily available. The year began with the Alumni New Year Reunion held online on January 3, 2021, attended by 7 alumni participants from Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Korea.

The key achievement in the first half of the year is that the program expanded and was transformed. The Digital Bodhisattva was developed as an online focus group of the YBP to explore and understand the impact of digital innovation on the lives of people to find ways to express our spiritual practice, especially compassion in this digital environment.

A total of 14 members from Indonesia, India, Vietnam, and UK (later 4-6 active) were selected to participate in this focus group that met four times with reading assignments and group presentations. An online viewing party of the documentary, *The Great Hack*, was scheduled with discussions on topics such as big data collection, privacy, and disinformation; block chain technologies; artificial intelligence; e-learning; and the digital divide.

The second half of the year, the core group developed a Talk Series on Clubhouse. Three events were organized in the theme of Digital Bodhisattva to emphasize the role of digital media, evolution of digital economy, and cybersecurity:

- 20 August 2021 – The Role of Digital Media as Tools for Social Change
- 25 November 2021 – A Buddhist Vision of Crypto-Economics
- 16 December 2021 – Think Before You Click: Cultivating Cybersecurity

During each talk, audiences were able to engage through Clubhouse. Later on, they were broadcasted

via Facebook Live on the INEB Network Facebook page. Though the number of participants (average 8-12 people) were lower than expected, the engagement level was on the high bar. The Digital Bodhisattva Podcast, where the Clubhouse talk reruns and other talks are presented, is now on Spotify.

Digital Bodhisattva has now been redefined as an INEB initiative that evolved from the original Young Bodhisattva Program. It will be a vehicle for spiritually-engaged digital capacity building through regular online events, future trainings, and technical consultancy support for the INEB member organizations as a social business enterprise model.

Women and Gender Equality

Female Sangha Initiative for Social Transformation in Southeast Asia

The Female Sangha Initiative for Social Transformation in Southeast Asia, that was made possible with funding from the Join Together Society (JTS) Korea, ended in December 2021. The key concept was to empower Buddhist women through participating in social, cultural and environmental activities. Seven projects directly benefited 2,929 people and indirectly benefitted 104,704 persons in four countries - Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Each approved proposal received 5,000 USD in funds for implementing their local projects. The projects were diverse in nature intersecting areas of development, and women's empowerment, that, involved capacity building, interfaith training initiatives, and one produced a training and resource manual.

This was a great first initiative which supported the women's sangha in the Southeast Asia region, plus Bangladesh, that addressed local needs identified by the projects. This project was especially impactful and relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, and following the February 2021, military coup in Myanmar, where the projects carried out their initiatives under difficult circumstances. We look forward to expanding these types of initiatives in 2022 by increasing the visibility and roles of women peacebuilders throughout the region.

Networking and INEB's 20th International Biennial Conference

Throughout the COVID pandemic, INEB's networking efforts held Zoom meetings with INEB members, increasing our online presence through the website and social media and being responsive to the changing situation in Thailand and around the world.

INEB is looking forward to its 20th conference scheduled for October 24 – 30, 2022, hosted by the Jungto Society which will be held in Mungyeong and Seoul, South Korea. This year's conference theme is Buddhism in a Divided World - Peace : Planet : Pandemic. Approximately 120 people are expected to attend the conference with others participating on a virtual platform.

INEB's Media and Expanded Online Digital Presence

- *Seeds of Peace* – The journal was published three times as scheduled in 2021. However, due to the increased costs of printing and postage which surged during 2020 and 2021, 500 copies are being printed now.
- *Publications (one book)* – *Silencing of a Laotian Son – the Life, Work and Enforced Disappearance of Sombath Somphone* by Ng Shui Meng. The book was launched at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand on December 14, 2021, during which four panelists, including the author and Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, discussed Sombath's life and aspects of forced disappearance.
- *Expanded Media and Digital Presence* - A new staff person was hired in 2021 to improve INEB's online presence and develop a comprehensive communication strategy. More activities in 2022 include creating a monthly INEB newsletter with more than 1,100 subscribers, updating the website, and expanding the social media reach and impact. The newsletter has also facilitated the dissemination of many Network member initiatives and will continue to be cultivated as a core method of external INEB communications.

INEB Secretariat

- *Code of Conduct* – INEB is reviewing all of its policies. After the Code of Conduct is completed in 2022, all staff and volunteers will be required to sign them as a condition of participating in activities, projects and programs.
- *Staff Development - Gender Equality and Social Inclusion - GESI Lens* – Our partner FHI360 that funded the Region Network for Peacebuilders Project, is supporting organizational development using the GESI process. GESI activities which took place in 2021 include 3 workshops with one being a GESI analysis of the organization, integrating GESI into INEB's policies, as well as integrating GESI into the Regional Network for Peacebuilders project.
- *INEB Annual Retreat* – The annual INEB retreat took place on the island of Koh Samet in early December. This was a time for staff to reconnect as a team, reflect on the past year and reenergize for the coming year. The retreat was designed for both INEB and SEM staff to have separate sessions, as well as be together for 2 days during which they appreciated how their work complements each other. This retreat was supported by funds from our partner FHI360 who intends to promote staff development through various activities.
- *Staff Updates* - During 2021 INEB's project staff doubled as three new persons began working on new initiatives that is expanding INEB's work in both current and new directions. Opor Srisuwan is coordinating the women's and child protection initiatives; Surin Onprom is coordinating the Regional Network for Peacebuilders Project, as well as other activities related to environment and ecology; and Dexter Bohn is coordinating INEB's communication and digital media strategy, as well as the youth initiatives.
- *Other* – Office space at the SNF compound is being rented to our partner Finn Church Aid - FCA (Thailand) Foundation (The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers).

INEB also assisted FCA with the process as a legally registered foundation in Thailand which was approved in September 2021.



International Network
of Engaged Buddhists



JUNGTO SOCIETY

Concept Note

The 20th Biennial INEB Conference Buddhism in a Divided World

Peace : Planet : Pandemic

Mungyeong & Seoul, South Korea
24 – 30 October 2022

Overview of INEB's 2022 Conference

INEB's 2022 international conference will be an opportunity for engaging with our partners and network to increase pluralism through expanding peacebuilding efforts, collaborating on environmental concerns, examining effective interventions for those effected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and exploring various issues of concern.

This year's international conference will be a time of celebration, especially because it will be the first time since INEB's last international conference in 2019, that we will be gathering in person. This will also be a hybrid conference in that some sessions will be available virtually that reach a wider audience. The present crisis during and after COVID is important; and the region is facing a political crisis as democracy is moving towards authoritarian regimes encroaching into space for civil society and social movements. We will learn together more about the South Korean country context as reunification of the peninsula remains a hot issue.

The conference theme of ***Buddhism in a Divided World*** seeks to further develop INEB's 10 Year Strategic Roadmap launched in 2017, and to expand its outreach to emerging like-minded social movements. This will help INEB more fully realize the potential of Socially Engaged Buddhism to support social justice, cultural and gender equality, inclusivity and diversity, transformative learning, and harmonizing initiatives associated with

Conference Co-organizers

- Jungto Society - www.jungtosociety.org
- International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)
- www.inebnetwork.org

ecology and economics (socially responsible right livelihood), intra and inter-faith dialogue, and youth throughout all its activities, which intersects with the major sub-themes of:

- **Peace** - As evidenced through the rising authoritarianism that divides societies, and many violent conflicts taking place around the world. Both structural and cultural violence contribute to these divisions which are rooted in the economic issues and social systems that lead to conflict. Peace processes need to address these forms of violence in order for pluralism to be achieved at micro and macro level politics with the potential for nonviolently resolving conflicts, reconciliation and unification.
- **Planet** - The need for an environmental and ecology response with more economic resources dedicated to ending the continuing climate crisis. Increase environmental awareness and active engagement of networks and partnerships that support regenerative practices which leads to mitigating climate change and ending environmental degradation.
- **Pandemic** - During which more communities have become isolated and marginalized, through digital economic divides. Inequality is evidenced as poverty increased with people unable to continue their livelihoods and generate income or other resources.

Increase the health status and well-being of persons isolated and marginalized during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conference Goal and Objectives:

The overall and long-term goal of the conference is to stimulate awakening to the profound and enduring teachings of the Buddha that can bring about personal and social transformation through reflection and social action.

- Increase knowledge and understanding of peace, planet, pandemic and develop new programs

and projects to address such needs, especially in the areas of environmental resilience, pluralistic societies, gender equality, social inclusion, youth empowerment, education for change and sustainable development

- Promote inter-faith dialogue, exchanges, and collaboration on issues of common concern
- Celebrate and expand the spirit of kalyanamitra and time for reflection of individual and community learning

S

Letter

Dear Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa,

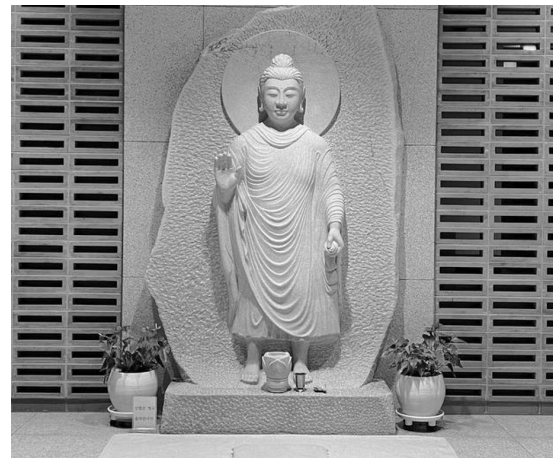
Enclosed please find my new book entitled, *"The Spring Revolution in Myanmar."*

In this book, I tried to explain to Japanese readers that the democracy movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi is based on Buddhism, namely [the] practice of "Engaged Buddhism." However, most Japanese people including the government, economic community and media cannot understand the true message sent to us by Myanmar people who are fighting a nonviolent 'Civil Disobedience Movement' against the military dictatorship, because most of us see Asia just as a market for Japan. The Japanese government has been supporting the junta in order to pursue the economic interests, in other words both are accomplices in the crime of oppressing the people of Myanmar.

Reflecting on our conduct, I made some suggestions for us building another Japan on the basis of cooperation and dialogue between people of both countries who aspire after the true peace and happiness. The subtitle of my small book is 'Is Japan a peace-loving nation.'

I owe you and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi so much.

Best regards,
Hiroshi Nagai
August 22, 2022



Buddha Statue in the Jungto Center

Meaning and purpose of Maaebul

As you enter the Pure Land from the Jungto Center lobby, you can meet the Buddha on the road, a dynamic standing Buddha that can symbolize Buddhism in practice. This is a space where you can calm your mind and (half) bow at the entrance of the temple.

Expression of Maaebul

In order to express the Buddha on the road, and in the people, the natural and rough stone Buddha (Maaebul) is enshrined

(Ceiling height: 4.4m, thickness of flagstone: about 20cm, height of flagstone: 1.70~1.8m -



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ช่วยสัตว์ป่า
WILDAID

Workshop for Spiritual Leaders on Community Campaigns to Reduce Demand for Wildlife Products

June 29 -30, 2022

Wongsanit Ashram, Nakhon Nayok

By INEB Staff



This event was the fourth time that Buddhist spiritual leaders were brought together to learn about how monks and nuns can be key influencers in Thailand's national effort to end the killing of animals and using wildlife products (skin, teeth, ivory, meat, etc.) in the belief that these products bring good luck and protection. The workshop was a collaboration between the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), USAID Reducing Demand for Wildlife, WildAid Thailand, Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) and Institute of Buddhist Management for Happiness and Peace (IBHAP). The two-day workshop was hosted at Wongsanit Ashram, Nakhon Nayok Province, Thailand.

Building on outputs from the previous two in-person and one online "Workshop for Spiritual Leaders on Reducing the Demand for Wildlife Products," conducted in partnership between INEB, USAID and WildAid Thailand in 2020-2021, this in person workshop aimed

to strengthen the capacity and commitment of monks and nuns in key selected temples in Thailand to:

1. Develop messages and campaigns aligned with USAID Reducing Demand for Wildlife's campaign messages that are relevant in specific temples and similar settings.
2. Equip participants with tools to build a campaign to reduce demand for wildlife in spiritual beliefs and respond to questions from people visiting temples and others with whom they come in contact.
3. Enable monks, nuns, and spiritual leaders to realize their wildlife campaign ideas and provide them with initial logistics and technical support.

The 16 participants included 3 Bhikkhunis, 4 nuns, 7 monks and 2 lay representatives from 7 temples in 7 Thai provinces. They will be key influencers in

promoting the message to stop using wildlife products and the killing of wildlife associated with these products. Other participants were from each of the coordinating organizations and presenters including: DNP, USAID Reducing Demand for Wildlife, WildAid Thailand, and the INEB team.

The training topics covered were:

- Update on activities held post-USAID Wildlife Asia
- Thailand update on tackling illegal trade of wildlife products
- Developing communication materials
- Social media capacity building for use as a communication and campaign tool
- Develop Ideas, project design, and proposal writing

This intensive workshop provided essential information and skill building to ensure that the participant's projects strategically and successfully achieved their objectives. Their involvement in many small and large group processes provided the opportunity for the participants to deeply examine, critique and revise their project designs.

A skill sharing session led by Ms. Nuthatai Chotechuang and Ms. Rabia Mushtaq from WildAid Thailand. The WildAid Thailand team addressed 5 main topics and expanded key points to developing an effective campaign.

Social media capacity building workshop facilitated by INEB and Venerable Napan Santibhaddo Thawornbanjob from the Institute of Buddhist Management for Happiness and Peace (IBHAP). During this workshop the participants produced and shared a piece of social media content related to the project proposal they submitted for the workshop. Ven. Napan shared his experience as a monk engaging with social media campaigns utilizing the Mercy is Power Facebook page to demonstrate the impact that influencers can have on the popularity of posts.

INEB staff facilitated the 6 presentations from

participants outlining the proposed activities that they plan to conduct within the next 60 days. Constructive feedback on the importance of refining the target audience and feasibility of the projects were provided by the participants, INEB and WildAid staff.

The second day of the workshop began with a short presentation from WildAid highlighting the key focal points of WildAid media campaigns. These are the topics will help WildAid with their upcoming "Communication Aid," that will be used by spiritual leaders and others in the future.:

1. Information about wild populations of elephants and tigers, and the harm inflicted from the wildlife market.
2. Information on Thai laws related to trade in wildlife parts.
3. Statistics on the consumers' motivation to use wildlife products based on USAID research.
4. What the role of religious leaders is in reducing the demand for wildlife products.
5. Buddhist teachings for the public audience to change their superstitious beliefs in wildlife parts.

Every group determined that topic number (5) was the most relevant to their work with information about Thai law (2) and research statistics (3) agreed to be the least useful in conveying their messages.

INEB staff Dr Surin Onprom presented the Problem Tree exercise as a visual representation of the current issue that each project is designed to address. The roots of the tree represent the root cause of the problem (often hidden from immediate awareness) while the trunk of the tree represents the main issue. The tree's branches indicate the consequences which stem from the main issue that affects the individual, the family and society as a whole. Dr Surin summarized the feedback from the participants and reminded them to see the problems that they had uncovered as opportunities for designing impactful solutions.

This final session was an opportunity for each group

to present their refined campaigns and receive feedback from the other participants as well as INEB and WildAid staff. The participants formed 6 smaller groups focused specifically on each province they represented. Each was asked to make a short presentation describing the objectives and activities planned to reduce demand for wildlife products and end the killing of wild animals in their local community. As shown below, the projects

focused on specific target groups to uniquely address community needs to achieve their objectives.

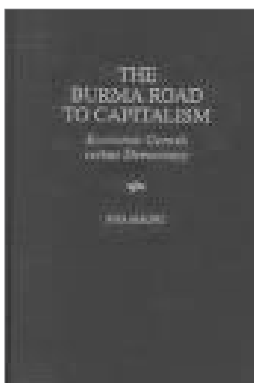
The next steps involve participants revising their proposal, including indicators and challenges before implementing it within 60 days. The participants were energized and eager to implement their projects which will ultimately reach even wider audiences from the grassroots to government officials.

SUMMARY OF GROUP PRESENTATIONS BY PROVINCE

Province	Target Group	Objective
Ubon Ratchathani	Children and their family members	To empower children as change-makers to transfer knowledge to parents and the broader community
Roi Et	3-pronged approach: Community, schools, and local authority	To produce clip videos, posters and brochures for canvassing the local area to raise awareness
Chiang Mai	Asian university students studying at Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai - 50 monks, 100 lay persons	To provide quality information about wildlife laws and ethical concerns from a Buddhist perspective.
Song Khla	General public	During Vassa 2022 retreat, the group will aim to advocate for zero tolerance of wildlife products on Koh Yor
Nakhon Sawan	Former users of wildlife products living in Nakhon Sawan that wish to change their behaviour	The group will work with 15 people to provide information on new laws related to the Wildlife trade.
Kanchanaburi	18 year old youth General public	Engage youth in campaign activity and target national park audiences with offline activities

5

Recommended Reading

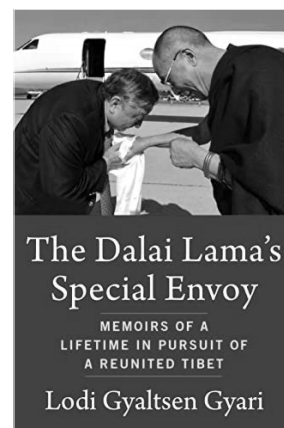


The Burma Road to Capitalism:
Economic Growth Versus Democracy

Author: Mya Maung
Publisher: Praeger, 1998

The Dalai Lama's Special Envoy:
Memoirs of a Lifetime in Pursuit
of a Reunited Tibet

Author: Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari
Publisher: Columbia University Press, 2022





Regional Network for Peacebuilders Project (Sangha for Peace) First Country Learning Mission, Thailand

May 28 – June 5, 2022

By INEB Staff

The Regional Network for Peacebuilders Project (Sangha for Peace) conducted its first country learning mission in Thailand from May 28 – June 5, 2022. This was the culmination of many months of planning after the project cultivated relationships with country partners, selected the participants, developed the curriculum, and located safe spaces for learning together.

This project is a collaboration between the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and FHI360. Regional Network for Peacebuilders (the Project) is a two-year project funded by USAID and is being implemented by FHI 360.

Overall Project Goal

To develop and nurture regional networks for peacebuilders, including a particular focus on women, that will strengthen national and regional efforts to promote inclusive intra- and interfaith dialogues in South and Southeast Asia.

Objective 1: To co-create, with country partner organizations, a regional learning community arising from a shared learning experience of cross-country intra- and interfaith exchanges. (Although the project has three objectives, only the first objective applied to the first country learning mission.)

Country Learning Mission's Learning Objectives

At the end of country learning missions, the participants will be able to:



- Have comprehensive understanding of the role Buddhism can play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding
- Have an awareness of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) and apply these knowledge and skills in local contexts
- Formulate concrete activities for project implementation to promote peaceful co-existence within their communities
- Develop a long-term strategic plan for regional network of peacebuilders

As an experiential learning platform, the project is designed to increase the participants' understanding as key peace influencers within Buddhist communities in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, as well as enhance their capacity to engage at the regional level. The 15 selected participants (Myanmar 4; Sri Lanka 4; and Thailand 7) are moderate Buddhist leaders, male and female, ordained and laypersons, in each country that bring unique backgrounds to peacebuilding. The

intensive interactive learning experience helped the participants form a learning community where they critiqued what they learned during the country learning mission. They will continue the learning journey together during the next two country learning missions.

Now, following the first country learning mission, the project has gained momentum after a slow start with the COVID-19 pandemic delaying its implementation. Fortunately, the project was supported by the FHI360 team who very flexible and understanding which helped adapt to the changing conditions. The participants' energy and project designs also have added momentum which is bringing the project forward. Yet we recognize that the participants will face a different reality returning to their home communities where they want to introduce the new concepts and ideas learned through their project designs.

During the seven days the participants were immersed in the curriculum which was comprised of 5 modules: Buddhism, peace and violence; Inter and

intra-faith dialogue for peaceful coexistence; GESI – Gender Equality and Social Inclusion; Community Engagement for Sustainable Peace; and Peace in Action. These same modules are the basis for the curriculum in the two forthcoming country learning missions. The modules took place in several ways including during an intensive interactive GESI workshop, by inviting visiting lecturers on specific topics relevant to the modules, and on-site exposure visits. The intensive GESI workshop was strategically presented first which helped the participants to get to know each other, and themselves through understanding the power dynamics, and make the connection between self-awareness and social change.

By the end of the first morning session the participants expressed how much they were looking forward to the learning mission. With this readiness and optimism, the participants were quickly forming a learning community. At the end the participants were preparing to return to their home countries where they would begin implementing their project designs.

Several types of follow-up activities will be conducted after the 1st country learning mission. First, the project coordinator will be following-up with the participants both individually and with the entire group which includes being updated on the implementation status of their individual project designs. The project is also looking at whether funding is available to support the participants' project implementation and activities.

The project team is preparing for the next country learning mission in Sri Lanka and revising the curriculum to include the feedback given by the participants. One particular observation regarding the modules was how to balance the content when making transitions between workshops and site visits. This preparation also includes addressing other areas such as providing adequate translation for all participants.



Happy 80th Birthday
to
Roshi Joan Halifax
July 30, 2022

For more information, please contact Surin Onprom, INEB Project Coordinator at peace@inebnetwork.org





Statement from the Secretariat
of the
International Network of Engaged Buddhists
Calling for Solidarity and Preserving
the Sanctity of Life in Myanmar

29 July 2022

We are deeply shocked and saddened at the recent executions of four democratic activists Kyaw Min Yu, Phyo Zayar Thaw, Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw in Insein Prison, Yangon, Myanmar. We offer our deepest condolences to the mourning families and solidarity to Myanmar people.

We are very concerned, as these executions have further implications to the 76 political prisoners, including 2 children, who were handed death sentences, as of 28 July 2022, according to the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (AAPP). We urge the State Administration Council (SAC) lead by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to refrain from violence, and instead to address the political disagreements with compassion and kindness.

Since the military coup d'état in February 2021, 11,859 democratic activists were detained, 2,142 civilians including many children were killed, according to the AAPP. As of 31 July, according to the United Nation's Office of Coordination for the Humanitarian Affairs - OCHA, over 866,000 people are being displaced while 21,000 civilian properties in towns and villages across the country were burned as a result of counter insurgency measures by the SAC. We condemn these acts of violence against innocent civilians perpetrated by the SAC and its security forces.

We are saddened to observe the situation of Rohingya refugee and other internally displaced people across Myanmar deteriorating, while the chance to

return to their home is nowhere to be seen. While we commend the courage and resilience of Myanmar people, we are providing regular humanitarian support through our networks as much as possible.

Myanmar people are risking their lives to restore democracy, human rights and rule of Dhamma. We acknowledge the vital roles Sanghas and other religious leaders are playing in restoring democracy through peaceful means, and in providing lifesaving humanitarian aid although they are at risk of losing their very lives. Meanwhile, we ask prominent Sanghas and religious leaders to tactfully intervene with the conflicting parties, using their moral authority to stop the bloodbath and to restore peace and stability.

We have seen the extraordinary sacrifices being made by ordinary young people and women for the future they rightfully belong to. Although INEB firmly disagrees with using armed-resistance and violence as a means used by the democratic forces, we offer our empathetic understanding and compassion, fully acknowledging that Myanmar people have faced unspeakable violence wrought by one of the strongest, well equipped and most violent military forces in Southeast Asia, and that the conflict is unjustly asymmetric.

In the meantime, INEB humbly reminds Myanmar that cycle of violence, killing and revenge never ends, bringing only more suffering to the society. Moreover, the impact will leave a very deep and destructive trauma that will require time and resources to heal. Therefore, the



SAC and the democratic forces both have responsibility to stop the violence, regardless of whichever believable reasons each party can justify.

As a Kalyanamitra of Myanmar people, INEB strongly urges,
SAC to:

1. Immediately stop using violence in addressing political disagreements, including the inhumane four cuts counter-insurgency tactics.
2. Immediately and unconditionally release all the political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Win Myint and other prominent politicians, activists and those who are under the death row.
3. Urgently convene an all-inclusive political dialogue, inviting the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), National Unity Government (NUG), Committee Representing Pyithu Hluttaw (CRPH), National League for Democracy (NLD) and other political parties, Ethnic Armed Organizations, democratic forces and other Civil Society Organizations, being mediated by the Sangha, religious leaders, UN and other relevant independent actors.

Myanmar people to: stay strong, keep your hope alive and refrain, as much as possible from resorting to violence and retaliation! We understand that your struggle is to protect your own lives, your community and your country.

NUCC, NUG and CRPH to: to use every possible means including non-violence approaches and political dialogue to restore democracy and human rights.

“Victory creates hatred. Defeat creates suffering. The wise ones wish neither victory nor defeat.”

Phrea Maha Ghosananda

About us: International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) is an independent organization include members from more than 25 countries across Asia, Europe, North America and

Australia. INEB's Core Mission is to confront and end suffering using analysis and action guided by Four Noble Truths taught by Gautama Buddha. INEB's core values are compassion, social justice, non-violence, co-existence, and Kalyanamitra - solidarity of spiritual friendship. INEB actively organizes international conferences and collaborations, engages and stands with some of the most marginalized communities across the world to address structural and cultural taproots of suffering. INEB is being recognized for bringing unique Buddhist perspectives to global debates and dialogues related to youth, education, child protection, gender, women's empowerment, human rights peacebuilding, agroecological farming and climate change issues.



School of English for Engaged Social Service - SENS

In January 2022, “Zhi-bde Rokpa,” a Himalayan alumnus of INEB's School of English for Engaged Social Service (SENS) designed and facilitated a month-long English for personal transformation course modelled on his experience as a student—and later a tutor—in the SENS program. Students attended a remote writer's workshop in which they explored poetry, including William Carlos Williams' deceptively simple poem “The Red Wheelbarrow.” Students collaborated in creating a poem in a similar style, honoring their nomadic lives and culture. That lovely poem, “The Humble Yak,” is below.

The Humble Yak

so much depends
upon

the humble black
yak

glazed with snow
merit

beloved by the vast
plateau

Through an Old Man's Eyes: Thailand's Long and Troubled Quest for Democracy

by **Subel Rai Bhandari** and **Wilawan Watcharasakwet**

2022.06.22, Bangkok

Source: **BenarNews** - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/thailands-long-and-troubled-quest-for-democracy-06222022132841.html>



Sulak Sivaraksa, a Thai social critic and intellectual, speaks about the 90th anniversary of the Siamese Revolution during an interview with BenarNews, in Bangkok, June 10, 2022.

[Nontarat Phaicharoen/BenarNews]

Sulak Sivaraksa was born soon after the Siam Revolution, when Thai intellectuals and members of the elite joined forces with disaffected army officers to stage a bloodless coup that ended nearly seven centuries of the monarchy's absolute rule.

The revolution they launched before dawn on June 24, 1932 did not abolish the royal institution outright or turn the kingdom into a republic, but transformed it into a constitutional monarchy.

The life of Sulak, a widely respected and outspoken Thai academic, has spanned the nine decades since that pivotal moment in Thailand's modern history. During that time, at least a dozen successful military coups have postponed the Thai people's quest for full-fledged democracy.

"Before 1932, the monarch was above the law, and he was the only one. After the 1932 [revolution], everybody became equal, everybody was under the law,

and that was the first victory," Sulak, a noted scholar of Buddhism, told BenarNews in an interview this month.

"In these 90 years, we are currently [at] the lowest point," said Sulak, who walks with a cane that once belonged to Pridi Banomyong, the leader of the 1932 revolution and co-author of Thailand's first constitution.

Meanwhile, the monarchy remains powerful and deeply entrenched in Thai society, shielded by a strict anti-royal defamation law.

Sulak has been charged and prosecuted multiple times under Lese-Majeste, a law where the smallest perceived public slight of royals can land you in jail, such as "liking" and sharing a controversial profile of the king via Facebook.

The government of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, the former junta chief who led the country's last coup in 2014 and has stayed in power since, has used the law to go after young pro-democracy activists.

"Gen. Prayuth claims this is a democracy, but it's a sham democracy because he is a soldier who never left his office. He is still in power eight to nine years later and does not want to step down," Sulak, 89, told *BenarNews*.

The Siamese Revolution started the so-called constitutional era in the Southeast Asian nation, and for a brief, shining period, Thailand had "full democracy,"



[Courtesy Thai Parliament Museum]

Sulak said.

Within a year of the revolution, however, Phraya Manopakorn Nititada, the first prime minister of Siam, was ousted in a military-led coup in June 1933, just two months after he took power for himself, dissolving parliament.

After yet another military takeover in 1947, “the coup leader praised the monarch, who was until then still under the constitution. They turned the monarch to God-like and above the constitution because they thought only the monarch could fight against the communists,” Sulak recalled.

The Thai monarchy has since become irreproachable. The 1932 revolution, on the other hand, is barely mentioned in school history books these days. The day is celebrated in a hushed manner, and few memorials survive.

“The royalist-military nexus is a legacy of the long and unfinished transition from absolute monarchy,” Thongchai Winichakul, a professor of Southeast Asian history at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, wrote in an article for *Nikkei* in 2020.

“The genuine constitutional democracy promised by the People’s Party, the backers of the 1932 revolution against King Prajadhipok, has never really been achieved.”

According to Thongchai, the monarchy “achieved uncontestable moral authority” by the 1970s.

“That influence was subsequently converted to political dominance, which endures to this day,” he added.

In 2017, a small brass plaque laid into the middle of the road at the Royal Plaza in Bangkok that commemorated the Siam Revolution went missing. It was replaced with a similar one bearing pro-monarchy inscriptions.

The Siamese Revolution “was the beginning of the call for democracy and the start of the fight for democracy. It was precarious because those involved in the 1932 revolution risked their lives,” Arnon Nampa, a prominent pro-democracy activist, told *BenarNews*.

Arnon, 37, is among activist leaders who have been charged with Lese-Majeste. In their struggle to bring full-fledged constitutional democracy to Thailand, he and his fellow activists are willing, too, to risk losing their freedom or lives for it, he said.

True friend of monarchy

Sulak, who was born into a wealthy Thai-Chinese family in March 1933, studied history and literature at the University of Wales in Britain in the 1950s. He returned to Thailand in 1961 and taught at Bangkok universities.

Sulak founded and edited *Social Science Review*, an intellectual magazine published in Thai, which played a crucial role in the student uprising that led to the overthrow of the military dictatorship in 1973.

In 1976, Thailand experienced its bloodiest coup, as hundreds of students were killed and thousands jailed. The military burned the entire stock of Sulak's bookshop, a hub for intellectuals and activists, and issued a warrant for his arrest. He was abroad then and lived in exile for the next two years.



Thai King Maha Vajiralongkorn attends a foundation stone-laying ceremony for a monument in honor of his late father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, in Bangkok, Dec. 5, 2021. [AP Photo]



A policeman stands guard over leftist Thai students on a soccer field at Thammasat University, in Bangkok, Oct. 6, 1976. Police stormed the campus to break up a demonstration by thousands of leftist students protesting the return of former military ruler Thanom Kittikachorn. More than 40 people were killed and over 150 injured during the raid. [AP Photo]

Sulak also helped start many indigenous grassroots organizations. For his social activism, he was awarded the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize, in 1995.

Sulak, who considers himself “a true friend” of the monarchy, has been jailed four times and accused of defaming the Thai monarchy five times.

The monarchy “is a very touchy subject in this country. Either you hate it, or you admire it blindly,” Sulak told a panel discussion at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Thailand in January.

“For me, it’s wrong on both sides. The monarchy, of course, is an institution represented by the present king, and the king is a human being. He has his weak points, his strong points, which we [should] try to understand,” he said.

“And with that understanding, perhaps, you can humbly suggest changing because the king, I’m pretty sure, will listen. And even with him, he cannot change everything himself,” Sulak said.

King Maha Vajiralongkorn, he noted, had recently granted him a 90-minute private audience.

“And his main concerns were three: Would the monarchy survive in this country, how would Buddhism operate in this country meaningfully, and thirdly, would democracy fit in with this country?” Sulak said.

At the other end of the social spectrum, Thailand’s young people give Sulak a glimmer of hope.

“Young generations understand Thailand. The structure is unfair; it benefits only the wealthy and influential ones and takes advantage of the poor,” he said during the interview at his home in Bangrak, a district of Bangkok.

“For me, democracy has to have freedom of speech, argument and disagreement, while respecting different opinions,” said Sulak, who has written more than 100 books on Buddhism, the Thai monarchy, and social issues.

In 2020, when massive, youth-led street protests sprang up against Prayuth’s government, Sulak shocked many people by attending several of the rallies.

“I’m only an old man, looking forward to young generations. I’ve seen young generations who are so brave to fight against dictatorship,” he said.

“I hope that Thailand, while celebrating 100 years of democracy, will go forward and not backward as is happening nowadays.”



In Praise of Sulak Sivaraksa at 90

For those who do not know Sulak sufficiently well, they may be amazed at his various names as referred by in the media. While some Thais know him as a social critic, a royalist, a knowledgeable historian, others call him an anti-monarchy, a feudalism, a communist, a CIA in disguise, etc. To many foreigners, he is a socially-engaged Buddhist, a Siamese intellectual and a true friend, etc.

However, for his close friends and his students, he is a man of integrity.

As his student, I see him as a man with loving-kindness, open-minded, and a genuine supporter of younger people.

Throughout his working life, he has, and still is, been constantly supporting the younger people who are courageous to speak out and tirelessly seek ways to improve Thai society as a whole or to reform certain social institutions in Thai society. He always respects their ideas and thinking, which more often than not, markedly differ from his own. He is not hegemonic or dominating the younger generation, intellectually and culturally.

Despite his political orientation differs from that of the younger generation, he continues helping them in ways he could possibly do. Even if his family is not considered wealthy, he is always a generous giver both in cash and in kind. More importantly, he always forgives even those who unfairly criticize him.

Many Thais tend to mis-interpret his good intention because he is critical with sincerity. Some people who do not like him take his critical comment as a negative criticism.

Besides, he respectfully praises the distinguished Thais, who contributed with strong commitment for the betterment of Thai society. His recognition of such individuals is not to publicly please them but he intends to motivate the younger generation to see as to how these individuals work and live with dignity.

As for me, he is a good example of an educated man as defined by Socrates. He is also a learned man. More importantly, he never keeps meaningful knowledge for his own benefits, but he willingly shares his knowledge and his thoughts to wider public. I was not a student in his

classroom, but I learned a great deal from him through various activities which he supported me to participate in and through informal discussion as well as through constant reading his numerous writings.

Sulak Sivaraksa has keen interest in mass media and education. He himself was an editor of a quarterly and monthly journals for several years and continues writing articles and books up until the present. He also supported some younger people to enter into this profession. In addition, he is a great supporter of alternative educational system. He supports some of his students to run an alternative schooling, which is quite well-known throughout Thailand and overseas. In addition, he also supports some of his students to regularly organize the learning programs for the Thais and non-Thais, who are seeking alternative ways of life.

I believe that only very few people know that he has declared, with the consent of his family, his will and testament to give his own properties to a non-profit organization, Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, at time of his death.

If I were to mention about his weakness, which is not uncommon for everyone, he is sometimes unable to control his temper, especially, in public sphere, even in the situation that, in my view, he could have been calmer, given the fact that he realizes very well that human sufferings are caused by ignorance, greed, hatred, and anger, as taught by Buddhism and he is in fact successfully overcoming the first three causes. However, what is good about this behavior is that he becomes calmer quickly after his anger has been expressed and more importantly, he is not spiteful. On the contrary, in private sphere, he is calm, discreet and thoughtful, even when he is challenged or confronted by his students.

In addition, he is sometimes over confident and stubborn, which has led him into unnecessary trouble, especially, his health.

No-one knows how long he will live, one year, two years, five years, ten years or more, but I am certain that he will be the same Sulak Sivaraksa as we have known him all along. Let us pray for his good health. I am confident that he will be remembered forever as a man of integrity and dignity.

Uthai Dulyakasem

Songkran Day 2565

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“Making Peace In a Time Of War”

Father Michael Lapsley, SSM

The 39th Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony

June 14, 2022

Source: Niwano Peace Foundation

- https://www.npf.or.jp/english/peace_prize/39th.html

Let Us Be Midwives!

An untold story of the atomic bombing

September 1945

By Sadako Kurihara

Translated by Richard Minear (1)

Night in the basement of a concrete structure now in ruins.

Victims of the atomic bomb jammed the room;

It was dark—not even a single candle.

The smell of fresh blood, the stench of death,

The closeness of sweaty people, the moans.

From out of all that, lo and behold, a voice:

“The baby’s coming!”

In that hellish basement,

At that very moment, a young woman had gone into labour.

In the dark, without a single match, what to do?

People forgot their own pains, worried about her.

And then: “I’m a midwife. I’ll help with the birth.”

The speaker, seriously injured herself, had been moaning only moments before.

And so new life was born in the dark of that pit of hell.

And so the midwife died before dawn, still bathed in blood.

Let us be midwives!

Let us be midwives!

Even if we lay down our own lives to do so.

Thank you to my friend Professor Tomoko Nakamura from Hiroshima for suggesting this poem to me.

I wish to dedicate my words to the end of war and to all those who have died in war, and the soldiers who remain haunted by what they have done.

Dear Friends,

I wish to begin by honouring Nikkyo Niwano, the Founder of the Niwano Peace Foundation. Today’s event is just one example of how his legacy lives on. The previous 38 recipients reflect a rich tapestry of peace building and interreligious collaboration involving countless people across space and time.

The great Catholic theologian Hans Kung, who also received this prize, is quoted as saying:

“No peace among the nations

without peace among the religions.

No peace among the religions

without dialogue between the religions

No dialogue between the religions

without investigation of the foundation of the religions”

I am deeply humbled to be the recipient of the 39th Niwano Peace Prize today. The prize equally belongs to all those connected to the Institute for Healing of Memories and its Global Network. There have been many companions on the way.

Healing of Memories focuses on the pressing issue of healing the wounds of history. How can we acknowledge the past and not be its prisoner? How do

we break the cycle that turns victims into victimisers?

Healing of memories is about processes of detoxification especially the poison of hatred, revenge and bitterness.

I like to think of the facilitators of healing of memories as “midwives,” supporting the storyteller, creating a safe space and making the birth easier.

Many have pointed out that trauma that is not transformed is transmitted from one generation to another. This is true of individuals, communities and nations. Eventually political violence comes to an end as family; domestic and sexual violence escalates.

The announcement of this Prize happened in the same week that Russia invaded Ukraine. Many millions of refugees have fled their homes, unleashing untold suffering, and creating the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War. The world is understandably focusing on Ukraine.

As South Africans, we recall that people from every corner of the globe supported us during the struggle against apartheid. We experienced international solidarity on a massive scale. We were very fortunate.

There are many other current, long lasting conflicts and wars which do not receive the same attention that they deserve. I am thinking of Yemen, Tigray and Myanmar to name a few. There seems to be moral blindness when it comes in particular to the struggle of the Palestinians against Israeli Apartheid.

In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2022, it is apparent that the fundamental human rights of some people are respected and given more weight than others.

In the early days of the Ukraine-Russia war, as millions fled, many Africans experienced racism at the Ukrainian border. Black lives were not as valued as white lives.

Following the murder of George Floyd in the US after so many other deaths of mainly black men, at the hands of the police, we saw the meteoric rise of Black Lives Matter. The movement found echoes across the world not least in the Mother continent as it resonated with the lived experience of enduring racism, through the ages till today.

Even as demands for reparation and restitution for slavery and colonialism get stronger, and more insistent, there are the beginnings of important conversations about white privilege. When will the talk bring about transformative justice? As the saying goes, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

In the work of healing of memories across the world during the last 20 years, there have been two common themes: gender-based violence and childhood trauma.

Is not gender based violence the oldest wound in human history? Many of our faith communities are more patriarchal than the mainstream of our societies. We often like to mystify how we, as men, oppress women in the name of culture, tradition and religion.

In our Institute we have a media campaign called the “Hands of Men” which focusses on our role as perpetrators and our power to stop the violence. Toxic masculinity stops us as men from giving ourselves permission to be vulnerable and deal with our own woundedness.

Many of our faith communities have stumbled and have been the most oppressive when it comes to human sexuality. This has caused deep woundedness among sexual minorities. Science has taught us that the kaleidoscope of sexual orientation is a matter of genetics. Not choice. I have long harboured a dream, that I would live long enough to see the leaders of all the great faith traditions, making a public apology to the LGBTQIA+ community, for our part in their oppression.

In the announcement of this award to me, specific mention was made of my role as a founder of the Friends of Cuba Society in South Africa. Whilst living under an illegal and immoral US blockade for more than 60 years, Cuba taught the world the meaning of human solidarity...especially to the poorest countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Cuba, quality health care for all is not a slogan, it is a reality. When Covid spread across the world, the weapons of mass destruction were of no use. Doctors and nurses were the heroes. Cuba's Henry Reeves Brigade saved countless lives including in South Africa and even in wealthy countries like Italy.

During our relentless struggle against apartheid, one of the fronts was the campaign to end the death

penalty. Every Thursday morning in Pretoria, there were executions, up to seven at a time, mostly black and poor. Today in South Africa we have abolished the death penalty. I am praying that I will live long enough to see all countries in the world, choosing life and abolishing the death penalty. I hope the Niwano Peace Foundation will support that campaign.

The Russian Ukrainian war is a tragedy. It's not just for the people of Ukraine but for Russia too. It has been encouraging to see people of faith in Russia especially rank and file clergy coming out against the war. Russian citizens in cities across the country, despite the risk of long imprisonment have been saying No to war and Yes to peace.

Psychologists speak of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a consequence of war and other traumas. People are beginning to speak more about the moral and spiritual injuries that come as a consequence of people violating their consciences. Many of our faith traditions assert that there is something of the divine in all of us so when we attack another human being, we are attacking the divine in that person as well as in ourselves. The antidotes to moral and spiritual injury are not a tablet, but rather confession, remorse and lives of reparation and restitution.

You can be sure that Russian soldiers, and Ukrainian soldiers as well will be suffering from moral and spiritual injury for decades to come and will haunt subsequent generations too.

Of course, this is no less true for South Africans and Japanese people as it is for the rest of humanity.

Once more we are facing the specter of a nuclear war. The founder of the Niwano Peace Foundation spoke in favour of Nuclear Disarmament.

As the only country in the world that has not only experienced militarism, but carries in its soul the deep wounds of the atomic bombs, Japan is uniquely placed to champion a new worldwide movement for nuclear disarmament.

Is this not something that could be championed by the Niwano Foundation together with the Japanese government?

The climate crisis is also telling us that we humans

have declared war on Mother Earth and she is crying out in pain. Mother Earth would survive without us but we cannot survive without her. Perhaps we should follow the example of Bolivia.

"Mother Earth has the following rights: To life, to the diversity of life, to water, to clean air, to equilibrium, to restoration, and to pollution-free living." So states the Law of Mother Earth, a Bolivian law passed in December 2010 as a binding societal duty.

As a person of faith, I often ask myself what is God's dream for all of us? What can I do to cooperate with God's dream?

With the eye of faith, I try to see the divine in all people and to experience all of creation as part of the divine.

I believe that we are all called to be midwives helping build peace through Healing the wounds of history and working for Transformative Justice.

As I mentioned when the announcement of this prize was made, my father was a soldier in the war against Japan. My mother once said to me that the man who went to war was not the one who returned.

From the next life I believe that today he is smiling at me and at all of you.

"Let us be midwives!

Let us be midwives!

Even if we lay down our own lives to do so."

I thank you.

This poem appeared first in the inaugural issue of Chūgoku bunka (the special issue on the atomic bomb, March 1946). The cellar in the poem was the cellar of the old post office in Senda-machi.

1. Source: *Black Eggs*. Poems by Kurihara Sadako translated with an Introduction and Notes by Richard H. Minear, Publisher: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1994.



Ven. Pomnyun Sunim: Buddhism in a Divided World

By **Craig C Lewis**

May 27, 2022

Source: **BuddhistDoor Global** - <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/ven-pomnyun-sunim-buddhism-in-a-divided-world/>

The Korean Seon (Zen) master Venerable Pomnyun Sunim (법륜스님) wears many hats: Buddhist monk, teacher, author, environmentalist, social activist, and podcaster, to name a few. As a widely respected Dharma teacher and a tireless socially engaged Buddhist in his native South Korea, Ven. Pomnyun Sunim has founded numerous Dharma-based organizations, initiatives, and projects that are active across the world. Among them, Jungto Society, a volunteer-based community founded on the Buddhist teachings and expressing equality, simple living, and sustainability, is dedicated to addressing modern social issues that lead to suffering, including environmental degradation, poverty, and conflict.

This year will mark the completion of Jungto Society's first 10,000-Day Practice—a 30-year exercise that began in March 1993 with the aspiration to create “Jungto,” a society of peace, happiness, and sustainable existence living in harmony with nature. In conducting its 10,000-Day Practice, the members of Jungto Society have committed themselves to the practice of engaged Buddhism as well as their personal spiritual practice. This includes activities to promote environmental awareness, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and working toward peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula.

Later in 2022, Jungto Society will host the 20th biennial conference of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), which will be held on the theme “Buddhism in a Divided World: Peace • Planet •



Ven. Pomnyun Sunim.
Image courtesy of Jungto Society

Pandemic.” The conference will be a platform for socially engaged Buddhists to discuss and share strategies for expanding peace-building efforts, to collaborate on environmental concerns, to examine effective interventions for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to explore a wide range of issues of global concern.

BDG sat down with Ven. Pomnyun Sunim to hear his views on Buddhism in contemporary society. He shared his thoughts on the COVID-19 pandemic and the role of engaged Buddhism in the face of the human-made global crises that are challenging the world we share, taking on topics from environmental collapse, societal and economic inequality, and the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism, to the need for a profound transformation of our temporal and spiritual lives to create a sustainable global civilization that recognizes and respects the fundamental interconnectedness of all life.

BDG: 2022 is a landmark year for Jungto Society. The first 10,000-Day Practice began in March 1993 with

the aspiration to create a society of peace, happiness, and sustainability founded on the Buddhadharma. Congratulations on reaching this remarkable milestone!

What was the original inspiration for this ambitious undertaking? Some people might even say it sounds too idealistic!

Ven. Pomnyun Sunim: Back in those days, Korean Buddhism was experiencing many difficulties. Sectarians within Buddhist society at the time were very divided. Their disagreements led to much disharmony and even physical conflict. The situation was such that it was not only covered by domestic media channels, but also by international media such as CNN.

In Korean society at large, which had suffered under a long dictatorship, we were starting to see the early successes of the pro-democracy movement. After the military dictatorship was finally removed from power, Korea started to see elected leaders placed in office by direct elections. Many young Koreans were directly involved in the pro-democracy movement.

After the first democratically elected government took office, and after Korea hosted the 1988 Summer Olympics, I think people started to recognize that they were finally living in a democratic society. And so the conditions were created that enabled people to engage in activism within their own communities—for example, workers could engage in the labor movement; farmers could engage in the agricultural movement; and women could engage in the campaign for women's rights. Prior to this, only intellectuals led the movements in each sector of society.

The big question then became: if workers are engaged in the labor movement and farmers are engaged in the farmer's movement, what would be the role of intellectuals? The public consensus at the time was that we should adopt a forward-looking attitude to shape the future direction of society and to expand Korea's influence—not only domestically, but also in the international context.

During the time of the pro-democracy movement, the Buddhist community was preoccupied with internal strife. As a result they didn't play a prominent role in the movement's leadership. The Buddhist community came under significant criticism for this. Conversely, Christians were very active as leaders within the movement. Because of the Buddhist community's

indifference toward the social movement, I participated in the Christian-led campaigns.

At the time, I also held a firm commitment that over the course of the next 30 years, the Buddhist community should work to restore their leadership role in shaping the future of Korean society. I believed that it was important to recognize what we would need to do in order to build our future and also that we should act and respond preemptively to this obligation.

I knew that there were some people in the Buddhist community with wisdom, so I went to see them to hear their views on what we would need to do to build a better future. After three years of intensive discussions, we came to the conclusion that the environment was sure to be a critical issue in the years ahead. This was despite the fact that, at the time, environmental issues were not very high on the social agenda.

While I was incarcerated [during the brutal dictatorship of Gen. Chun Doo-hwan from 1979–88], I read a book titled *Entropy** and I intuitively realized from reading this book that the environmental issue would be one of major significance. This is because economic development and growth inevitably brings about environmental damage. We therefore came to the conclusion that environmental sustainability is a fundamental global issue.

We Buddhists practice every day to reduce our desire, which is also related to overcoming consumerism. I quickly realized that Buddhism is intimately related to the environmental issue. I knew that we humans cannot fundamentally resolve our environmental problems when we look upon nature as something to be conquered or subjugated. This is a common view of modern civilization. Because the Buddhist teaching is based on the understanding of dependent origination, I believe that environmental crises can only be addressed through understanding the principle of the interconnectedness of humans and nature, of all things.

From the Japanese colonial era to the division of the Korean Peninsula, and then to military dictatorship, South Korea's domestic issues have long been the most difficult and pressing issues for our society. During the colonial era, the revolutionary movement was the most important, overarching issue. With the Korean War, peace and reunification became the most crucial problems to address. Under military dictatorship, the

pro-democracy movement was at the forefront.

Because we were so focused on resolving our domestic issues, we didn't have the ability to look outward to the rest of the world. But after the 1988 Summer Olympics, we realized that our economic growth had already reached the ranks of the advanced economies. So we came to the conclusion that the poverty issue was not only an issue for other advanced economies to address, but that we were also responsible—up until that point, we had always been on the receiving end of aid and assistance from the West. During the pro-democracy movement, assistance from Germany and the US came to us through Christian organizations, which also founded the labor and pro-democracy movements. We also adopted methods for education and advocacy activities learned from the West. So I think it's fair to say that we were accustomed to being on the receiving end of assistance.

It was then that we understood that we, too, bore a responsibility to help lift the poorest countries out of absolute poverty. We realized that relieving and eliminating absolute poverty was the most globally pressing issue at that time. And we recognized that the issues of hunger and disease and illiteracy are not just problems of a certain segment of society, but that humanity as a whole has a responsibility to address those three issues. The standard at that time for absolute poverty was an income below US\$1 per person per day. So we set a goal of donating at least US\$1 per day each to alleviate poverty, and then after that we could use our remaining money to build our own lives.

On the Korean Peninsula, not repeating the war was at the forefront of most people's minds. During the 1950–53 Korean War, 2.8 million people died, and 10 million people were separated from their families by the division of the North and the South. This issue remains unresolved to this day. If war were to break out again, then the damage would be enormous. That's why we believe that building peace is the overarching focus for the Korean Peninsula.

Observing globally, there is one region in particular in which the three issues of hunger, disease, and illiteracy have been largely resolved. That region is Northern Europe: Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden all share the commonality of natural beauty, low absolute poverty, prosperity, and peace. Yet that region also had

one of the world's highest suicide rates at that time. Why did the people living there want to commit suicide? Because simply resolving social issues doesn't mean that people are freed from their own suffering. The Buddha's own suffering wasn't resolved just because he was born as a prince.

That's why in order to be happier and to be free, we need a practice to help us train our minds. Buddhism offers the best means to practice in this way—by which I mean Buddhism as a spiritual practice rather than Buddhism as a religion. I believe that Buddhist practice should be embraced by all people as a path to personal happiness, without being bound by the restrictions of religion or the conventions of society. And the practice of Buddhism should be undertaken with a view to social engagement rather than as a purely personal issue.

As such, we laid out four goals: people should find happiness through their personal practice; we should bring about peace on the Korean Peninsula; humanity should become free from absolute poverty; and we should find a way to address environmental issues such as climate change. We set out these four goals as the main objectives of our practice and we named this community “Jungto,” which means an ideal society founded on the Buddhadharma.

But what is “Jungto”? What is an ideal society?

The natural environment should be beautiful and protected. Human society should be peaceful. Individuals should be happy. These are the three basic elements needed for a Jungto Society; living with the Buddha's teachings based on truth, not simply wishing for blessings and not discriminating against people based on status, or other perceived differences.

The second point is that the Buddhist teachings should be easily accessible and easily received by the public. The teachings should be something that we can easily practice in our daily lives. Therefore, the well-being of our families and the resolution of social issues should all come together and not be viewed as separate. It's not as if society and individuals exist separately; they exist together. This is what we call simple Buddhism and practical Buddhism.

The Buddha began sharing the Dharma on his own. He didn't have his own temple, he didn't have any tradition to follow. In fact, he broke with tradition and as a result was met with resistance from established

traditions. Instead, he started out by receiving alms for food, sleeping beneath a tree, and clothing himself in discarded rags.

What is it that we cannot do? Nothing can be solved by criticizing what is wrong in existing Buddhist traditions. Rather, perhaps we can see the beginnings of change if we look forward into the next 30 years. There's an old teaching that has been passed down through the generations within the Buddha's sangha: it takes 100 days of practice to reveal who we have become as individuals. It takes 1,000 days of practice to bring about actual change within ourselves, such as becoming less greedy or less angry. And it takes 10,000 days of practice to bring about change in the world.

This is why we started the first 10,000-Day Practice.

BDG: Did your vision of a community founded on the Buddha's teaching changed during that time?

VPS: I wouldn't say "vision," but at the very least, existing Buddhism should not inflict any harm upon society. Many people were opposed to Jungto Society in the beginning. But now, more and more people realize that perhaps Jungto Society represents hope for the future of Buddhism. In fact, in many respects, Jungto Society has received much more recognition from lay society than from the Buddhist community.

People have gained a good impression from our engagement in environmental campaigns, humanitarian assistance programs in North Korea, and our relief work around the world. Indeed, many other Buddhist organizations have been inspired by our work to engage in their own humanitarian relief activities, leading to the emergence of new social engagement movements.

On reflection, I think it's fair to say that the direction of Jungto Society was right, but our influence has not been sufficient. Over the last three decades, we have attained our outreach aspirations in a qualitative sense, but not in a quantitative sense. Jungto Society has had a positive effect on the world, but not yet as much as we'd hoped to see.

BDG: A key feature of the Buddhist tradition has been the personal relationships between teachers and practitioners. The global shift toward online contact as a result of the pandemic has expanded the reach of Dharma teachers, yet depersonalized their interactions.

How might such drawbacks be addressed?

VPS: The biggest advantage of this new paradigm from Jungto Society's perspective is that our reach has grown, even to remote areas, no matter how far away people might live. Another advantage is that we're no longer shackled by the limitations of physical space in bringing people together. A further advantage we've found is that it's now easier to reach people who might otherwise not have been motivated to learn about Buddhism by attending a physical setting.

Now that it's easier to have a direct relationship with so many people, it's important to preserve that advantage; for example, it has meant that about 8,000 people participated in the recent semester of our online Jungto Dharma School.

But practice is defined by the characteristics of humanity. This means that human contact is needed in order that we can feel moved. So the benefits of our online outreach are also limited in terms of the emotional connection of direct human contact. As such, our online community carries the risk of being perceived as limited to simply disseminating the Buddhist teaching, instead of being truly awakened to the truth of the Buddhadharma through that vital human connection. In this respect, our remaining goal in adapting to this new medium is overcoming this limitation.

Also, only listening to online Dharma talks is often limited by being unable to participate in terms of service or engagement or personal practice. So we also need to focus on supplementing this shortcoming.

Before the pandemic, Jungto Society had more than 200 physical branches in Korea alone, but we decided to close them all because people could even hold Dharma meetings in their own homes. Instead, we established a few regional practice centers where people can come to do volunteer work (such as farming), meditate, or conduct prayer ceremonies in their free time or at the weekend.

Now we educate people online, so people can even join meditation sessions online from their homes, and can also participate in practice online. Offline, people can engage in environmental or aid activities. They can also do volunteer work such as farming and gardening. This is one way of supplementing the limitations of online Dharma communities, which is the lack of human

contact and the lack of in-person practice opportunities.

But we should also remember that Buddhism has already evolved in the face of such changes throughout history. This can be seen in the communication of the Buddhist teachings; the way the Buddha shared his teaching with the world. Originally, it was an oral tradition. The Buddha gave his teachings orally and they were only shared through direct human contact. Later on, the Buddhadharma was recorded in written texts, in the form of sutras. This meant that the teaching could spread—from India to China and Korea, and so on, and that people could learn by reading these texts. This had an enormous impact on the global reach of Buddhism.

However, there was also a downside to this. As Buddhist books and texts became more widespread, the human and experiential aspects were omitted as books can only transmit Buddhism in the form of intellectual knowledge. So throughout history, we've witnessed the downside of the Buddhist teaching being transmitted as a form of knowledge and also the authentic spread of the global outreach of Buddhism as a spiritual practice.

This is why Buddhist developed as a form of knowledge in China. And that's how Buddhist schools emerged to make up for the lack of human context in the books that contained the Buddhist teachings. It's for this reason that Seon [Zen] Buddhism teaches that ultimate truth cannot be expressed in words. This is the essence of Seon Buddhism.

Therefore, I think that online Dharma today has an advantage compared with the past, when Buddhism was limited by being perceived as textual knowledge. Today the spread of the Dharma is much faster, and a side effect is a lower incidence of Buddhism being perceived as mere knowledge, because we can at least have the benefit of face-to-face contact online.

Another issue we're facing is that Buddhist ideology has taken on a "digested" form—a shallower, more simplified version, rather than people contemplating or undertaking deep introspection of the teaching. Modern people have become accustomed to "fast knowledge," so nowadays, the content needs to be short and interesting and to speak to the heart of the person, otherwise people might not see it.

So it might be an advantage, but it can also represent a disadvantage. Our task now is how to lessen that disadvantage over time—to focus on amplifying our

advantages and reducing our disadvantages. We cannot prepare for every eventuality in advance, but we should work to tackle each task as our time allows, and see how things unfold.

BDG: The COVID-19 pandemic has also been a major disruptor for humanitarian work. What is the status of your efforts to help children and vulnerable people in North Korea?

VPS: Our humanitarian work in North Korea has been completely halted for two-and-a-half years. We have no way of doing anything in North Korea as the border is completely closed.

Instead, we have focused our attention elsewhere for the time being. For example, we have supplied 100,000 gas burners to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.** Our humanitarian work in India and the Philippines was temporarily suspended, but has since reopened. And we have been able to provide humanitarian aid to Myanmar, in cooperation with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB).*** We've also been engaged in other projects in South and Southeast Asia with the help of INEB as we were unable to directly dispatch personnel to those areas.***

BDG: The theme of INEB's 20th biennial conference this year, to be hosted by Jungto Society, is Buddhism in a Divided World. In a world that seems to be increasingly polarized, politically and socially, what in your view are the greatest challenges facing society today?

VPS: Fundamentally, I think the biggest challenge is consumerism. People mistakenly believe that excessive production and excessive consumption equate to more wealth. This has led to climate change and environmental issues. It has widened the wealth gap and caused economic disparities. And it has caused incessant suffering, even though in many cases we already have enough to make ends meet. What is realistically important is to address polarization.

First of all, economic polarization; the gap between wealthy and poor nations. And then within each country, there's a gulf between wealthy and the poor citizens. And that gap is widening. It used to be that this wealth separation was about 80:20, which then shrunk to 90:10, and now further to 99:1. With this widening gulf, it's inevitable that some societies are going to spiral into

chaos and confusion.

The second issue is ideological conflicts. People tend to lack a complete understanding of others because they are exposed to one-sided information from social media and other online content. Yet even within a single social group, we can see conflicts caused by a widening generation gap. And within the borders of a single country, we see friction and conflict between conservatives and progressives. It's not merely a competitive relationship, I think it's fair to say it has become a hostile, confrontational relationship.

These intensifying conflicts are a global problem that is leading to situations of extremist and exclusionist elements. This is also resulting in intense jingoism and in some cases risks leading to all-out war. The ongoing Ukraine crisis, for example, is just the beginning; I anticipate more such conflicts emerging. In that sense, the risk of war on the Korean Peninsula has also increased.

BDG: Given the scale of these global crises and the deep systemic changes that are needed to respond effectively, how optimistic are you for the future?

VPS: Taking a long-term view, I'm optimistic, because people and societies will of course evolve through trial and error. Peace eventually came to us after the first and second world wars, but too many lives were lost in the process. But taking a short-term view, I can say I'm pessimistic.

I think it's much more likely that people will continue to act out of ignorance and behave foolishly. Only afterwards will people and societies realize their mistakes and begin to undertake the real work that's needed. Now, we can only do our best to prevent such conflicts, crises, and wars from arising. Only then, after we're able to do so successfully, can we begin to lay out our direction for the future. This is the way that the human mechanism, human society works.

BDG: In that case, do you have any advice for our readers? How might ordinary people and lay practitioners play their part in helping to make the world a more peaceful place?

VPS: If we're already on the right path, then the only thing we can do is simply to do our best, without being overly concerned about whether or not our efforts

are actually successful. It's not that our happiness is dependent only on our success or failure; happiness can be obtained through the process of striving toward our goals.

BDG: Ven. Pomnyun Sunim, our sincere thanks for sharing your time and wisdom with us today.

VPS: There's an old saying that goes: "구슬이 서말이라도 꿰어야 보배다." No matter how many beads you have, they only become valuable when threaded together—nothing is complete until it has attained its final form!

Similarly, no matter how beautiful the Buddha's teachings are, they are effectively useless unless they can lead people to lift themselves out of their suffering!



JUNGTO

With special thanks to the members of Jungto Society for making this interview possible. Venerable Pomnyum Sunim is an Honorary Advisor to INEB.

Craig C Lewis

Craig grew up in a transplanted Scottish family in England before setting off against all advice to seek light and wisdom in far-off places, rather than staying put and looking within. After repeated encounters with the Buddhadharma as a journalist in Thailand, Singapore, and Hong Kong, he eventually found refuge as senior editor at Buddhistdoor Global. He is also a keen mountain trekker and photographer, finding particular inspiration in the peoples, cultures, and Buddhist expressions of the Himalaya. Contact: craig@buddhistdoor.com

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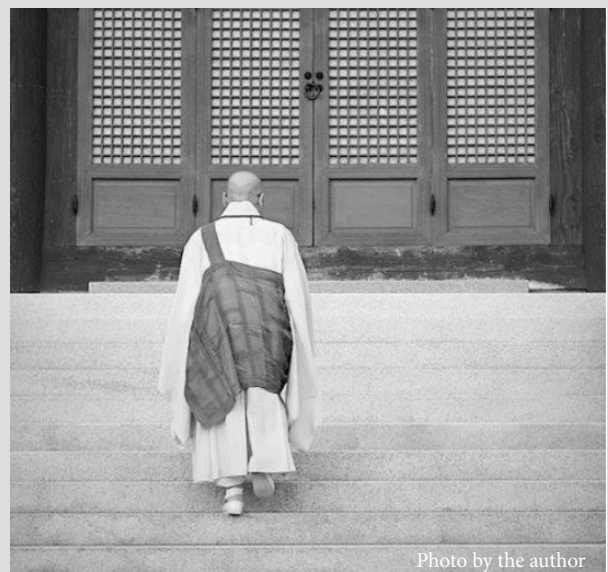


Photo by the author

Metta in Action: Buddhist Nuns in Ladakh Fight Climate Change

For the members of the Ladakh Nuns Association,
environmental education, healthcare support,
and dharma practice are deeply interconnected.

by **Ema Lewis**

April 21, 2022

Source: *The Buddhist Review Tricycle* - <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/ladakh-nuns-association/>



*Members of the Ladakh Nuns Association
Photos courtesy of the author.*



Venerable Dr. Tsering Palmo

Arriving at Thubstan Choskor Ling nunnery in Leh, Ladakh, you might first notice a five-seat pickup truck with the words “Nuns Association” printed on its windshield. In this vehicle, groups of Tibetan Buddhist nuns travel to remote villages in the mountains where they distribute herbal medicine and educate local people in environmental stewardship. These nuns belong to the Ladakh Nuns Association (LNA), which works to fight climate change, improve the health of Ladakhi communities, and elevate the status of Buddhist nuns locally and globally.

Ladakhi nun Venerable Dr. Tsering Palmo, who is also an amchi, or traditional Tibetan medicine doctor, founded the association in 1996 to provide local nuns and laywomen—especially those from economically strained villages or nomadic families—with the opportunity to achieve secular and monastic education, to train as medical practitioners, and to rise as leaders of social welfare projects in the region. She focuses specifically on environmental and healthcare initiatives. Today, the Ladakh Nuns Association sponsors seventy nuns to receive full-time education, and fifteen of these nuns recently completed training in the Tibetan medical system.

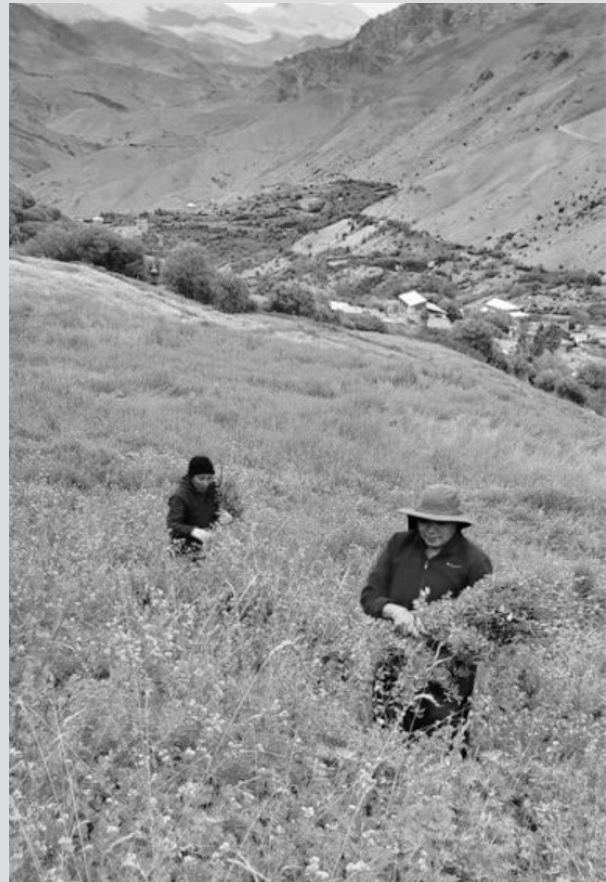
I first met Dr. Tsering Palmo in 2019 and reconnected with her over the phone in early 2022. During one of our recent calls, Dr. Palmo told me, “We want to train nuns as dharma teachers, counselors, and healthcare workers. Nuns can serve a need for the community: they can be guides when people and the planet are in trouble.”

Ladakh has suffered the effects of climate change acutely in recent years. Rapidly receding glaciers and changes in snowmelt patterns have resulted in frequent water shortages, increases in flash flooding, and cyclically failing crops in its agriculture-dependent villages. The region is also experiencing an increasing loss of mountain biodiversity—a loss that bears economic, cultural, and health implications. Research from the Department of Earth Science, University of Kashmir shows that the average annual temperature in the region increased by approximately thirty-three degrees between 1980 and 2016.

Climate change has impacted Tibet’s traditional medical system, known as Sowa-Rigpa, too. Tibetan medicinal practices, honed and utilized across centuries, rely on the availability and harvesting of herbal materials. Many of Ladakh’s medicinal plant species are becoming rarer with each season due to climatic changes, making efforts to gather, produce, and distribute key traditional medicines progressively more challenging. Dr. Palmo emphasizes: “Environmental issues are critical for human beings. If there is no health in the environment, there cannot be health for human beings.”

LNA’s intrepid social work activities aim to manifest lovingkindness, or metta, in action.

Each year, LNA nuns travel to provide communities in Ladakh’s villages with training in conservation, sustainable waste management, and the cultivation of medicinal herbs. As many LNA nuns hail from village areas, this provides the chance for nuns to extend their skills to family members and to the places they call home. Dr. Tsering Palmo explains, “There is the precious opportunity to share experiences and resources with the villagers. In particular, women and nuns can learn from



Nuns collecting medicinal herbs.

each other and support each other in meeting many difficulties and social issues. Our nuns have been involved in reviving the traditions of nuns, but also in engaging closely with our community.”

Through dialogue and connection with people from across Ladakhi society, and especially with laywomen, the nuns are able to strategize and distribute many vital forms of social and environmental service. In past years, the LNA amchi nuns have spent several days annually in the Changthang and Karnak Valleys collecting local herbs; the nuns also travel to the high pass of Khardong la on the Ladakh Range. Each year, new nuns begin their training as practitioners of Tibetan medicine and join in for the annual plant harvesting and community education trips to village areas.

The nuns teach about the harms of burning plastic waste and encourage trainees to plant fruit trees and



One of the Tibetan medical clinics in Leh.

vegetable gardens. They also provide educational workshops in the cultivation and stewardship of mountain herbs commonly used in the Tibetan medical system. Following these trainings, they return to the villages seasonally to collect seeds saved by community members, which are then planted in the LNA greenhouse in Leh.

Meanwhile, for over a decade, the LNA nuns have operated two Tibetan medical clinics in Leh to provide consultation and treatment free of charge to people who

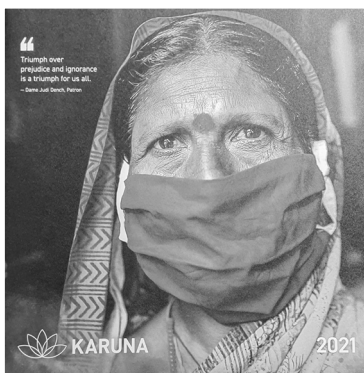
are physically or emotionally unwell. The walls of the clinics are lined with neatly labeled jars of Tibetan herbal medicine, many of which were collected during harvesting trips to villages and the mountain slopes of Ladakh. According to LNA, approximately 7,000 people receive treatment at these clinics each year. In times of crisis, including during outbreaks of COVID-19, the nuns initiate mobile clinics, providing aid to village residents who otherwise could not access care.

For the LNA nuns, environmental education, healthcare support, and practice of the dharma are deeply interconnected. As Dr. Tsering Palmo told me, “We cannot place blame: we have the opportunity to learn from these problems, which can help us to develop strength within ourselves. We can share that strength and can transform one another through the practice of compassion and loving kindness for one another.”

Venerable Dr. Tsering Palmo is a member of INEB’s Advisory Committee.

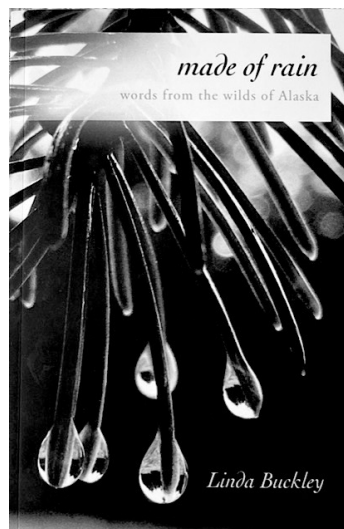


Recommended Reading



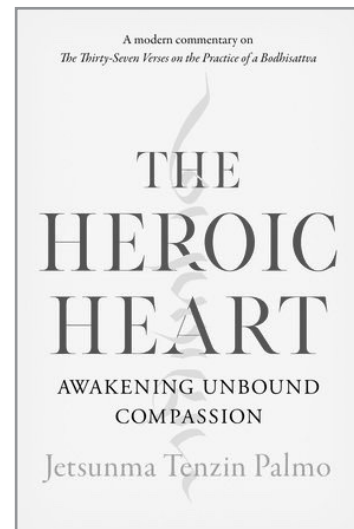
Karuna 2021

Editor: Amy Edwards
The Karuna Trust



made of rain -
words from the wilds of Alaska

Author: Linda Buckley
Publisher: Wild Rising Press, 2022



The Heroic Heart
Awakening Unbound Compassion

Author: Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo
Publisher: Shambala, 2022

Gender, Sexuality, and Engaged Buddhism

By **Ouyporn Khuankaew**

International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice (IWP)

www.womenforpeaceandjustice.org

One of the fundamental foundations of peace and justice work is gender and sexual equality. Patriarchy, the system of beliefs and practices constructed and sustained through gender roles and hetero-normative sexuality, deem the bodies, roles, needs and status of men as superior to that of women, and masculinity as more valuable than femininity. Patriarchy is deeply rooted in all institutions of our society from the village to the international level.

Gender and sexual oppression, created by patriarchy, are probably the oldest forms of suffering that continues to affect half the world's population. This oppression directly contributes to and exacerbates other forms of social injustice based on class, race, ethnicity, and colonization, including conflict and war. When men are taught to control and feel superior to the women in their families, community and the larger society, and when women are taught to accept that domination, it often follows that women accept or participate in other forms of oppression. Thus, building peace, a state free from violence toward women, must begin from the direct experiences encountered through gender and sexual roles in daily life.

There is a deep connection between gender, sexual equality, and peacebuilding. The International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice, a non governmental organization that I co-founded in 2002, has made a commitment since our inception to integrate gender and sexuality liberation as a fundamental component of our work for peace and justice. The International Women's

Partnership for Peace and Justice is a feminist Buddhist, spiritually-based training center located in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Its mission is to support the work of social activists and social movements around Asia, including grass-roots women leaders and community organizers, religious leaders, government officers and middle class social activists in Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka and India (including Himalayan Buddhist groups), offering spiritually-based, anti-oppression, feminist training on issues related to peace and justice. We run engaged Buddhist workshops at our own training center and also teach at other venues as invited by different organizations. The core content of our training includes an analysis of power (power over, power sharing and power within), as well as of the structural oppression that creates marginalization based on class, race, ethnicity, ability, gender and sexuality. This understanding of the root causes of social suffering compels us to commit to working and living with a model partnership of culture, based on the values and practices of non-violence, spirituality, peace, equality and respect for diversity.

This chapter is based on my years of experience searching to understand and to find a connection between feminism and Buddhism for peace and social justice. I currently co-direct the International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice with a vision and commitment to create a spiritually-based feminist organization and culture of power-sharing with the Buddhist principles of simplicity and self-reliance. Prior to co-founding the International Women's Partnership, I worked with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists where I learned about all schools of Buddhism and their social engagement and the feminist teachers

within the Buddhist circle.

The chapter consists of three sections. The first addresses how patriarchy has infiltrated Buddhist institutions and teachings in ways that deeply impact women and LGBT¹ people. The second discusses how we use the Buddha's true teachings to help workshop participants understand the root causes of their personal and social suffering, as well as the ways to transform them. The third and final section emphasizes the integration of spirituality in social activism in order to impact change effectively.

Because the populations with whom we work are mostly Buddhists, we have learned how the traditional patriarchal Buddhist teachings and institutions are part of the root causes of gender and sexuality oppression. Thus, through our workshops, we help participants deconstruct the deep internalization of the misinterpretation of the Buddha's teachings. At the same time, we share and explore the true meaning and practice of our spiritual roots. Separating patriarchal beliefs and messages from Buddha's teachings, we recognize the tremendous value of true Buddhist teachings and spiritual practices that liberate our mind and heart. This helps women to see themselves as human beings with full potential to attain the highest spiritual development, aside from their socially constructed roles as a woman, daughter, wife and mother. This awakening alleviates much of suffering caused by multiple layers of oppression that many women experience. It can transform women's fear, low self esteem, guilt, confusion, and disconnection, and bring about wisdom, compassion, peace, inner strength and joy developed independently from within, with the support of good friends and teachers.

This spiritual liberation is a fundamental base for women to free themselves effectively from the many traps caused by assigned roles and beliefs that often are oppressive and deprive women of dignity, rights, power, status and opportunity. When women are liberated from within, their inner strength guides them to work

collectively with others to change the unjust systems outside. We encourage women activists to integrate spirituality into their daily lives and their activism in order to build the foundation that will help them transform day-to-day difficulties and live in the joy and contentment which will sustain and nurture life and social movements.

We use a feminist lens to filter patriarchal Buddhism so that we can understand, appreciate and reconnect with ourselves and with the true Buddhist teachings. With that reconciliation, true Buddhist teachings help us to transform anger, guilt, fear, and other forms of ignorance, a transformation we can find neither in feminism nor activism.

Personally, feminism helps me understand multiple oppressions and their impacts on humans and other beings. This insight helps me reclaim confidence, self worth and dignity as a woman. Buddhist teachings heal my pain and help me understand and care for every other living being. Feminism guides me to see suffering caused by injustice while Buddhist teachings guide me to work and live through the practice of compassion and joy so that my activism can be sustained and effective.

I. Patriarchal Buddhism and How it Causes Suffering to Women and Members of Sexual Minorities

There are several ways that Buddhism contributes to gender and sexual oppression. The patriarchal religious institutions neither support ordained women nor the full ordination of women. Mae Chi, white robe nuns, have existed in Thailand for over a century, but they are neither recognized by state law nor religious institutions. During the years 1996-2000 when I was working with the Thai Mae Chi Association, they reported that there were about 100,00 nuns in the country. But, because there was no recognition of their legal or social status, the nun leaders told us that neither the government nor the religious high council allocated a budget for their education or any social welfare needs. Most of them have to live in temples headed by male monks; their main jobs are cooking and cleaning for monks. This leaves very

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.

little or no time for their spiritual practice.

Two Thai women attempted to take full monk ordination in the early 19th century, and in response, the national Buddhist high council issued a policy that prohibits any Thai male monk from conducting the full ordination of women. Despite these restrictions, by 2016, more than 200 Thai women had been fully ordained. Still, most had to do this in Sri Lanka, and they continue to be treated by the state and the high council the same way as the ordained white robe nuns. In Cambodia, Burma and Laos, the conditions of the nuns are similar to the Thais. In Sri Lanka, although the revival of fully ordained women has taken place since late 1990, the general conditions and status of these women have not changed much.

In Tibetan Buddhism in the past three decades, despite continuous work of international feminist Buddhists' demands for the full ordination of women, their wishes have still not been granted by the male monk leaders. They comprise a non-formal network of individual Buddhist feminist leaders and teachers from Asia, North America and Europe, who have been internationally recognized for their work on this issue for 30 years. Some are co-founders, leading figures and members of the Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women.

The male dominance in Buddhist institutions has led to many other forms of abuse, exclusion, discrimination and misogyny against women in all schools of Buddhism. From 1997-2007 when I worked with Buddhist nuns in South and Southeast Asian communities, I witnessed numerous forms of violence against lay women and nuns living inside the temples. Some women and nuns experienced sexual harassment, verbal and physical abuse, including rape by male monks. In Northern Thailand, women and girls are not allowed to enter certain places within the temples or to attend some religious ceremonies. Only laymen are allowed to have three months leave with pay for their Buddhist spiritual retreat.

Women in most Buddhist countries are taught that their body and sexuality are dangerous for the enlightenment of monks. When there are sex scandals,

women are blamed for being seductive. There is one Tibetan text which describes how filthy and ugly women's bodies are, and how women tend to tempt monks with their uncontrolled sexual desire.²

The Wrong Notion of Karma

Although karma is not the focus of the Buddha's teachings, it is a common notion used among Buddhists to explain the suffering that they experience, either good or bad. It is used particularly to explain the violence experienced by many marginalized groups who are not part of heterosexual patriarchal institutions. I remember from my childhood that whenever my father was violent in our family, my mother often said, "What did I do to suffer so much and when will this karma end?" This wrong notion of karma is a powerful patriarchal tool to oppress women and sexual minority groups, and to perpetuate passive acceptance of the violence they experience.

The word karma repeatedly comes up as the answer when we ask women in workshops and through counseling sessions what they think is the cause of their suffering in situations of spousal beatings, extra-marital affairs, alcoholism, rape, forced abortion and forced prostitution. Women are told to tolerate and accept these forms of violence as suffering which is caused by the karma of their own previous life experiences. Acceptance, compassion, patience and forgiveness are often the monks' advice to women so that the suffering or dishonest husband will change his behaviors.

In addition, women are discouraged from practicing meditation. Monks tell them that enlightenment cannot be realized through a woman's body and that being born in a woman's body is a result of not having enough merit in a previous life. One of my sisters, who is very dedicated to the temple and her religious practice, asked the local

² Described in the film by Liz Thompson, *Cave in the Snow* (Australia: Firelight Productions, 2002), the story of Venerable Tenzin Palmo, a prominent female teacher in Tibetan Buddhism and leader of the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery located near Dharamsala in northwest India.

monks about enlightenment. She was told that it is so unfortunate that she is a woman because she cannot be ordained so her chance of enlightenment is dim. That sister often told me how much she regretted not being born a man, and that, according to the monks, accumulating more merit in this life by giving lots of money to the temple is very important so that in the next life she may be born as a man.

LGBT people and their families face the same oppression and internalization with the notion of karma – you are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender because of your previous life's bad karma; you broke the third precept and engaged in sexual misconduct in your previous life. Parents are told they gave birth to a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender child because of their own bad karma in their previous life.

In Thailand, traditionally boys and men are expected to take a temporary ordination at some point in their lifetime, in order to pay gratitude to their parents and to follow the Buddhist tradition. Often feminine young boys are forced by their parents to take ordination in hopes that the monkhood might 'cure' them from being transgender, looking feminine or becoming gay. Some boys are forced to receive the holy water from monks for the same reason. Many who are forced to take ordination as a novice monk at a young age are raped by the temple abbot and elder monks and cannot report their suffering either to their parents or the government authority. Many "toms" (butch lesbians) and transgender people feel uncomfortable, unwelcomed and judged when they go to temples and meditation centers, or when they seek spiritual guidance.

These stories reflect how patriarchal Buddhism regards the body, roles and status of women, gay and transgender people. The underlining message sent to them and to society is that enlightenment's path and leadership roles in Buddhism are not for them because of their bodies and sexuality; their bodies and identities are both considered to be the root cause of their suffering and also an obstacle to their spiritual development and enlightenment.

Waking up from Ignorance

Because of growing up in such a traditional patriarchal

Buddhist culture, for many years I did not feel a connection with Buddhism and I have not lived my life the same way as most traditional Buddhists in Thailand. Here, to go to the temple on the big Buddhist days means that you are Buddhist. The year 1994 was the turning point of my life. I started working with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, a network of Buddhist teachers and practitioners around the world who are committed to apply Buddhism into the modern world and to use Buddhism as a guide to transforming our own suffering and the suffering of others. My interest in and commitment to this network involves bringing a feminist lens and practice into the circle and seeking ways Buddhism can support my feminist work and life.

The great wake up for me came in meeting Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, formerly Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilasingh, internationally known for her Buddhist feminist activism. She is the first female feminist monk of Thailand, ordained in 2002. In late 1990, I often attended the Buddhist teaching for women at her temple located near Bangkok. We also have invited her to teach feminist Buddhism at our center. Every time that Dhammananda teaches women, she always tells us the stories cited from the Therigatha³ about the 13 women who gained enlightenment during the Buddha's life. It is her powerful way to empower Buddhist women who since childhood have internalized the distorted teachings of the monks. For me and many Buddhist women from Asian countries, Dhammananda offered our first exposure to positive messages about being a Buddhist and being a woman. Until then, I had never learned that a woman could gain enlightenment, never heard any positive stories of women in Buddhism or in Buddhist history. When asked if being a woman is an obstacle to enlightenment, a message we all heard throughout our life, Dhammananda told us that women can gain

³ The Therigatha, Pali for Songs of the Elders, is an anthology of the poems of enlightenment of the first Buddhist women of the 5th century B.C., arguably the world's first women's literature.

enlightenment, that enlightenment takes no physical form, no gender nor sexuality, just the pure mind.

Dhammananda clarified the myths that I and many other Buddhist women from Thailand, and other countries and traditions, had been taught about women and Buddhism. Her teachings help many Buddhist women see the root causes of gender oppression, the patriarchal belief system which has been internalized deeply by both male teachers representing Buddhist institutions, as well as the majority of the population, both men and women in all Buddhist countries. This internalization has influenced the interpretation of the religious texts. One clear example is the teaching that many Thai women, even today, are told that they are the enemy of the monks enlightenment, and thus should not sit close to monks. This teaching instills in women a feeling of inferiority and dirtiness, and women then feel awkward and uncomfortable when they are with monks. Many monks also look down on women's spiritual ability and potential. Dhammananda helped explain the story that led to such misinterpretation:

Ananda, the close disciple and personal attendant of the Buddha, was a very charming monk. He also had much compassion toward women. Many women knew of this kind monk. So many came to see him to seek support. Because Ananda had not attained enlightenment yet, he was impacted by the encounters with beautiful women. The Buddha knew the challenges in Ananda's mind. Thus, this is the teaching he gave to his disciple, "Ananda, if your mind is not yet strong, you should not stay close to women, because the contact could make your mind go astray."⁴

From this text, the Thai monks choose to teach only the part that says that women are an obstacle to the enlightenment of the monks who are living a celibate life; they skip the next line where the Buddha says men are

also an obstacle to women's enlightenment. Dhammananda gave this Dharma talk several times at our center as a result of repeated questions by Thai women who had deeply internalized the notion that they are dangerous and an obstacle to the spiritual practice of monks.

From this story we can see that the Buddha meant to teach Ananda to watch and to train his mind whenever he encountered women. He did not teach him to tell the women to keep distance from him, asserting they are dirty, bad or seductive. He taught Ananda to take responsibility for his own sexual behavior.

Above is one example of the context in which the Buddha intervened and taught his disciples. But the male monks used their patriarchal views to interpret the original text to blame women and perpetuate misogyny. In order to transform this ignorance, we need women with a feminist lens to study the texts and bring back the true intention of Buddha's teachings. The leadership of women within the institutions will also give direction, encouragement and space for many women who would like to follow a formal spiritual path as a life choice. The bold action to be the first fully ordained woman in the history of Thai Buddhism, the Venerable Dhammananda, has continued to influence many Thai women toward a Buddhist education that is true and spiritually empowering for them. Her actions have proven how badly needed women's leadership is in order to transform Buddhism into a true spiritual refuge for society, and how crucial for the survival of Buddhism itself.

Deconstructing the Notion of Karma

The true meaning of karma in Buddhism is action that can be in mental, verbal and bodily forms. Each of our actions is influenced or caused by internal and external conditions. Each action then has consequences. Thus, karma is about a chain of choices and effects of our past and present that determine our future. This logic provides us a choice in order to create or change the conditions both from within and outside, when we can. With this awareness we can take responsibility for our own action or inaction and prepare for its consequences.

The Buddha spent most of his life after his

⁴ Mahaparinibbana Sutta, Tipitaka. Thai version, Vol. X.

enlightenment teaching about the present moment because this is the only place where we can wake up and create the internal and external conditions that will affect our life. His teachings focus on the path leading to the end of suffering which can only be realized through mental training. The clear mind is needed in order to see the suffering and the possibilities to create new conditions and make a different choice. The belief that happiness and unhappiness in this life are the results of previous lives is not what the Buddha taught. It was a prevalent belief in India during his time, but it was not his teaching.⁵ Unfortunately, it has continued to have much influence, altering the real meaning of karma in Buddhism.

II. Transforming Traditional Buddhist Teaching with Engaged Buddhist Views and Actions

We challenge the internalization of karma by using the Four Noble Truths, the core teaching of the Buddha. We emphasize looking at the problems caused by collective or structural ignorance because the traditional mainstream Buddhist analysis and solutions to suffering still focus mainly at the individual level. Thus, being a good Buddhist means that following five ethical precepts is enough. Do not kill, do not steal, do not lie, do not commit sexual misconduct and do not take intoxicants. From an engaged Buddhist view, this is not enough to transform the suffering that many individuals encounter in the world today caused by structural ignorance or violence systematically embedded within most social institutions, including Buddhist ones.

⁵ Perspectives of Venerable Phra Paisal Visalo, a prominent Thai Buddhist activist monk and abbot of Wat Pasukhato, Chaiyapum province, presented during his teaching at the International Women's Partnership in Chiang Mai. See, for example, Paisal Visalo, "Goodness and Generosity Perverted: The Karma of Capitalist Buddhism in Thailand," in *Rethinking Karma: The Dharma of Social Justice*, edited by Johnathon S. Watts (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2009).

When teaching the engaged Buddhist workshop, we apply The Four Noble Truths to help participants analyze contemporary social problems.

► *The First Truth is Dukkha – suffering or dissatisfaction.*

Suffering is natural and part of life. As engaged Buddhists we differentiate between socially caused suffering and natural suffering, a result of the cycles of change/impermanence such as old age, sickness, and death, and the consequences of our attachment to the self which include fear, anger, disappointment, sadness, pain, grief and hurt. We also identify socially caused suffering such as poverty, gender-based violence, racism, violence against LGBT people, ethnic oppression, environmental destruction, war and conflict.

► *The Second Truth is Samudaya – root causes of suffering*

The root causes of suffering are desire/greed, hatred/anger, and delusion/ego. All of these lead to attachment of self. If one can remove her/his anger, greed or delusion, for example, the suffering will be eradicated. As engaged Buddhists, we understand that injustice and other forms of social suffering are rooted in collective greed, anger and delusion. For the oppression of women and LGBT people, we name the core root cause as patriarchy, the internalization of hetero-normative unequal gender roles, values and images that are reinforced through major social institutions such as the family, education, religion, history, media, folklore, entertainment business and advertisement, health system, economic system, law and legal systems, tradition and culture, and the monarchy.

► *The Third Truth is Nirodha – the cessation of suffering, or the vision of freedom from social suffering.*

Any form of suffering can be transformed when the conditions sustaining it are removed. When all conditions that cause, support and perpetuate oppression of women and LGBT people are removed or eradicated, the society will be equal, safe, peaceful,

and harmonious. This is a vision of society where everyone, regardless of their gender, class, ethnicity, race, religious beliefs, or sexuality can live happily with dignity.

► *The Fourth Truth is Magga – the path to end the suffering.*

Natural personal suffering can be overcome through meditation, training one's mind to a level of calm, peace, equanimity and insight on impermanence and non self so as not to be affected by physical or mental suffering. Suffering rooted in collective ignorance, such as patriarchy, can be overcome by a collective effort to remove the root causes. The Fourth Truth comprises eight elements and is known as the Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right intention/thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right concentration, right mindfulness and right effort. This Eightfold Path is interconnected. It can be summarized into three main categories: wisdom, (right view and right intention), ethical conduct (right actions and right livelihood) and mental discipline (right concentration, right mindfulness and right effort). An engaged Buddhist integrates all of these in order to diminish or reduce suffering. In short, this teaching is about wisdom and compassion which are both necessary and interconnected; the teaching is depicted as the two wings of a bird that need each other in order to fly.

Wisdom starts with having the right view. Any action for change needs a right or wise view because it is the basis of our speech and bodily actions. The Buddha's teaching on right view is about believing in the truths that he discovered, that is, to accept that there is suffering, understanding its root causes and determine to work to remove them. Right view also includes the realization of impermanence and the interconnectedness of all beings. When we apply right view to gender and sexuality, it means acknowledging the reality of the many forms of suffering experienced by women and members of sexual minorities. This suffering will be ended once the root causes are removed because they all have a nature of impermanence. The suffering of women, LGBT people, or any marginalized group in our society, is a result of a

collective ignorance of which each of us is a part, directly or indirectly. We become aware that our view influences our actions, speech and livelihood and can contribute to any positive change, however small. It is this understanding of interconnectedness of all beings that invokes our natural compassion to act in order to reduce any form of suffering caused by patriarchy.

The mental discipline (right concentration, mindfulness and effort) is about training our mind, a foundation for sustaining peace and calm while working to change structural injustice or violence. Change outside requires an internal shift of our thinking, speech and actions. Working to challenge the long history of oppressions based on gender, sexuality, class or race can easily lead activists to experience burn out, despair and anger. As activists we cannot assume that we are free from any internalized form of oppression. In order to be aware of this ignorance and the internal difficulties that exist within us, we need clarity of our own mind. The clear mind allows us to see ourselves; with mindfulness we can transform the internal obstacles. A spiritual foundation supports the internal transformation that individuals and groups need in order to create real change.

*The Four Abiding Abodes:
A guide for a caring partnership-culture*

Another teaching we use as a guide for social change is the Four Abiding Abodes, the *Brahma Viharas* or House of God. This teaching of the Buddha was offered to a Brahmin who appreciated the teaching but did not want to convert to Buddhism.⁶ The International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice adapted this teaching as a guide for loving relationships. We share this teaching both to Buddhists and non-Buddhists since the teaching historically is for non-Buddhists.

We use this teaching because we have found that many women, particularly heterosexual women in the Asian countries where we work, are socialized to believe that once you are married you belong to your husband;

⁶ Ibid. Venerable Dhamananda shared these teachings at the International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice.

you have to endure with patience and forgiveness whatever form of violence he perpetrates. Many women tell us that their partner, after abusing them, says, “I love you and I am sorry that I hurt you.” For the women then, it comes to the point where the abuse or infidelity is acceptable - he just “lost his mind” or got distracted. In part, the abuse is endured because of the wrong notion of karma; among Christian women, it is also endured because of the distorted notion of the abusive behavior being God-given or God’s will.

After several workshops with women participants from Thailand and Burma, we decided to take the teaching as expanded by engaged Buddhist teacher and Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh,⁷ and apply it to loving relationships with oneself and others. This teaching has four components as follows:

Loving-kindness: The intention and action to create joy and happiness for ourselves and others, including our partner.

Compassion: The intention and action to relieve and transform suffering and lighten sorrows for ourselves and others, including our partner.

Sympathetic Joy: The intention and action to rejoice when we see others happy, including our partner, and to rejoice in our own well-being.

Equanimity: Nonattachment, nondiscrimination, non-controlling or non-possessiveness towards others, including our partner or our project. Equanimity is a result of seeing things as they are: that they are impermanent by nature, that they are interconnected and that there is no separate self. Realizing this truth we see all beings as equal and are committed to live our life in a way that preserves our own freedom and supports the freedom of others. When we work for justice, we set a clear goal and program. Once we create sufficient conditions, then we let go of the attachment to the outcome. This will avoid burn out, blaming, and closing oneself off to criticism or judgment of ourselves and others.

Building peace and equality requires having loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity for ourselves

and our partner. Thich Nhat Hanh calls this True Love.⁸ The Four Abiding Abodes can also serve as a guide for our relationship with our family members, friends and work colleagues, as well as with fellow human beings and with nature. Peacebuilding at every level requires a commitment to fostering relationships based on these same loving principles.

The True Meaning of Enlightenment and Nirvana

When working with Buddhists, we reclaim the real meaning of enlightenment or nirvana because we have found that it has been taught in the wrong way. Many Buddhists were taught to believe that enlightenment only happens at the death of an arahant “worthy ones (who) have seen through ignorance, transcended self-centeredness, and are released from all suffering;” nirvana is a “special city, empty of pain and chocked full of the happiness of fulfilled wishes, supposedly reached after death by those who store up perfections (paramis) over tens of thousands of lifetimes.”⁹ Some monks led us to believe that lay people who live a defiled worldly life cannot reach such enlightenment.

Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhi, who was known among Thai Buddhists scholars as the pioneer who reformed Thai Buddhism, taught that nirvana literally means “coolness” of mind, the mind free from the fires of defilement.¹⁰ It is about the state of mind that is free from ego (“the me and the mine”). Buddhadasa himself had been taught incorrectly by his teacher and only discovered the real meaning of nirvana from the original text on his own. Nirvana is open and accessible to everyone; it is about moment-to-moment experience in the present life.¹¹

⁷ See Thich Nhat Hanh, *True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2004).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Nibbana For Everyone*, trans. Santikaro Bhikkhu, Messages from Suan Mokkh Series No 2 (Bangkok: Buddhadasa Indapanno Archives and Norwalk, WI: Liberation Park, 2006), 1. First published in Thai (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1988).

¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹ Ibid., 11. For more Dharma talks and teachings of Buddhadasa, see www.buddhadasa.org.

Beyond Masculine Buddhist Spiritual Forms and Structures

When teaching engaged Buddhist workshops at our center, we share with participants stories of marginalized people, particularly women of Buddha's time and the present time (Thai Buddhist women who are living with HIV/AIDS), dedicated to meditation practice to transform their suffering and who gain enlightenment. These are stories that most monks never share and that women never hear from any source. This is a way to deconstruct all the wrong views laypeople have internalized about the impossibility of their own enlightenment. With the right knowledge, women can feel motivated spiritually and empowered to begin their path.

Although we work predominately with Buddhists, we use the term spirituality instead of religion. We define spirituality as power within - a state of mind where one experiences calmness, clarity, awareness, joy, peace and a sense of connection to what is happening in the here and now within oneself and in the outside surroundings. Spirituality does not necessarily entail being part of an organized religion, although many people develop and enhance their spirituality through religious practices. Spiritual practice brings wisdom, courage and clarity, equanimity, connection, compassion and love. We all inherit some of these qualities, if not all, in our heart and mind regardless of our age, gender, skin color, ethnicity, physical ability or sexual orientation. These qualities of mind and heart serve as a foundation that helps us to accept and love ourselves, to respect and appreciate others' identities and choices, to embrace and transform any challenges and suffering that may arise in our daily lives, and to be able to maintain our equanimity while working for social change.

Mainstream Buddhist meditation practice, particularly in Southeast Asian countries that follow the Theravada school of Buddhism, is still confined to temples, and therefore led and defined by monks. The forms, methods and structures in mainstream Buddhism, especially in Thailand, are suitable for monks of privilege with no family responsibility and for lay men who can take long vacations because they do not have to do housework and take care of children. These forms do not support lay women's life conditions and experiences. Particularly if women are trauma survivors who have

experienced sexual abuse, the formal masculine method of sitting with eyes closed does not work for them. At our center, the forms of meditation vary from formal sitting to yoga, mindful movement, walking in the rice fields, bicycling, eating in silence, singing, practicing deep relaxation, arranging flowers, washing dishes or doing any household chore with the mind present. Throughout our workshops, participants practice meditation through deeply listening to others' suffering without judging or giving advice. It is a practice of meditation in action for healing and change.

III. Transforming Feminist Work and Life with Spiritual Practice

Growing up in a male-dominated traditional Buddhist culture did not train me in formal Buddhist spiritual practice. The first time I learned formal meditation was in 1993. At that time, I suffered greatly from the break-up of my intimate relationship, and was toppled with the anger of my childhood trauma and the absence of direction for my feminist work in Thailand. Meditation helped me to heal and transform the anger I had toward my father. I realized that feminism helps me with clarity at the head level, with the ability to analyze how patriarchy works in our society and how it influenced my father to be violent.

But at the heart and spiritual level, feminism has not helped me to understand my father and other men who use violence. I saw the deep anger inside of me that pushes me to do feminist work to end gender inequality. But I also saw how this same anger is an obstacle to my work and daily life of harmony and peace. My first intense meditation retreat allowed me to do a practice of sending loving-kindness to my father who had died many years before. That was the first spiritual transformation for me. It was the work that allowed me to feel compassion for my father, that healed and connected me with him for the first time.

I realized later that my feminist peace and justice work needed a spiritual base. Otherwise, I could easily reproduce the same things I want men and people who use violence, to change anger, greed, disconnection, fear, and delusion. I realized that I could not operate my heart and mind with the same ignorance that I want to remove from others and from our society.

Many of us peace activists who are drawn to justice

work are often driven with anger that pushes the desire to change society. Yet activists and social movements will not be sustained with anger and greed as the base. Challenging the deep, complicated history of oppression requires a clear mind and peaceful heart in order to see how both internal and external oppressions are interconnected. The structural violence rooted in greed, anger, hatred and delusion are an external phenomenon that we can see in our daily life. But we also know that the same things can easily operate internally within us daily. They show up in very small actions, from not being able to listen to our colleagues at work, to not being able to be patient and calm with our children's demands or with an aging mother's pain at home. It is a constant challenge for us all to have peace within while working daily for peace and harmony outside.

Spiritual practice is about training the mind and heart to be present, to be clear, calm and open. This kind of mind helps us to understand deeply how the dominant male culture causes gender and sexual inequality, an inequality that is interconnected with all other forms of injustice that produce collective pain, fear, disconnection, insecurity, violence and exploitation in ourselves, our friends, our sisters and brothers, and the whole ecology system. With this understanding, we have a vision of a different culture that we want to create, to practice daily, effortlessly in our own life and in any relationship or situation that we can influence, no matter how small the action. This understanding opens our heart to feel the suffering of ourselves and others living in the dominant culture. It helps us not only to connect with our own pain, fear, and confusion, but the pain and fear of every human being including the ones whom we see as our opponents. We realize that we are not separate from anyone, that there is no otherness in suffering or in peace. It is at the heart and spiritual level that we reconnect, reconcile, heal and transform.

The awakening of heart and mind is a foundation that sustains us to stay committed in movements and communities that create peace and justice, to end violence within and outside. We are embodying a living experience of a new culture that respects and values differences and diversity, a practice of patience and tolerance, of compassion, of acceptance, and of loving ourselves, others and the eco systems that support our lives. It is a way of living in peace and harmony, walking

the path of enlightenment in our daily life.

In our experience working for almost two decades with Buddhist women throughout Asia, we have learned that women are assigned to preserve the dominant male culture through their gender and sexuality roles. It is vital to empower women to wake up from this deep ignorance and delusion. Peacebuilding within and outside can be achieved only through a clear mind and a compassionate, open and joyful heart, guided by the true teachings of the Buddha.

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ALLY Project Closes with Final Advocacy Messages

By Philip Gassert

After two years of building peace in their own countries, 46 youth convened in Bangkok, Thailand, to advocate on behalf of their work in South Asia. The ALLY Policy Dissemination Event was one of several engagements between regional policymakers and youth from the European Union-funded ALLY project.

ALLY – Amplifying Leadership of Local Youth – is a 36-month project empowering youth working to prevent violent extremism (PVE) in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The project began in March 2020, with participatory action research that engaged 69 active young peacebuilders to produce comprehensive evidence-based regional and country-specific policy briefs. Building on the research, ALLY initiated a fellowship programme comprised of over 60 youth dedicated to PVE in May 2021. More than just advocating for peace, the ALLY Fellows designed and implemented 24 Social Action Plans (SAPs) to promote social cohesion at local, national, and regional levels.

Their SAPs included radio and podcast series, online and in-person workshops, art contests, and much more. Stories of their work and their messages can be found on the ALLY webpage.

With research and real-world experience, ALLY staff and fellows welcomed key stakeholders and policymakers in Bangkok in June 2022 to hear directly from the youth on the real-world impacts of their work, opportunities for change stemming from the ALLY fellows' SAPs, and their policy recommendations.

Fellows discussed the importance of government platforms that included youth as active participants, policies that allowed access to international donors, the Youth Peace and Security agenda and UNSCR 2250 as focuses in peacebuilding activities, among other topics. With the regional engagement completed, fellows returned to their countries to conduct national level advocacy engagements.

Not only are youth highly affected by violent extremism, they also play a crucial role as positive change agents working closely with those most susceptible to extremism, and their inclusion in peacebuilding is crucial to long-term, systemic change across South Asia.

Following the completion of all activities in August



2022, ALLY consortium partners will continue to support ALLY stakeholders through regional engagements and their on-going regional networks. Those interested in future opportunities should follow the Network's Facebook and Twitter pages.

To download and read the ALLY research and recommendations, visit the UNOY and Network websites:

<https://unoy.org/downloads/ally-research/> and <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/ally-project/>.

ABOUT ALLY

Amplifying Leadership of Local Youth (ALLY) intends to amplify young people's constructive voices and agency in addressing diverse factors of violent extremist narratives in South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. It is a 30-month program funded by the European Union, launched in March 2020, and implemented by The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers with a consortium of partners: UNOY Peacebuilders, Finn Church Aid, Youth Development Foundation, Sri Lanka Unites, Rural Development Society, and Centre for Communication and Development. Combined, the consortium carries 100+ years of experience in youth-driven peacebuilding and capacity development.

For more information please contact: Philip Gassert, Project Coordinator, email: philip.gassert@kua.fi, The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (The Network). INEB and the Network collaborate on various initiatives, and the ALLY project complements INEB and SEM projects by strengthening the network of peacebuilders throughout the region.



Metta Development Foundation

March 23, 2022

Dear Ajarn Sulak,

On behalf of the Metta Development Foundation (Metta), your kalyanamitra from Burma (Myanmar) and the Myanmar people, we would like to send our warmest wishes to you, on the auspicious occasion of your great 89th birthday!

We are glad to learn that both you and your wife have recovered from Covid-19 infection. May God grants both of you many happy and healthy return of the days!

Myanmar people has greatly benefited from your friendship, generosity, wisdom and compassion. Many civil society organisations, movements and monastic initiatives evolved in Myanmar, inspired by your teachings on social justice and engaged spirituality. From the first Grassroot Leadership Training with the late Rev. Dr. Saboi Jum to the later Peace Leadership, Eco-leadership and the Awakening Leadership trainings and multiple exposure trips, grassroot leaders from Burma got a chance to learn, improve and grow themselves into the global networks of interconnected kalyanamitra. Their journeys were guided by you, Pi Pracha, Jane, Moo and many other good friends. Now, new generations are taking the social justice agenda further and broader. Along the way, Metta has grown from a small organisation to a credible national NGO, providing lifesaving support for the people during devastating crises such as Cyclone Nargis, conflict in Kachin and northern Shan, 2021 coup d'état and the Covid-19 pandemic.

It has been 25 years since you, Seng Raw and your dear friend, the late Michael Baumann, helped student leaders and the broader democratic movements in Burma. The struggle of the people striving for freedom and democracy has come to another turning point. Now, those who were trained by your initiatives persist and lead the resistance at many fronts. The struggle of the people in Burma is not an isolated one as you rightly pointed out. Struggle for democracy, justice and freedom is a regional and global phenomenon. You helped us see the interconnectedness of struggles in Thailand, Hongkong, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, India, Palestine, Ukraine. At the same time, you helped restore our belief that solidarity and engaged social actions may one day liberate us from all form of oppressions. Most critically, you helped us to see the need to address capitalism as a root cause if we want to effectively tackle structural violence and climate change. There are many reasons to be hopeful despite many setbacks we have witnessed these days. There is a greater understanding and solidarity between Burma and Siam (Thailand), and the young generation has politically awakened and leading the struggles. You have played a very crucial role in bridging the two societies and nurturing camaraderie between the two countries despite their tumultuous historical relations.

Your birthday commemoration reminds us about the values and principle you firmly stand for. On this special occasion, we reaffirmed our commitment to stand with the oppressed people, and to strive for justice, equality, democracy and peace. With your generous helps, many lights of wisdom, compassion and courage illuminate across the cultural cradles of Mekong, Chaophraya, Irrawaddy and Ghanga. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for being a shining beacon in a troubled time! Ajarn Sulak, may your light keep shining for many years to come!

Peace be upon you Ajarn,

With loving-kindness, Klyanamitra and the People of Myanmar

Digitally signed
by Gum Sha
Awng
Date:
2022.03.22
21:01:17 +06'30'

Gum Sha Awng

Executive Director

Metta Development Foundation

Khunying Noi - M.R. Saisawasdee Sawatdiwat passed away, age 91 years.

1931 - 2022



Source: *Thailand Posts English* -
<https://thailand.postsen.com/news/24487/MR-Sai-Sawadee-Sawatdiwat-passed-away-at-the-age-of-91-years.html>

On July 20, M.R. Narissara Chakrabongse posted on Facebook that M.R. Saisawasdee Sawatdiwat or Khun Ying Noi, passed away on Tuesday, July 19, at Ban Suan Kaew, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. She was 91 years old.

Previously she served as the President of the Harmony Association under royal patronage which counseled Thai citizens, mostly students, living in the UK. It is the first Thai Association in the UK and the largest and oldest Thai Overseas Association.

In 1984, M.R. Saisawasdee and her sisters generously donated the 34 rai of land to the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation. Her mother, Princess Samur, wanted the land to be used for something spiritual, a Buddhist contribution to world peace and personal growth. The Wongsanit Ashram is named in honor of her parents, Prince and Princess Wongsanit. The Ashram has been and continues to be the campus for our alternative education community where many people have benefitted from their learning experience through the years.

Through Facebook, Sulak Sivaraksa, posted "M.R. Sai Sawadee also had the heart to lead in charity and fully stand up for human rights. For example, when a bloody incident occurred in Thailand in October 1976, the Thanin Kraivichien government was an absolute dictatorship. Thai people in England set up the Mit Thai Foundation to support the liberal democracy movement in Thailand. M.R. Saisawasdee accepted as a director to fully help with this work. Even until the unity of the association that was established since the reign of King Rama VI to provide opportunities for Thai students in England to get to know each other, exchanged views. M.R. Saisawasdee [and] I have been working with this association almost all the time."

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OCT 24 - 25

Meditation Retreat: Seonyu-dong
Training Center, Mungyeong
Meditation guided by the Venerable
Pomnyun Sunim & Jungto Society
Dharma teachers

OCT 26

Temple Visit: Unmun-sa bhikkhuni
temple
Discussing gender issues and the
bhikkhuni's concerns
Organic Farm Visit: Dubuk Jungto
Center

OCT 27 - 28

Main conference: Seonyu-dong
Training Center, Mungyeong
Keynote speech • plenary sessions
• breakout sessions • cultural events
and more

OCT 29

Peace Study Tour: DMZ
(Demilitarized Zone)
Public Symposium: Jungto Center,
Seoul

OCT 30

**Joint meeting of INEB's Advisory
and Executive Committees**
(invitation only)

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