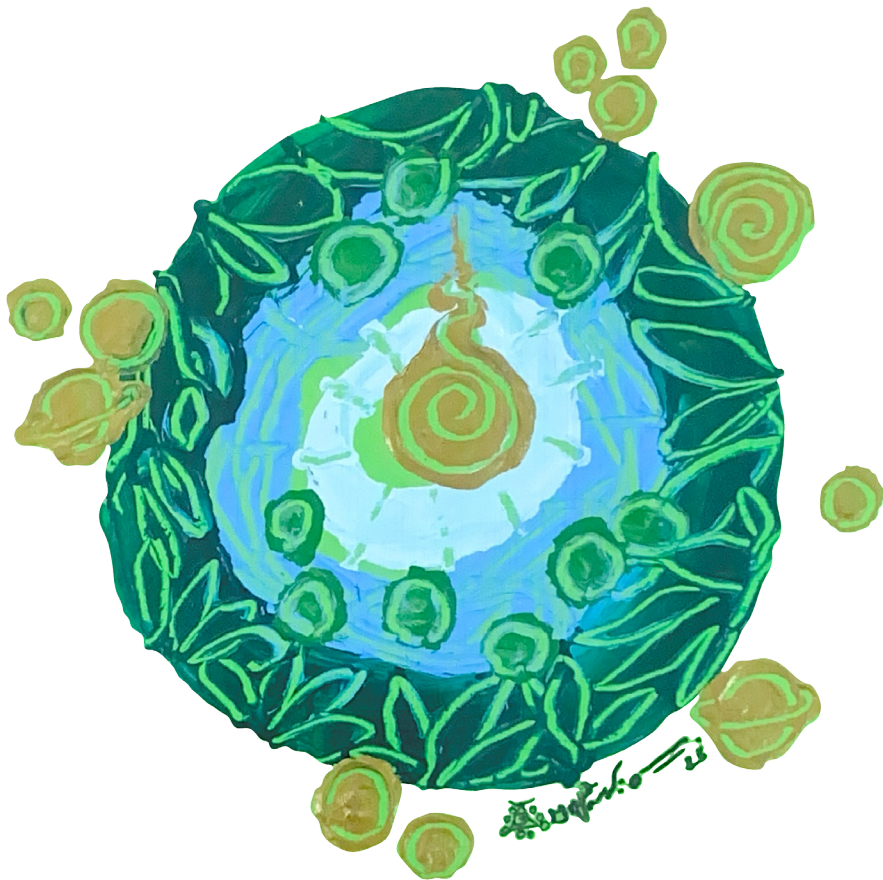


SEEDS OF PEACE

Vol. 41 No. 1

January – June 2568 (2025)



*Celebrating the 30th Year Anniversary of the
Spirit in Education Movement (SEM)*

Publisher
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF
ENGAGED BUDDHISTS (INEB)

Editorial team
Sulak Sivaraksa (Advisor)
Harsha Kumara Navaratne (Advisor)
Somboon Chungprampree (Editor)
Rita Litwiller (Assistant)

Cover
Artist: Bagyi Lin Wunna
Given to SEM by Kalyana Mitta
Development Foundation (KMF) -
Myanmar

Lay-out & Cover Art
Surapong Petnamlai

Distributed by
Suksit Siam
113-115 Fuangnakorn Rd.,
Bangkok 10200
Tel. (662)2259536-40
spd@semsikkha.org

**Suggested annual
subscription \$100USD**

Payment info:
Please go to the INEB website -
<https://inebnetwork.org/donation/>
● Personal cheques are payable to INEB
and are accepted from the UK, US
and Europe.

Seeds of Peace
666 Charoen-Nakorn Road,
Klongsan, Bangkok 10600 Siam
Tel. (662)860-2194
Fax. (662)860-1277
coordinator@inebnetwork.org
www.inebnetwork.org

Seeds of Peace is published two times
annually in January and July, in order to
promote the aims and objectives of the the
International Network of Engaged Buddhists
(INEB) around the world, and organizations
under the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa
Foundation (SNF), including the Spirit in
Education Movement (SEM), Towards
Organic Asia, the School for Wellbeing
Studies and Research, and Wongsanit
Ashram.

Editorial Note 3**Country Reports 4**

Bangladesh: Attack on Indigenous Students during
a Peaceful Demonstration and Rally in Dhaka
/ Saksith Saiyasombut **4**

Cambodia: Cambodia Charges 6 Activists Deported
from Thailand with Treason */ RFA Khmer* **6**

India: Buddhist Monks Continue Hunger Strike,
Seeking Full Control Over Mahabodhi Temple
/ Justin Whitaker **7**

Malaysia: Musawah to receive the 42nd Niwano Peace Prize
/ Niwano Peace Foundation **9**

Siam - Thailand: Recipient of the 3rd Niwano Peace Prize
Visionary Award Muslim Attorney Center (MAC)
/ Muslim Attorney Center (MAC) **10**

SEM 11

30 Years of SEM and Community Resilience!
/ SEM Asia **11**

INEB 17

INEB's 21st Biennial Conference Concludes in Chennai
with a Commitment to a Shared Heritage of Compassion
and Inclusivity */ Craig C Lewis* **17**

Field Notes from Myanmar - A Reflection
/ INEB Staff **20**

Statement of Congratulations and Solidarity on the Supreme
Court Ruling Recognizing Sri Lankan Bhikkhunis **22**

Laughing and Crying
while Facing Death */ Jonathan S. Watts* **23**

Articles 28

Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of Establishment
Atisha Dipankar Peace Trust Bangladesh
[ADPT Bangladesh] One decade for peace &
social cohesion **28**

Engaged Buddhism : The Bodhisattva Path to Gender Equality in Thailand / <i>Craig C Lewis</i>	29
Opening & Welcome remarks by Kul Chandra Gautam 6 th Global Forum of Global Network of Religions for Children	37
Socially Engaged Spirituality Buddhist Heritage Towards Inclusive Societies / <i>Lokamitra</i>	39
Mining, Land and Territories Digging Deeper: Conversations on Mining and Just Transitions / <i>Sai Sam Kham and Itayosara Rojas</i>	42
On Sombath's Birthday / <i>Shui Meng</i>	51
A Penetrative Understanding of The Five Aggregates in Buddhism / <i>Venerable Zinai</i>	52
Statement Affirming the Continuation of the Institution of Dalai Lama	53
Letters	54
Obituaries	55
In Loving Memory of Nilchawee Sivaraksa / <i>Anchalee Kurutach</i>	55
Condolence Messages to the Sivaraksa family	56
John B. Cobb	57
Remembering Alan Senauke / <i>Colleen Busch</i>	58

Editorial Note

Dear friends of INEB,

This first issue of the *Seeds of Peace* in 2025, highlights the Spirit in Education Movement's (SEM) 30th Anniversary as noted on the cover, and INEB's 21st international conference in southern India. Please read the in-depth article about SEM's journey with reflections by many persons who have been involved over the years. Regarding INEB's international conference, one of our local partners, the Foundation of His Sacred Majesty (FHSM), hosted it which also showcased the Buddhist communities in southern India. These types of collaborations help to strengthen the entire network of socially engaged Buddhists and their efforts throughout the region, as well as connect them around the world. Please read Craig Lewis' Special Report about INEB's 21st Biennial Conference - *Commitment to a Shared Heritage of Compassion and Inclusivity*. Quoting Gautama Prabhu, "When the conference theme was conceptualized, we emphasized the importance of heritage and how our Buddhist heritage plays a significant role in addressing the issue of inclusiveness. This biennial conference is certainly epoch-making in the history of South India, particularly Tamil Nadu."

This issue includes several reflective and thought provoking articles on diverse topics by our close friends Lokamitra, Venerable Zinai, and Sai Sam Kham. Also, note the International Women's Meditation Center Foundation recognized several Outstanding Women in Buddhism – 2025, including two from the INEB network.

We are also very sad about the passing of Sulak Sivaraksa's dear wife, Nilchawee, and are sharing some letters of condolence with you. We also greatly miss the presence and constant support of Hozan Alan Senauke who passed away in December 2024. Hozan Alan had been involved in various capacities with INEB for many years. His deep commitment to socially engaged Buddhism was expressed in many ways, and particularly through his activism in South and Southeast Asia and the wider INEB network.

This issue also includes other content which will interest you, so we invite you to read the country reports and other articles.

Best wishes and metta to all of you.
The SOP editorial team

Bangladesh

Attack on Indigenous Students during a Peaceful Demonstration and Rally in Dhaka

By Saksith Saiyasombut @SaksithCNA and Jalelah Abu Baker @JalelahCNA,

15 January 2025

Source: Website - *Kapaeeng Foundation*, www.kapaeengnet.org



Picture Source: Collected.

Background of the incident:

On January 15, 2025, a violent attack was occurred out on Indigenous Students by a group of students in front of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) building in Motijheel, Dhaka. The Indigenous students had gathered for a peaceful protest against the removal of an image of a graffiti featuring the word 'indigenous' (Adivasi, in Bangla) from the back of a school textbook. At least 19 indigenous students were injured in the attack and 10 of them were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Earlier on January 12 the NCTB authority removed the image of the graffiti that contained the word "indigenous" following the demands of 'Students for Sovereignty' organization. Indigenous students declared today's protest program against this decision of the NCTB.

The protest, however, turned violent when members of 'Students for

Sovereignty' launched an unprovoked attack on the Indigenous students. It is learnt that; the protest of indigenous students was organized under the banner of "Aggrieved Indigenous Student-People" as part of their ongoing struggle for cultural recognition in Bangladesh's educational system. The removal of the term 'Adivasi' from textbooks sparked outrage within the community. The students planned a peaceful procession against the decision of removing the graffiti by NCTB authority.

The demonstration and protest rally by the Indigenous students was first started from TSC, Dhaka University at 10 am in the morning today. From TSC hundreds of indigenous students and leaders of many progressive organizations and human rights activists marched towards NCTB located in Motijheel area of Dhaka city. Eyewitnesses said

that before the indigenous students reached at the NCTB building at around 12 noon, the members of 'Students for Sovereignty' were already there holding cricket stamps with the national flag.

Meanwhile, the indigenous students, who were marching peacefully to the NCTB building, were attacked first by members of the 'Students for Sovereignty'. Despite the presence of police personnel at the scene, 'Students for Sovereignty' launched an unprovoked assault. The attackers, armed with cricket batons, struck the indigenous students, resulting in injuries to at least 19.

Number of injured victims:

At least 19 students were injured, and several were required to admit at Dhaka Medical College Hospital with serious injuries.

The seriously injured has been identified are -1. Ananta Dhamai (35), Former President of Bangladesh Indigenous Youth Forum, 2. Don Jetra (28), Dhaka Metropolitan Branch of Bagachas, 3. Jewel Marak (35), Journalist of DBC News, 4. Rupaya Shrestha Tanchangya (25), Central Member of Anti-Discrimination Student Movement and Student of Dhaka University, 5. Tony Mathew Chiran, Vice- President of Bangladesh Indigenous Youth Forum, 6. Isaba Shuhrat (32), Human Rights Activist, 7. Futanta Chakma (22), Student.

The other injured are-1. Donai Mro (25), Student of Dhaka University, 2. Rengyoung Mro (27), Vice-President of CHT Hill Student Council, 3. Sneha Lal Tanchangya, Student of Dhaka



Picture Source: Collected.

University, 4. Shanta Chakma, Student of Dhaka University, 5. Sushmi Chakma, Student of Dhaka University, 6. Angel Chakma, Student of Jagannath University, 7. Sushanto Chakma, Student, 8. Michel Tripura, Student, 9. Malay Bikas Tripura, Student, Dhaka University, 10. Shoili Chakma (27), Student of Dhaka University, 11. Rahi Nayab, Student of Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Dhaka University, 12. Robi Biswas, Student of Dhaka University.

Action taken by police:

The police have yet to release an official statement on their role in managing the situation, and an investigation into the incident is underway. Indigenous leaders are demanding impartial investigation of the attack, and activists are calling for a broader conversation about the need for greater recognition of indigenous rights in Bangladesh.

Alik Mree, an organizer with the Agitated Indigenous Students, condemned the attack, emphasizing that their protest was meant to be peaceful. He expressed disbelief that their group, which was marching in a non-violent manner, was attacked by

another student group, even in the presence of police. Mree further criticized the use of national symbols, such as the national flag tied to cricket batons, in what he described as an act of aggression.

Statement by different organizations:

Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' Forum (BIPF) condemned the violent attack by the members of 'Students for Sovereignty' on the peaceful demonstration and protest rally of the Indigenous Students.

Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' Forum also considers the decision taken by the NCTB is unfortunate which is to remove the 'Adivasi' (Indigenous) word from the Grade 9-10 Bengali grammar textbook without any discussion with the relevant organizations and authorities of the state in view of the demands of some radical sectarian and fundamentalist groups on 12 January 2025. Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' Forum (BIPF) rejects with disgust and expresses strong anger and protest against such discriminatory and humiliating decision and demanded punishment whoever involves in the attack.

Hill Student Council and Hill

Women's Federation of CHT also strongly condemned and protested and demanded speedy arrest and punishment of the terrorists involved in the attack.

Post Attack Actions by the Indigenous Students:

The indigenous students immediately declared programs against the attack

1. Protest rally in the evening at Dhaka University campus
2. Protest on 16 January 2025 in every conner of the country
3. Protest on January 17, 2025 In front of the Chief Adviser's Office demanding justice of today's incident and reinstatement of the graffiti containing 'Adivasi' (Indigenous) words.

Kapaeeng Foundation

(A Human Rights Organization for Indigenous Peoples of Bangladesh)
Salma Garden, House # 23/25, Road # 4, Block # B, PC Culture Housing, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207, Telephone: +880-2-22243263
Email: kapaeeng.foundation@gmail.com, kapaeeng.watch@gmail.com, Web: www.kapaeengnet.org

Cambodia

Cambodia Charges 6 Activists Deported from Thailand with Treason

By **RFA Khmer** - Edited by Mike Firn, Taejun Kang, Eugene Whong and Malcolm Foster. Pimuk Rakkanam for RFA contributed to this report.

26 November 2024

Source: *Radio Free Asia* - <https://www.rfa.org/english/cambodia/2024/11/26/cambodia-thailand-deports-activists/>



Buddhist monks stand in front of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) headquarters in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, November 17, 2017. (SAMRANG PRING/Reuters)

Cambodia has charged six political activists deported from Thailand with treason in what their relatives and supporters called a case of cross-border persecution.

On Sunday, a total of seven people were sent back from Thailand, including a 7-year-old grandson of one activist, who was released to family members upon returning to Cambodia. They had fled to Thailand in 2022.

The six -- Pen Chan Sangkream, Hong An, Mean Chanthon, Yin Chanthou and Soeung Khunthea and Vorn Chanratchana - were all members or supporters of the one-time opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party, or CNRP, which was

banned in 2017.

They are being held in three separate Cambodian prisons, Kheang Sonadin, a spokesman for the Ministry of Interior's General Department of Prisons, told Radio Free Asia on Tuesday.

"These six people were detained under the arrest warrant of the Phnom Penh Municipal Court ... for treason as stipulated in the Criminal Code of the Kingdom of Cambodia," he said.

Hong An's daughter, Sean Sinuon, called the arrest and deportation of her mother and other refugees from Thailand to Cambodia a barbaric act.

"Their arrest is a forced arrest, a denial of their right to speak and

express their opinions," she said. "I urge the government and the courts to quickly release them because they have done nothing wrong."

Radio Free Asia could not reach Phnom Penh Municipal Court spokesman Y Rin for comment on the case.

Previous imprisonments

Among the activists, Pen Chansangkream and Hong An were previously imprisoned in 2021 on charges of incitement in connection with protests demanding that the government of former Prime Minister Hun Sen address social injustice.

After their release, they remained committed to their opposition party and decided to flee to Thailand for safety.

Ny Sokha, the president of the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association, or Adhoc, said the Thai government has the obligation to protect refugees recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR. He said it was regrettable that Thai authorities failed to fulfill their duties, instead handing the political activists over to Cambodia.

Ny Sokha considered this a violation of refugee rights, a violation of international law, and that the United Nations must intervene to address member states that violate their obligations. Otherwise, refugees will continue to suffer, he said.

"We are very disappointed. The behavior of the government and the Thai authorities in deporting them is unacceptable," he said. "This is a shameful thing on the international

stage.”

The CNRP was founded by veteran opposition leader Sam Rainsy in 2012 and dissolved by a court in 2017 after being accused of plotting to topple the government, which the party denied. A spokesperson for the UNHCR did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

A spokesperson for Cambodia's national police, provincial police and the Phnom Penh Municipal Court could not be reached for comment.

A Thai immigration official confirmed that the seven had been detained in Pathum Thani province, in Bangkok's northern suburbs on the weekend and sent back to Cambodia. “Based on immigration law, we had to deport them on Sunday evening,” said the officer, who declined to be identified.

‘Swap mart’

International human rights groups have condemned Thailand for assisting neighbors, including Vietnam and Cambodia, to undertake what the groups say is unlawful action against human rights defenders and dissidents, making Thailand increasingly unsafe for those fleeing persecution.

Human Rights Watch criticized what it called a “swap mart” of transnational repression in which foreign dissidents in Thailand are effectively traded for critics of the Thai government living abroad. Thailand has rejected such criticism, saying it only implements its immigration laws.

The Cambodian and Thai governments are collaborating in transnational repression, said Soeung

Sen Karuna, director of the Australia-based Khmer Democracy Organization.

“It is very inhumane that Thailand turns to collaborate with the Cambodian government to deport Cambodian opposition activists back to their homeland where they face severe prosecutions,” he said.

“Thailand fails to honor human rights law and refugees rights as a member of the UN. I condemn the Thai authorities,” he said. “They should stop such harassment and persecutions and not be judged as joining hands with the Phnom Penh government.”

India

Buddhist Monks Continue Hunger Strike, Seeking Full Control Over Mahabodhi Temple

By **Justin Whitaker**

27 February 2025

Source: *Buddhist Door Global* - <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/buddhist-monks-continue-hunger-strike-seeking-full-control-over-mahabodhi-temple/>



From *phayul.com*

A group of several hundred Buddhist monks, religious leaders, and lay followers have entered the 15th day of an indefinite hunger strike at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhi Gaya, in the Indian state of Bihar. The demonstrators are demanding full Buddhist administrative control of the temple, challenging the existing management structure established under the Bodhi Gaya Temple Act of

1949, which grants a majority presence in the governing body to Hindu members.

The Mahabodhi Temple, considered the most sacred site in Buddhism, is revered as the location where Siddhartha Gautama attained awakening. Built during the reign of Emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE, the temple was destroyed



From en.themooknayak.com

following the 12th-century invasions led by Bakhtiyar Khilji of the Ghurid dynasty. The site was later rediscovered and restored through the efforts of Anagarika Dharmapala, a Sri Lankan Buddhist reformer, and others. In recognition of its cultural and historical significance, the temple was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2002.

Despite its centrality to Buddhism, the governance of the Mahabodhi Temple is regulated by the Bodh Gaya Temple Act, which mandates a nine-member Bodhgaya Temple Management Committee (BTMC). Under the Act, the committee consists of five Hindu members, including the district magistrate of Gaya, who serves as chairman, and four Buddhist members. Protestors argue that this structure excludes the Buddhist community from its rightful authority over its most sacred site.

Demonstrators are also demanding an end to state interference in Buddhist religious affairs. Many have voiced concerns over what they describe as systematic distortions of Buddhist history and efforts to diminish the temple's sacred identity. The Bihar state government has been accused of ignoring their grievances, and protestors allege that the authorities

have used intimidation tactics, including creating loud noises to disrupt peaceful assemblies and obstructing visibility at the protest site.

Concerns regarding temple administration have been raised beyond governance issues. Protestors have accused the authorities of mismanaging donations and mistreating visiting pilgrims. The hunger strike has drawn increasing national and international support. More than 500 organizations, including the All India Buddhist Forum and the Ladakh Buddhist Association, have expressed solidarity with the movement. Reports indicate that supporters from across India, including Tripura, Ladakh, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra, have traveled to Bodh Gaya to join the demonstration.

Since the protest began on 12 February, international Buddhist communities have also voiced their support. A petition titled "In Solidarity: Demand Buddhist Control Over the Mahabodhi Temple" has garnered more than 12,900 signatures from Buddhist communities in Cambodia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Laos, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the United States:

We, the undersigned, stand in

unwavering solidarity with the Buddhist monks and followers protesting in Bodh Gaya to demand the rightful transfer of the Mahabodhi Mahavihara Temple's administration to the Buddhist community. This sacred site, where Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment, deserves to be managed by those who uphold its spiritual and historical significance. (Change.org)

However, despite the pressure, the Indian government has yet to formally respond to the demands of the protestors.

The movement has revived long-standing debates over religious autonomy and heritage preservation in India. Advocates for Buddhist control argue that, given the temple's historical and spiritual significance, the current administrative structure is an outdated remnant of colonial-era policies that should be revised. Others maintain that the existing system, which includes Buddhist representation, serves as a balanced approach to managing a site that holds historical importance for multiple religious traditions.

Akash Lama, a prominent voice in the movement, said: "Every religious community has full control over its sacred sites, but Buddhists are denied this right. The government is profiting from the Mahabodhi Temple while ignoring the demands of the Buddhist community." (The Mooknayak)

As the hunger strike continues, attention remains on the Bihar state government and the central authorities, with observers awaiting a potential resolution to the dispute. Meanwhile, Buddhist leaders and organizations worldwide continue to call for reforms that they believe would restore full autonomy over one of the most sacred sites in Buddhism.

Malaysia

Musawah to receive the 42nd Niwano Peace Prize

18 February 2025

Source: **Niwano Peace Foundation** - https://www.npf.or.jp/english/peace_prize/42th_press.html



The Niwano Peace Foundation is pleased to announce that the 42nd Niwano Peace Prize will be awarded to Musawah, a global movement striving for gender equality in Muslim families.

Founded in Malaysia in 2009, Musawah—which means “equality” in Arabic—addresses gender issues primarily within Muslim societies. The organization advocates for the reform of Muslim family laws and the protection of women’s rights through policy recommendations at both regional and international levels. Furthermore, Musawah engages in educational initiatives, promotes women’s leadership, and empowers individuals by collaborating with partner organizations in over 40 countries.

We would like to share an excerpt from the statement of Dr. Muhammad

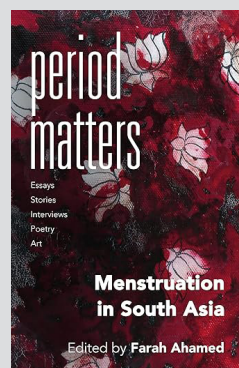
Shafiq, Chairperson of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee, regarding the rationale for this year’s award.

The 42nd Niwano Peace Prize shall be awarded to Musawah in recognition of its immense efforts to strengthen citizenship and peaceful coexistence in diverse societies, and to create contexts and platforms for interfaith dialogue and spiritual solidarity. It is addressing the gender biased socio-economic, legal and political discrimination in human history. Its goal is to uncover the voices of women that have long been silenced in cultural and religious societies. Its international network includes hundreds of advocates from

Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Global North in over 40 countries, who are campaigning for positive changes in attitudes, practices, laws, and policies to support the human rights of women and girls in Muslim countries. The Niwano Peace Foundation honors Musawah’s dedication to empowering women’s leadership in social, legal, and spiritual activism, advancing civic engagement, human rights, and peace.

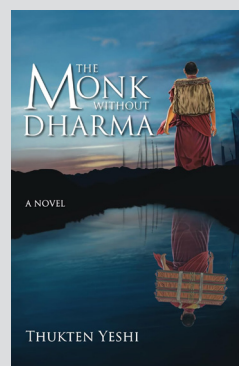


Recommended Reading



Period Matters: Menstruation in South Asia

Editor: Farah Ahamed
Publisher: Pan Macmillan Publishing India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2022



The Monk without Dharma

Author: Thukten Yeshi,
Publisher: Thomson Press Ltd., India, 2024

Siam - Thailand

Recipient of the 3rd Niwano Peace Prize Visionary Award Muslim Attorney Center (MAC)

Muslim Attorney Center (MAC)

Nationality: Thailand

Established: 2004 Organization of lawyers to protect human rights

Religion: Muslim



Muslim Attorney Center (MAC) was established in 2004 to provide legal support to Muslims and others who were being unjustly treated and facing security challenges, especially in the three southernmost provinces in Thailand, namely Yala, Narathiwat, and Patani, and engages in protecting human rights.

As the Thai government's assimilation policy has heightened ethnic tensions, MAC has focused on providing legal assistance and promoting interfaith dialogue to raise the self-esteem of the local population. MAC participates in national and international human rights advocacy networks, trains pro bono human rights lawyers, and trains citizens in nonviolent solutions as the secretariat of the Civil Society Assembly for Peace (CAP).

§



Outstanding Women in Buddhism 2025

The International Women's Meditation Center Foundation recognized several Outstanding Women in Buddhism – 2025, including two from the INEB network. The Outstanding Women in Buddhism Awards Ceremony began in 2002 and has been held consecutively for 24 years throughout Thailand and in Taiwan. This year the celebration was held on International Women's Day - March 8, 2025, in Indonesia.



Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammakamala
Thailand



Venerable Tsering Palmo
India

For more information about the awardees, please refer to the International Women's Meditation Center Foundation - <https://iwmcf.net/award/2025>.



30 Years of SEM and Community Resilience!

21 February 2025

Source: *SEM Asia* - <https://semasia.org/2025/02/21/30th-anniversary/>



In the wake of the Myanmar military coup, countless citizens fled to the Thai-Myanmar border, seeking safety and stability. Among these refugees are children and novice monks who have left their homes and temples due to the escalating violence and insecurity. Families, both financially comfortable and those facing severe hardships, have sent their children to safe spaces and monasteries in Mae Sot, hoping to secure a brighter future for them.

Since 1995, the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) has been committed to empowering grassroots and civil society actors in the Southeast Asia region to build a movement of people that empowers local communities to address their own needs based around social justice and

sustainable living in a participatory and sustainable manner.

On February 14, 2025, we gathered at the Sathirakoses-Nagrapradipa Foundation (SNF) in Bangkok to commemorate the 30th anniversary of SEM. The theme of the event is *“Community Resilience: The Enduring Stories Amidst the Storm... Until We Reach the Spring!”* This year, we are not only commemorating our commitment to supporting our *kalayanamitr* (good friends) and communities, but also honoring our collective resilience and solidarity in challenging and difficult times. As we also mark this milestone, four years have passed since the military coup in Myanmar.

Sulak Sivaraksa, a co-founder of SNF, delivered the opening remarks that SEM was established with the alternative education purpose which was funded by the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the alternative Nobel Prize. The intention behind naming the organization was to honor Dr. Sem Pringpuangkeo’s commitment to underprivileged communities. The organization was later named in the similar sound as the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM), a name that was chosen to emphasize the addition of spirit and hearth to education.

He also mentioned Pracha Hutuanuwat, the first one who dedicated his life to bringing SEM to Burma (Myanmar). At the time, SEM was the only organization permitted to operate legally in the country.

“30 years is not a long time, but we’ve done something, in my opinion, wonderful because we have become very friendly with quite a number of people in Burma. They trust us and we trust them, we become *kalayanamitr* (good friends) and that is the best thing in life.”



Sulak Sivaraksa, co-founder of SNF and SEM

“When I start working here I’m aware of something special. It’s very easy when we tell the people we work with that we are from SEM, that’s the legacy we carry from the founder and the seniors who worked with SEM before. This legacy, this spirit, and this approach has been carried from generation to generation. Our success as a CSO - NGO was to stop working, which means that our communities can rely on themselves and reach the goal of social justice.” Wichai Juntavaro, SEM project manager, also welcomed all the alumni, partners, and guests who attended the event.



Somboon Chungprampree, SEM’s Asia director, began his talk by stating, “let’s celebrate resilience and solidarity together.” He was a student when he participated in the first launch of the organization 30 years ago. The speech of Satish Kumar from Schumacher College really inspired him and later he decided to join the peace march to Cambodia that was organized by SEM, and he has been involved with SEM ever since.

“Myanmar is like my second home. In the beginning we started with the grassroots leadership training. We invited the grassroots leaders from Myanmar to Thailand and learned from the Thai development experience, in both positive and negative ways. We also took them to other countries where they learned from those experiences.

Based on that, many alumni have set up various organizations and mobilized even more people inside Myanmar. This effort inspired me to keep supporting them.”

Somboon went on to say that since SEM is a Thai organization, it will focus more in Thailand if Myanmar is ready to function more independently. In light of this, SEM is exploring opportunities to localize a number of projects, and carry on some work along with many networks up to the present.

Somboon Chungprampree, SEM Asia Director



SEM staff, alumni and guests also shared many stories as follows:



“We continue to organize the training for more than 12 years to open their (participants) minds through the learning trips in different countries with the help of SEM to engage with society.” – Saya Ko Thar, Peace Leadership Training Alumni

“The first time I learned about Myanmar and developed a realistic perspective was during a SEM exposure trip to Dawei. The real spirit I got from SEM is to learn and understand people. No matter what nationality you are, but we all need freedom, equality, and we want to determine our own life.” – Wipaporn, Journalist Network

“The transformative training has really empowered me and changed all my thinking and perspective. When



we talk about SEM, the keyword is alternative. They always look for, open, and welcome alternative development, solutions, and education. The way SEM has facilitated the learning was totally different from what we’ve experienced in the past, so I would say SEM is our transformative educator. And whenever we’re in need, SEM always comes up with what we can do and how we can work together. SEM is always there as Ajarn Sulak said about kalayanamitr. I would also like to tell you about my current foundation, which grew out of SEM’s Buddhist Youth Empowerment Program, where we were able to train thousands of young people in Myanmar. Now they are actively engaged in different sectors and roles, which we’ve learned a lot from SEM and are trying to apply.” – Bo Bo, Grassroots Leadership Training Alumni

“Since after the GLT, I have been working on community development because we have many problems in Kachin State such as natural resource/environmental issue and armed conflict. At that time, we were not allowed to talk about human rights, democracy, gender or any rights, but we can learn from SEM. I’m still using that knowledge with my PhD like the concept of consumerism that I learned from Ajarn Sulak, Ajarn Pracha and Ajarn Moo. Many of my GLT friends are now working as activists in the KIO and at the national level. We’re really proud and appreciated.” – Saya Zung Ting, Grassroots Leadership Training Alumni

“We all suffer a lot because of the military coup, and I have a lot of pressure when I moved here. When I join SEM’s mental wellbeing program, it heals me a lot. I got the idea that mental support is not only for me, but for everyone, including the children. People focus more on adults, so I just want to focus and spread my knowledge to children. So I wrote some children’s mental health books and delivered them to the IDP schools in Tanintharyi area. PiChai mentioned that SEM curriculum focuses on 3H, I want to add 1 H is health. SEM allows us to heal ourselves both physically and mentally.” – Pyartho, Active Citizen Training Alumni

“One thing that I’d like to highlight is kalayanamitr.

Across Myanmar, I have a chance to know a lot of inspired activists in different sectors and also a lot of good friends in Thailand. It's really supportive for me and for the Dawei and CSOs movement in Myanmar. After the coup we've struggled a lot in different levels, but SEM is very ready to support us." – Myo Thu, Former SEM Staff

"Not only SEM, but the whole SNF is like a home. I have gradually healed during the 7-8 years here because of this family. Here I can gain energy and give my energy to others. We will be friends, brothers and sisters forever, and this will be our home forever." – Ae, Former SEM Staff



"After finishing my BA in International Relations, I worked as an intern in SEM's PLT program in 2005. It was the first time for me to learn and know about the civil war in Myanmar. During my four years of studying IR, I didn't know about it. I was 5-6 years in the dot of 30 years, and I've been privileged to be a witness of a transition from dictatorship to more democratic regime, a witness of the suspension of Myitsone dam, and a lot of issues. Also now let's think about how Thai society can really support the people from Myanmar, at least find the way to work together and be like a friend." – Mo, Former SEM Staff

"I've learned a lot during the coup period that young people are very important. Ajarn, Pi Pracha, Pi Moo and the previous seniors have built the capacity of young people, that's how SEM can contribute to the society, and we are still doing that through the Active Citizen Training. SEM's role in supporting the CSOs and grassroots organizations keeps me appreciating how SEM's work contributes to the society, country, region and globally." – Jeab, SEM's Project Manager

"After the training I got a lot of perspectives, critical thinking and resilience. I've met Saya Na and Chanchai, they give me a lot of strength and power to overcome the difficulties of my situation. We get closer to our friends through the counseling session and now I have a lot of

communities here.” – Mi Lae, Active Citizen Training Alumni

“I believe that the work of SEM and the people involved really made a historical change in Myanmar. I think it’s built a whole generation, yet even more than one generation of genuinely aware civil society workers, and activists have been impacted by SEM’s efforts. I feel a great deal of admiration for everyone who is doing the work now, also for all of those who started the work so long ago. I also want to thank Moo for inviting me to do somewhat similar program called School of English for Engaged Social Service (SENS). I’d like to share a couple words that Rev. Sugino from Japan shared with us. He said all of you are part of a creative minority. And to change the world, we don’t have to have a majority. We need a minority of people who are independent and thinking creatively and compassionately. The world is really tough right now, but I really do believe in this creative minority.” – Ted, INEB

“I work together with SEM as ETOs Watch Coalition on the project in Dawei invested by the Thai company that has affected the community and environmental rights. It’s been 5 years since I’ve been to Myanmar after the Covid-19 outbreak. After the coup, I try to support the policy advocacy for Myanmar refugees and democracy movement. Although there’s an increase of anti-migrant sentiment, I will continue to work for them.” – Teerachai, ETOs Watch Coalition

“Many people we’ve met online, but right now it’s more natural for me to meet in person. Thank you for coming here and being together. I feel that the presence of each other is very important. By seeing each other, talking each other, sharing your feelings and ideas, it helps us to get closer.” – Na, Facilitator

“I worked with SEM in 1998 as an accountant because I had a degree in finance and banking. After working for



two years, I know that I love working with people and it changed my life. Now I’m working with training and western psychology. I find working with people to be fulfilling. And resilience for me is having kalayanamit and the Sangha supporting each other and lifting you up. Then you have more energy to go forward and overcome your obstacle and suffering.” – Jar, Former SEM Staff

“I was invited to translate the document for the Kathin ceremony to Dawei organized by SEM, and participated in many trips. I helped research about Dawei in Myanmar sources for tourism, and became more and more fond of Dawei. After the coup, the project was stopped, but Dawei will always be in my mind.” – Sittiporn Netniyom, Professor

“What I and SEM would like to address to the society is we cannot deny that Myanmar is a part of Thai society. Although the situation in Myanmar will be better one day, Thailand cannot live without migrant workers, especially from Myanmar. I wish that SEM will continue to work for society, supporting humanitarian efforts, and for the people who need space to express themselves.” – Lalita Hanwong, Professor

“As part of the Environmental Journalists Network, I brought 12 journalists from 7-8 media outlets to Dawei to cover the Dawei Special Economic Zone issue. I was told that it was the first largest group of Thai journalists to visit Dawei. So currently it’s a good news that the Dawei project has been suspended or stopped, which I believe is



one factor from the news reported by these journalists.”

– Thitipan Pattanamongkol, Journalist Network

“Shortly after the coup, the armed conflict in Karen State forced thousands to cross the river into Thailand. At that time, I was really interested in the issue, but I had very few connections and struggled to access that area. But the trip with SEM was the starting point to allow me to cover the refugee issue along the Thai-Myanmar border. I experienced a lot of things along the way in that trip. We had to shout across the river to interview refugees on the other side with Cherry’s support on translation. I hope to work more with SEM in the upcoming issues.” – Wongpun Amarinthewa, Journalist Network

“At that time I had just graduated with a BA degree and wanted to take a break at my hometown, Dawei. But I didn’t take a break yet, I met the SEM team and helped translate for the journalist group. And since then, I have been working with SEM. We have been through many

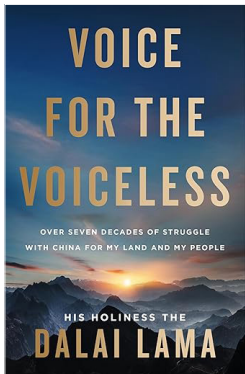
challenges, including COVID and the coup. Some representatives joined us today to give special performances.” – Cherry, SEM Staff

“As a representative of Dawei, we’re very happy to participate in this 30th anniversary of SEM. We feel grateful and happy that SEM has been working for Myanmar for a very long time. At present, it’s more than 8 years that we have been working with SEM since the We Love Dawei and We Miss Dawei events. These activities help us to know each other more and allow us to share and exchange our Thai-Myanmar culture over time. We thank SEM for always supporting us and inviting us to participate in many activities, and we hope to see each other more often. We also hope that SEM will continue to support our community and society. Lastly, we really miss our home.” – Dawei Community members

The event featured a variety of activities, including a musical performance by Kob Rattikal, a long-time contributor to SEM events, a poetry reading by Nathaphob Sungkate, a SEM’s media alumni, and Ronphan Tawansao, a guest, and traditional dances from the Dawei migrant community. In addition to the performances and story telling sessions, SEM showcased its 30-year journey in Myanmar and an art corner where participants could express resilience on a Myanmar tumbler doll (Pyit Taing Htaung), which symbolizes perseverance, resilience, and the ability to overcome challenges.

As we come together to demonstrate our collective resilience and look ahead to a just, brighter, and peaceful future, we will continue to stand in solidarity!

Recommended Reading



*Voice for the Voiceless:
Over Seven Decades
of Struggle with China
for My Land and
My People*

Author: The Dalai Lama
Publisher: William Morrow,
March 2025

Special Report: INEB's 21st Biennial Conference Concludes in Chennai with a Commitment to a Shared Heritage of Compassion and Inclusivity

By **Craig C Lewis**

4 December 2024

Source: **Buddhist Door Global** - <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/special-report-inebs-21st-biennial-conference-concludes-in-chennai-with-a-commitment-to-a-shared-heritage-of-compassion-and-inclusivity/>



Photo by Craig Lewis

The 21st Biennial Conference of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), organized and hosted by the socially engaged Buddhist non-profit Foundation of His Sacred Majesty (FHSM) in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, concluded on Tuesday with a shared pledge to honor the values of compassion, social equity, and inclusive social engagement. The gathering, running from 22 November–3 December in the city of Chennai, was held under the theme “Buddhist Heritage: Toward Inclusive Societies.”

INEB is a global network of individuals and organizations who are committed to promoting and working toward building compassionate societies, environmental sustainability, and world peace. INEB emphasizes the importance of developing an ethical, Dharma-based approach to its work, and encourages its members to work collaboratively and respectfully with individuals and organizations based on a foundation of shared values and aspirations.

“It’s such an honor to organize the 21st Biennial Conference of INEB,” FHSM founder and president and

INEB board member Rev. Gautama Prabhu told the international gathering of scholars, activists, monastics, community leaders, teachers, and practitioners who had gathered in Chennai for the colloquium. “When the conference theme was conceptualized, we emphasized the importance of heritage and how our Buddhist heritage plays a significant role in addressing the issue of inclusiveness. This biennial conference is certainly epoch-making in the history of South India, particularly Tamil Nadu.”

“We have great masters and leaders here with us.



Photo by Craig Lewis

I'd like to offer special thanks to [the revered Korean Dharma master, social activist, and patron to INEB] Ven. Pomnyun Sunim, as well as my elder brother Harsha Navaratne, the chairperson of INEB. Their presence is more than satisfying for me because what we call in Buddhism *abhaya dana*, the dana of fearlessness, is one of the greatest gifts that gives us immense courage to move forward. . . . I would like to emphasize that this conference is not about unity in diversity, but about diversity in unity."

The Foundation of His Sacred Majesty (FHSM)—named in commemoration of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (r. c.268–c.232 BCE), a key figure in the propagation of Buddhism across Asia—is guided by the principles of socially engaged Buddhism, with a focus on empowering deprived and marginalized communities. The foundation's work is based on four broad propositions: social transformation through strengthening grassroots democracy and good governance; sustainable livelihoods, education, and social empowerment; promoting alternative healthcare systems; and protecting and conserving ecosystems.

The program lineup for the conference was as diverse as its participants, commencing with a five-day hands-on workshop at the Sukhavati Eco-temple in Auroville, an experimental township in Tamil Nadu. The sacred site is being constructed using environmentally friendly and sustainable materials and techniques, and is a focal point for a range of social initiatives in the surrounding community.

The conference proper continued with a series of parallel workshops on engaged Buddhist on the themes: Archaeological Justice and Community Participation; Marginalized Communities on Gender, Social Justice and Inclusiveness; Eco-Temple and Sustainability; and

Youth Empowerment.

Because of the sudden landfall of Cyclone Fengal, which brought a deluge of heavy rains and strong winds, planned archaeological site visits to the Mahabalipuram UNESCO World Heritage Site and Kanchipuram heritage city were abandoned in favor of a visit to the Indian Government Museum in Chennai—the second oldest museum in India and home to a valuable collection of Buddhist and Hindu artifacts.

The event concluded with a public symposium, featuring keynote speeches by senior INEB members, and a two-day meeting of INEB's Advisory and Executive Committees to review the fruits of the conference and to chart a forward course for socially engaged activities and projects.

Addressing the participants in his keynote speech at the conference symposium, Ven. Pomnyun Sunim observed: "Today, I would like to speak to you about the Buddhist heritage that was passed down to me here in India. First, as a Buddhist, I inherited the legacy of the Buddha's teaching here in India. Second, as a Mahayana Buddhist, I inherited the legacy of [the monk and philosopher] Nagarjuna, who was born here in South India and systematized Mahayana Buddhism. Third, Bodhidharma, who originated from South India, is the founder of Zen Buddhism. As a Zen Buddhist, I inherited the legacy of Bodhidharma's teachings. I am who I am today, and I was able to visit Chennai, because I inherited these three legacies. I thank the INEB officials for inviting me."

The inclusive gathering of engaged Buddhists from across India and the world was ambitious in scope and profound in the depth of its exploration of a multitude of interconnected themes and concerns central to the practice of socially engaged Buddhism. Key issues



*The revered Korean Dharma master, social activist, and patron to INEB, Ven. Pomnyun Sunim.
Photo by Craig Lewis*



*INEB executive board member for the Malaysia Network of Engaged Buddhists, K. V. Soon Vidyananda.
Photo by INEB*



*FHSM founder and president and INEB board member Rev. Gautama Prabhu.
Photo by INEB*

examined and explored included: the promotion of peace and social harmony; Buddhist heritage and culture since antiquity; grassroots support for environmental sustainability, gender equality, children's well-being, and social justice; spiritual development and practice; strengthening networks and relationships within the global Buddhist community; and encouraging young people to explore and engage with Buddhist teachings and practices.

INEB executive board member for the Malaysia Network of Engaged Buddhists, K. V. Soon Vidyananda offered this closing thought: "Buddhist heritage is an expression of the timeless wisdom of the Dharma put into practice. And that is why we are here. It reminds us that true inclusivity is not about building structures. It is about the transformation of hearts and minds. It is about cultivating compassion that knows no boundaries, and justice that serves all beings."

The 21st INEB conference also bore witness to several significant landmarks:

- The first international Buddhist conference to be held in the state of Tamil Nadu, providing a unique opportunity to showcase the depth of the region's Buddhist history, heritage, and contributions of South India to Buddhist culture;
- The first dialogue among Tamil Buddhists of India and Indonesia, and Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka;
- The inauguration of the South Indian Buddhist Council, a fellowship of socially engaged Buddhist organizations;
- The colloquium also coincides with and commemorates

the 75th anniversary of the Constitution of India, which was drafted by a committee chaired by the Buddhist reformer and social activist Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

INEB was formed in 1989 by Prof. Sulak Sivaraksa and a group of Buddhist leaders and scholars seeking to apply the Buddhist teachings and principles to contemporary social and political issues. Through its global network, INEB works to promote understanding, cooperation, and connection among inter-Buddhist and inter-religious groups, and to actively address urgent global issues such as human rights, conflict resolution, and environmental crises.

Headquartered in Bangkok, INEB has established a wide range of social projects and outreach programs aimed at overcoming suffering and empowering vulnerable communities through the practice of the Dharma and social engagement, such as education and training programs, community development projects, advocacy and lobbying efforts, and interfaith dialogue. The network also advocates the importance of environmental sustainability and the responsible use of natural resources, and has promoted sustainable development practices in various communities.

BDG is the official media partner for the 21st INEB Biennial International Conference. Our continued coverage over coming weeks will include a series of in-depth feature articles drawn from conference participants and their work as engaged Buddhists.

Field Notes from Myanmar - A Reflection

By **INEB Staff**

Two months after the 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck Myanmar's Sagaing and Mandalay regions, INEB deployed a staff member to support ongoing relief efforts on the ground. Below are the reflections from the staff member who was inside Myanmar for a week at the end of May 2025.



Young novices holding hands
All photos by INEB staff



Refugee camp shelters for double-hit families and individuals



A newcomer couple arriving in the refugee camp

My journey to Myanmar gave me a clearer and more sobering understanding of the scale of devastation caused by the Sagaing earthquake on March 28, 2025. Thousands of homes, religious sites, and critical infrastructure were destroyed. Rescue efforts were severely hampered by ongoing armed conflict, damaged roads, and general insecurity. Fighting and military attacks continue, further traumatizing victims who are already reeling from the disaster. These are truly “double-hit” communities—facing war and natural catastrophe simultaneously.

Immediately upon arriving in Mandalay, what struck me most was the strength and resilience of the people. Their determination is unwavering. No one is waiting passively for help. While external support is needed and appreciated, survival is being secured through self-reliance—through whatever resources are at hand, even if that means bare hands. Despite the danger, life must go on, and it does.

This trip also deepened INEB's connection with our local partners. We've helped link them to several sources of funding, enabling them to provide food, medicine,

basic supplies, and shelter to thousands. Monks and nuns have played a critical role in these relief efforts. They are often the first to respond and remain deeply embedded in their communities. Their compassion is matched by their practical leadership, though I sometimes wonder whether they are caring for themselves enough in the process.

My visit would not have been possible without the protection and guidance of a venerable monk who has been part of an INEB project in recent years. At numerous military checkpoints, his presence ensured my safety. In leading the relief efforts, the venerable monk drew upon his extensive network, collaborating with a range of skilled and committed people including former Red Cross workers, engineers, lawyers, accountants, and community organizers. Many of them had previously benefited from his meditation teachings or experienced his compassion firsthand.

The funding we've secured, through INEB's crowdfunding efforts and the generous support of partners such as Join Together Society and Le Secours Populaire Français (SPF), has made a real and tangible difference. In



Eighty orphan girls, now novice nuns, reside and study in a nunnery in Mandalay region.



A building in Inle lake that was destroyed by the earthquake

Sagaing, I visited a makeshift refugee camp sheltering more than 600 families displaced both by the earthquake and the ongoing conflict. The camp, set up by a local monastery, was a stark testament to resilience amidst hardship. As we walked through the grounds, I saw families piecing together shelters with bamboo frames and plastic tarpaulin—one of the most vital and in-demand resources. A young couple was carefully tying string to fasten the bamboo poles, assembling what would become their new home, barely 2 by 4 meters in size. All around were babies, children, teenagers, adults, and elders. Yet, there were no proper bathing facilities—just two open pits, each about 3 by 6 meters and 50 cm deep, lined with tarpaulin. These served as communal bathing areas. There were no walls, only the open, makeshift tubs.

The morning that we visited the camp to distribute relief goods, fighting in the village had broken out, and some homes were set ablaze. This kind of danger keeps many away for fear of their own safety. We were the only group that went into this camp.

With the rainy season already underway, concerns are growing around health and illness—especially among the youngest and oldest members of the camp.

I also visited a nunnery housing about 80 orphaned children who have fled conflict zones—some having lost their parents, others sent away for their safety. The majority of the children are girls, ranging in age from 4 to 12. Now living as novices and young nuns, they share a monastic setting where they receive education, basic care, and spiritual guidance. Thanks to funding from *Le Secours Populaire Français*, construction is underway on a new

building that will serve as both a school and living quarters, providing a safer and more stable environment for their growth and learning.

For two days, I also traveled with a nun who is part of INEB's Eco-Temple Network and is an active figure in Myanmar's eco movement. Through her connections, we visited Inle Lake and a temple that functions as a vibrant community center. In close collaboration with a dedicated community organizer, the abbot has initiated various activities to engage local youth—such as organizing regular volleyball practice—and supports a range of social programs that benefit the entire community. It was a powerful example of how monastic leadership can foster community wellbeing through active and compassionate engagement.

Lastly, a new initiative is now underway to establish a center for healing and dialogue in the Mandalay and Sagaing regions. As the situation continues to evolve, the need for long-term community care has become increasingly clear. However, such work must be rooted in the leadership and ownership of local communities. INEB has begun this envisioning and planning process in close collaboration with two of our long-standing partners inside Myanmar.

In conclusion, despite the ominous presence of weapons at every checkpoint, my travels across affected areas were quiet, solemn, and deeply moving. Myanmar remains an extraordinary place. Its landscapes and nature are beautiful, and its people—above all—are resilient beyond measure.



Statement of Congratulations and Solidarity on the Supreme Court Ruling Recognizing Sri Lankan Bhikkhunis

INEB extends our heartfelt congratulations to the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Sangha on the historic Supreme Court ruling affirming their right to a national identity card bearing the rightful title of *Bhikkhuni*. This landmark decision is not only a long-overdue recognition of their dignity and status as fully ordained monastics, but also a significant milestone for all Bhikkhunis around the world who continue to seek justice, equality, and inclusion in religious life.

This courageous ruling sends a powerful message: that spiritual commitment and ethical leadership deserve recognition and respect—regardless of gender. It affirms the fundamental principle that no one should be excluded from their rightful place in society or the Sangha based on outdated norms or discriminatory interpretations.

We also express our deep appreciation to all those who have stood in solidarity with the Bhikkhunis, raised their voices in support, and worked tirelessly to advance

this movement. In particular, we honor the many allies in Sri Lanka: human rights advocates, supportive members of Parliament, committed legal and civil society actors, Bhikkhus, and—above all—the Bhikkhunis themselves, whose courage and perseverance made this historic victory possible.

As an organization that has long supported the rights and religious freedom of female monastics, INEB is deeply encouraged by this development. We remain dedicated to this cause and hope that this breakthrough will inspire similar progress in other Theravāda Buddhist countries.

May this be the beginning of greater inclusion, recognition, and spiritual renewal for all.

With deep respect and in solidarity,

The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)
18 June 2025

S



THE PEACE MANIFESTO

I'm sick and tired of the culture of war,
so I give my support to the culture of peace,
and I will keep spreading the word
on social media until we win.
I live in (your city, country).

The Peace Manifesto 2025 hopes to achieve the success of the Manifesto 2000 that obtained 75 million signatures during the International Year for the Culture of Peace that was directed by UNESCO.

INEB has signed the Peace Manifesto which is being relaunched in 2025. Please go to the website if you are interested in signing the Manifesto - <https://activatingpeace.org/> You will be able to see how the global movement is growing, when you enter your city and country in the social media comments or replies.

There is also an additional link on the website for educators to promote the Peace Manifesto in a school or university class or a youth group.

To know about the culture of peace, and how it is defined and supported by UNESCO and the United Nations, you may visit

<https://activatingpeace.org/whatis.html>

Laughing and Crying while Facing Death

by Jonathan S. Watts

17 April 2025

Source: *Institute for Buddhist Counseling and Chaplaincy* -
<https://www.inebcounseling.net/laughing-and-crying-while-facing-death/>



A Zen Monk Brings Death Workshops & Buddhist Suicide Prevention Counseling to Thailand

In life, not everything goes as you wish. There are times when you may feel frustrated, or when you may be overcome by the absurdity of things, or when you may be in the depths of sadness at the loss of someone you love, or when you may be seeking peace of mind.

If today was the last day of your life...what would you think about and what would you do? As you face death, you must let go of the things that are important to you one by one. What would be the thing left in your hands at that final moment?

When you become aware of death, it becomes easier to rediscover what is important to you in the course of your life up to that point. If you can feel what is important to you, it will become a source of strength to live more strongly, and you will also become kinder to others. Why not experience

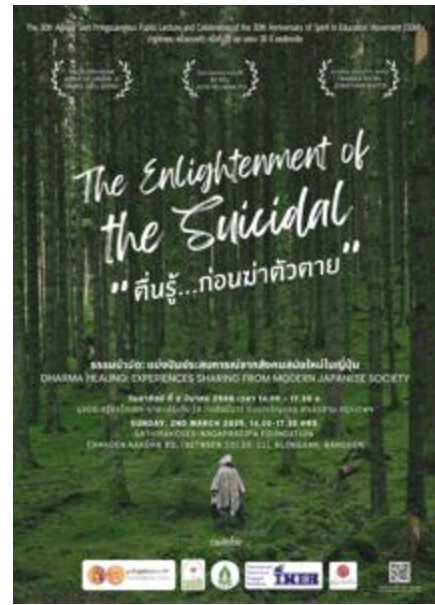
“departing” (tabidachi) together and make this precious moment of your life a fruitful one?

These are the opening words of invitation to the Departure (*tabidachi*), a death workshop run by Rev. Jotetsu Nemoto, the abbot of Daizen-ji temple in Gifu, Japan and a priest from the Rinzai Zen sect who has been working for two decades in suicide prevention in his home country. For two weeks, he brought his experiences, skills, and imagination to Thailand for a series of these workshops as well as a public talk and a two-day workshop on suicide prevention skills for monks and nuns from Thailand and Myanmar. These events were co-hosted by the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), its partner affiliate in Japan called JNEB, and a new collaborative initiative called the Institute for Buddhist Counseling and Chaplaincy (IBCC). IBCC has emerged out of the efforts of JNEB and the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC)

at Kodosan temple to document and support suicide prevention work by Buddhists in Japan. IBCC has also emerged out of the efforts to train Buddhist chaplains in Japan and make chaplaincy programs that fit the specific Buddhist cultures across Asia.

While Nemoto's work has become rather well known in Japan and also documented in foreign films like the documentary *The Departure* (2017), this was the first time for Nemoto to share his work outside of Japan. Work stress, relationship trauma, alienation, depression, and suicide have become a global problem beyond the confines of Japan's Era of 30,000 suicides per year (1998-2011). Questions about the meaning of life and death have become especially acute in countries with high levels of economic growth and urbanization. Thailand, which has experienced rapid economic growth over the last three decades, is now one of these nations facing increasing levels of mental illness and suicide. While it shares a common Buddhist heritage with Japan, the two national traditions could be no farther apart with celibate, robe clad monks in Thailand and fully secularized, married priests in Japan. Still, their Buddhist roots, whether in the *satipatthana* (4 Foundations of Mindfulness) or *zazen* (seated meditation), have long traditions of confronting death directly as the most appropriate practice for gaining enlightenment.

Nemoto's first event was held in Bangkok as a public talk at the 30th anniversary of the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM), a local affiliate of INEB in Thailand. SEM and INEB's nonagenarian founder, Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa (92) was in attendance and actively listened to Nemoto's hour-long talk entitled, "The Enlightenment of the Suicidal: Dharma Healing & Experiences from Modern Japanese Society." Like a true follower of the Zen way, Nemoto did not spend any time explaining psychological theories concerning suicide or providing commentaries on ancient texts. Rather, he told, in a very matter of fact way, stories of the many different kinds of people he has encountered in his twenty years of work: from highly educated persons who used Zen meditation to heal their minds to motor cycle aficionados supporting other suicidal comrades in on-line chat groups to two suicidal comrades who found life and love while trying



to kill themselves on a Buddhist pilgrimage. The power of these stories felt much like the way Shakyamuni Buddha himself would teach through instructing others to investigate an issue directly rather than providing them with ready-made answers.

Tabidachi Workshops

This talk was followed by two consecutive days of *tabidachi* workshops, one held for the staff of INEB, SEM, and affiliated groups and one for the general public. Rather than provide our own conclusions and impressions, we will provide testimonials of those who participated in these workshops as an attachment to this article. To provide a clearer sense of the workshop, it moved along as follows:

Participants were welcomed by Rev. Nemoto and provided basic instruction in Zen meditation. Unlike other forms of Buddhist meditation, Zen meditation, or *zazen*, involves very little instruction or teaching of methods. Simply, there is a great emphasis on maintaining a straight upright posture, then simply following the breath and becoming increasingly aware of the five senses. The practice is, therefore, amazingly direct and alarmingly uncluttered, with no techniques for the ego to hide behind or within. With the participants quiet and somewhat pensive awaiting instructions for



death, Rev. Nemoto then unexpectedly had them engage in a one-hour Vision Board exercise. With a piece of white posterboard, a large pile of random magazines, glue, and colored pens, participants created a collage of impressions of their lives—again, as with the *zazen*—with little explanation of purpose or goal. Participants seemed to enter a liminal place in their life experience, becoming children again making art, either quietly in a corner or yapping together with others.

After posting their Vision Boards on the walls and taking a short break, participants were suddenly drawn back into the theme of the day, confronting death. Each participant was given 12 post-it slips, three each of four different colors, which corresponded to four themes: most important people in one's life, most important possessions in one's life, most important activities in one's life, and most desired things to do before one dies. With these established and taking a meditative posture, Nemoto led participants through an imaginary scenario of themselves at the center in which they become diagnosed with a terminal illness and slowly lose their faculties to live independently. At each stage, Nemoto instructs them to throw away two or three of these posts as things “you can no longer be, have, or do.” The scenario ends with oneself on one's deathbed surrounded by grieving loved ones while paralyzed and unable to speak, and then eventually fading away and “becoming the wind” (*ka-ze-ni-natta*)—and the last post is thrown away.

The final stage involves a “mock funeral” in which one has turned back from the tunnel of light of death and returns to consciousness in the hospital room. With only

a random nurse left cleaning up the room to attend to you, the participant has ten minutes to express their final thoughts, feelings, and gratitude to others. In this role play, two participants act as partners with one serving as the nurse providing “presence” and deep listening while the dying patient has a white scarf covering their face during their time of reflection. At the end of the ten minutes, Rev. Nemoto rings his temple bell and begins chanting as during a funeral. After participants have experienced both roles, the workshop is brought to a conclusion with each participant sharing their Vision Board and offering their impressions of the death process.

Suicide Prevention Training for Monks and Nuns

Nemoto's Thai tour concluded at the Wongsanit Ashram, a forested retreat center outside of Bangkok that Sivaraksa established in 1990. As one of its first activities to bring various Buddhist chaplaincy and counseling skills to parts of Southeast and South Asia, IBCC gathered a group of 30 monks and nuns from Thailand and Myanmar for a workshop on suicide prevention and confronting death. While Nemoto's methods, especially the *tabidachi*, and style of direct engagement as a secularized Japanese priest were quite foreign to the more conservative Theravada monastics, there was still a common base from which to share. As the core members of the IBCC have been discovering over the past few years of cross-cultural sharing, the Buddha's seminal teaching of the *satipatthana* and the East Asian tradition of Chan/Zen share an emphasis on working first with the body and posture (*kaya*), which conditions and



regulates the energetic body through “feeling” (*vedana*), which then allows one to confront the complexity of the cognitive mind (*citta*) and discover new insights into reality (*dhamma*). Within the satipatthana is also found the well-known contemplation of the stages of the dying corpse as oneself, which align with Zen’s emphasis on “the great matter of life and death” (生死事大 *sho-ji ji-dai*). This mix of shared foundations and widely different cultural styles made for a rich interaction.

As above, we will leave longer reflections on the workshop to a group of attached documents by the participants themselves and provide a simpler outline of the two-day event:

Both mornings began at 5:30 am with instruction in *zazen* in which the Theravada monastics were counseled to pay special attention to keeping a very upright and aligned posture, something not always emphasized in the tradition. On the first morning, Nemoto told an ancient Zen story from China to clarify the emphasis on Zen training in becoming mindful of the five senses as the foundation for all experience. There was also a chanting of the *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra*, an essential text in the Mahayana tradition that was available to Thai participants in a new local translation.

The first day of the workshop involved Nemoto “teaching,” again, through the use of case studies rather than psychological or spiritual analysis. His translator, this author, also presented on the wider suicide prevention in

Japan, including the holding of special memorial services and group counseling for families and loved ones caught in the grief of those who had committed “suicide” or “self-death” (*ji-shi*). The latter term is now being used more commonly by Japanese Buddhist priests to remove the social stigma attached to “suicide” in Japan, which became more commonly referred to as “self-murder” (*ji-satsu*) under the influence of Westernization in the 1800s and 1900s (see more in *Engaged Buddhism in Japan* Vol. II). Nemoto then spoke deeply on the engagement with bereaved persons:

At memorial services for those lost to suicide, called tsuito-hoyo, I have often witnessed people crying and laughing simultaneously. The deeper the sorrow, the more poignant the warmth of memories becomes.

“Unforgettable, no matter how much time passes.”

“If only I could return to that day.”

With such thoughts in their hearts, attendees remember the deceased. Yet the gathering is not solely filled with grief.

“Do you remember that moment?”

“I can still picture their smiling face.”

When such words are exchanged, smiles emerge amidst tears. This is a time to affirm the life shared with those who have passed—a process of cleansing sorrow and taking new steps forward. Witnessing these moments reaffirms for me that human hearts are built on emotional complexity. It is this very complexity that upholds human dignity.

Human rights advocacy often emphasizes laws and systems. However, what truly matters is mutual respect and support between individuals. Moving forward despite conflicting emotions; cherishing memories while laughing through tears—these are uniquely human endeavors beyond AI’s reach. Therefore, I will continue creating spaces where people can live together amidst emotional complexity. No matter how much time passes or how far apart we may be—we will not forget. Transforming these feelings into “prayers,” we live on today.



That evening the group gathered to watch the very “uncut” documentary about Nemoto’s life and work called the *Departure* by Lana Wilson, which debuted in New York City in 2017 at the Tribeca Film Festival. “Uncut” means the film does not portray Nemoto as a heroic Zen master saving these lives of pathetic, suicidal people left and right. Rather, it shows what it really means to engage fully in the suffering of others and the way it can consume one’s own self, one’s own health, and the family and loved ones around them. In this way, despite certain shocking scenes for the Theravada monks—such as Nemoto drinking alcohol at a disco—the sincerity and depth of Nemoto’s bodhisattva vows to liberate numberless sentient beings struck a deep chord in them, as seen by their largely positive feedback the next morning.

The following morning participants worked in their own groups to not only reflect on practical considerations raised by the movie but also consider steps forward in developing forms of engagement with the suicidal and bereaved in their own localities. The afternoon and final session was devoted to the monastics experiencing the *tabidachi* workshop. In short, this featured a fascinating mix of certain monastics meeting the exercises with stoicism and the kind of guarded emotionality common to the Theravada tradition. Still, others became visibly moved while providing support to their dying partners, and many expressed deep emotional complexity in their final reflection and sharing of their Vision Boards.

Conclusion: First Step of Many

In a feedback and reflection session among the organizers held a month later, the impact of the *tabidachi* workshop was immediately noted with news that two Thai monks and a Myanmar nun had already started run their own versions of the workshop in their local regions. As noted above, there were certain cultural barriers in having Theravada monks and nuns hold hands during the dying process, but this was expressed as a more positive potential for growth in their training as compassionate listeners and also a unique aspect of this workshop. As the first time to hold these events outside of Japan, there were of course certain imperfections in the process,



especially in the suicide prevention training workshop. Becoming a chaplain or counselor is one process, but being able to, in turn, train such persons is a different kind of challenge that established chaplains/counselors might not be especially skilled at. This point is evidenced in the United States where the path to train as a chaplain “supervisor” is far more arduous than the one of becoming a chaplain.

We hope to create these programs with Rev. Nemoto again in Thailand and other parts of Asia. In the meantime, seeds have been planted and are already taking root along with other initiatives by monks and nuns for supporting mental health in their local regions. Specifically, since the time of the workshop, a catastrophic earthquake hit northern Myanmar on March 28. The new local IBCC team for Thailand and Myanmar has already begun to design a program to teach monastics how to offer disaster trauma care for the victims with the support of a different group of Japanese priests who experienced and developed their work during the great tsunami of 2011. Stay tuned!



G20
SOUTH AFRICA 2025

Please visit their website for more information about events scheduled during 2025.

<https://www.g20interfaith.org/g20-interfaith-forum-south-africa/>



Atisha Dipankar
Peace Trust Bangladesh
Local Efforts for Global Peace

Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of Establishment

Atisha Dipankar Peace Trust Bangladesh [ADPT Bangladesh]

One decade for peace & social cohesion

We are inspired to celebrate the 10 years' noble journey of a community based development organization Atisha Dipankar Peace Trust Bangladesh [ADPT Bangladesh] towards promoting peace, harmony, humanity and sustainable development initiatives with embracing mutual understanding, trust, respecting religious/cultural values and connecting multilateralism to generate potentials of local religious and peace actors in ways to sharpen human efforts with following the organizational motto 'Local Efforts for Global Peace' to build a just and peaceful society.

This 2025 AD marks the 10th anniversary of establishment. It is our pleasure to share our 9 years noble journey and the next future agendas to fostering inclusive peace, humanity, generating love, compassion towards living beings and non living nature, including all and leaving no-one as religious beliefs, gender identity or locality.

We believe, from the inception on May 28, 2015 AD the organization used to focus on multi-religious/faith and traditional actors who play key roles in peacebuilding

efforts at local levels and commits to connect the vast section of local and regional peacemakers in meaningful social actions. As one decade of anniversary, we would eagerly wait to hear voices, intended views and innovative ideas from various stakeholders in the way of peacebuilding processes connecting with local needs and possibilities. It is urgently needed to equip and connect different sections of ideologies/outlook, like/unlike minded people in peacebuilding processes to get remedy from social barriers, difficulties and sufferings. So, we look for many small but effective action plans along the year 2025 to reach out our commitments in inclusive peacebuilding processes with the various religious, civil society, government, non-government bodies and development partners of Bangladesh and beyond the country to connect and equip sustainable / inclusive peacebuilding strategies. We eagerly wait to build a national platform and institutional structure for connecting vast sections of peace loving and nonviolent people in lasting peacebuilding processes.

We earnestly believe your moral support and solidarity would help us work together for peace and harmony!

With kindest regards

Prof. Tushar Kanti Barua, Chairman & Trustee

Dr. Dibakar Barua, Vice-Chairman & Trustee

Ven Dr. Priyadharshi Mahathero, EC Member & Trustee

Sanat Kumar Barua, General Secretary & Managing Trustee

Ashim Kanti Barua, Finance Secretary & Trustee

Lecturer Supti Barua, EC Member & Trustee

Ven (Lecturer) Priya Bangsha Thero, EC Member & Trustee

The 10th Years Anniversary Celebration Committee

ATISHA DIPANKAR PEACE TRUST BANGLADESH [ADPT BANGLADESH]

www.adpt-bd.org, Mobile: 01819320689, 01757001120, 01817203633

Engaged Buddhism : The Bodhisattva Path to Gender Equality in Thailand

By **Craig C Lewis**

6 February 2025

Source: *Buddhist Door Global* - <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/engaged-buddhism-the-bodhisattva-path-to-gender-equality-in-thailand/>

Thailand's senate passed the landmark Marriage Equality Act in June 2024 that would see the kingdom go on to become the first nation in Southeast Asia to legalize marriage for LGBTIQA+ couples, and the third in Asia.* In September 2024, the bill was forwarded to the royal palace for endorsement by Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn, who formalized the new law.** This groundbreaking legislation finally came into effect this year on 22 January. Social activists have hailed the move as a historic step for equal rights, marking the culmination of years of advocacy for marriage equality in Thailand.

One of the key figures in this painstaking—and ongoing—process of social reform is the committed Buddhist activist and member of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), Nachale Boonyapisomparn, better known to most by her nickname Hua. As a member of INEB, in particular its Sangha for Peace project, Hua has been a prominent and outspoken agent for change and social equality. She speaks truth to those in authority and is an active participant and leader in the ongoing dialogue toward manifesting an inclusive society that values the equality, safety, and well-being of all.

INEB is a global network of individuals and organizations who are committed to promoting and working toward building compassionate societies, environmental sustainability, and world peace. INEB



Hua Boonyapisomparn, bodhisattva for gender equality.

Image courtesy of Nachale Boonyapisomparn

emphasizes the importance of developing an ethical, Dharma-based approach to its work, and encourages its members to work collaboratively and respectfully with individuals and organizations based on a foundation of shared values and aspirations.

INEB's Sangha for Peace is a regional project aimed at promoting interfaith harmony and addressing the challenges of rising religious and ethno-nationalist conflict in South and Southeast Asia. Supported by funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Sangha for Peace works to address challenges and problem-solving by equipping stakeholders with the knowledge and tools needed to enhance regional engagement.

As an engaged Buddhist activist, Hua has been instrumental organizing numerous events and projects

aimed at nurturing trust and cultivating a sustainable network of allies and supporters of the vision of an inclusive society. One such event was INEB's "Interfaith Pride: Gender Equality and Social Justice," the first event of its kind, held in June 2023 in cooperation with Bangkok Pride and other LGBTIQ activist organizations.**

BDG recently spoke in depth with Hua to learn more about her life as a transgender woman and her work as a Buddhist activist and bodhisattva for social change.

BDG: Can you talk a little about your personal relationship with Buddhism?

Nachale Boonyapisomparn (Hua): Yes, as a Thai, I grew up in a Buddhist family. Actually, I don't really know what my father's religion is, but my mother is definitely a Buddhist. She would regularly visit the temple and would always take me with her.

There's one story I often hear about how I was born: my mother had some difficulty conceiving after her first daughter, so she would go to the temple and pray to the Buddha for another child. She made a promise that if she had a boy, he would be ordained as a monk. Eventually she became pregnant with me, and when I was 13 years old I was ordained as a monk for seven days. This is a fun story that demonstrates how serious my mother was toward Buddhism, which had a strong influence on me.

Also, you know, growing up in Thailand, when we're in primary school and high school we have classes on Buddhism. So I had a strong Buddhist influence from my mother and from school as well while I was growing up. Buddhism has always been integral to my life; going to the temple, observing Buddhist festivals and holidays. As I grew older, I recognized that there are many religious traditions in this world yet the Buddha's teachings have resonated the most with me.

My attitude is that I trust the Buddha, not the temple. As I grew older, I began to question whether the temple was the right place for me as a transgender woman. When I'm in my hometown, Phrae, in northern Thailand, I still go to the same temple that my mother used to take me to. When I was ordained as a novice monk, I was ordained at that temple. So whenever I go home, if I have time, I attend that temple, because they know my mother and they know me well and saw me growing up.

BDG: Can we say that you practice traditional Thai Buddhism?

NB: I don't know that I can describe myself as a traditional Thai Buddhist because when we speak about traditional Thai Buddhism, I feel that it has a very gender-binary perspective, you know? I think that as a

Hua, foreground, with social activists organizing the second Interfaith Pride event in Bangkok in July 2024, platforming the voices of LGBTIQ+ people of different faiths and spiritual practices.

Image courtesy of Nachale Boonyapisomparn



Religious leaders and activists at Interfaith Pride: Gender Equality and Social Justice gathering hosted in Bangkok by INEB in June 2023. Image courtesy of INEB



transgender person, and at my current stage of life, traditional Thai Buddhism is not so relevant to me anymore. I would rather learn more about the Buddha's actual teachings and about Buddhism outside of the Theravada paradigm. Thai Buddhism is traditionally very male dominated, which is something that's not so relevant to me.

BDG: How were your early experiences as a member of the LGBTQ community?

NB: I don't know exactly when I first recognized it, but I grew up feeling very different from other boys. Although the gender I was assigned at birth was male, I felt different growing up as a boy, although I didn't have the words at that time to express my feelings or to describe what I wanted to be. This was also because I grew up in a very rural area, and Phrae is a small province. And 30 or 40 years ago, the term transgender was not even known!

So in those days, when I was a kid, people would call me "*katoey*" [a colloquial term in Thailand commonly translated as "ladyboy"]. I felt that this term was very insulting but at the same time I didn't have a better way to describe who I was, so I accepted the label of *katoey* up until I went to university. And I had close friends who also referred to themselves as *katoey*.

I didn't refer to myself transgender until my first real job as a project manager for a social program to assist transgender women. That was when the term transgender first entered my consciousness, and I recognized it as the right identity for me. And when I say transgender, it's not the same as the term transsexual, although many people use them interchangeably. Transgender is when your gender identity is different from the gender you are assigned at birth; transsexual specifically applies to someone who has undergone sex-reassignment surgery; but it's an outdated term. So I think of the term transgender as a broader definition that I prefer to apply to myself.

But I wasn't really aware of these concepts when I was growing up. I just knew that I felt different from a very young age. I don't think I ever had to tell my mother because she already knew who I was, although she never

addressed directly the fact that I was different or that I behaved in a very feminine way. When I went to college, I think she finally recognized that this is who I am and she came to accept it fully.

So I didn't have to struggle to win my parents' acceptance—unlike a lot of transgender kids. I think part of the reason for this was that, as Buddhists, we are much more willing to compromise and let things go, and my mother was a very sincere Buddhist, so that may be part of the explanation in my case.

BDG: At what point did you decide that you wanted to work as a Buddhist activist?

NB: I think that I've always embraced activism since I was at school. I was always doing something, even if it was just managing the school cooperative shop or being a member of the student council. But I didn't become involved in human rights activism until I moved to Bangkok after graduating from university.

Then I was a Master's degree student at Chulalongkorn University and I became involved in an international conference on HIV/AIDS here in Bangkok in 2004 as a volunteer for the Global Village, which was

Image courtesy of Nachale Boonyapisomparn



the space to showcase nonprofit organizations working in the sphere of HIV/AIDS. I applied to be a volunteer with the Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand, and through getting to know them, I became hooked on this work. Later, I was recruited to become a program manager for Rainbow Sky.

This was the starting point for me in working for nonprofit organizations. I focused on HIV/AIDS for about four years, then I started to feel increasingly strongly about working with transgender people to promote human rights and gender diversity and sexuality. So I became a researcher before focusing on human rights advocacy for transgender people. Up until 2024, when I turned 44, I've been working in LGBTQ activism for 20 years—so 2024 was my 20-year anniversary!

I continued this work in Thailand for six or seven years before moving to the United States, where I live for about 10 years. Then I moved back to Thailand in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. When I returned to Thailand, I felt very refreshed; I was very motivated and full of energy and I became involved in so many projects, including working with INEB.

Since 2020, I've realized one thing: the reason I now have so much energy is because I was able to take a break from activism—not a full break, I was still involved—but I was also able to live my own life for 10 years in the US. I was still active, for example volunteering at a sex worker's organization in Washington, DC, organizing events with my school in the US, and so on, but at the same time I could experience many new things and I had the opportunity to grow up and truly live my life. I think this is the reason why I have so much energy for activism now.

BDG: How did you become involved with INEB?

NB: I didn't know about INEB until I came to know the NGO International Women for Peace and Justice (IWP) in Chiang Mai [in northern Thailand]. I was connected with them for many years before I moved to the US. I used to attend training workshops, and I co-facilitated a 10-day training program for 16 transgender activists, which was one of the first events of its kind at that time

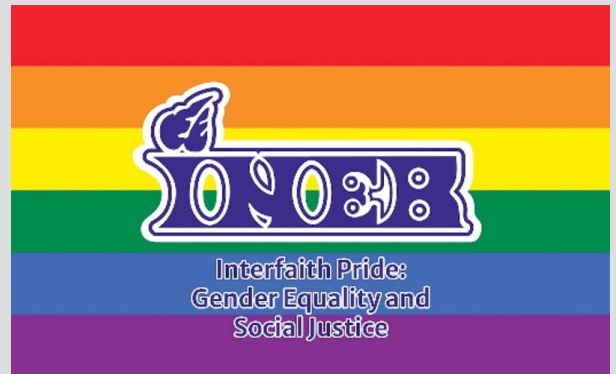


Image courtesy of INEB

in Thailand. I eventually came to know INEB through the IWP's affiliation. And when INEB began their Sangha for Peace project, IWP nominated me to join this project. So that's how I entered the INEB fold.

BDG: How has your Buddhist practice influenced your approach to LGBTQ activism?

NB: I believe strongly in the Buddha's teaching. As I mentioned before, I trust the Buddha's teaching, although I don't feel like I belong in a temple. I feel that compassion is the foundation for this kind of work. Especially when working in social justice, having compassion, not only for other people but also for yourself, helps you sustain what you do and also helps you to understand other people's suffering: it gives you the ability to to give yourself, to sit with their suffering. Compassion is extremely important. If we're unable to sit with their suffering in this way, then we cannot find the right solutions for their suffering, we cannot be a help for people—especially transgender people, who suffer a lot from social injustice, discrimination, and violence.

BDG: And how about compassion for people who may not understand what you're trying to do or perhaps feel afraid or even threatened by it?

NB: Yes! Yes, yes, I think it's very important that you mentioned this. Sometimes we have to hear from those people about their perspectives and the reasons why they

may disagree. I think it's very important to cultivate compassion toward them as well. Although it can be very difficult, I feel like it's most needed because if you're going to work toward social change, you're not only working on behalf of those who support you, but also with those who may disagree with you.

I can give you an example: on one occasion, I was asked by a *bhikkhuni* in the south of Thailand to organize a gender workshop in her temple. The *bhikkhuni* invited a Buddhist monk to give a speech before the workshop started. The monk sat on a raised platform above everybody else, who sat on the floor. He began his address by saying something like, "Sometimes I feel like activists do too much; I think that gender is flexible so you just have to bend back to being a man in order to be ordained as monastic." I was sitting there as he said this, listening to him among all the *bhikkhunis* and female novices. I was the only transgender woman in that space, and the only activist in that space, so I felt like I was targeted by this monk's words. But I told myself, I'm not here to work with that monk. When he finishes his speech, he's going to return to his temple and my workshop will begin. I'm here to work with these *bhikkhunis*, who are going to participate in my workshop. So although I disagree with a lot of what this monk has said, I don't need to respond. And it was actually a good thing that I didn't respond to the monk because otherwise I might have ruined a chance to work with the *bhikkhunis*. This is just one example of how compassion can work with someone who has a different attitude or disagrees with you!

BDG: Is it difficult to balance the Buddhist cultivation of acceptance and equanimity with the need for social change?

NB: This is very interesting, because at that workshop where I spoke with the *bhikkhunis*, the *bhikkhunis* said, "We're monastics. We shouldn't become overly involved with what happens in the secular world because we practice the Buddha's teachings, we practice to let go of our attachments and aversions, we practice to attain spiritual awakening, so we shouldn't engage too much with what's happening in the outside world."

I responded saying, "No, the Buddha did not say that; a lot of the Buddha's teachings only work when we engage with those who are suffering. We cannot attain Nirvana knowing that we're not lifting other people up together with us. This is the bodhisattva path. As a monastic, you can still do small acts for the benefit of society and to engage with social justice.

As for me, I recognize the need in my community for a space to practice, to feel safe. How can you engage in spiritual practice if you don't feel safe? First you need a practice space where you feel safe, where you can practice according to your faith—whether you're a Buddhist, a Christian, or a Muslim. A lot of LGBT people don't always feel safe in a traditional temple because a lot of the teachings are still being misinterpreted—for example, karma: that I was born as a transgender woman because of something terrible I did in a past life. When you teach people like this, you're not liberating them, you only oppress them! You're taking away their value. What we need as trans-gender people is a space that affirms us as we are. Focusing on your current life allows you to improve yourself physically, mentally, and spiritually, here and now.

BDG: Have there been any occasions when you felt that your gender identity and your Buddhist beliefs were in conflict (and how did you reconcile them)?

NB: Yes, aside from the issue with karma teachings, there was one time when I was much younger. I don't really like to use these words, but they are the only words that accurately describe it: *I hated myself for being born as a transgender woman*. I felt that I didn't deserve love, that I made my parents feel ashamed or embarrassed by being who I am, that I was too tall, that I didn't look feminine. All of these kinds of things. I hated myself.

But I was eventually able to reconcile these feelings after I connected with the IWP in Chiang Mai. During a workshop there are so many activities, such as mindfulness, meditation, deep listening, and other spiritual practices, but the core teaching was not only learning about feminist concepts but also learning how



Hua and fellow engaged Buddhists at the public symposium on the theme "Roles of Spirituality & Faith in a Divided World," organized as part of the 20th Biennial INEB Conference in South Korea in 2022. Image courtesy of Nachale Boonyapisomparn

to keep compassion for yourself and for those who share your suffering. Whatever guilt, whatever blame, whatever stigma you put on yourself, you learn how to disengage from that.

When I attended that workshop, there was an activity about understanding privilege. A statement was read out and if the statement was true for you, you stepped forward. If it wasn't true for you, you stepped back. An example statement might have been, "If you have a Bachelor's degree, step forward." By the end of this activity, I was standing right at the front. And the next instruction was: "Those of you standing at the front, please turn around and look back." So I looked back and saw the rest of the group were all standing behind me.

Then it was time for us all to sit in a circle and share our reflections. The first thing I did was to cry so hard because I realized that for all these years, I was the only person who was constantly telling myself that I was undeserving of love, that I was shameful, that I was unworthy, and so on. I was the one stopping myself from being happy. I cried so much! And those people gave me the space to cry, and listened to what I had to say. That was the first time I was truly able to put aside a lot of the guilt and shame that I was carrying, *that I had put on myself*, and to try to change that way I felt about myself.

This was such an important experience in my life. I think that part of being a Buddhist is exploring how to let go of negative feelings, such as guilt and trauma: things that happened to you in your body, things that happened to you in your heart, things that you have been thinking about yourself or carrying with you in your mind.

Compassionate mindfulness is so helpful in this sense. It allows you to practice self-compassion and to offer yourself loving-kindness. Then you can let go of all the feelings of guilt, all the bad things that you keep telling yourself. It was a life-changing experience for me. In the same workshop, we also learned about cultivating Buddha-mind, which is like a clear blue sky. Our minds are so often unclear and clouded with thoughts and feelings that are tied to the past, present, and future.

As I said, it was a life-changing experience. I remember that I suddenly saw an image of a lotus flower in my mind, so I associate that experience with the story of the Buddha attaining enlightenment and seeing four kinds of lotus flower. I remember thinking, "Oh my! I used to be like a lotus under the water, and now as a disciple of the Buddha I can see myself as a lotus flower that has grown above the surface of the water, to be reborn! I saw this clear image in my mind all of a sudden. It really was life-changing!

I now use the same approach in all of the workshops that I organize for my activist community.

BDG: How has the recent legalization of marriage equality in Thailand impacted the public perception of LGBTQ individuals?

NB: I think a major reason why we were able to see the marriage equality bill passed is because we received a lot of support from society at large. I think the narrative is very clear, very easy to understand: when we say "love is love," this concept, this feeling resonates clearly with



Participants of the Interfaith Pride: Gender Equality and Social Justice gathering, hosted in Bangkok by INEB in June 2023, engage in group work.

Image courtesy of INEB

people. Love has no gender, right? This is the first thing that people recognize, especially those who are more open-minded. They give their support because they can see that their love is no different from that between a same-sex couple.

Another factor is that in Thailand, there was no law that protected or promoted the rights of LGBTQ people. So I think this is a very significant moment for Thailand to pass the marriage equality bill. It stresses the importance of thinking beyond binary concepts. When we say equality, it doesn't only mean male and female, equality means everyone in society regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

One thing that does still concern me, although I may be overthinking, is that people in Thailand may see this as meaning that equality has been achieved; that there's nothing more we need to do for LGBTQ people because we already have marriage equality. In fact, there are still so many things that we need to do, including legal gender recognition for trans people, gender-affirming care coverage, and support for lesbians, non-binary, queer, and intersex people. Each of these different identities has different circumstances and needs.

We use the term LGBTQ and many people see a monolithic community, when of course it's not: lesbians have different needs than gay people, who have different needs than trans, and so on, so we still have a lot to do.

I just hope that Thai people don't think that marriage equality is the end game for LGBTQ equality and social inclusion.

BDG: How do you address opposition from more conservative Buddhists (or people of other religions) who may not support LGBTQ rights?

NB: One thing I've learned from working with INEB is that INEB organizes a lot of activities and spends a lot of time on dialogue, putting people with different ideas and different perspectives together to talk about ways in which they can live in the same society. I think it's very important when working with those who might disagree or who are different from you. We need that space where people can come without judgment and feel safe enough to speak their own minds, and perhaps express anger without judgment—a safe space that can still contain all the feelings that are happening.

But if you ask me how we're going to build that space, I'm not sure! You know, it's very challenging, very difficult. But what INEB does is amazing, putting people of different faiths together to talk about sometimes very sensitive things. So I hope we can put people of different ideologies about gender together to talk about how we can progress.

Another very important point is having allies, especially when working with a group of Buddhists. I think that having a few allies who understand you and can pave the way for you to give space for people from the community to have their voices heard is also very important. We have a few allies in the Buddhist community who can talk about gender issues beyond a binary perspective, who can talk about equality, and can challenge resistance. I think it's important to have more of these people; starting from a few people, we can expand our reach.

I've seen this while working with Buddhist monastics on the Sangha for Peace project. On one occasion, I asked whether a transgender person could be ordained, and the bhikkhuni said, "No, we cannot ordain trans people." And so, during the course of a year, we had a lot of dialogue and exchanged ideas. We got to know

*Engaged Buddhist activist
members of Rainbow
Sangha Bangkok,
which has held monthly
gatherings since 2022.
Image courtesy of
Nachale Boonyapisompan*



one another and they came to see me as a real person. And after interacting in this safe space, I asked the same bhikkhuni the same question, and this time the answer was different; she said, “Yes, you can ordain!”

So clearly, we really need this dialogue, we really need the time, we really need to get to know one another at a very personal level to truly understand that we’re all human, that we all seek peace and we all want happiness.

BDG: Do you have any advice for young people—or young Buddhists—who are struggling with their gender identity in relation to their practice?

NB: My advice would be don’t believe anyone who tells you that you did something terrible in a past life. I think it’s very important to empower people, regardless of the past. Life is in this moment. It’s very important for you to separate yourself from your suffering. In my experience, it’s also very important as a Buddhist to not only bring compassion for others but to bring that same compassion for yourself as well. You need that compassion to grow, to learn, to explore your identity, and also to be able to live in a society that may be against you or may completely misunderstand you. You’re going to be able to live as your authentic self with the compassion that you give to yourself. Bringing this compassion is something very important that we can do for ourselves.

Later on, when you’ve grown up and found the

right place for you, that’s the time when you can fully be yourself. Practicing self-compassion will help you hang in there until such time as everyone can see you for your authentic self!

BDG: Hua, thank you for your time and for sharing your insights with us.

* Taiwan became the first Asian government to legalize same-sex marriage in 2019, while Nepal has taken progressive steps toward equality, most recently in November 2023, when its government, under an interim order from the Supreme Court, recognized a marriage between two Nepalis of the same legal gender for the first time.

** Thailand Becomes First Southeast Asian Country to Legalize Same-Sex Unions (BDG), Special Report: Thailand to Become First Nation in Southeast Asia to Legalize Same-Sex Marriage (BDG), and Thailand Takes a Historic Step Closer to Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage (BDG)

*** Engaged Buddhism: INEB Hosts Landmark Interfaith Gathering in Bangkok for Gender Equality and Social Justice (BDG)

S

Opening & Welcome remarks

by Kul Chandra Gautam

6th Global Forum of Global Network of Religions for Children

Abu Dhabi, 19 November 2024

Good morning Esteemed & Venerable religious leaders,

His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance, UAE
Rev. Miyamoto, President of Arigatou International and
Convenor of GNRC,

Madame Dana Humaid, President of Interfaith Alliance
for Safer Communities, Co-Chair of IOC & our chief host,
Excellencies

Distinguished participants,

Dear children -

A warm welcome to you all at this 6th Global Forum of
the Global Network of Religions for Children.

The motto of this conference says: The Child is Calling!

And we are gathered here to respond to their call to help
build a more hopeful world for children.

Now, let us first understand what are the children
calling for?

We just heard a passionate call from the first child
representative, Ms. Ghaya from our Children's Advisory
Group.

We have dozens of other children attending this Forum
from many countries around the world.

Yesterday, they completed their own Children's Pre-
Forum.

They represent the voices and views of their peers from
around the world.

From developed and developing countries.

Peaceful and war-torn countries.

They speak many languages and follow many different
religions.

But they ALL share some common dreams and
aspirations.

We will hear their call directly from them throughout
this Forum.

But we can guess what their fervent call and appeal will be:

Children everywhere wish and deserve to enjoy the
tender loving care of their parents, and neighbors.

To live a healthy life.

To play and get an education.

To get gainful employment when they grow up.

To live up to their full human potential.

To be good citizens of their community.

And above all, to live in a peaceful world with dignity.

Is that too much to ask?

They are not asking for the moon.

I trust none of us thinks they are demanding or
expecting too much.

But alas, ladies and gentlemen, for most children in the
world, even their simplest wishes – which are actually their
fundamental human rights - seem utterly unattainable.

But why?

Perhaps some of us would blame politicians for
neglecting the interest of children.

Perhaps others would blame greedy businessmen and
the private sector for ignoring the wellbeing of children.

Yet others may blame UN agencies and NGOs for not
doing enough.

But how about us – the faith communities and religious
leaders?

This is a conference about building a better world for
children through interfaith cooperation.

So, let us dive deeply into what we the faith communities
and religious leaders can do to respond to the Call of the
Child.

We will hear again and again at this Forum - that all our
religions celebrate the sanctity of childhood.

That is true.

We will proclaim with pride that our holy books call
for love, peace, compassion, brotherhood (but not quite
sisterhood) and friendship.

And that is also true.

But notwithstanding what the holy scriptures and our
great prophets say -

In the real world, far too many wrongs are committed,
injustice justified, cruelties and indifference to the plight of
women and children accepted - in the name of religion.

Not too far from here there is a country where girls are not allowed to go to school and women are not allowed to pray or even speak in public - in the name of religion.

Many of us come from countries where children face discrimination based on caste, creed, race and ethnicity - in the name of religion.

Recently, we saw leaders of several industrialized countries acknowledging and apologizing for the large number of children of indigenous communities who were separated from their parents and mistreated in places of worship - in the name of religion.

Millions of children are married around the world in ceremonies officiated by local priests – in the name of religion.

Millions of girls still undergo the medieval practice of female genital mutilation – in the name of religion.

In our history, many wars have been fought and crusades and jihads justified – in the name of religion.

Right now, we are witnessing horrific deaths of children and unimaginable, large-scale destruction of schools, hospitals, places of worship in Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Myanmar, Haiti and elsewhere.

The toxic mix of politics and religion is a blot on our human civilization.

Quotations from holy scriptures and teachings of great prophets are of little consolation to the millions of children who face the daily reality of such violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination.

Of course, we will rightly say that such mistreatment of children is NOT sanctioned by our religion, but is a harmful traditional practice based on superstition or misinterpretation of religion.

But to the vast majority of the world's population, religion is what is preached and practiced by their local priests, imams, swamis, rabbis, in their daily lives, not what is written in ancient scriptures and what is preached by distant prophets.

Dear friends,

Despite many such harmful traditional practices, overall, the goodness and positive inspiration that religions can bring in the world are enormous.

That is why we are gathered here to harness the great positive power and potential of religions for the wellbeing of children.

The children attending this Forum are calling on religious leaders to please impress upon your fellow local priests to abide by the lofty teachings of your faiths - and do no harm.

The children are also calling on the rest of us - secular leaders – of government, civil society, the media and other walks of life to honor the commitment we have made in signing international conventions, human rights treaties and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Dear friends,

Arigatou International has prepared this *Multi-religious Study on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* that shows that the rights of the child as enshrined in the world's most universally ratified human rights treaty and the genuine teachings of all the major religions of the world are fully compatible.

Arigatou has also prepared this manual *Learning to Live Together* that shows how people – especially children - professing different faiths and cultures can live in peace and harmony - if we adults guide them the right way.

The common enemies of children are poverty, ignorance, violence, and the climate crisis, all of which can be addressed through the pursuit of sustainable development goals.

And to educate and motivate children, Arigatou in partnership with others, even runs an *SDG Academy for Children*, a model of which you can see just outside this hall.

Together with our gracious host and very special partner, the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, we are gathered here to help build a safe, secure and sustainable world for children.

And let me take this opportunity to most sincerely thank the Interfaith Alliance and the Government of the UAE for your super-generous hospitality and partnership.

I would also like to thank all members of the International Organizing Committee who have provided great guidance in preparing for this Forum.

Dear friends,

At the end of this Forum let us come out with an Abu Dhabi Declaration and a Plan of Action that commits all of us to help build a truly hopeful world for children.

In the next three days I count on all of us to put our hearts and minds together to try to come up with the best ideas to help build such a hopeful world for children.

I trust that you will all agree with me that there is no cause that is more noble, that is more urgent, and that is more worthy for interfaith cooperation - than building a world that is safe, secure and sustainable for all God's children.

Thank you.

Arigatou Gozaimasu!

Socially Engaged Spirituality Buddhist Heritage Towards Inclusive Societies

INEB Conference Symposium December 1, 2024

By Lokamitra

When talking about anything to do with Buddhism, the starting point has to be the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, known as Three Jewels and the Three Refuges. In the Theravada tradition the Buddha is celebrated on the full moon day of May when Siddharth was enlightened and became the Buddha. This is known variously as Wesak, Vaishakha Purnima and Buddha Jayanti. On the full moon day two months later, at the beginning of the rainy season retreat, the Dhamma is celebrated as Dhammachakkha Pavattan Day, being the day when the Buddha started teaching his first five disciples. Four months later, at end of the rainy season retreat, the Sangha is celebrated. First of all, lay people would prepare robes for the bhikkhus and present them in a ceremony known as kathin dana, to express their gratitude for being near and accessible during those four months. Secondly, the bhikkhus would confess to each other any mistakes and unskillfulness. Living in close proximity for four months, tensions and misunderstandings are bound to have arisen; by confessing these, the bhikkhus could depart with a clear heart. This day is also known for the Buddha's exhortation to his first sixty disciples to out for the welfare and happiness of as many as possible, "Bahujan Hitaya. Bahujan Sukhaya", words that have rung down the centuries. We could say this day represents birth of Engaged Buddhism.

I was introduced to Buddhism by Urgyen Sangharakshita London in 1972. At that time in the West most of us were interested in Buddhism for subjective reasons only. Sangharakshita taught Buddhism as a path of personal development, which is what we wanted. But gradually he showed us that every Buddhist teaching had an explicit or implicit altruistic dimension, whether it be ethics, the Noble Eight Fold Path, or Sila, Samadhi, and Pragna; in other words it was not possible to practice the Dhamma just for oneself. He developed this aspect of the Dhamma fully in the lectures he gave in 1976 on the Sutra of Golden Light, the Suvarnaprabhasa Sutra. The essence of this teaching, he suggested, was that one cannot transform oneself if one is not working

at the same time on the world, and equally one cannot transform the world without working on oneself, the two being inseparable. This teaching had a profound impact on me.

A year later in October 1977 I found myself in Nagpur on the day that Dr. Ambedkar had converted to Buddhism in 1956 along with 500,000 followers, most of whom had come from communities previously called and treated as Untouchable. I was taken to the place where the conversion took place, and later was asked to address the massive crowd. I realised immediately that Dr. Ambedkar's vision was nothing less than the two-fold transformation of self and world of the Sutra of Golden Light.

I need not say much about Dr. Ambedkar as most will be familiar with his story to some extent. It is enough to say that he found the way forward out of the most extreme structural violence his community suffered in the teachings of the Buddha. In converting to Buddhism he set into motion perhaps the most positive and optimistic social movement India has known since time of Asoka. I would like to briefly look at three aspects of his path to Buddhism.

Firstly, he was one of highest educated people in India at the time. He was an acclaimed economist, educationalist, statesman, and constitutionalist, bringing about significant reforms and developments in these areas. Quite early on in his career he realised that external changes, however important, would not be enough to bring about the social revolution he deemed necessary, without a corresponding deep change of mind and attitude. He concluded that the Buddha's teaching could bring about the required change in attitude. In November 1956 in Kathmandu at a World Fellowship of Buddhists' conference on "Buddhism and Communism", he said, "The greatest thing that the Buddha has done is to tell the world that the world cannot be reformed except by the reformation of the mind of man, and the mind of the world."

Secondly, he famously said that he derived his most cherished values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, not from the French Revolution, but from "my master, the Buddha". He wrote much on these, and saw that they were placed at the centre of the Preamble to the Indian Constitution. Now I can only give a hint of how we can approach them as Buddhist values.

Liberty, to Dr. Ambedkar, was by and large synonymous with freedom. Twenty years before his conversion when he was still searching for the most suitable way forward out of Untouchability, he wrote very passionately "*Mere physical freedom is of no use. ... The freedom of mind is the real freedom.*" He went on to spell out what he meant, "*A person whose mind is not free, though he is not in chains, is a slave....though he is alive, is dead.*"

...I call him free ... who is not a slave of usage, customs, and traditions, or of the teachings because they are brought

down from the ancestors; one whose flame of reason is not extinguished.... has not surrendered himself, who does not act on the teachings of others blindly; who does not keep faith on anything unless [it has been] examined critically in the light of the cause and effect theory;a man who is the master of his own [life], him alone I consider a free man."

The Buddha exemplified for Dr. Ambedkar this supreme freedom of the mind. But at same time he insisted others could realise this state if they made the effort.

Regarding Equality, he said, "*The Buddha's teaching nothing if not equality.*" The central chapter of the Buddha and His Dhamma, his compilation of the Buddha's teachings, is on Saddhamma. This, he said, had two functions, to purify the mind and to create a better world. He emphasised that all Buddhist practices - Pragna, Sila, Karuna, Maitri, were only valid to the extent they manifested in our behaviour and way relate to others. But that was not enough. He went on to say that Saddhamma must pull down all social barriers, both hierarchical and horizontal; we relate to others as just human beings and not in terms of their social place or group. Finally, Dr. Ambedkar insisted, Saddhamma must promote equality.

Dr. Ambedkar wrote a lot about Fraternity; "*What sustains equality and liberty is fellow-feeling. What the French Revolution called fraternity. The word fraternity is not an adequate expression. The proper term is what the Buddha called Maitree.*" Suffice it to say that maitree or metta (Pali) are unlimited, no one being excluded, not even those we people consider extremely harmful. INEB's late patron, Thich Nhat Hanh, who coined the phrase "Engaged Buddhism," exemplified this attitude.

The last point I want to make about in connection with Dr. Ambedkar's path to Buddhism is that despite the unimaginable oppression his community experienced, he never considered violence as a path; he was not even tempted, and had wish for revenge. Instead he insisted on path of Buddha who he called the prince of peace. Even though this path may take time to change society deeply, he was convinced in the long run it was the surest way.

From these few points I hope you can appreciate that Dr. Ambedkar's approach was in tune with the basic values of Buddhism, but at the same time presented in terms of social transformation. It is important to understand this as Dr. Ambedkar is the major influence and inspiration behind the fasted growing Buddhist movement in history, which is having an increasingly profound impact on India, and almost by default will influence much of Asia.

Encouraged by my teacher, I came to live and work in India in 1978. I found followers of Dr. Ambedkar very receptive to Dhamma, but that there were very few teachers at the time able to help them understand (the situation is very different today). They were especially keen to understand how the practice of the Dhamma could help improve society, as Dr. Ambedkar had suggested it would. Our work spread quickly and we started a number of small Dhamma centres, and along with these we started many social projects. These were run by Dhamma practitioners as part of their practice; we began to realise how powerful the Buddha's teaching was in empowering practitioners.

Eventually I withdrew from developing and running social projects and concentrated on Dhamma training as empowerment at Nagaloka. There we hold two residential courses, the eight month Dhammasekhiya courses and the three year BA in Buddhist and Dr. Ambedkar Studies. Besides Buddhist studies including Dr. Ambedkar's approach to the Dhamma, students learn practice meditation twice a day, puja, and help on the campus. Over a few months many students experience deep inner changes, and develop the confidence that they can do something with their lives, both for themselves and for society. This is enhanced by living and practicing together with students from many different caste backgrounds and from all corners of India. They begin to lose their separate identity, just as the Buddha's simile of the rivers entering the sea; they get a taste of the Sangha as an ocean of equality. After they leave Nagaloka, many students feel empowered to start social and Dhamma projects of their own initiative, some of which are exceptional.

One image illustrates this empowerment very well. All will be familiar with the Ashoka Pillar, with the three lions on the top. It has become well known throughout the Buddhist world, and Dr. Ambedkar made it the symbol of the Government of India. Just below the top is a band with four animals, an elephant, a bull, a horse, and a lion. These are usually seen as representing four episodes in the life of the Buddha. They also represent four strengths that we begin to develop as we practice the Dhamma. Note that all are strong, outward going animals, not meek and weak. The elephant can carry any burden, bear the weight of the suffering of others. For the bull no obstacle is too great to break through. The horse does not waste time but gets on with what needs to be done. And the lion is supremely confident. That is confidence we can have if we put Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha at the centre of our lives, and if we remember the Buddha's words, Bahujan Hitaya, Bahuja Sukhaya. We can have the confidence that we will impact the world beneficially in ways that harm no-one and promote harmony.

Lokamitra is a member of INEB's Executive Committee.

S



Suksit Siam

117-119 Fuang Nakorn Road, Bangkok 10200
 Tel: 02-225-9536-8, Fax: 02-222-5188
 email : suksit-siam@gmail.com
 www.kledthaishopping.com

Open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. except Sunday.
 English books on Engaged Buddhism are available.

Mining, Land and Territories Digging Deeper: Conversations on Mining and Just Transitions

As mining for critical minerals expands, rural communities face new threats.

Two activist-scholars examine land's meaning, policies for justice, and the struggle for sustainable, equitable mining tied to the renewable energy revolution.

10 December 2024

Authors **Sai Sam Kham** and **Itayosara Rojas**

Source: *Transnational Institute* - TNI - <https://www.tni.org/en/article/mining-land-and-territories>

This is part of a series of conversations aiming to explore challenging questions around mining and the energy transition, and the solutions that transnational social movements are putting forward. Given the devastating impact of mining and mineral extraction, and the claims from the mining industry that hugely increased mineral extraction is needed for renewable energy, how can we collectively address the climate crisis, without creating new geographies of displacement, destruction, and exploitation? While there are no easy answers, how are different movements tackling and confronting the violence of mining, and trying to shape a better future after fossil fuels?

This conversation with two activist-scholars working with social movements on different continents explores the question of land in relation to mining and critical minerals. What does land mean for rural working people? How is new mining linked to renewable energy threatening peoples' lives and livelihoods? What understanding of land, and what kind of land policies could help to create the possibility for more just and less exploitative forms of mining? And what would it take to get there?

Sai Sam Kham is a PhD researcher at the



Illustration by Fourate Chahal El Rekaby

International Institute of Social Studies in the Hague where his research focuses on land politics, national political regime transitions in Myanmar, and how land grabbing interacts with the democratic transition. He came to the Netherlands after more than 10 years working as a social worker engaging with rural agrarian issues in Myanmar.

Itayosara Rojas is a scholar-activist and PhD researcher at the International Institute of Social Studies. Her research focuses on the 'land rush (external link)' in a strategic ecosystem in the Amazon, in Colombia, addressing how the land rush shapes and reshapes the politics of labour, state and citizenship relations and climate change.

Digging Deeper Conversations on Mining and Just Transitions

Mining and land politics

Yukari: Thank you both for joining me! Could you begin by telling us about the relation between mining and land politics in the territories where you and movements you are connected to work?

Itayosara: I do my research in the Colombian Amazon, which is now home to different rural and indigenous communities: nomadic, semi-nomadic, and recently settled indigenous communities. It is home to afro-descendant black communities that were attracted to the region during previous ‘commodity booms’. There are also white and mestizo peasant communities who have been pushed into these areas. This is the history of many land reforms in Latin America: instead of redistributing the most fertile and productive lands, policies were aimed at colonizing a new agricultural frontier. All these communities share the same territory and relate in different ways to each other, to land and to natural resources.

Each of them has different agricultural practices. Many indigenous communities, practice so-called ‘slash-and-burn’ agriculture [where a plot is. But now slash-and-burn agricultural practices are being blamed for increasing cleared and cultivated for a relatively short period of time, then allowed to return to forest for a longer period]. That is how the soil and the landscape of the Amazon has been made deforestation. This is a narrow perspective that doesn’t acknowledge the role of these practices for communities and the ecosystem. Increasing deforestation is not linked to indigenous communities and their traditional livelihoods or agricultural practices but to other more recent changes.

That is why I link this to the global dynamics of the ‘land rush’. [‘The land rush’(external link) refers to the growing pressure on land due to a wide variety of economic and social factors, including increased demand for minerals]. Sometimes these manifests as land grabbing, but pressure on land can also take other forms. We have a portfolio of different economic activities happening right now in the Amazon: extraction of oil, or large hydrocarbon projects, but also speculation around

rare minerals. This is really important. A decade ago debates around coltan [a mineral ore that is important for electronics and a source of niobium] gained a lot of momentum. There was widespread information saying that coltan was available in some parts of the Amazon. However, we didn’t have the technology to establish for sure where.

Indigenous communities in need of income participated in extraction without knowing if they would actually find it or not, based on speculation and rumours. This had a big impact, because they started switching away from agriculture, small-scale forestry and collection of forest products to mining, without having a real base to do so.

These repeated previous patterns of commodity rushes or booms in the region. In the end of the 19th and first half of the 20th Century, we had the ‘rubber rush’ here in the Amazon, remembered as one of the most bloody episodes for indigenous communities. It worked through an indebtedness system, in which a third person arriving in communities provided them with materials to start production and extraction. Then the indigenous communities had to pay them back. With this new cycle of mineral extraction, especially gold, we returned to this same system of indebtedness. Most people come from Brazil, giving tools such as gasoline or a chain saw for communities to start production, and then the community becomes indebted to this person. That is really an unequal exchange.

Mining of rare minerals, especially gold, in the Amazon is now also linked to illicit economies, specifically the coca trade in Colombia. We are experiencing a sort of coca crisis, because coca prices are decreasing. Coca is part of a larger portfolio of illegal activities or economies in the hands of non-state armed groups. So, when coca prices fall, gold prices rise, and these criminal entrepreneurs change from coca trade to gold trade.

Also, most gold mining happens near rivers, where the land is most fertile and suitable for agriculture. So communities are losing access to the most fertile land. The few places where they can engage in agriculture for self-consumption are being taken for mining.

Sai Sam: Thank you so much Ita. The link between the coca crisis and the rise of gold mining makes sense also in the area where I am working. My current research focuses on Northern Shan State [in Myanmar], but as a social worker, my experience is also in Kachin state, in the northern part of Myanmar, bordering China. These areas are both linked to China in terms of trade, movement of labour, movement of goods, and minerals and other raw materials.

Myanmar is located between India and China, with a long history of over 70 years of civil war. In 2011, the conflict in northern Myanmar started again, after the first general election in 50 years. We had what we call a democratic transition between 2010 and 2020, but in 2021 there was a military coup and the country is in crisis at the moment. People are resisting the military take-over, and the military is losing a lot of their territory. Ethnic armed revolutionary groups, as well as students and professionals are staging a civil disobedience movement as well as a very strong, loosely coordinated armed resistance. More and more territories are being taken over by these smaller armed resistance groups. Other large areas are being controlled by the ethnic armed revolutionary groups. So this is the current crisis in Myanmar.

In terms of land grabs and the land rush, we see two waves. In the 1990s the transition from a socialist military dictatorship partially opened the country and invited foreign investment. The government issued the “Wasteland Instructions” [classifying some land as unused and available for development, in a disputed process] and granted land concessions to investors. The rise of opium cultivation in Myanmar around that time is also very much linked to this. So the dynamics of illicit crop cultivation are similar in Colombia and Myanmar. China’s opium eradication policies also affected Myanmar.

From 2008-9 to 2013-15, there were a lot of land concessions granted. Over 1 million acres of land were given to the private sector and individuals. There is no such thing as ‘wasteland’ or ‘unused land’ or ‘wilderness’ in Myanmar, because people depend on the forest and natural resources, using it in their own ways through

informal or customary land tenure and practices.

Renewable energy, climate change and global climate change politics affect Myanmar because we are part of the international community. In the transitions of the 1990s and 2000s, huge parts of the land in Shan state were transformed completely. Traditionally, we practiced agroecological farming – you grow what you eat. But as we started transitioning into cash crops, for example maize, it completely changed the landscape. Maize is an export crop, and what we call flexcrop, or flexible crop: it can be food, animal feed or energy, linked to biofuel production.

So, land grabs are very much linked to opium policies and green energy policies, through the expansion of maize and sugarcane plantations. It’s a very visible transition there.

After Myanmar’s transition to democracy started in 2011, they issued a law called Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Act in 2012. This opened up land to land grabs. Individual land titling, land concessions and commodification of land accelerated land grab in Northern Shan State. Mining is linked to that, similar to the experience in Colombia with gold mining. Gold mining is large across Myanmar, and in Kachin state jade mining is a billion-dollar business.

Rare earth minerals, particularly heavy rare earth elements (HREE) for electric vehicles and wind turbines are heavily produced in Kachin state and Northern Shan State, particularly in the Wa region. Both areas border China, the importer of these materials. In 2023 alone, the value of HREEs from Myanmar to China was 1.4 billion, over 40 thousand tonnes. And to produce that, ‘in situ leaching’ is used: they bore holes in the mountain and pour in chemicals, including oxalic acid and ammonium sulphate. In 2023, Myanmar imported 174,000 tonnes of oxalic acid and 1.5 million tonnes of ammonium sulphate from China for this purpose. All these chemicals poured into the mountain go to the watershed and water systems. The labour and workplace safety situation is also really bad. A few weeks ago, there was a landslide in the rare earth mining area and over 30 people were killed. These areas are also linked to ethnic armed resistance, and ethnic armed revolutionary groups are very much

involved in gold and rare earth mining, and tin mining in the case of Wa state. Wa state exported 48,000 tonnes of tin to China in 2023.

In the end, finished products, such as electric vehicles or wind turbines, produced by China, are used throughout the world, and all these areas where we have conflict are producing, extracting and exporting minerals to support the green energy needs of the rest of the world. The impacts of pollution and conflict related to mining, however, is being borne by ordinary people and peasants in Myanmar, ethnic minorities who are already facing big problems because of conflict and displacement.

Land struggles and mining in the Amazon

Yukari: Thank you so much for sharing. How are communities, indigenous people and local organizations responding to this in your different contexts?

Itayosara: Communities are not homogenous in the Amazon, and they have different ways to gain access to land. Indigenous land struggles, black communities' land struggles and peasant land struggles do not have a common ground that can tie them together. So, the responses to mining are also different. In some cases, indigenous communities take an active part in mining, because they see it as an income possibility. Black communities also have historical links to mining. But in some cases, peasants are against mining, and oppose it

directly. The responses are individual and depend on the context.

Sometimes, rare alliances between people within the territory can also form. In one of the cases I have been working on, some landless people started an alliance with cattle ranchers against oil extraction. Cattle ranchers turned against oil extraction because [companies] have to run lots of pilots before they start. These pilots produce small-scale earthquakes, affecting their lands, and sometimes killing cows. So alliances can happen.

Now, it's not clear if we can move towards a consensus of all the communities against mining. Because, as I was saying, there was a period almost a decade ago in which rare earth minerals became very trendy and lots of communities wanted to engage in the new 'boom' (and bust) cycle. But the responses can be broad. Most cases when communities are against mining, they need an alternative. And often, the alternative is green initiatives, carbon offset schemes. There are many examples, but these alternatives are not always as fair as we might think.

These complexities make us think about how people react, how they engage with these economies, and how they see and understand possible alternatives. When a community engages in a carbon offset scheme, they can no longer use the forest as they used to. So this new momentum of extraction creates unfairness in the whole landscape. The extraction can be of something material and visible, like gold or oil, or the extraction of something we don't see, like the measurement of carbon.

Currently, 54% of the total area of the Amazon has been considered suitable for REDD+ [forest-based carbon capture] projects. This is in the northwest region of the Amazon, called the 'north arc of deforestation', where deforestation rates are actually increasing. REDD+ projects are now taking place there, and people living there could engage with REDD+ initiatives and in that sense more or less stop mining and deforestation.



But that's not happening: mining is continuing and deforestation rates continue increasing. So [REDD+] is a fake solution because it doesn't address the issue. However, rents are being extracted from these places. So someone wins and someone loses due to a socio-ecological problem that has not been fixed yet, because all these solutions are actually part of the problem and not addressing the problem.

The impact of land grabbing in Myanmar

Yukari: Very interesting, indeed false solutions, aside from not addressing the problem, can also further extraction in other ways. Sai Sam could you speak to the question of responses?

Sai Sam: Thank you. It's interesting to hear about the carbon offsetting. In Myanmar there is also a huge land grab: 300,000 acres in the Southern part of the country linked to palm oil plantations, and another 300,000 acres in the northern part for cassava plantations linked to biofuels. These land grabs happened two decades ago, but the area designated for cassava plantations is also claimed by the World Conservation Society as the world's largest tiger conservation area. So, we see green grabbing happening. And in the tiger conservation area, gold and other mining is also happening. The Hkakaborazi National Park [in Kachin state] has also recently been expanded in the name of carbon offsetting. It is an important biodiversity area in the northern part of Myanmar, with snow-capped mountains. It deserves to be protected, but people are not being part of the solution. Internal colonization and oppression of indigenous people continues there, causing loss of access to land and other natural resources they have been using for generations.

We keep seeing international solutions that don't work in the local context. Some of these solutions are based in the North, where there is democracy, stable administration and governance. But in parts of Myanmar, access to education and basic essential services are missing. Many children don't have schools, clinics or hospitals.

I would say communities and people are responding in two ways. Working as a social worker during the democratic transition was a rude awakening for me. We had long been struggling for a democratic transition, and we finally had the first election- in 2015 we voted for the government for the first time, even though the Constitution limited peoples' ability to influence political positions due to unelected military personnel still sitting in Parliament and making policies, laws and all that. But the elected civilian government was very much for taking land from small-holder farmers and giving it to capitalists and corporations. They made very pro-corporate land policies. So, the struggle for land, natural resources and against mining, occurred in many different ways. Some groups tried to form political parties to compete in the elections. Some tried to do policy advocacy to change policies. Civil society groups tried to use existing international platforms, such as the EITI, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, learning about the systemic corruption in the jade, gold and other mining sectors.

Those who grabbed the land and are conducting mining, are the same people sitting in parliament and making laws and policies about mining. They are also the same people regulating mining; the same people taxing mining. They are the same people controlling the export and port authorities. So, basically these state-owned enterprises are controlled by the Myanmar military, or retired personnel from the military. Civil society organizations started to learn this. Without controlling and transforming this sector, any democratic election or transition will be a fake one. The military will always be in control and in power.

People also tried to advocate to the ethnic armed revolutionary groups, because they control large territories where mineral deposits are located. A lot of unregulated mining is happening there. These groups need to finance themselves through this mining, and at the same time, the military is profiting from this mining. That explains the long civil war in Myanmar. Many people started to call it 'ceasefire capitalism' (external link), or 'khaki capitalism (external link)', because capitalist expansion is very much linked to the conflict

and peace situation in Myanmar.

Some groups tried to use the FPIC (Free Prior and Informed Consent) processes, but we all know the problems with FPIC. Even when people get consulted, they have limited information and don't have the power to stop groups taking their land. People also resisted mining, land grabbing and extraction by forming a people's movement, such as the Land in Our Hands movement([external link](#)) or other indigenous people-oriented resistance. This was possible because of the democratic opening.

But all of this changed after the 2021 military coup. The political debates in Myanmar now are about federalism; about greater autonomy where local people can decide policies, laws and mode of development that are going to affect them. People think that federal democracy is the only way local people can control these things. But without the awareness of social structures, social relations, and what is already there, federal democracy alone will not solve our problems. The concern is that the federal democracy we talk about is very much ethno-nationalist inspired, so people try to protect people who are similar to them, or 'belong' to them, excluding others who don't.

There has been a lot of military resistance with ethnic armed revolutionary groups taking huge territories. But the concern is that those who have guns have the power. So we really need to go back to the more democratic base. I understand that for the time being, taking down the military dictatorship is the first priority. But it's worrying that the armed resistance groups are also extracting minerals, grabbing land, going against the will of the local people. We are already seeing some communities clashing with the ethnic armed revolutionary group who they supported their whole life, giving their children to fight successive military dictatorships. They supported these institutions for over 50, 60 years, and they are now turning against them, grabbing their land and doing rare earth mining. We have seen many clashes between the Kachin community and the Kachin Independence Organization movement in the northern part of Myanmar. At one point the chairman himself came out to apologize to the community. But jade mining and

rare earth mining is still a very important source of income for these ethnic armed revolutionary groups to fight against the military dictatorship. So, these are very complex situations.

Myanmar has a Bamar majority and other ethnic minorities. Many minority leaders who control huge territories see federalism as the only way of having power-sharing, resource-sharing or revenue-sharing. The ethnic minorities have long felt that they reside in a huge and mineral rich territory, but whatever is extracted from the region is not fairly distributed.

Development projects - transportation, large infrastructure, electricity, healthcare provision, education - were happening only in the majority-controlled areas. Meanwhile, ethnic minority areas are usually difficult to reach in terms of transportation and geographical location, and have been kind of forgotten. Resources are being extracted from them, but they don't get anything. So it's about redistribution, and also about the provision of services and legitimacy of a governance. So this is where the inspiration [for federalism] comes from.

But the debate is also very much ethnically inspired. Shan people may feel that a Shan government will be fairer to them. We understand the rationale, but there is no guarantee that a Shan government will be fair to everyone living in Shan state. This is the ongoing debate: 'what will the federal units look like?'. Shan state is also a very ethnically diverse state, and many groups are calling to make it into a federated Shan state. So a federal system within the whole national-level federal system. It is a very complex situation.

Itayosara: I would like to follow-up on two key points. The first one is about the division between legal and illegal, especially in extraction processes. Sometimes the mainstream discourse blames only illegal extraction activities, and not the legal, where in fact they are deeply inter-linked. For instance, most of the extraction in Colombia happens in a sort of blurred part, and most policy targets the illegal part. However, all this illegal production ends in the hands of large-scale legal international actors. So the division between legal and

illegal is false, while what is common to both is the expansion of capitalist relations.

We also need to come back to the relationship between political economy and political ecology. When some NGOs in Colombia talk about gold extraction, they focus on whether we, the public, are wearing gold jewellery. But most gold extraction goes into the international reserve of gold of foreign countries, not for jewellery. So the political economy is concerned with: what happens to the gold in the end? What is produced? Who gains what? Who gains the profit from this? It's not the same if these products are produced for large-scale for international trade or for a short-circuit of trade. They have different impacts on socio-ecological relations.

On the complexities around federalism that Sai Sam mentioned, here in Colombia, we do not have the question of federalism, but we have the question of decentralization, giving space for regions that have been marginalized in the national project. But we cannot romanticize this - decentralization can end up giving more power to local elites. It's not just a matter of centralization or decentralization: power dynamics don't follow a single national logic. As Sai Sam said, federalism is not going to solve all our problems, including the problem of democratization in our society. The same with decentralization in Colombia; it will not resolve the question of how to redistribute access to resources, how to redistribute wealth.

Closing remarks

Yukari: Do you both want to say some closing remarks?

Itayosara: One way we, as scholar-activists, can act upon these conflict dynamics is to recognize that it's not just about one single case in one state, or one country. It's a structural, global dynamic, transforming and changing every day. So, we need to also elaborate global common goals to pursue struggles for land access and fairness in the distribution of natural resources. We need a common blanket for all of us.

There are some elaborations in that direction, like 'agrarian climate justice' that considers environmental

and climate dimensions of land struggles, and the meaning of transition in the countryside. To have just transitions in the sectors of energy, mining, we need a transition in agrarian social relations. So that's how this umbrella or blanket of 'agrarian climate justice' might be helpful, and also its 5Rs [Recognition, Restitution, Redistribution, Regeneration, and Representation/Resistance] as principles.

The 5Rs can take different forms in different parts of the world. In the Colombian Amazon I have explored them in the sense that: we need redistribution of land that is highly concentrated or is used in ways that are not beneficial for people or ecosystems, like cattle or oil palm. We also need the restitution of rights - including land rights - for people who have been dispossessed because of the armed conflict. Not the restitution of the single land plot, but of the whole rights around that. We need the regeneration of soils that were used in terrible conditions, degraded and made unsuitable for sustaining the life of people. We also need the recalibration of our socio-ecological relations: we need to think of alternatives that are fair with us, and as part of nature. And the last one is representation, which means that a just transition in energy, mining and agrarian settings, must be in the hands of the people who live there. It must be in the hands of indigenous peoples, black communities and peasants in the case of the Amazon.

Yukari: Thank you so much Ita. Sai Sam, do you want to add to what Ita said about the 5Rs? Or about global common goals?

Sai Sam: Like Ita said, the phenomena we are seeing are not just local but very much linked to global phenomena of renewable energy, green energy, climate justice and expansion of capitalism. When we started working with peasant communities in Myanmar, people would feel that the issue was too big, that you could not do anything. But we also cannot just 'think global act local'. 'Act local' is not enough. A local person can do something but, in the middle of the land rush, it matters that this is a global phenomenon: the World Bank's sudden interest in land and agricultural investment; the geopolitical currents affecting us through China. China



is interested in railway access to the Indian ocean and providing energy to its provinces, such as Yunnan, with oil and gas pipelines through Myanmar. Ethnic revolutionary groups are increasingly controlling the area, being hugely influenced by China. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Myanmar economic corridors are seen as opportunities for economic development, but the concern is what will happen for people, small farmers, peasants and the environment.

Myanmar is also a very food insecure country. People say that it is due to the conflict, because we have more than enough land and water. But there are many questions around the way we produce food and conduct our economy. We are starting to talk about food sovereignty, what Via Campesina has been advocating for a long time. Food sovereignty is not just about food production. It is also about sovereignty of land and sovereignty of seeds. A lot of the solutions in Myanmar are revolving around ethnic federalism, federal democracy. But, as Ita was saying, the '5Rs' - recognition, redistribution, restitution, regeneration and representation - are very important principles.

People are hoping for a democratic transition: a federal constitution and federal elections to control our autonomy, future, resources, mining, all of that. But we also need to think about fair representation of the people affected by the expansion of mining, and regeneration of communities so that they have the power to conduct their own affairs. That includes regeneration of ecology, but also regeneration of political organizations. Regeneration of economy is very important, and regeneration of the

spirituality which binds people together. We cannot just use a democratic transition model from the West, we also need to understand what brings people together in this part of the world. Spirituality is a very important part of it.

Myanmar has a history of over 70 years of civil conflict and mass displacement. For the Rohingya people in the western part of Myanmar, for the Shan, Karen and

Kachin people who have been displaced for over 30, 40 years, there are land disputes between those who were displaced and those who took over these lands. So, land reform and especially land redistribution is very important and complex.

Finally, solutions that fully hinge on electoral democracy are not enough. Election in Myanmar is 4-year kind of cycle, and there is no democratic government who has the courage to take over land reform, for example, or talk about redistribution of wealth and control. The current political structures, the current social and class structure, will not allow this. No political party has the courage to do that and face the backlash. As someone coming from the agroecology movement and humanitarian work in conflict areas, these solutions have to link with the democratic transition. We want to see democracy not only in terms of electoral democracy and electoral transition, but transition in the social structures also. How do we bring people together in political struggle, among small peasants and migrant labourers? It does not matter if it's a military dictatorship or ethnic armed revolutionary groups taking over territory, as long as ordinary people have no say, this is not a democracy. Land - land reform, land redistribution - is at the foundation of all the changes that we want to see, the just transition that we want to see.

We used to have a people's movement for land rights in Myanmar, and now the hype is 'those who hold the weapons have the power'. But the urgent question is: how are we going to communicate with the ethnic armed revolutionary groups who are controlling territory now?

Some people call these groups ‘non-state actors’. But I kind of disagree because they are basically forming a new state. They have political and military power, and administration of the land and natural resources. So we need to work with them to make sure they understand the political economy of resources, of mining and other extraction, towards greater fairness and justice.

Many tonnes of rare earth minerals are being extracted from Myanmar. Because of the nature of illegality or conflict kind of minerals, these groups are receiving a fraction of the market price. It’s cheap because they are doing in situ extraction methods, a very reckless way of doing mining.

China also needs to consider about buying unregulated minerals from Myanmar. They can pressure suppliers to adopt more environmentally friendly ways of extraction. But for us, the local people, polluting industries that are not benefitting us must be stopped, at least until we have a democratic government, and these industries can be regulated.



World Meditation Foundation

The World Meditation Foundation (WMF) is a non-political and trans-religious non-profit organization registered in the Principality of Liechtenstein, Europe. WMF was founded by proponents of establishing a “World Meditation Day” and is willing to be guided by the “World Meditation Day Committee.” The mission of WMF is to promote a meditative lifestyle globally, advocate for the physical and mental health benefits of meditation, protect people from the disruptive impacts of technologies such as AI, and help individuals achieve the highest levels of physical and mental well-being.

<https://www.worldmeditationfoundation.org/>

Who are the end-users of electric vehicles or wind turbines? Countries with green energy policies, global supply chains where rare earth minerals from Myanmar are being used for wind turbines and such. So the responsibility and solution should not depend only on Myanmar people. It needs international action to trace the origin of minerals, the conditions under which they are being extracted, and think about accountability.

These are important, concrete and practical things to organize a people’s movement. In Myanmar, what is more practical for us at the moment is to approach these different power centres and try to shift the way of thinking and how they conduct mining and mineral extraction.

Yukari: Thank you so much Sai Sam. Indeed, at the local level it’s very difficult for international movements to monitor and know what’s going on right now, or how to push for greater accountability.

Sai Sam: I would like to share that all the information that I have and provided is being researched by local and international researchers. Particularly for the Myanmar researchers, it’s a very risky business. In some of the rare earth mining areas in the Northern Kachin, whoever enters the region must leave their phone. If you are not the local people, you are not allowed to go in. I would just like to say that there are groups and people taking risks to monitor and to inform us, and to help us strategize and organize our resistance, our strategy for fair and just energy transitions.

I have said less about the labour conditions in extraction process: workers lack any protection, suffer daily exposure to toxic chemicals, without paid pension, and limited access to land for their own use. We also need to think about labour in terms of solidarity. Chinese labour in China, or Myanmar migrant labour working in these industries, refining to produce batteries for electrical bikes for example. We often focus on extraction itself, but labour is also critical.

Yukari: Thank you so much Sai Sam and Ita for sharing your time and knowledge.

On Sombath's Birthday

by Shui Meng



2005 - Study visit to Bhutan where Sombath learned about the concept of Gross National Happiness - GNH. Sombath is in the back row, 3rd from the right.

My dearest Sombath,

Today, 17 February, marks your 73rd birthday. For the last 12 years, since your abduction in 2012, you have not celebrated your birthday at home with me and the rest of the family. But, every year whenever your birthday comes around, I feel a special tug at my heart, wishing that you are with me at home with your loved ones, as it should be like everyone else.

I can now only imagine that if you are here with us for your birthday, I would be either taking you out for a birthday meal with the family, or making something that you like, like “larb” fish and bamboo shoot soup. Your taste has always been simple, but you always like fresh foods from nature.

My dearest Sombath, now that you are not with us, I can only send you a birthday prayer, praying that wherever you are, you are still well. I can only send you hugs and blessings for happiness, good health and peace. My dearest Sombath, may you be well, may you be happy.

You are not only remembered today on your

birthday. You are close to my heart everyday. In fact, with the passing of time, and as I get older, I hold you even closer to me in my heart and in my mind.

Sombath, I just want to let you know that I have set up the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund (SSMF) to be managed by the Foundation established by your mentor, Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa. I set up the SSMF to specifically make sure that your passion for supporting education through youth and community engagement will go on.

The SSMF is set up to provide small grants to support young people from the Mekong sub-region who are working on innovative projects in their schools or communities for improvement of learning or livelihoods in their communities.

The SSMF has now completed its second year of operation, and the supported projects are really very creative and interesting, with most projects focusing on innovative and joyful learning for children from migrant or disadvantaged families, and engagement of schools and communities in environmental protection and reforestation, or small animal raising for income improvement and nutritional support to poor families, and so on. The success of these projects has validated your belief that people's development must be rooted on analysis of their own problems, and solutions must come from people taking actions themselves.

In setting up the SSMF, I also hope that your legacy and ideas will be continued through the work of the younger generation in the region, and your memory be continued into the future.

Love you always,
Shui Meng

A Penetrative Understanding of The Five Aggregates in Buddhism

by **Venerable Zinai**

Good morning, respected venerable, ladies, and gentlemen,

Today, I would like to explore how a penetrative understanding of the Five Aggregates in Buddhism can foster the actualization of socially engaged spirituality. By delving deeply into the nature of our existence, through the Five Aggregates taught by the Buddha, we can cultivate compassion, empathy, and a sense of interconnectedness that leads to meaningful and creative social actions.

I. Understanding the Five Aggregates

The Five Aggregates, or Skandhas, form the cornerstone of Buddhist psychology. They represent various components that constitute our sense of self:

1. Form (Rūpa): The physical body and the material world.
2. Feeling (Vedanā): Sensations from physical and mental experiences.
3. Perception (Saññā): The process of cognizing and interpreting sensory information.
4. Mental Formations (Saṅkhārā): Thoughts, emotions, and volitional activities.
5. Consciousness (Viññāṇa): Awareness of the other four aggregates.

II. Penetrative Understanding of the Five Aggregates

To have a penetrative understanding means to see beyond the superficial and comprehend the deep, interconnected nature of these aggregates, revealing that what we consider “self” is a constantly changing collection of processes.

III. Key Insights

1. Impermanence: Recognizing the fleeting nature of each aggregate helps us understand that

clinging to a fixed identity leads to suffering.

2. Interdependence: Understanding that our physical bodies are supported by others’ hard work fosters a sense of interconnectedness and appreciation.
3. Non-Self: Realizing the absence of a permanent self can lead to liberation from ego-centered thinking.

IV. Cultivating Spiritually-Inspired Social Action

Socially engaged spirituality integrates spiritual practice with social action. By applying insights from the Five Aggregates, we can nurture a spirituality that is both deep and practical.

V. Applications

1. Develop Compassion: Understanding that all beings are composed of the same aggregates helps us empathize with others.
2. Promoting Social Justice: Seeing beyond the illusion of a fixed self encourages flexibility in social roles and working toward equality and justice.
3. Building Community: Recognizing our interdependence nurtures a sense of community and collective well-being.

V. Enhancing Socially Engaged Spirituality with Wise Attention (Yoniso manasikāra)

Wise attention involves directing our minds toward wholesome and skillful thoughts and perceptions, which can significantly help in building socially engaged spirituality.

Key Benefits:

1. Mindful Awareness: Developing mindfulness allows full presence and awareness in interactions.
2. Discerning Right Action: Promotes ethical and compassionate behavior.

3. Reducing Negative Mental States: Focusing on wholesome thoughts reduces negative mental states.
4. Fostering Empathy and Compassion: Better understanding and empathizing with others' suffering.

Practical Steps

1. Mindfulness and Meditation: Regular practice to gain deeper insights into the aggregates.
2. Education and Dialogue: Engaging in discussions about the Five Aggregates to inspire social action.
3. Volunteering and Activism: Applying spiritual insights through community service and social justice initiatives.
4. Practicing Wise Attention: Maintaining a focus on wholesome thoughts and skillful actions.

5. Being Aware of Unwise Attention: Actively redirecting unwise attention towards more constructive thoughts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a penetrative understanding of the Five Aggregates offers profound insights that can transform our spiritual practice and motivate social engagement. By recognizing the impermanent, interconnected, and non-self nature of our existence, and enhancing it with the practice of *yoniso manasikāra*, we can lead happier lives and contribute to a harmonious society.

Thank you.

S

Statement Affirming the Continuation of the Institution of Dalai Lama



July 2, 2025

Source: *His Holiness, THE 14th DALAI LAMA OF TIBET*,
<https://www.dalailama.com/news/statement-affirming-the-continuation-of-the-institution-of-dalai-lama>
 (Translated from the original Tibetan)

On 24 September 2011, at a meeting of the heads of Tibetan spiritual traditions, I made a statement to fellow Tibetans in and outside Tibet, followers of Tibetan Buddhism, and those who have a connection with Tibet and Tibetans, regarding whether the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue. I stated, “As far back as 1969, I made clear that concerned people should decide whether the Dalai Lama’s reincarnations should continue in the future.”

I also said, “When I am about ninety I will consult the high Lamas of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Tibetan public, and other concerned people who follow Tibetan Buddhism, to re-evaluate whether or not the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue.”

Although I have had no public discussions on this issue, over the last 14 years leaders of Tibet’s spiritual traditions, members of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile, participants in a Special General Body Meeting, members of the Central Tibetan Administration, NGOs, Buddhists from the Himalayan region, Mongolia, Buddhist republics of the Russian Federation and Buddhists in Asia including mainland China, have written to me with reasons, earnestly requesting that the institution of the Dalai Lama continue. In particular, I have received messages through various channels from Tibetans in Tibet making the same appeal. In accordance with all these requests, I am affirming that the institution of the Dalai Lama will continue.

The process by which a future Dalai Lama is to be recognized has been clearly established in the 24 September 2011 statement which states that responsibility for doing so will rest exclusively with members of the Gaden Phodrang Trust, the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They should consult the various heads of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions and the reliable oath-bound Dharma Protectors who are linked inseparably to the lineage of the Dalai Lamas. They should accordingly carry out the procedures of search and recognition in accordance with past tradition.

I hereby reiterate that the Gaden Phodrang Trust has sole authority to recognize the future reincarnation; no one else has any such authority to interfere in this matter.

Dalai Lama
 Dharmashala
 21 May 2025

Thank you for your support for Joint Statement from Asian CSOs

from: Junghee Min <secretariat@ice-network.org>
to: 민정희 <mujin21@gmail.com>

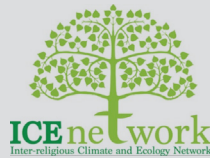
I am happy to share with you that 86 organizations/institutions, and about 450 activists around Asia signed to the Joint Statement from Asian CSOs: G20, End Fossil Fuels and Scale Up Climate Finance.

THANK YOU for contributing - I am attaching the list of the organization and activist with this message. We had a press meeting in front of the U.S. embassy in Seoul and handed the statement to the embassies of member countries of the G20 and the host country of COP 29, Azerbaijan early November.

I am also sharing with you some of the photos that show the scenes of the press meeting.

1. Link to the list of the organization and activist <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PEjDGeBdoDtkiHuTA7CxguveFJs0uBfcrQXk1pXeXMw/edit?usp=sharing>
2. Link to the photos of the press meeting https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1O3XNjO_M3L_YyzA8LDMiLDn2C2po8MOh

Thank you !
Junghee



국제기후종교시민(ICE)네트워크
Inter-religious Climate and Ecology(ICE) Network

Appreciation from Ven. Pomnyun Sunim

Dear Ajarn Sulak Sulak Sivaraksa,

Thank you for your congratulatory letter for the Peace Foundation's 20th anniversary celebration.

I am pleased to share the attached summary of our 20th anniversary celebration.

Your support has been instrumental in advancing the Peace Foundation's important work.

We look forward to continuing our collaboration and contributing to peace-building initiatives in the years ahead.

Best regards,

Eun Kyung Kim,

The secretary of the peace foundation,
On behalf of Ven. Pomnyun Sunim,
the chairperson of Peace Foundation
<peacefoundation20th anniversary.pdf>



Beverly N Doug

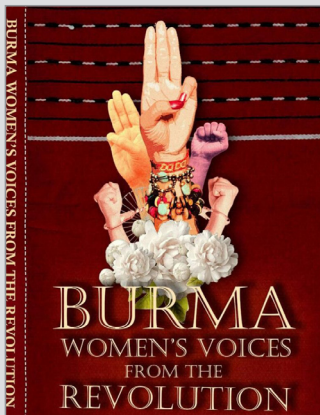
Jul 1 · 🌐

Please join me in my prayers for Joanna Macy, one of my most cherished mentors as she crosses over.

She is a beloved elder to many, across our Living Earth. I am incredibly sad to see her cross over. She is 96.

If you are so moved please join me in my Prayers for her as she makes her sacred journey to join the Ancestors.

Recommended Reading



*Burma
Women's Voices
from the Revolution*

ALTSEAN Burma 2025

In Loving Memory of Nilchawee Sivaraksa

27 May 1936 - 3 January 2025

By **Anchalee Kurutach**



Painted by Phisal Thiparat

Nilchawee Sivaraksa passed away on January 3, 2025, in Bangkok. Her passing was deeply felt throughout the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF) communities, and most profoundly by her beloved family. Her surviving husband of 61 years, our very own Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, has often said that the most fortunate decision he ever made was to ask Khun Nilchawee to marry him.

At an interview with a youth group early this year, Ajarn Sulak was asked to share some of his most profound moments in his life. He paused for a second before talking about the morning his wife passed away: "At 4:00 a.m., my wife called our daughter to check on me because she dreamed that I had fallen down. I was fine - but then she died at 10:00 a.m." Knowing that her last thought of him was rooted in the loving care and concern for his well-being is the greatest and most profound gift he ever received.

While many knew Khun Nilchawee primarily as the wife of Siam's most well-known intellectual, she was so much more. She was a home economics teacher at a finishing college. She managed a publishing

company, translated books, and for decades ran a household that welcomed the never-ending stream of visitors at all hours! A devoted mother of two amazing daughters and a son, Khun Nilchawee was patient, strong, elegant, and kind. She truly embodied integrity, grace and genuine beauty!

Khun Nilchawee met Ajarn Sulak at his younger brother's wedding in the early 1960s. Captivated by her presence, the young Sulak made every effort to get to know her and eventually asked for her hand in marriage. Khun Nilchawee was from a beautiful and serene riverside community in Uthai Thani, a place Ajarn Sulak always cherishes. In fact, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) was born on a raft floating in the river in front of Khun Nilchawee's family home.

Throughout their life together, Khun Nilchawee remained unconditionally supportive of Sulak, accompanying him during his times in exile in the U.S. and Europe. She stood by him, quietly and resolutely, through his ups and downs. Ajarn Sulak has said that Khun Nilchawee 'sustained him,' and described her as honest and had a very good, solid character.' Her attributes and constancy were there throughout sixty years of marriage that was celebrated on November 27, 2024.

During Khun Nilchawee's funeral at Wat Thong Noppakun, hundreds of guests and dignitaries showed up to honor her life. Among them were Venerable P. Payutto and other senior monastics, former prime ministers and state representatives, members of SNF and INEB, many grassroots communities, as well as academics, artists, and writers. Venerable Phaisal Visalo delivered a sermon at the cremation. The entire community came together to pay tribute to this remarkable woman, who embodied the finest virtues of a bygone generation.

*Ajarn Sulak and Khun Nilchawee and the announcement
of Nilchawee's Funeral Ceremony*



Condolence Messages to the Sivaraksa family

Dear Achan Sulak,

I'm sorry to hear that Pi Nin has passed away and I wanted to send you my condolences on the loss of your heart companion of many, many years. She seemed to be a lovely, quiet, gentle, and stable presence whenever I visited your home at Thanon Naret in those early years of my time in Thailand. I appreciated the sense of steadfastness that she emanated and I am sorry for this loss to your family.

I hope you are well. By way of an update, I am still living in Chiang Mai, happily retired for six years and not editing at all due to a very weak hand and wrist from so many years of editing in my younger days. I'm involved in other activities that are better for me now. Today, I had lunch with Jiw, my former employer, so I try to stay in touch with old friends who are still around.

May you find peace and comfort in the good and beautiful things in life, including life itself. It's impressive that you are still speaking out strongly about issues of concern in Thai society. I pray God's blessings of continued good health and strength for you in this new year.

**With my best regards,
Suesan Offner**

January 4, 2025

Dear Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa,

We were surprised and saddened to hear the unexpected news of your wife's passing.

Niwano Peace Foundation and I extend our deepest sympathies to you and her family.

Our sincere condolence,

**You are in our thoughts,
Hiroshi Niwano**

Chair of the board of directors
Niwano Peace Foundation

Dear Ajarn Sulak,

Therese and I send our heartfelt condolences to you and your family on the passing of Nin.

**With loving, best wishes,
Arnie Kotler**

Dear Dr. Ajan Sulak Shivaraksha,

I was deeply saddened to hear about the passing of your beloved wife. Please accept my heartfelt condolences during this difficult time.

Her life was a testament to love, kindness, and grace, and I hope the cherished memories you shared bring you comfort and strength.

May her soul find eternal peace and attain Nibbana.

You and your family are in my thoughts and prayers. If there is any way I can support you during this time, please do not hesitate to let me know.

With deepest sympathy,

Most Ven. Dr. Madampagama Assaji Mahanayaka Thero
Amarapura Maha Nikaya

- Advisory Board Member – INEB Sri Lanka

Dear Sulak,

I was sorry to hear of Pi Nilchawee's passing. I remember her grace and kindness whenever I visited Soi Santiphap.

Sulak, may I share with you a poem I wrote after the death of my mother, Rose:

Touching Rose's Hands

Touching Rose's folded hands,
Cold, but still with a softness,
That I know as part of the love,
With which she cared for me,
Since my first day.

Squeeze her hand one last time,
Remember the gentle smile,
That seemed to radiate,
Throughout her life,
So many times t'ward me.

I kiss her forehead.
Saying farewell my heart chokes,
As I leave her, small and frail,
At rest in the white sheets,
And walk into the night under a lonely sky.

John McConnell

4th December 2010

While our loved one no longer has physical being, the spiritual dimension of the relationship is still there in our own heart and mind.

As I write I share metta with you, and with Nilchawee for her journey.

**With metta and in friendship,
John**



John B. Cobb

1925 - 2024

I just received confirmation that my grandfather, John B. Cobb, Jr., has passed away at the age of 99. The founder of process theology, his work spanned far beyond the field of theology into interdisciplinary approaches to ecology, economics, biology and social ethics.

Born in Kobe, Japan, to Methodist missionaries, he later served in World War 2, primarily in Washington, but he also helped with the reconstruction of post-war Japan, where he saw what remained of their old house in Hiroshima.

After he got out of the army, he married my grandmother and studied at the University of Chicago, where he was introduced to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. His integration of Whitehead's philosophy into Christianity became known as process theology.

Though I often disagreed with him and came to question many aspects of process, I can honestly say I always admired and looked up to him. He was a true trailblazer and an intellectual titan.

I think I was in college when I first came to understand his significance. To me growing up, he was just granddad. But as I started seeking to develop my own intellectual understanding of the world, his work was a major jumping-off point for me.

In the past couple of decades, his work has become increasingly influential in China, not for the theological aspects, but in influencing China's initiative for an ecological civilization. He has founded over 30 process

centers in China, where the movement continues to grow.

We were hoping he would make it to his 100th birthday in February, but it looks like we will have his memorial service then instead. While this Christmas was difficult sitting at his bedside and watching him fade away, I'm glad to share some of his last days with him.

Sulak Sivaraksa's Tribute to John Cobb

I am very sad at the passing of John Cobb, he was 99. He was a unique person and very rare among our contemporaries. John Cobb was a leading Christian and he taught at many Christian seminaries. Most of his students were influenced by him who cared not only to overcome personal suffering but social suffering, as well as environmental suffering.

He would collaborate with non-Christians, especially Buddhists. We have a Buddhist-Christian Theological encounter meeting every 2 years in the name of Cobb Ethics World Day – Japanese Buddhists who were disciples of D.T. Suzuki. But the leading person was John Cobb, and I was privileged to be invited to this group through my good friend by my good friend David Chappell, who was the first editor of journal of this group. Unfortunately, David also passed away before John Cobb. Both were tremendous people. David was a Buddhist, John was a Christian, but we collaborated together. John Cobb even canonized me. He called me 'Censorer.' He told me that in Protestantism to canonize a person was simple, unlike in Catholicism where the process was elaborate and had to be approved by the Pope.

John Cobb was willing to learn from the Catholics, or the Muslim, from anybody. He was inspired by E.F. Schumacher's Buddhist economics. So, he wrote one, Christian Economics [*Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy*]. It was a big book, which he asked me to present a copy to James Wolfensohn who was then the president of the World Bank. Anything which would improve humankind, John Cobb would get involved. And, he often got me involved, too. He was energetic, even in his old age. I really miss him. I am sure that he is now in heaven with God. And that he may be in the Western paradise with Amitābha Buddha, too.



Remembering Alan Senauke

Obituary by Colleen Busch

Source: *San Francisco Zen Center – Sangha News* –
 posted February 24, 2025 – Please use this link to read the full obituary -
<https://blogs.sfzc.org/blog/2025/02/24/remembering-alan-senauke/>



Hozan Alan Senauke

December 13, 1947 -
 December 22, 2024

Hozan Kushiki Alan Senauke, abbot of Berkeley Zen Center, died late in the day on December 22, 2024, in Berkeley, California. He'd suffered a cardiac arrest in December 2023. While he was able to return home and resume some of his abbot duties, he never fully recovered. He was 77 years old.

Hozan helped Berkeley Zen Center (BZC) maintain stability and a depth of practice during a time of grief and uncertainty. He became abbot in January of 2021 during the covid pandemic, after the death of Sojun Mel Weitsman, the first abbot and founder of BZC. Whether you called him by his Dharma name Hozan or knew him as Alan depends on which circle of his life you were part of—and there were many circles, overlapping in resonant harmony.

Born in Brooklyn, New York on Dec 13, 1947, to Lillian Weiss Senauke Stein and Isaac “Lish” Senauke, Hozan grew up in a secular Jewish family, the

eldest of five children. He was attuned to matters of social justice early—a Bob Dylan doppelganger strumming protest songs on his guitar and bussing to Washington D.C. in 1963 for the March for Peace and Freedom, where he heard Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

In the San Francisco Bay Area later in 1968, Hozan was exposed to Soto Zen practice at San Francisco Zen Center and BZC, both established with the guidance of the late Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, author of *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*. But it wasn’t until the early 1980s that he found his home, with his teacher, BZC founder Hakuryu Sojun Mel Weitsman. Hozan moved in, became a priest, married fellow Zen student Laurie Schley, and raised a family.

Hozan Kushiki, the name Alan was given by his teacher, means *Dharma Mountain, Formless Form*. Demonstrating his characteristic insight and nimble wit, he later wrote that he chose to go by Hozan rather than Kushiki because he wasn’t comfortable being known as Mr. Formless Form. Though he was a penetrating thinker, his way as a teacher, and a parent, was not to pressure or direct. He asked questions. He listened. But when his daughter took up mandolin and his son dove into Zen, two of his life’s treasures, he was happy and proud.

During his tenure as abbot, Hozan led BZC collaboratively,

fostering inclusivity and working to skillfully address privilege, bias, and what he called “systems of suffering.” He cultivated interfaith partnerships and a new generation of leadership, supporting women teachers and helping young and diverse practitioners take up Zen practice. Previously, he’d served as president of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association and taught in the Buddhist chaplaincy program at Upaya Zen Center in New Mexico. He facilitated meditation behind bars at the now-shuttered women’s federal prison in Dublin, California, protested capital punishment in the fog and rain outside San Quentin state prison, and befriended writer and Buddhist practitioner Jarvis Jay Masters, an innocent man on death row.

Hozan served as executive director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship from 1991 through 2001. Attending the general conference of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) in 1991, he traveled to the headquarters of a student and ethnic rebel alliance on the border of Thailand and Myanmar. When the village was bombed by the government air force during his visit, Hozan experienced firsthand the visceral suffering of people living under military dictatorship. He made more border visits over the years, sometimes clandestinely, and collaborated with an American Theravada Buddhist monk, the Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, to support young, engaged Buddhists in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Hozan was also instrumental in efforts to define Buddhist social engagement and develop clear critiques of modern society through a Buddhist lens. These efforts grew into Think Sangha, a collection of activists and thinkers exploring

creative solutions to social issues like economic globalization, consumerism, and technology. He took part in the World Faiths Development Dialogue, a series of World Bank conferences that gathered international religious leaders to reframe the meaning of development not solely in economic terms.

During this period, Hozan's bodhisattva path snapped into focus for him. (A bodhisattva, in Mahayana Buddhism, defers his or her awakening until *all* beings are awakened.) A natural networker, his was a boots-on-the-ground activism, and he traveled abroad frequently to meet with Buddhist communities. In the early 2000s, Hozan became involved with Dalits in India—former “untouchables” who followed their leader Dr. B. R. Ambedkar into leaving the Hindu caste system behind and taking up Buddhist practice. In 2007, he formed Clear View Project, a nonprofit providing material relief and connecting Buddhists in North America with movements for social change in Buddhist Asia. He was especially beloved by his many students at the Nagaloka Training Institute in Nagpur, India, whom he taught to apply the Buddha's and Martin Luther King's teachings to their lives—and entertained on his guitar.

Hozan authored several books in which he shared his lived understanding of the Dharma: *Heirs to Ambedkar: The Rebirth of Engaged Buddhism in India* (Clear View Press), *The Bodhisattva's Embrace: Dispatches from Engaged Buddhism's Front Lines* (Clear View Press) and *Turning Words* (Shambhala). A bodhisattva's path is not easy. It requires stepping out of one's zones of comfort and knowing. At times irritable, impatient, and self-doubting, Hozan took refuge in the

Buddha's teachings, in music and literature, in family and friendship—and in simple pleasures like watching old movies on the Criterion channel. In a powerful 2012 piece in *Inquiring Mind*, he shared the teachings found in his personal experience with depression and anxiety: “There is a message in depression. Things in life are roiling. Change is afoot. After years of practice I sense this even in hard times. If I can bear it, see through it, depression becomes the harbinger of transformation.”

Lines from an early poem Hozan wrote about zazen (meditation)—“The walls step back and lie down/ When I sit”—point to the powerful recognition of the truth of no separation, especially when that recognition is carried off the cushion into the troubled wider world. Awakened activity, he believed, is asking, *How do I want to act in the face of this?* Violence was never his answer. “I am unwilling to kill or harm another person in the service of my beliefs,” he wrote in *The Bodhisattva's Embrace*. Hozan taught that turning towards suffering is to become truly human,

and that impermanence, often the cause of suffering, can be a source of comfort. In the last year of his life, bed-bound but with heart and mind burning bright, he drew on these teachings to meet his difficult circumstances and received an outpouring of love and gratitude that he found astonishing.

Hozan leaves behind five Dharma heirs and many students and friends in the global Buddhist community. He is survived by siblings Suzie Senauke Laskin, Scott Senauke, Lisa Senauke, and Tracey Stein West, wife Laurie Schley Senauke, also a transmitted Zen priest, daughter Silvie Senauke (Cooper Long), and son Genpo Alexander Senauke.

San Francisco Zen Center mourns the loss of our good friend, teacher, and brother in the Dharma. May his teachings and practice touch us all, bringing wisdom and compassion into our lives and to the wider world.

S



A global gathering for local solutions, high in the Himalayas

<https://www.localfutures.org/events/planet-local-summit-ladakh-2025/>



Participants of the 21st INEB Biennial International Conference, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Photo by INEB.