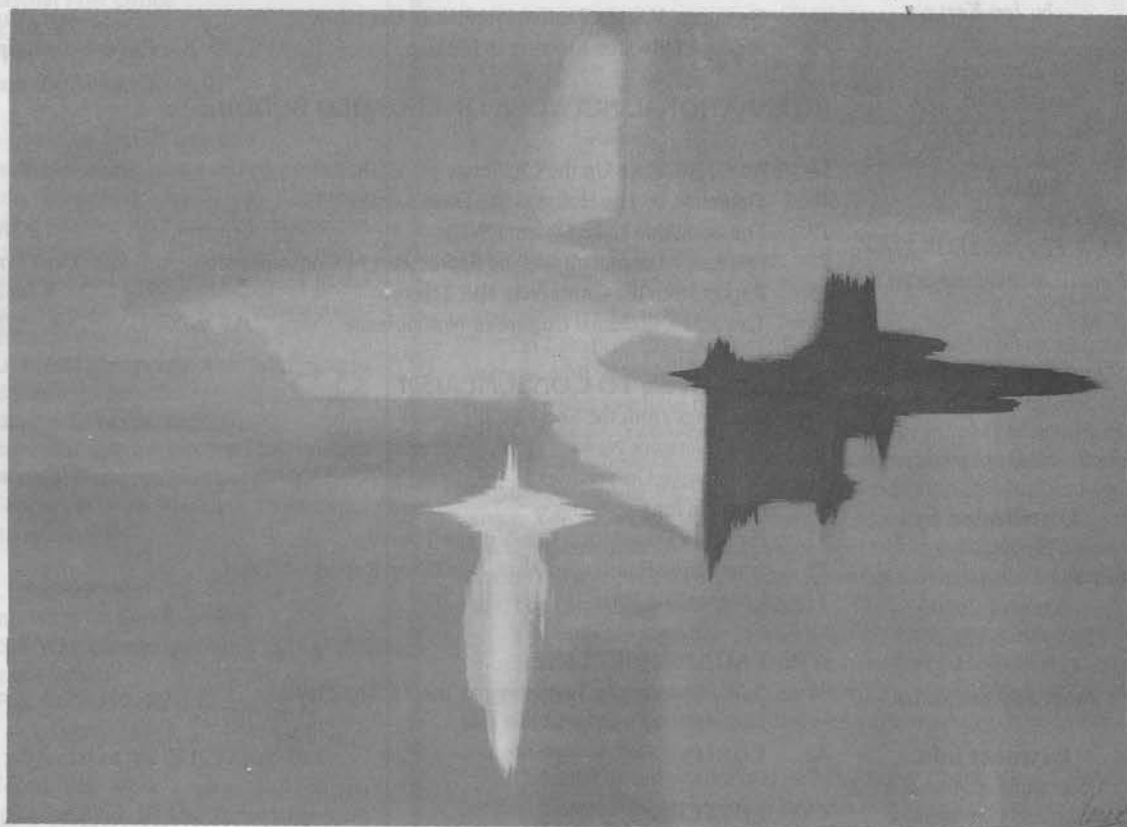


# SEEDS OF PEACE

Vol.14 No.3 Sept.-Dec. 2541 (1998)

## Human Rights and Responsibilities

### "Equilibrium"



*all human rights for all*

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

**1948-1998**



# SEEDS OF

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ATC

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# PEACE

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INEB  
P.O.Box 19  
Mahadthai Post Office  
Bangkok 10206  
Tel./Fax [662-]433-7169  
E-mail: ineb@loxinfo.co.th

## The goals of INEB are to :

1. Promote understanding and co-operation among Buddhist countries, different Buddhist sects, and socially conscious Buddhist groups.
2. Facilitate and carry out solutions to the many problems facing our communities, societies, and world.
3. Articulate the perspective of Engaged Buddhism regarding these problems and train Buddhist activists accordingly.
4. Serve as a clearing house of information on existing Engaged Buddhist groups.
5. Cooperate with activists from other spiritual traditions.

Thai Inter-Religious  
Commission for Development  
124 Soi Wat Thongnophakun  
Bangkok 10600  
Tel/Fax: 66-2-437-9450

## The objectives of TICD are to :

1. Coordinate work among individuals, groups of individuals and various agencies dealing with religions and development in the course of working together.
2. Share experience in and knowledge of religions and development as well as exploring ways and means of working together.
3. Offer training and secure resources in terms of man-power and materials to support and enhance the agencies that need help.



## WAT BOVORANIVES VIHARA

248 Phra Sumera Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand. Tel: 281-2831-3. Fax: 285-0343



Ref. 342/2541

5 July, 1998

To  
His Holiness Dalai Lama  
Dharmashala, U.P. India.

Your Holiness,

I remember so well that you were very kind to sending me your greeting and your gifts on my 84th birthday.

As it will soon be your birthday, I will pray for you on that day and I understand that there will be cultural activities in Bangkok in your honour all through this month. This is being organized by the Tibetan Study Centre and other affiliates.

May you have good health and long life in order to be living compassion to all beings for many more years to come. May you tirelessly guide the Tibetans and others on the path of love and nonviolence. And may Tibet be free from oppression.

Sincerely yours in the Dhamma,

*S.D. Phra Nyanasamvara*

H.H. Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara,  
Sangharaja of Thailand.

The Hague, July 28, 1998

Dear Mr Sulak Sivaksa,

On behalf of the first Awards Committee of the **Unrepresented Nations and People Organisation** it gives me great pleasure to announce that you have been chosen to receive one of two of the 1998 UNPO-Awards. You were selected from a large number of nominees.

You have been chosen for your deep commitment to peace and non-violence as well as for your courageous leadership and inspiration to others. You have over the years been an articulate and daring voice of peace, human rights and social justice, not only in your native Thailand, where you have been for forty years an outspoken advocate for democracy, but also in international arena.

You embody the spirit in which UNPO was created; the spirit of co-operation, of sharing, yet with respect for the differences, and empathy for their problems. You are a source of inspiration, motivation and solidarity to everyone who believes in democracy, human rights and self-determination.

The other award winner is Buddhist Master Cheng Yen of Taiwan for her devoted efforts over many decades that have touched the lives in poor and disaster stricken areas in many countries all over the world.

Therefore, UNPO would be very honoured to present to you the UNPO -Award during the eighteenth Steering Committee Meeting that will be held in Taipei, Taiwan through 23-26 of September 1998.

Yours sincerely,

Ms. Helen Corbett  
General Secretary

## EDITORIAL NOTES

This issue of *Seeds of Peace* is devoted to Human Rights and Responsibilities. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this issue of *Seeds of Peace* you will find quite a variety of stories and information, not all pertaining to human rights per se, but all pointing in the same direction. Namely, all the stories in *Seeds of Peace* express concern at the current state of the world in terms of the upholding of human rights and the fulfillment of responsibilities, especially by the most powerful segment of society. However, expressing concern is not the full mission of the *Seeds of Peace*. Many of our stories speak to the possibilities and potential for redirecting the current course of global history to a more peaceful, fair and fulfilling mode of existence. Many paths are offered that can help individuals and groups learn to become more tolerant and peaceful, and when necessary, to take steps to actively promulgate this message of the possibility of a saner existence. Spirituality, or looking into world wisdom traditions for inner strength and wisdom is one path. Indeed, *Seeds of Peace* refers to the practice of using meditation to look at the roots of anger, and to cut off anger at the source, beginning with calm reflection. Many people around the world are experimenting with alternative communities, to look into ways society may work more fairly and inspire less discord by emphasizing community development over centralized structures. Members of the International Network of Engaged Buddhism have organized dharma walks. A dharma walk follows the Buddha's model for teaching both his students and the community by direct action instead of words and ideas only. This really gets at the heart of what the engaged Buddhism movement is all about. Thus in many various ways *Seeds of Peace* aims to raise awareness of problems within the context of offering alternatives or ways to try to work toward a solution of these problems.

Approaching the issue of Human Rights and Responsibilities in such a multi-cultural arena is a difficult one. Every culture has a characteristic way in which this subject has been traditionally treated. In Asian cultures the idea of human rights is a tacit one, subsumed under the definition of human responsibilities. In the Occident, historically we have tended to rely on the specification of human rights in writing, outlining what is unacceptable behavior by the powers that be based on our social contract. One approach is proscriptive, what we should not do. The other is prescriptive, what we should do.

In a sense, neither approach has worked well, especially in this century which has seen bloodshed and human rights abuses on a massive scale. So what does work? The answer to that question will not be settled in the pages of the *Seeds of Peace*. But one unequivocal suggestion will be made. Get involved! If this journal has any specific mission it is to be inspirational. Many of our readers are already involved in projects which promote peace and human rights. To any who are looking to get involved, here is your chance. *Seeds of Peace* is full of information about people all over the world who need help, and ways for others to find out how to get involved in helping. Use our journal like a community meeting place where we all gather to exchange notes about things which are important to us, and share our wisdom with each other. We also want to hear back from our readers, this is how we chart the future course of *Seeds of Peace*.

Chris Walker

On July 29<sup>th</sup> Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai presided over the first official meeting to prepare for the centenary of the late Serior Statesman Pridi Banomyong, which will take place nationwide and internationally in the year 2000 (B.E. 2543).



## INDONESIA: Students - a Moral Force in a Country in Turmoil

*The Union of Indonesian Buddhist Students (KMBJ) has been involved in the student struggle against the Suharto regime from the very beginning. Their stand for a non-violent and peaceful struggle made KMBJ an important moral force in the student-movement. Martin H. Petrich asked their representatives, Daniel Johan and Agus Hartono, to comment on the political situation in their country.*

**Q:** What is the future perspective regarding politics and the unity of the country as far as you can tell from the current situation?

**A:** Almost all of the reformist groups realize that the reformation is not over yet. There are still so many agendas in the reformation that have yet to be carried out due to the long and influential 32 year Suharto period. All economic, political, legal and military systems have been deeply corrupted for the sake of Suharto's New Order regime. And now, thanks to the students' moral force, the 32-year long repressive power has been demolished. However, the reformation doesn't only target the fall of Suharto. This is just one of the preconditions for larger reform. The main theme is to rehabilitate all the corrupted systems. This is not an easy task. On one side, we have political problems that have to be totally solved and on the other, we face terrible economic conditions. These two things need to be solved simultaneously. In striving to do this, the most basic thing is to have a trusted and respected government, and this is not

found in Habibie's government. His leadership position is still a topic for arguments. There are groups who support Habibie, especially powerful Muslims, while others refuse to trust him, such as student groups and other dissident groups. Habibie is also a part of the system that should be reformed. Habibie is a part of Suharto's regime, moreover, he has been deeply involved in the downfall of this country with his own contribution of corruption. Finally, we feel that Indonesia's future political situation still depends on students' moral force. Our task is to maintain the purity of this moral force, so that this reformation can be totally realized.

**Q:** Do you expect more political freedom in the future?

**A:** Obviously - political freedom in the future appears imminent and important since what allowed Suharto to become a dictator for the past 32 years was the absence of political freedom in Indonesia. All the dissident groups in the past were easily controlled using various underhanded tactics which in turn sacrificed a great deal of lives. Such an absence of popular conscience should not be repeated, since if it does, a new dictator might easily gain power and could become even more repressive than the previous regime.

**Q:** What about Suharto's influence in the future? Will it be like Ne Win in Burma or Deng Xiaoping in China?

**A:** The students believe that Suharto still has some power. This is not surprising if we look back on the experience of the

power which he developed during his tenure. Furthermore, Habibie's close relationship with him supports their belief. This means that the current political situation is still the same engineered format as that of the New Order regime. So again, we should be very critical in responding to the political situation under Habibie's government. Therefore, we - the Union of Indonesian Buddhist Students - together with the other Moslem, Catholic, Hindu, Christian and nationalist student movements will keep demanding that a special People's Assembly meeting be held and that Suharto be held responsible for all the previous corruption and the present crisis the country is experiencing now. We also oppose the transfer of power from Suharto to Habibie. We demand that the People's Assembly form a national presidium which includes leaders who are trusted by the people to become a transitional government. Its tasks should be to abolish all the laws which hamper democracy, to prepare a just and fair general election, and then to elect a president trusted by the people. This is the only way to regain the people's and international trust. We do not want to put Suharto in the role of either a Ne Win or a Deng Xiaoping, since he has created great injustice and misery to the people of Indonesia. However, we don't want to treat him inhumanely. What we ask is that he take legal responsibility for the violence and corruption which has created this crisis. It is extremely important that the truth

be revealed. It would be a good lesson for the next generation in order not to repeat these same mistakes.

**Q:** What about the Chinese community? How will their life change in the future?

**A:** Discrimination and the "Divide and Rule" policy has obviously been a powerful tool developed by Suharto's regime. This policy is not different from a colonial policy which is to divide society's various sectors in order to retain power. Racism is engineered from above. The former Dutch colonial government used this policy to divide Indonesians so that they wouldn't unite. The Dutch realized that such a union would be a great threat to their power. That's why for the moment we have to completely tear down all such systems engineered by the New Order regime. The New Order has always played two groups off each other in order to maintain power. The first one is the poor Muslim majority group, and the second one is the Chinese ethnic minority group. Whenever there is a threat to this power, the minority group is scapegoated in the name of the wealth gap which is deliberately set up by the government itself. Then the majority is used to assault the minority. After such rioting breaks up, the government appears on the scene as a hero who is able to take maintain national stability. These tactics have been repeated so many times, and again this was repeated in the riots of last May 13-15 where numerous human rights abuses took place.

**Q:** How have the Buddhist communities (Sangha) responded to the challenges of the future?

**A:** Since the Buddhist revival in Indonesia in the 1960s, there have been a number of achievements in

our religious life. Unfortunately, the improvement has been mostly focused on the material side, such as increasing the number of temples and Buddhists. The Buddhist values are hardly developed by our Buddhist society. We have been too involved in ritual matters and the real implementation of the values has been abandoned. Some reasons for this are fear of the government, avoidance of politics and ignorance. Ironically, the ordained Sangha has been the leader of this kind of thinking. Buddhists have been discouraged from criticizing the government. This condition has resulted in the absence of prominent figures in Indonesian Buddhism voicing the misery suffered by weak people. However, some Buddhist student and youth groups, together with their other student friends from other religions, are working hard to voice such people's suffering. They are committed to being engaged Buddhists, despite the difficulties in being so. Positively, this kind of engaged Buddhist movement has encouraged some awareness from Buddhists in Indonesia, and we do hope this could change these unaware attitudes into an attentive Buddhist society.

**Q:** Were there any signs from NU or Muhammadiyah to the Chinese at the peak of crisis? How is it now? How do you expect relations between Muslims, Buddhists and Christians to develop now?

**A:** So far, obviously NU has been regarded as a majority group which always defends and protects minority groups, both the ethnic and religious minority groups. Muhammadiyah has also lately shown their concern in protecting minorities; a stand which they did not show clearly

in the past. In the very pluralistic structure of Indonesian society, the harmonious relationship between Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity is a fundamental issue, since religious differences have also been manipulated as a tool to retain power. The government has separated these religions into different boxes, and this limits interaction between them. However, the people now are becoming more aware of uniting so that this religious polarization could be finally demolished and not used again as a political tool.

**Q:** Did you get any moral support from abroad?

**A:** It has been comforting to us that we have received much moral support from abroad including from INEB friends. Moreover, many Indonesia NGOs have developed good relationships with their partners overseas. Some foreign student organizations have also conveyed directly their moral support for our struggle.

**Q:** What do you expect from the future government?

**A:** The future government should be able to uphold Pancasila and return to the great values of our Independence proclamation. All the wrong practices of the former dictatorial government should be ended. Political and press freedom should be given back to ensure that social cohesion can take place. By having these freedoms, all forms of misgovernment such as human rights abuses, corruption, collaboration, cronyism, monopolies, abduction, torture, etc., will not appear again. Moreover, state institutions such as the House of Representatives and the Supreme Court should be freed from power influence.

**Q:** Is Pancasila a practical tool for the unity of Indonesia?

Pancasila has surely proved a successful tool to unite this country since it ensures the freedom and rights of every citizen. What about the policy towards religions? What should it look like?

**A:** Religion should not be subordinate to political power. In the New Order era, religion has been heavily influenced by political power. Now, we are trying together to set religion free from political power interests. In other words, we could say that religion must overcome politics, it must not be controlled by politics. By this way, religion can influence politics in order to not be so cruel.

**Q:** Will there be more political rights in the area of human rights (free speech, free media, founding of political parties) in the

future?

**A:** Yes, we do hope so. We think that in the process of reformation, every component of the nation would make sure that the reformation will result in the freedom of press, the freedom of speech and other political rights such as the founding of new political parties. Because without having these rights, this country will expose itself to another period of dictatorship.

**Q:** What will be the role of the students in the future?

**A:** Students should maintain their role as a moral force. In Asia, students have always been a force of democracy. In Indonesia's case, students have had this role several times, starting from the independence struggle,

then the fall of Soekarno's Old Order regime and up to the fall of Suharto's New Order regime. But the mistake after taking the old regime down was giving the chance for Suharto's repressive government to rise. That's why the students' role as a moral force and their pure critical mind are still very much needed. We cannot be swayed by the success of merely taking Suharto down and then become careless by letting other possible dictators rule this nation. The most important thing is that students should always be critical to all the deviations of government and laws developed by the former regime and make sure that the establishment of a just and fair system of laws according to Pancasila is achieved.

## BANGLADESH:

### Reconciliation in Bangladesh

The war between the Cittagong Hill Tracts' tribal groups and National Army soldiers which claimed approximately 20,000 lives over 23 years, ended on February 10, 1998, when the Jana Sanghati Samities surrendered their arms to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. As 40,000 people watched, she presented white roses to 739 guerillas in Khagrachari stadium. In an emotional speech she described the December 1997 peace treaty: "We want to forget the bitter experiences of the past and work together for a better future...in which we accept one another. From today, Chittagong Hill Tracts will be a place of peace." Bengali settlers will not be expelled and members of the many indigenous tribes who fled to

India have begun to return.

The peace ceremony began with recitations from Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian holy texts. It was a joyful day, despite fear of sabotage by opposition parties who accused the government of selling out Bangladesh to India. Since February, the peace accord's implementation has been jeopardized by fierce political debate between the government and opposition alliance. In April, two indigenous leaders were killed.

While the agreement fulfilled a dream, it does not obliterate the memory of persecution from both sides. One priest said, "Real reconciliation is possible only on the basis of justice, but that is not the case now because of the legal question of tribal members' land

possession."

#### Breaking the Spiral of Violence

Pain Shwe U of the Marma tribal group was orphaned by the violence. He joined the youth program DISHARI, run by the development and cultural organization Anando, an IFOR contact group. Pain Shwe said, "It was a day of joy for me, but at the same time I think of the violence and pain that my relatives and friends suffered in the village I had to flee. It will take a long time to overcome this horrifying memory. Sometimes it makes me emotional. But at last it has been possible to break the spiral of violence."

Bangladesh has created hope and earned international recognition by this courageous peace.



Giving tribal people a real chance for a better future should come next. The process of healing can only be realized by communication between individuals and

among groups, who sincerely accept each other's differences. To reach that goal, personal initiatives and development programs are as important as government

policies.

*By Fr. Klaus Beurle*

*Anando House,*

*<<anndo@citechco.net>>*

*reprinted from Reconciliation International, June 1998*

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## BURMA: The Case for Democracy and Economic Reform

The current headlines on Asian economic problems rarely include Burma. Even one of the top generals running the Burmese junta senselessly asserted that "Asian flu" has not reached his country. The remark missed the point. For one reason, the Burmese economy is small and could influence none beyond her borders. On the other hand, economic woes in Burma are more home made than exogenous. Still the generals' opinion that Burma does not suffer from capital flight-the main culprit in the fall of the Asian dominoes-is under challenge. Consider the non-existence of equity market in Burma, the talk about sudden reversal of capital flow is irrelevant. What is relevant is the contagion effect from the sickened Asia that would exacerbate the already stagnated economy.

### **The Impact of the Asian Financial Crisis**

The impact of the Asian financial crisis has already taken a big toll in Burma. First the Asian

firms who constitute 70 % of foreign direct investment in Burma have either reduced or indefinitely postponed putting their money into Burmese operations and projects in the wake of the credit crunch at their home fronts. Those trying to divest in Burma are being met with heavy retaliation by the Burmese military generals under the pretext that this kind of immediate flight of capital would be damaging for the regime and seriously hamper future foreign investment. Secondly over half of Burmese exports go to Asia and many imports as well come from that part of the world. Cash strapped Asians are very reluctant to buy any thing but the most essential exports from Burma while at the same time they are attempting to dump their exports as part of their global strategy to export-push themselves out of the financial crisis. Surely Burma will face even tougher competition from her neighbors in selling its low quality agricultural produce. Moreover, the contagious pressures on the weak Burmese

currency were already felt last year as speculative attacks brought nearly 150% depreciation at the height of the Asian crisis. Finally, for the short run, Burma's hope from benefiting from the spillovers from ASEAN dynamism are now dashed since every Asian country has its own priorities for survival let alone attending to the problems of its weaker neighbors.

In economics, crises often come in a series. Unfortunately, the forces of nature do not seem to have aligned with Burma recently. The massive floods last year caused severe damage to the country's agriculture. For instance, the government can export only 20,000 tons of rice this year (the 1995 amount was 1 million). This will reduce government income from exports and make for a balance of payment crisis. This has already prompted the speculative attacks on the kyat, which has been substantially weakened by regional effects.

*By Zaw Oo*

*FDL-AP Qtrly. spring 1998*

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## THAILAND: The Canvas of Freedom

The hunger strike by members of the Tibetan Youth Congress from March 10 to April 27 in New Delhi, India ended in predictable tragedy when Thupten Ngodrup, aged 60 burned himself to death as Indian police forcibly removed the remaining hunger strikers.

The Youth Congress members were protesting in order to get the United Nations to send human rights investigators to Tibet and supervise a referendum, allowing Tibetans to chose independence or autonomy within China.

Referring to the incident, the Dalai Lama said: "It was like Tibet dying, with its cultural and spiritual heritage, in front of the whole world."

Although he admired the courage of the Tibetan Youth Congress, the Dalai Lama added, "I



am against all kinds of violence, whether it is towards oneself or others...I am in a state of dilemma, I don't know what to do."

Indeed, there appear to be no easy answers. There are even differences among the Tibetan people themselves as to what future they want for their occupied land.

Nonetheless, the Free Tibet movement is now widespread and well known and the artistic community has not been shy in coming forward with its support.

Two years ago, Tsering Chopel, a member of the Tibetan government-in-exile, along with Belgian artist Frank Liefhooge and European parliament members Jessica Lariue and Oliver Pupuis, established the Tibet Intergroup and began organizing the "World Artists for Tibet"-to draw attention to Tibet's plight.

That idea has now reached fruition and throughout August over 3000 artists from 45 countries will be staging artistic events around the world in support of the Free Tibet movement. Such notable campaigners involved in the event include Francesco Clemente, Phil Borges, Yoko Ono, Richard Gere and Leslie Dill.

Thailand was delighted to stage its own exhibition after veteran painter Nithi Wattuya, of project 304, received an invitation from Tibet Intergroup to join



Monks participating at the opening of the World Artists For Tibet exhibition on July 5.

the project. Over 40 artists, writers, human rights activists and performers, both local and international, are participating at two venues: Project 304 and 303 Open Space in the Co-op Housing Building on Thoetdamri Road.

This local event is being organized by both projects-along with WOW International Company, Studio 1109, Thai Tibet Center, SEM (Spirit in Education Movement), Chulalongkorn Buddhist University, and the Santhirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation.

Like the third eye, the Thai exhibition reflects the plight of Tibet from several angles: the human rights accord, the elusive peace and the cultural collapse.

Yannawit Kunchaetong's mixed media pieces reflect a message of peace, while Kamin Lertchaiprasert has chosen the teachings of the Buddha with his

drawings on paper entitled, "Tibet-Aniccang, Dukkhang, Anatta".

Bangkok based artist, Varsha Nair, represents Tibetan art and culture through her mixed media "Maya's Story Retold;" Montri Toemsombat's sculpture "Alien" reflects the difficulties of Tibetans living in their country. Songsak Tang's satirical painting "The Teardrop at Kai Fong Court" holds a prominent spot at the 303 Open Space, depicting the legendary Judge Pao Bun Jin-Chinese icon of justice-with tears rolling down his cheeks.

Viewing the exhibition, Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa said, "If we understand the problem of human rights at all levels, we can solve Tibet's problems. We have to fight with peace and intelligence. Artistic expression is one of the ways."

Phatarawadee Phatarawanawik

## TIBET: Report From Dharamsala

Human rights abuse seems to be a core issue of today's world. Despite increasing freedom and the collapse of repressive systems with the demise of former Soviet Union as a prime example, deterioration of human rights has still been increasingly witnessed in countries and regions. There seems

to be an urgent need for expansive improvement of systems whereby the collective rights of the populations can be protected.

In last July, a four day seminar was organized in Dharamsala, Northern India, to address the issues related to human rights violation in Tibet. Participants,

especially from South East Asia, were invited to share the suffering and to learn how peaceful struggles have been mobilized.

Since 1959, Tibet has been occupied and is now claimed as a part of China. Historical information has been faked to uphold the claim. Despite outcry from

the Tibetans themselves and the world at large, the Chinese government still holds a tight grip over the fate of Tibetans and forces them to be indoctrinated into the Chinese language, culture and political system.

A group of Tibetans led by His Holiness the Dalai Lama fled to Northern India after the invasion of Tibet and formed a community which has become well established and serves the people in exile, politically, socially, culturally and spiritually. It is in general a peaceful settlement. It is also situated with offices of the Tibetan administration in exile, which takes care of the general well-being of the locals, as well as pushing for more possibilities of increasing freedom in their homeland at the policy level.

As for human rights, the Tibetan Center for Democracy and Human Rights (TCDHR) has been formed and is a separate legal entity which advocates human rights issues in Tibet. This seminar, organized by TCDHR, was geared toward exposing the problems and looking for cooperation in the peace process from individuals and communities.

It was very moving on the first day of the seminar to hear an account told by a Tibetan nun who was severely tortured by the Chinese authority for her political dissent, and later had to flee. The torturing methods as described by her shocked us beyond our wildest dreams. Physically, sexually, and mentally, she and her like-minded were subjected to extremely cruel conditions. Dharamsala has since then become a haven in which they find themselves free of such torture and abuse.

What could be more devastating in a long run are the attempts to Sino-size the Tibetan people. Children are required to

learn Chinese language and culture and the Chinese government also provides incentives and encourages the ethnic Chinese to settle in Tibetan territories. Kate Saunder from the Tibet Information Network in the UK gave us a vivid account how the Tibetan population will soon be outnumbered by the Chinese and how education has been used as a tool to suppress political outrage. Numerous other speakers' contributions attested to the haunting human rights deprivation there.

Interestingly though, the Tibetans in exile, however strongly they feel moved and outraged by the abuses they themselves had faced before coming to Dharamsala, or those abuses imposed on their fellow nationals; they still uphold the principle of nonviolence vigorously and bravely. In last April, a group of Tibetans, out of their desperation for peace in Tibet, staged a hunger strike and vowed not to stop until international bodies like the UN Commission on Human Rights, took a substantial step regarding the problem of Chinese invasion of Tibet. They were eventually rounded up by Indian police and then were hospitalized.

One of the Tibetan hunger strikers was very committed to the cause and showed his strong determination to get the world's attention on this issue by setting himself afire. He died almost instantly. His death, besides bringing sorrow to concerned people, has inspired many of his fellow national towards peaceful mobilization. Sadly enough, the very day our seminar sessions were ended, the news came that a French man committed self-immolation in Paris and left a note to the effect that the action was to show his solidarity with the cause for Tibet's freedom.

In addition to learning about human rights situation in Tibet,

we were also taken to visit a few projects in Dharamsala. A visit to Children's Village School gave us a picture of how the Tibetans in exile value the importance of equipping their children with a good education. Even modern subjects are also taught there including English, Science, Math, etc.. It seems that a conviction for attaining freedom is alive in the students' hearts.

We had chance to talk to a boy, who studies at the high school level. The words uttered through his innocent voice reflected his wish to act for the freedom of his motherland. I could not, however, see any hatred towards the Chinese government. He seemed to understand the cause of their action as a result of ignorance, and had learned to forgive even those who are so oppressive toward him and his people.

This reminds me of an oft declared teaching expounded by His Holiness, the so called "middle path," which in Buddhism also means freedom from extremes. Sadly, I could sense among the highly and western-educated Tibetan academics that they have misinterpreted the teaching. Many times they express their dissent with His Holiness' policy and accused that it is too compromising and shows too weak a political stance.

I was sad to hear some of their thought process, which very much resembled the Western way of addressing issues which lacks compassion as a basis. The approaches based on the notion of Western human rights without the effort to cultivate love, understanding, and compassion will simply lead to a stronger and more severe repression of the population and find no peaceful solutions.

Apart from illustrating to us the human rights issues, a session was also set for us to get a glimpse

of the environmental destruction that is happening at an alarming rate. Deforestation and mining are especially common catastrophes imposed upon Tibet for the economic interest of the Chinese government. This should give rise to concern and action to solve the problems. One of the speakers at the seminar profoundly pointed out that most rivers in South Asia

originate from Tibet, thus, the destruction of the environment there will wreck havoc on the eco-system of the entire continent, including Southeast Asia.

Near the end of the conference we watched performances arranged by Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA). I could feel how strongly the people are connected to their indigenous

and enchanting culture. I saw and appreciated that these young performers will absorb both the political conviction and cultural appreciation of their heritage. As they grow up I am certain that they will advocate ways for a more democratic and free Tibetan society.

*Pipob Udomittipong*

## GERMANY: Vanida Tantivitayapitak in Germany

At the invitation of the Institute of Interdisciplinary Study and Research (ISF) - Project East-Southeast Asia in association with the Asia desk of the Heinrich-Boell Foundation, Vanida Tantivitayapitak, a well-known environmentalist and currently advisor to the Forum of the Poor went on an information tour to Germany from June 6 to June 13. During her stay she first participated in a workshop on Southeast Asian Economy, Ecology and Social Movements at the University of Trier, where Vanida spoke about on emergence and development of the Forum of the Poor. She also showed a video about their activities which attracted great interest by the participants. Vanida also visited a project of the Socialist Self-aid Cologne-Mulheim, where in 1979 a group of social activists occupied an empty factory slated for destruction. The activists were a group of marginalised people, especially the unemployed who are very often drug addicted or alcoholics. Together they transformed the buildings into living spaces and community homes. Vanida and the local group used the opportunity to share their experiences. Vanida also went to Bonn to meet representatives of German NGOs. She talked with Juergen Maier from the Forum Environment & Development, a network of environmental and

development NGOs which was founded in order to follow-up the UNCED conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Vanida also met the social activists Rainer Falk and Barbara Unmuesig of the German NGO "WEED" (World Economy, Ecology and Development), who have been pressuring the German government for debt relief for the Third World as well as introducing ecological and social standards in German foreign private and public investments. An important topic was German export assurances (so-called Hermes export guarantees) to private German companies for big investments like dam projects in Asia (e.g. Pak Moon Dam), so that in case that the local government does not pay the German company the German government pays recompensation. In spite of a clear code-of-conduct not to support projects which are not ecological and socially sound, the German government supported the bidding for mega-projects with ecological and socially disastrous effects like the Three Gorges Dam in China.

At the end of her visit Vanida went to Brussels, where she participated in the Poor 7 conference organised by the Green group in the European Parliament. This conference is a yearly event which brings together representatives from the poorest countries in the world. This is in contrast in to the

G7/G8 gatherings where the richest nations gather together. Vanida participated in the panel discussion with Vandana Shiva from India and Samir Amin from Africa. In her presentation she made very clear that the policies of the IMF and World Bank for saving the Southeast Asian economies hit the rural and urban poor very hard. She mentioned that the Thai government, by rescuing the private business sector, took over the debts of the banks and is now obliged to cut down social spending to guarantee paying back the loans of the IMF. As a solution to the worsening of the social situation she demanded more participation of the grassroots and urgently pleaded for land reform in Thailand.

For most people who met with Vanida it was the first time that they could obtain first-hand information about the suffering of the poor in Southeast Asia. Since the beginning of the Asian economic crisis, reports on the social effects of the current economic turmoil are nearly nonexistent in the German mainstream media. I feel that these alternative views on development are very important to make people think about the present development model and its high ecological and social costs.

*Jost Wagner, Co-Director, Institute of Interdisciplinary Study and Research, Trier, Germany*



## MEXICO: Oilwatch Meeting in Mexico

Extraction of natural resources has long been beneficial to human economies. Perhaps one of the most profitable is oil exploitation. These industries have raked in huge amounts of fresh capital from different tropical countries in the last two decades, and the money just concentrates in the hands of a few multinational companies. Their faces are familiar, and the consequences of their profit maximization are similar everywhere in the world: the abuse of local, indigenous people, the reckless depletion of natural abundance, and environmental pollution.

In Asia, the most obvious example of the two combinations, natural resource extraction and human rights abuse vis-a-vis environmental destruction, is perhaps the project to commercialize natural gas in the Mataban Bay and pipe it to a power plant in Thailand. Controversy about the project centers around the fact that its construction has increased the abuse of rights of ethnic groups and democratic forces in Burma. Evidence attests to the abuse of ethnic populations along the 60 km-onshore pipeline route, who have been found to work with no pay. Worse, they have been brutally treated in the worst way as rapes, looting and torture by government forces accompanies the pipeline's construction. Previous allocation of the Burmese national budget, of which 40 % has been spent on military purposes, strengthens the notion that the biggest ever influx of revenue from abroad (app. 200 million USD per annum for 30 years), will be spent on the effort to quell resistance and demands from ethnic groups to have their voices heard.

For the construction of the natural gas pipeline in Thailand, opposition has accelerated out of solely environmental concerns to

include the domain of human rights. A big chunk of forest which is home to endemic species and which helps to maintain the balance of climate has been destroyed to pave the way for the pipeline. The lack of transparency, the fact that villagers have been prevented from access to information about the project before its implementation, is another serious scam which has even been confirmed by a hearing committee set up by the present Prime Minister's order and led by a former Prime Minister.

Total silence of opposition amidst the excessive exploitation of nature has taken place in different dictatorial countries the world over. The case of Shell Oil's exploration on the indigenous lands, traditionally belonging to Ogoni people of Nigeria, is another reflection of profit maximization imposed over the extreme suffering of the locals. Ken Saroivivo and his colleagues who were executed in 1994 as a result of their campaigns against the exploitation is just one example of how multinational corporations can abet extremely gross human rights violations.

Stories like the above two were discussed by Oilwatch affiliates from different countries in a meeting held in Mexico City, during 27-30 July 1998. Indigenous people of tribal groups from Ecuador, Tabasco (South-east Mexico), Colombia, and Africa, came together with nearly 100 representatives from non-governmental organizations which have been active in campaigning against these exploitative and abusive businesses. They came to share with us their suffering and strategies in their protest efforts as well as to forge relationships for a long-term co-operation. On all continents, the exploitation of nature has been on the rise with no respect of

how these activities will cause suffering to the indigenous people and their habitat.

A representative from Latin America, Lorenzo Muelas, representative of the Oor tribe, told stories of agonies for the destruction of their mother land in Colombia. Clad in his colorful indigenous clothing, he started by referring to a statement which may have become a cliché but still reflects the pain indigenous people suffer to see the earth exploited and their people suffer. He said "Nowadays, the population of native Indians in America has declined to just one million." To an Oor person like himself, "oil is like blood of mother earth" which it is immoral to exploit. He and his people have vowed to commit a massive suicide if they fail to protect their mother. Their brave resistance has been recognized by the awarding of the 1997 Goldman Prize, an environmental Nobel Prize, which was given to the Oor people by a group in the USA.

Unless human and natural concerns are equally taken into account, every attempt to make use of nature will result in gross violation of human rights and colossal environmental destruction. How many more tragedies of human rights and how much more environmental damage must take place before we learn that this present kind of development will lead to no good? How many more people must suffer to bend the hearts of the men who control the companies which inflict so much suffering?

For more information on Oilwatch, please contact  
Elizabeth Bravo  
Accion Ecologica  
P.O. Box 17-15-246C  
Quito Ecuador  
phone (593) 2-547516  
fax (593) 2-527583  
email  
oilwatch@uio.satnet.net



## INEB Update

\* INEB Conference 1999: Towards a Culture of Non-Violence

The coming 9th International INEB Conference, which will take place from 1-5 March 1999 in Sri Lanka, will focus on the theme "Towards a Culture of Non-violence". Various activities are planned related to the topic during the conference: panel discussions, workshops, a peace-walk, meditation, etc. A three days special training workshop will be organised prior to the Conference. From 20-28 February the INEB Women Program plans the second meeting for Buddhist nuns from Asia. Those of you who would like to participate at the INEB Conference, please contact the INEB Secretariat. For update information please visit our web-site: <http://www.bpf.com/bpf/ineb.html>.

\* INEB endorses appeal of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates

INEB endorses the international campaign to declare the years 2000-2010 the "Decade for a Culture of Non-Violence" and the year 2000 the "Year for Education for Non-Violence" (see related information). This was decided by the Executive Committee.

With this decision INEB joins the international campaign which was launched by various Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, IFOR, and other organisations on 1 July 1997, to declare the years 2000-2010 the "Decade for a Culture of Non-Violence" and the year 2000 the "Year for Education for Non-Violence". The Nobel Peace Prize Laureates: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and H.H. the Dalai Lama appeal to the heads of state of all member countries of the General Assembly of the United Nations, "that non-violence be taught at every level in our societies during this decade, to make the children of the world aware of the real, prac-

tical meaning and benefits of non-violence in their daily lives, in order to reduce the violence, and consequent suffering, perpetrated against them and humanity in general. Together, we can build a new culture of non-violence for humankind which will give hope to all humanity, and in particular, to the children of our world."

Meanwhile, the UN General Assembly has declared the year 2000 International Year for a Culture of Peace under the auspices of UNESCO. Signatures in support of the UN declaring the years 2001 to 2010 the Decade for a Culture of Non-violence, with an emphasis on education for nonviolence, are still being gathered, and national groups have been formed to look at how they can support the campaign and nonviolence education. If you would like to support the campaign, please contact the IFOR International Secretariat, Spoorstraat 38, 1815 Alkmaar, The Netherlands, Tel. [31-72] 512-3014, Fax: [31-72] 515-1102, e-mail: [office@ifor.ccmil.compuserve.com](mailto:office@ifor.ccmil.compuserve.com). For update information please visit the IFOR website: <http://www.gn.apc.org/ifor/>.

\* Jobvacancy in INEB Secretariat

INEB seeks applicants for the position of Executive Secretary [ES] at the International Secretariat in Bangkok. The ES is responsible for facilitation of internal communication with INEB members, organisation of seminars and the biennial Conferences, fund-raising for the organisation, and information dissemination. The ES receives direction and carries out the decisions of an international executive committee.

Applicants should send their CVs plus a cover letter describing why they are drawn to work with INEB as soon as possible and not later than 30 November 1998 to the INEB Secretariat.

\* NEB Germany seeks infor-

mation exchange

\* Since the INEB conference in 1993 the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) is also present with local groups in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The German speaking regional network, called "Netzwerk engagierter Buddhisten" (Network of Engaged Buddhists), supports engaged Buddhist activities and organisations worldwide, and disseminates information via internet ([www.buddhanetz.net](http://www.buddhanetz.net)) and newsletter. Please send your relevant information to:

Netzwerk Engagierter Buddhisten, Geschäftsstelle c/o Loo, Fidicinstr. 44, D-10965 Berlin, GERMANY. Fax: [49 -89] 6661-7283-25, e-mail: [BuddhaNetz@aol.com](mailto:BuddhaNetz@aol.com). If you like to learn more about NEB Germany please visit their Website: [www.buddhanetz.net](http://www.buddhanetz.net).

\* IFOR: Consultation on Non-violent Conflict Resolution for Women

\* The Women Peacemakers Program of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) is preparing a consultation on nonviolent conflict resolution for women living in armed conflict areas in the Asia-Pacific region. The consultation is by invitation only; a video and a written report will be available after the consultation, scheduled for late in 1998. The Asia-Pacific consultation is the second in a series of regional consultations for women peace activists; a 21-minute video of the European regional consultation (which took place April 1998 in Budapest, Hungary), with participants from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Cyprus, Ingushetia, Israel, Northern Ireland, Palestine, and Serbia. Contact;

Women Peacemakers Program, IFOR, Spoorstraat 38, 1815 BK Alkmaar, the Netherlands. E-mail: [s.anderson@ifor.ccmil.compuserve.com](mailto:s.anderson@ifor.ccmil.compuserve.com)

## Buddhists Take Up the Challenge of AIDS

Toi (not her real name) is preparing her daily herbal cocktail on a small stove. It is a medicine which gives her hope for a better life. In her early thirties, she is already widow. Her husband died of AIDS two years ago. The only legacy he left for her was the deadly virus. Rejected by her family she found a new home at Arokya Ashram near Mukdahan in the Northeast of Thailand, where Buddhist monk Phra Suthep Chinawaro opened a spiritual center and hospital. Here, people living with HIV/AIDS and other sicknesses, have the chance to find physical and spiritual care. A number of volunteers, physicians and nurses, treat the patients with various herbs and acupuncture while Phra Suthep offers meditation and counselling to support spiritual growth.

Toi is one of thousands of women in Thailand who have been infected with HIV by their husbands. In most Asian countries it is common for men to frequently go to prostitutes. As a result, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is spreading in Asia quicker than elsewhere in the world. UNAIDS and the World Health Organization (WHO) warned in their last joint report, that the HIV Pandemic is far worse than previously thought. Over 30 million adults and children are now believed to be living with the HIV infection - one in every 100 sexually active adults worldwide. Regarding Asia, the numbers are even bleaker. In Cambodia, one in 20 pregnant women, one in 16 soldiers and policemen, and one in two sex workers tested HIV-positive in the most recent moni-

toring surveys. Burma and Việt Nam are also seeing a rapid spread of HIV. In Burma, HIV infection among sex workers rose from 4% in 1992 to over 20% in 1996, while two-thirds of injecting drug users are infected. Around 500,000 people in Burma are believed to be carrying HIV. In Thailand, where 750,000 persons are infected, the number of new infections is declining, especially among sex workers and their clients, after years of awareness campaigns by Government and NGOs. UNAIDS further reports that there are more than 20 million people living with HIV/AIDS in developing countries, where the resources are severely limited. Insufficient health care structures, the increasing complexity of HIV management and care, the cost of treatment, medical training, etc. are obstacles to the proper care of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Women and children are the first victims of the economic crunch in Asia. Cuts in the health care budget are affecting women more seriously than men and mothers with HIV/AIDS are the hardest hit. Considering the already limited and now dwindling financial resources, traditional ways of healthcare play a crucial role in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 4 billion people, 80 percent of the world population, presently use herbal medicine for some aspect of primary health care. This is especially the case in Asia, where physicians, therapists and traditional healers use methods such as acupuncture, healthy nutri-

tion, massage and herbal medicine, with significant results. Many AIDS patients have seen their physical and spiritual strength improved. International and local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are trying to fill the increasingly critical gaps in the health-care structure. Along with them, more and more religious communities, organizations and individuals have begun to realize their responsibility to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Since religions reach deep into the Asian cultures and traditions, they can play a significant role in the struggle against AIDS. Local religious organizations and individuals have started projects on AIDS. For examples, in Cambodia, Buddhist monk Pal Horn is operating a HIV/AIDS treatment centre at Svay Don Kum Pagoda in Phnom Penh, where he offers traditional medicine and Buddhist counselling. In Hué (Central Việt Nam), Buddhist monk and medical doctor, Thích Tuệ Tam manages a school for herbal medicine, and also treats and counsels people living with HIV/AIDS. Thailand has seen by far the most Buddhist activity. In the north of the country a group of Buddhist monks began an educational project to enlist more monks, especially in the countryside. AIDS experts see the project to encourage Buddhist monks to play a major role in counselling both people with HIV and non-affected populations as a good example of how Thailand is using its cultural resources to battle the pandemic. In September 1996, a seminar was held on 'The Roles of Buddhist Monks in Solving Aids Problems in Thai

Society.' In many Asian countries, the Buddhist temple is the center of the community. Monks play an influential role, since millions of young Buddhists study in the monasteries, receive moral instructions and are initiated into the monkhood for a period of their lives. Several monasteries in Thailand now run meditation centers, and provide traditional ways of treatment, counselling services and income generation activities for people living with HIV. They are based on two common features: local wisdom-based medication and the recovery of the patient's balance of their body and mind through a variety of means, such as meditation, counselling and simply being in peaceful surroundings.

The first, and today most well-known, AIDS hospice center is at Wat Phra Bat Nampu near Lopburi. It was founded by Ven. Alongkot in 1992 with the initial support of the INEB Secretariat. Since then it has grown notably to its present size of some 300 beds. Other Buddhist monks, such as in 1993 meditation master Phra Phongthep Dhammagaruko, followed soon after. His temple hospice in Wat Mai Huay Sai in Muang District is located on a green and peaceful two-rai plot of land near Chiang Mai. Phra Phongthep founded the temple as a meditation centre in the line of Chiang Mai's most well-known forest monastery Wat Umong, where he first lived. But meditation didn't reach many people. So he looked for something which affected the daily life of the people in order to teach the dhamma. He found it in AIDS, since a growing number of people from all walks of life with HIV/AIDS, or their relatives, came to seek help from him. "I thought



Women living with HIV/AIDS  
at Wat Thammasatorn Angarika, Nong Saen

my service would help bridge a gap between the community and I, so I could teach them dhamma more effectively," he said. According to Phra Phongthep, AIDS is a good means to teach Buddha's way of dealing with suffering. The 45-year-old monk and former social worker named the hospice Baan Puen Cheewit, Home of Friends for Life. The hospice provides patients with basic necessities, as well as a spiritual retreat free of charge. "I want to give them a place where they don't feel discriminated against. I believe a good living environment, sufficient food, medical treatment and acceptance by others will help them improve their physical and mental health," says Phra Pongthep. Baan Puen Cheewit has room for twenty patients, although many more are waiting to stay there. But for Phra Pongthep the quality of care is more important than the quantity. "I don't think increasing the number of beds is the way for us to tackle the problem. We will never be able to catch up with this disease. I want the temple hospice to serve as a temporary shelter, for it is family care which

is a key long-term solution to the burgeoning AIDS problem in Thailand." But one of the main obstacles he encounters in his work is finding qualified and devoted staff to work with. "It is very difficult to find good people for help. The culture of consumerism in Thailand leads people to a mentality of taking and accumulating and not of giving and helping. Everybody wants to get rich and nobody wants to do the dirty work," he complains. That is the reason why he currently has only nine patients, although many more need a place to live and die peacefully.

Other Buddhist monks share Phra Pongthep's dilemma, including Phra Suthep Chinawaro, and the 32 year old monk, Phra Pandit Paphaso, from Wat Sathorn Angariko near Udon Thani (Northeast Thailand). They too suffer from a lack of qualified and motivated people who are willing to help them in their work. Both monks use various sorts of herbal medicine and acupuncture in their treatment of people with HIV/AIDS. "The forests are full of herbs which can improve the life of the AIDS



patients," Phra Suthep remarks. He is growing various sorts of herbs in his Ashram. Without doubt, the use of traditional medicine and daily meditation practice can improve the physical and spiritual well-being of many patients. As a natural and affordable method, it gives particular hope to the poor people who, according to the Human Development Report 1997, make up the majority of HIV/AIDS victims. The report notes that more than half of a household's income could be spent on caring for the sick. All of these monks agree that the AIDS epidemic can only be solved if people change their lifestyle. "It is not just a health-problem," Phra Pongthep stresses, "it is a spiritual problem as well." The dominating consumer culture creates greed, which leads to

exploitation, prostitution, different kinds of addiction (alcohol, drugs, money, sex, status), and appalling neglect and mistreatment even by close relatives. All of this is an excellent breeding-ground for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Taking up the challenges of the pandemic, INEB will organize, in cooperation with other Thai organizations, a regional seminar on A Holistic Approach to Health Care for People living with HIV/AIDS in May 1999. Invited are Buddhists, Christians and Muslims from Asian countries who are working in the healthcare sector. The goals of the seminar are to encourage religious communities, individuals and organizations to work with and for people living with HIV/AIDS, and to educate them about

a holistic approach to healthcare. Holistic is understood in this context as a way of physical, spiritual and social care for the patients, with them and their needs as the center of concern. INEB wants to offer an opportunity for the participants to share their experiences in working in the healthcare sector, and to learn from various HIV/AIDS activities in Thailand, so that they can identify programmes needed in their own context and to act on the challenges of the HIV epidemic. INEB hopes that links will be established between the various participating and organizations in order to strengthen their activities.

*Martin H. Petrich is INEB's Executive Secretary and one of the coordinators of the seminar.*

## The Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 39th Anniversary of Tibetan National Uprising Day on 10 March 1998 Dharamsala

Great changes are taking place all over the world at the dawn of a new millennium. While there are instances of new conflicts breaking out, it is encouraging that we are also able to witness the emergence of a spirit of dialogue and reconciliation in many troubled parts of the world. In some ways, this twentieth century could be called a century of war and bloodshed. It is my belief that humanity in general has drawn lessons from the experiences gained during this century. As a result, I believe the human community has become more mature. There is, therefore, hope that with

determination and dedication we can make the next century a century of dialogue and non-violent conflict resolution.

Today, as we commemorate the thirty-ninth anniversary of our freedom struggle, I wish to express my sincere appreciation and great respect for the resilience and patience shown by the Tibetan people in the face of tremendous odds. The current situation in Tibet and the lack of any substantive progress in resolving the Tibetan problem is no doubt causing an increasing sense of frustration among many Tibetans. I am concerned that

some might feel compelled to look for avenues other than peaceful resolutions. While I understand their predicament, I wish to firmly reiterate once again the importance of abiding by the non-violent course of our freedom struggle. The path of non-violence must remain a matter of principle in our long and difficult quest for freedom. It is my firm belief that this approach is the most beneficial and practical course in the long run. Our peaceful struggle until now has gained us the sympathy and admiration of the international community. Through our non-





violent freedom struggle we are also setting an example and thus contributing to the promotion of a global political culture of non-violence and dialogue.

The sweeping changes across the globe have also embraced China. The reforms, initiated by Deng Xiaoping, have altered not only the Chinese economy, but also the political system, making it less ideological, less reliant on mass mobilisation, less coercive, and less stifling for the average citizen. The government is also notably far less centralised. Moreover, the post Deng Xiaoping leadership in China seems to have become more flexible in its international policy. One indication of this is China's greater participation in international forums and co-operation with international organisations and agencies. A remarkable development and achievement has been the smooth transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese

sovereignty last year and Beijing's subsequent pragmatic and flexible handling of issues concerning Hong Kong. Also, recent statements from Beijing on re-starting cross-strait negotiations with Taiwan reflect apparent flexibility and softening of its stance. In short, there is no doubt that China today is a better place to live in than 15 or 20 years ago. These are historic changes that are commendable. However, China continues to face grave human rights problems and other formidable challenges. It is my hope that the new leadership in China, with this renewed confidence, will have the foresight and courage to provide greater freedom to the Chinese people. History teaches us that material progress and comfort alone are not the full answer to the needs and yearnings of any human society.

In stark contrast to these

positive aspects of the development in China proper, the situation in Tibet has sadly worsened in recent years. Of late, it has become apparent that Beijing is carrying out what amounts to a deliberate policy of cultural genocide in Tibet. The infamous "strike hard" campaign against Tibetan religion and nationalism has intensified with each passing year. This campaign of repression - initially confined to monasteries and nunneries - has now been extended to cover all parts of the Tibetan society. In some spheres of life in Tibet, we are witnessing the return of an atmosphere of intimidation, coercion and fear, reminiscent of the days of the Cultural Revolution.

In Tibet human rights violations continue to be wide-spread. These abuses of rights have a distinct character, and are aimed at preventing Tibetans as a people from asserting their own identity and culture and their wish to preserve it. This Buddhist culture inspires the Tibetan people with values and concepts of love and compassion that are of practical benefit and relevance in daily life and hence the wish to preserve it. Thus, human rights violations in Tibet are often the result of policies of racial and cultural discrimination and are only the symptoms and consequence of a deeper problem. Therefore, despite some economic progress in Tibet, the human rights situation has not improved. It is only by addressing the fundamental issue of Tibet that the human rights problems can be overcome.

It is an obvious fact that the sad state of affairs in Tibet is of no benefit at all either to Tibet or to China. To continue along the present path does nothing to alleviate the suffering of the Tibetan

people, nor does it bring stability and unity to China, which are of overriding importance to the leadership in Beijing. Also, one of the main concerns of the Chinese leadership has been to improve its international image and standing. However, its inability to resolve the Tibetan problem peacefully has been tarnishing the international image and reputation of China. I believe a solution to the Tibetan issue would have far-reaching positive implications for China's image in the world, including in its dealings with Hong Kong and Taiwan.

With regard to a mutually-acceptable solution to the issue of Tibet, my position is very straightforward. I am not seeking independence. As I have said many times before, what I am seeking is for the Tibetan people to be given the opportunity to have genuine self-rule in order to preserve their civilisation and for the unique Tibetan culture, religion, language and way of life to grow and thrive. My main concern is to ensure the survival of the Tibetan people with their own unique Buddhist cultural heritage. For this, it is essential, as the past decades have shown clearly, that the Tibetans be able to handle all their domestic affairs and to freely determine their social, economic and cultural development. I do not believe that the Chinese leadership would have any fundamental objections to this. Successive Chinese leaderships have always assured that the Chinese presence in Tibet is to work for the welfare of the Tibetans and to "help develop" Tibet. Therefore, given a political will, there is no reason why the Chinese leadership cannot start addressing the issue of Tibet by entering into a dialogue with us. This is the only proper way to ensure stability and unity, which

the Chinese leadership asserts are their primary concerns.

I take this opportunity to once again urge the Chinese leadership to give serious and substantive consideration to my suggestions. It is my firm belief that dialogue and a willingness to look with honesty and clarity at the reality of Tibet can lead us to a viable solution. It is time for all of us to "seek truth from facts" and to learn lessons derived from a calm and objective study of the past and to act with courage, vision and wisdom.

The negotiations must aim to establish a relationship between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples based on friendship and mutual benefit, to ensure stability and unity, and to empower the Tibetan people to exercise genuine self-rule with freedom and democracy thus allowing them to preserve and cultivate their unique culture as well as to protect the delicate environment of the Tibetan plateau. These are the principle issues. However, the Chinese government is making consistent efforts to confuse the real issues at stake. They allege that our efforts are aimed at the restoration of Tibet's old social system and the status and privileges of the Dalai Lama. As far as the institution of the Dalai Lama is concerned, I stated publicly as early as 1969 that it is for the people of Tibet to decide whether this institution is to continue or not. In my own case, I made it clear in a formal policy in 1992 that when we return to Tibet, I will hold no positions in any future Tibetan government. Moreover, no Tibetan, whether in exile or within Tibet, has a desire of restoring Tibet's old social order. It is, therefore, disappointing that the Chinese government continues to indulge in such

baseless and distorted propaganda. This is not helpful in creating a conducive atmosphere for dialogue, and I hope that Beijing will refrain from making such allegations.

I also would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the many governments, parliaments, non-governmental organisations, Tibet support groups and individuals, who continue to be deeply concerned with the repression in Tibet and urge to resolve the question of Tibet through peaceful negotiations. The United States has set a precedence of appointing a Special Co-ordinator for Tibetan Affairs in order to facilitate dialogue between Tibetans and the Chinese government. The European, and Australian parliaments have recommended similar initiatives. Last December, the International Commission of Jurists issued its third report on Tibet, entitled Tibet, Human Rights and the Rule of Law. These are timely initiatives and most encouraging developments. Moreover, the growing empathy, support and solidarity from our Chinese brothers and sisters in China as well as those overseas for the fundamental rights of the Tibetan people and for my "Middle-Way Approach" are of particular inspiration and a source of great encouragement for us Tibetans.

Furthermore, on this occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence I wish to express on behalf of the Tibetan people our heart-felt congratulations and reiterate our immense appreciation and gratitude to the people and government of India, which has become a second home to the majority of the Tibetans in exile. India represents not only a safe haven for Tibetan refugees, but is also for us a country

whose ancient philosophy of Ahimsa and deep-rooted democratic tradition have inspired and shaped our values and aspirations. Moreover, I believe India can and should play a constructive and influential role in resolving the Tibetan problem peacefully. My "Middle-Way Approach" is in line with the basic Indian policy vis-a-vis Tibet and China. There is no reason why India should not be actively engaged in encouraging and promoting dialogues between Tibetans and the Chinese government. It is clear that without peace and stability on the Tibetan plateau, it is unrealistic to believe that genuine trust and confidence can be restored in the Sino-Indian

relationship.

Last year we conducted an opinion poll of the Tibetans in exile and collected suggestions from Tibet wherever possible on the proposed referendum, by which the Tibetan people were to determine the future course of our freedom struggle to their full satisfaction. Based on the outcome of this poll and suggestions from Tibet, the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies, our parliament in exile, passed a resolution empowering me to continue to use my discretion on the matter without seeking recourse to a referendum. I wish to thank the people of Tibet for the tremendous trust, confidence and hope they place in me. I continue to

believe that my "Middle-Way Approach" is the most realistic and pragmatic course to resolve the issue of Tibet peacefully. This approach meets the vital needs of the Tibetan People while ensuring the unity and stability of the People's Republic of China. I will, therefore, continue to pursue this course of approach with full commitment and make earnest efforts to reach out to the Chinese leadership.

With my homage to the brave men and women of Tibet, who have died for the cause of our freedom, I pray for an early end to the suffering of our people and for peace and welfare of all sentient beings.

## The Songkhla Lake Dharma Walk: Thailand's First Buddhist Walk for the Environment

By now many readers are probably aware of the role monks have played in the conservation of Thai forests. Fewer readers are likely to know that this year in May, for the third year in a row, Buddhist monks led a Dharma Walk, or Dhammayietra, for the revival of Songkhla Lake and the lake basin region in southern Thailand. Over these three years a contingent varying in size from 10 to 120 walkers has covered approximately 1100 kilometers in three separate walks. Each of these walks has combined the elements of spiritual practice and social transformation. This article gives a brief history of the lake walk. It also sketches out a few thoughts about what makes the walk a powerful and appealing form of Buddhist practice, and

what kinds of challenges the walk brings into view.

### Why Was a Dharma Walk Necessary?

The waters of Songkhla Lake stretch some 70 kilometers from north to south along the southern peninsula that divides the Andaman Sea on the west from the Gulf of Thailand on the east. The southernmost portion of the lake has an outlet to the Gulf at the deep sea port of Songkhla. This narrow channel allows salt water to circulate with the fresh water that flows into the lake from watershed forests in the mountains to the west and south. This complex and seasonal circulation of fresh, salty, and brackish water is the basis for the lake's unique ecological diversity. There are

some 700 marine species and hundreds of types of migratory birds and water fowl that have depended on this ecological system, a system which formerly included extensive marshes and mangrove forests at the lake's edge. The uniqueness and variety of the lake's wildlife, which prompted the creation of two wildlife sanctuaries in the lake region, also once provided abundant resources to fishing communities on both sides of the lake.

The lake appears to have taken its present form only a little more than 100 years ago, when the forces of wind and sea linked a chain of islands into a new eastern shore. Yet present communities around the lake can trace a long history shaped by Buddhist and Muslim states, trade with





Walkers at the Third Dhammayietra near Hat Yai

China, and complex urban settlements dating from at least 1000 years ago. The introduction of wide-scale rubber planting was the earliest of the dramatic human transformations of the lake region in this century. Such transformations have accelerated in the last 30 years. The city of Hat Yai has grown to become the financial and commercial center of Thailand's southern region. Together with Songkhla, it supports an export industry based on two of Thailand's major trade products—rubber and seafood. Shrimp farming has expanded rapidly in the lake region, as have the areas under rubber cultivation. Numerous seafood and rubber processing plants have sprung up as well around Songkhla and Hat Yai.

The side-effects of these developments have been dramatic, particularly in the last five years. A key problem has been the pol-

lution of the lake water. Shrimp farms, along with factories, waste from growing cities, and the spread of chemical-intensive agriculture, have released enormous quantities of toxins into the lake. The pollution of the lake waters, overfishing, and human-made barriers to the lake's natural circulation patterns have significantly reduced the number and diversity of fish and other wildlife. Siltation, the use of water for municipal and industrial needs, and the spread of subdivisions into marshland have also brought about a pronounced decrease of the total volume of the water in the lake. These changes have naturally had an effect on the ability of local communities to extract a livelihood from the lake.

#### Origins of the Walk

A visit to Hat Yai in 1995 by monks from Sekhiyadhamma, a national network of socially

concerned monks, gave them the opportunity to learn about the emerging crisis in the lake region from local monks, NGOs and villagers. Some of the Sekhiyadhamma monks had recently participated in the Thai portion of an international Dharma Walk for Peace on the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. They were also aware of Maha Ghosanda's leadership of the Cambodian Walks for Peace and Reconciliation. Phra Phaisan Visalo, one of the leaders of Sekhiyatham, helped tell the story of how the lake walk began to this year's walkers, who gathered on straw mats set in a large square under the shade of trees at the Thung Yung Sangha Retreat for the afternoon activities this last May:

As we were talking back and forth—"Ping"—it hit us, especially Than Kittisak, this idea of a Dharma Walk. It was like we



were talking together and, in English it's called "to synchronize," which is to say that our ideas got all mixed up together and came out as something we had never dreamed of before. I use the word "*Ping!*" because the thought that "Hey, we have to walk a Dharma Walk around Songkhla Lake" arose without us having thought of it or imagined it before. (Translation from Thai)

Achan Kittisak, a Sekhiyadhamma leader who became the key organizer of the first walk in 1996, stresses the fact that many local groups had mobilized to address the diverse problems of the lake region, but these groups lacked coordination and the wherewithal to work together. Religious leaders could potentially play an impartial role, so it was proposed that they be at the center of building a network of individuals and groups dedicated to the revival of the lake. Key goals of the walk were thus to stimulate the formation of a conservation movement around the lake, to foster cooperation and network building among diverse groups, and to apply religious principles to the solution of the environmental and social problems of the lake region.

### Multiple Levels of Learning: Examples from Walk III

At the heart of the Dharma Walk this year were activities that brought the contingent of walkers and the local villagers together. Nearly every evening there was a seminar of some kind to get to know the problems and hopes of the villagers, and to understand the transformations occurring along the Utaphao River. At Huai Khu near the headwaters of the Utaphao, for example, the seminar focused on questioning a government official about the

effects of a large earthen dam recently built in the vicinity. Villagers expressed their fear that they would not have rights to use the water from the dam's reservoir. After noticing that most villagers, especially women, spoke little in the large group, we subsequently broke into small groups formed of villagers, monks, and lay walkers. The small groups then reported back to the larger group on the key issues in the community. On other occasions activities were more informal, or involved cultural performances. We had the delight of seeing and hearing part of a Manorah, listening to elderly women sing traditional lullabies, and witnessing an improvised Nangtalung, the southern Thai shadow play.

Many daily activities were designed to get to know others in the walk, to share feelings, and to process experiences and infor-

mation encountered along the way. These activities took many forms. For example, there were "base groups" that took turns with activities, washing dishes, seeing to the order of the procession, and transporting luggage. But these groups also met nearly every day to converse, share experiences, plan skits, and so on. Skits became occasions to elaborate, sometimes very extemporaneously, on our relationships with nature, or on what we had learned on the walk. One well remembered series of skits acted out the transformation of the Thai countryside from what was designated "the age of self-sufficiency" all the way to "the age of IMF." Often a day would end in a large group circle with each person responding to a simple question such as, "What impressed you the most today?"

Virtually any part of the walk could become an occasion for personal spiritual exploration and reflection. Yet some activities were specifically designed to cultivate a contemplative mood. Every morning there was the opportunity to chant together, usually followed by a period of group meditation. Before the procession set out, a monk would read a prayer that affirmed the solidarity of all beings and the good will of the walkers towards those we met. There was also agreement that a silent procession made it possible for the walking itself to be a form of meditation. Monks would usually give a sermon after the morning or noon meal when local villagers who had provided the food were in attendance in large numbers. Monks also led rituals to prolong the life of the river on several occasions—in the watershed forests, at certain important communities along the river, and on



Ven. Kittisak Kittisophonno,  
initiator of the Dhammayietra

the final day when we sat looking out over the lake.

### Some Kind of "Ping!" Every Day

In spite of all of the reflection, planning, and logistical work, the feeling of the Songkhla Lake Dharma Walk is that you never know what to expect. You cannot predict the weather. You probably will be hot but you might get soaked by a downpour. You cannot predict how you will feel as you walk in the hot sun. Why those sudden feelings of anger, or why so happy today? You cannot predict when the endless monoculture of rubber trees will suddenly become your friend, as when the path takes a turn and plunges through deep rows of white branches framed against a dim light, and the cool canopy softens the sound of the drum. You cannot predict either who you will meet on the Dharma Walk, and you cannot know in advance how well you will understand them. It might be a young woman from Phitsnulok who is thinking about what to do with her life. Or it might be Maha Ghosananda, the head of the Cambodian sangha. Or it might be an Australian conservationist. Or it might be a village teacher who has started an environmental group. Furthermore, you cannot predict what you will learn, and from whom you will learn it. It might be a monk, like Santikaro Bhikkhu, who gives the most thorough analysis of the IMF. And it might be a lay woman's reflections on dharma that stay with you the longest. It might be a young person from the south who provides the most moving example of energy, humor, and group spirit. And it might be your own body, passing landscape after landscape on its own two feet,

that teaches you most about the exhilaration to be found in something as simple as walking.

I think it is this unpredictability, the almost chaotic richness of learning possibilities that attend the effort to find a path for oneself within a larger movement, that are the source of both the beauty and the challenge of the Songkhla Lake Dharma Walk. Thus if we ask what changed as a result of the lake walks, the answer has to be quite complex. If we are thinking in terms of reversing the long-term consequences of extensive rubber plantations, whose roots are too shallow to hold the ground water well, and whose highly productive tree populations need intensive chemical inputs to survive in local conditions, our answer must be quite dim. Likewise, if we would like to help alleviate the economic pressures on local communities—pressures that make conservation seem a luxury to many individuals—the answer might seem dismal. Even if we were to think in terms of the goals of the Dharma Walk, of building a religious network for the conservation of the lake on the basis of relations of trust between very diverse groups, we have to be honest and say that there is only a beginning. What kind of understanding and commitment has in fact developed between monks from Sekhiyatham and monks from the local temples around the lake? Or between city conservationists and rubber workers who live in the lake region? Or between those who think the most important thing is strategizing the next action, and those who mostly want to meditate? How different is the Buddhism of the villagers who offer food to the walkers, and the Buddhism of walkers themselves?

### Conclusion

The richness of the Dharma Walk as a combined social and spiritual practice, as a field of learning together, and as an everyday experience that is unpredictable and open, is in part a result of the strangeness and newness of walking together in unknown territory, outside of normal routines, with people who are drawn together only by a commitment, or by a shared piece of a commitment. But I suspect it is also a result of the openness that characterizes socially engaged Buddhism as it has developed in Thailand. I was particularly moved by the leadership of the Sekhiyatham monks, who were willing to learn from the lay walkers and villagers as well as teach them. Also, the contemplative tone of the walk seemed to suggest that in spite of differences or frustrations, it was possible at any moment to notice each step, each encounter, and be pleased with it. Given all the diverse interests, backgrounds, and interpretations of those who came together in the walk, one had to wonder at times that there could be any unity at all. Yet the simple act of gathering every morning and walking silently together provided a potent reminder that we were after all together in this.

I want to suggest that the walk may symbolize the realities of socially engaged Buddhism in Thailand in this sense as well. It seems to me that those who are committed to spiritual and social transformation face the danger of suffering because they see how big the gap is between what is and what could be, and they see this at so many levels—in finding a path for personal growth, in relating with others who share a similar social vision, in overcom-

ing the many divides that continue to mark present societies, and in eliminating economic exploitation and the destruction of nature. Yet in spite of all the difficulties, by exploring these many areas through activities such as the Dharma Walk, medi-

tation retreats, or conferences, those who hold these commitments create a field of common practice, one in which we are thinking together, and in which we can notice at any time that, yes, we are walking together and it is good.

*Ted Mayer is Ph.D. student in Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin. He is writing his dissertation on the contemporary development of engaged Buddhism in Thailand.*

## Spiritual Materialism and the Sacraments of Consumerism: A View from Thailand

The distinction between religious faith and consumerism is becoming increasingly vague these days. Nowadays, religious faith has been altered to the degree that it means purchasing auspicious objects to worship. One's faith (*saddha*) is no longer measured by how one applies it, how one lives life, but by how many holy or sacred articles one possesses.

Many Bangkok monasteries as well as those in the provinces have transformed into trading centers for such auspicious objects. In these temples, it's not just a few ordinary photographs, encased amulets, and yantra (lucky cloths) that are bought and sold, but an incredible diversity of products, like protective lockets to hang from your rear view mirror, fancy matted pictures, figurines, and signs with magic phrases (like "The House of Richness"). Before long there may be specially blessed watches and consecrated calculators for sale. No doubt there are willing buyers already; it's just a matter of who will start producing them.

Consumerism rests on the principle that happiness and success come about through consuming or purchasing things, not through creating or realizing it by



Phra Paisan Visalo

oneself. This belief causes people to see religion as merely another aspect of consuming, rather than something which should be applied and practiced. The result is that religion has become superstition, and a low form of superstition at that.

There are many people "seeking" religion who are bothered by all the fuss surrounding auspicious objects but unfortunately they are still influenced by consumerism. Some go to temples seeking peace of mind, but in terms of their expectations, they are more like tourists at a resort. When they realize that for peace to be possible one has to make

efforts that involve staying in a tiny, lonely sleeping hut with no running water or electricity in the middle of the forest, and a good long walk to get there as well, their determination fades quickly, and they turn tail, get back in their cars and go home.

Another form of religious consumerism is the desire to rack up spiritual experiences, like seeing *nimitta* (signs, images), visiting heaven and hell realms, and going into deep meditative states of absorption. This is no different than tourists who visit all the famous national parks, but who are happy just to drive around and check out the view from behind the windshield and stay in air-conditioned hotels, rather than walking in the forest, pitching a tent and experiencing peace and quiet. Such people only want strange and new experiences; it never occurs to them to work away at the illusion of "self." They are interested in the "instant coffee" kind of religion where the results are quick and immediate. They won't commit themselves to a single long-term practice or stick with a single teacher, but hop around from this temple to that practice center, and often wind up being deceived by some charismatic phoney, who promises



quick liberation.

A superficial comparison of this kind of people with those whose primary concern in life is money - thinking always of profit, following stock prices during the week, going out shopping on the weekends - indicates that these two groups are exactly the opposite. The first group is religious in a strict way; the second are materialists. But looking more deeply, we see that they both are composites of religion and consumerism, and it is difficult to separate the two. The first group profess their religion in a consumeristic way. The second is religious about their consumption; in fact they are so religious about it, that we can call it a new religion: The Religion of Consumerism.

Broadly defined, a religion is a system of thought and beliefs which meet deep human needs, particularly that of security in our hearts. Each religion has the initial function of providing hope or a promise to people that if they do good, make merit, give alms, trust in God, pray to or beseech him in the proper way, then they will have longevity, good standing, power, good health and prosperity. On a higher level, religions help provide meaning for people's lives, or at least help them know who they are, how to lead their lives and what direction to go. In another sense of the word, religions help people to get beyond their confusion and doubt. Those who have faith or trust in their religion are likely to have resolute strength and energy.

Consumerism functions, up to a point, in the same way that religions do, starting with answering physical needs. People today are obsessed with accumulating wealth and property. And it's not just a matter of how much

you have; what or what kind is equally important. There are loads of people who are willing to spend 100,000 baht on a Rolex watch, and invest millions in a Mercedes Benz. This is all because of their basic insecurity.

Consumerism gives purpose to life as well. People who are completely submerged in it will have no hesitation or doubt because they are very focused - focused on looking for things to consume. There are all kinds of things that obsess people, even to the point where they work so much that they sleep less than strict meditation monks. When it goes this far, we can rightly call it religion. What should we call this kind of strong faith, if not religion.

We should understand that it is not desire alone that drives consumeristic behavior. People's beliefs or world view is a crucial factor. One reason that consumerism has power is due to the set of (seemingly rational) ideas, which say that happiness comes from consuming, and that the more one consumes, the more happiness there is. At the same time, this set of ideas holds that all problems have material solutions. The city has traffic problems? Just buy a computer to design a traffic system. You're putting on weight? Buy some diet pills. Want to be more popular and respected? A Benz is the thing you need. The sacred power of technology lies in more than just its ability to provide rational backing for materialism and consumerism, making them "scientific;" it also transforms technology itself into one of the components used in the rituals of consumerism.

Apart from security in their minds, humans have a deeper need, and that is to transform into

a "new person." The Religion of Consumerism has both rituals and practices which bring about this transformation. In the past, young Thai men who had passed through the monkhood would be known as *kohn sook*, literally "ripe people" (with connotations of being ready or seasoned). Consumerism goes far in answering this deeper need. A great, great number of people use consumerism as a way to build a new ego or become a new person by purchasing those products which support their self image. Taste is not the only thing which draws young people to buy soft drinks, but it is also the young consumer's desire to be one of the "New Generation" or to have personality like the pop star on the commercial. Ads these days do not try to sell the qualities of the products, but sell the qualities of the star or the model hired for the job. An image is being peddled to the consumer, an image that is obtainable by using that particular product.

So consumerism has more than just a material aspect; people's trust, beliefs and views play a very important role as well. When you consider consumerism in terms of the functions that it performs as well as the attitude and understanding of people who are under its influence, it is not so different from other religions. But in the final analysis, the Religion of Consumerism cannot truly answer the deeper needs of humanity. It will never make its followers feel completely satisfied. One who never feels like he has enough will never be able to quit striving and struggling, and will never be able to find real peace. Even worse, when one gives oneself over to the doctrine of consumerism, it is very difficult to realize the fact that it is peace which is the deepest

aspiration and need for life. The desire for material things covers and obscures that deepest and finest wish, leaving one ignorant of life's real needs. Fulfillment in life cannot arise when one is entangled with and overusing

material things. Life's meaning is revealed not through building a new ego, but by delving deep until seeing that "self" is illusion.

*Ven. Phra Paisan Visalo, Thai Buddhist monk and social activ-*

*ist, is member of INEB Think Sangha and one of the key members in Sekyidhamma, a group of Engaged Buddhist monks in Thailand.*

## Report from the Chittagong Hill Tracts

The road into the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in southeastern Bangladesh, winds from the port city of Chittagong on the Bay of Bengal, past a long strand where huge ships are beached and broken down for scrap. It passes through teeming bazaars full of bone-thin men and endless blocks of shabby apartments. It meanders through flat green paddy land, where Bengali farmers scrape out a bare living, up into the rolling hills, with their stripped-out forests, enticing valleys, and ubiquitous army encampments and checkpoints.

Not much traffic as you climb the narrow, pockmarked road into the Chittagong Hill Tracts towards Khagrachari. The only vehicles are buses with passengers spilling onto the roof, a few baby taxis spewing dark, oily exhaust as they labor up the steep incline, and military vehicles full of impeccably uniformed Bengali soldiers.

I've been back in California from Bangladesh for three months, and the images and memories still come to me in a flood. As they stream along, I have a hard time knowing just what to share with you, and I wonder about my personal responsibility, as I recall bitter realities and painful, impoverished lives.

I spent two weeks in Bang-

ladesh this March, traveling, witnessing, and working with INEB's Ordained Sangha: socially engaged monks, nuns, priests and ordained people of different religious traditions. This was the third meeting of the Ordained Sangha, and our first outside Thailand. It was also a meeting in which we found a new form for coming together. We kept the gathering small, no more than twenty five people, who were mostly from within Bangladesh. Only a handful of us from the U.S., Japan, Europe, and Thailand were there to bear witness to the plight of Bangladeshi Buddhists. We spent much of our time listening to voices of poverty, oppression, and human loss.

The Ordained Sangha met at Parbatya Bouddha Mission, a spacious rural temple and orphans' school in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. For seven years, the abbot, my friend Ven. Sumanalankar, has been inviting me to visit him in Khagrachari. Only recently was the Bangladesh government willing to let anyone from the outside into the Hill Tracts.

After 20 years of guerrilla war, there is a moment to breathe in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This once-forested region has been home to 600,000 tribal people for several centuries—mostly Chakma and Marma Buddhists,

Tripura Hindus, and many animist groups, in contrast to more than 120 million Bengali Muslims who live in the alluvial plains to the west. In 1900 British colonizers recognized the fragile balance of populations and set regulations that limited the migration and settlement of Bengali Muslims in the Hill Tracts. But with the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, and the brutal war for Bangladesh independence in 1971, the CHT was once again vulnerable to settlement by a rapidly expanding Bengali population, and also vulnerable to outside exploitation of its forests, lands, and minerals.

In the late 1950s and early 60s, the government created a huge lake and hydroelectric plant at Kaptai in the Hill Tracts, which flooded rich valleys and destroyed 40 percent of the arable land. One hundred thousand hill people were displaced without compensation, and many fled to India. The ancient tradition of swidden agriculture, called *jhum*, was no longer practical. Too much land had been destroyed. More land was lost in the years after independence as the Bangladesh government implemented a policy of Bengali settlement in the hills. This set the stage for 20 years of forced relocation, murder, torture, cultural oppression, and fierce rebellion. It has been a

bitter civil war, unseen and unheeded by most of the world.

In December 1997, a peace accord was signed by the government, the military, the hill people's political organization (the Jana Sanghati Samity or JSS), and its armed wing, the Shanti Bahini. The day before we arrived in the Hill Tracts, several thousand insurgents had surrendered weapons in a ceremony at the sports arena in Khagrachari. It was the second such ceremony, and it expressed an intention of peace, if not the realization of justice. The challenge now is implementation: resettling and compensating exiled hill people, building schools and indigenous institutions, developing democracy, and healing wounds of war. Can this be accomplished in the face of pervasive poverty, unchecked population growth, and global systems of exploitation? We must try.

This is an old commitment for Buddhist Peace Fellowship, our first international program, in fact. BPF Board member Michael Roche traveled to the Hill Tracts in 1980 and wrote a series of reports for BPF and International Fellowship Of Reconciliation. We undertook political lobbying with the U.S. Congress and began to send money to orphanages in Bangladesh. Long friendship with a leading Chakma monk Bimal Bhikkhu, still exiled in Calcutta, was renewed through INEB conferences in the 1990s. Although foreigners were banned from the CHT for many years, we kept listening and helping as we could. Monks, organizers, and church groups in Bangladesh knew we were there, and were grateful that people around the world were willing to bear witness.

The short time I spent in Bangladesh was not easy. With

my friends Ven. Bodhinyana and Sister Cecilia, a Catholic nun, I traveled to the cities of Chittagong, Cox's Bazaar, and Teknaf, far from the capital of Dhaka. I saw burned-out homes of poor Hindus, desecrated stupas, a rickshaw driver collapsed by the roadside, and officious military police at checkpoints in the CHT. In the streets, young mothers held out their frail babies and beseeched us for alms.

But I also met curious, friendly, generous people of many ethnicity. From the bus window, I could see Bengali men walking arm in arm, coming home from the fields in early evening. In Dhaka and Rangamati we visited Banophool and Moanaghar, two large schools and orphanages housing hundreds of children from the CHT. They are partly financed by Partage, a French organization founded by Thich Nhat Hanh's student Pierre Marchand, who personally took up his teacher's message to save the world's children.

Distilling needs is a slow process. From discussions at the Ordained Sangha meeting and long talks with Santikaro Bhikkhu, Brother Jarlath D'Souza, Ven. Sumanalankar, Ven. Bodhinyana, and others, we are evolving a long-range plan so that monks in the Hill Tracts can help their own people. This plan, jointly undertaken by BPF, INEB, and BPF-Bangladesh, calls for dharma education, meditation instruction, critical thinking, non-violence training, and reconciliation work. There are now two young Chakma monks training with Santikaro Bhikkhu at Dawn Kiam in Thailand. The next stage of our work, a month of retreat and right livelihood training for a small group of senior Bangladeshi monks, is planned for No-

vember. But this urgent work calls for great patience, and we all wonder whether we can act in time.

As night falls, the children at Parbatya Bouddha Mission chant their lessons in dimly lit dormitories. From their separate spaces, girls' and boys' voices mingle in nearby fields. The sweet, musical sound contrasts with the violence they have all witnessed. How close to the surface the violence is, even in myself. How vulnerable these children are. In Bangladesh I could also see the illusion we have in the West that our own vulnerability is protected, buried beneath layers of self and possession. When we stand with these children, with the hill people, we set aside all separation and allow our true vulnerability to arise. The Chittagong Hill Tracts are very close. I wish I could show you more.

If you want to learn more or support the CHT training program organized by BPF, INEB, and BPF-Bangladesh, contact me by mail or e-mail at the BPF office: P.O. Box 4650, Berkeley, CA 94704 U.S.A.; <bpf@bpf.org>. Donations in the U.S. are tax deductible. Please mark CHT in the memo section of your check. Thank you.

A version of this article appeared in the Summer 1998 issue of BPF's journal, *Turning Wheel*.

Alan Senauke  
BPF's Coordinator

The *Seeds of Peace* regrets to inform our readers of the passing of three leading Buddhists: Maurice Walshe, Ven. Walpola Rahula, and Lady M.L. Pui Jayanama.



# Towards a Buddhist Culture of Nonviolence and Human Rights

**F**or Vesakh 1998, INEB and numerous Buddhist and Human Rights Organizations published a declaration which calls for a joint effort to work towards a culture of Non-violence and Human Rights. The text was published in different languages.

On 10 May 1998 Buddhists all over the world celebrate Visakha-puja (Vesakh). It is the most important day of observance for Buddhists, the day we commemorate the Lord Buddha's Birth, Awakening, and Parinibbana. On this day Buddhists remind themselves of their undertaking to follow Buddha's path towards Enlightenment. The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) would like to take the opportunity of this holy day to invite everyone to work towards a culture and global implementation of Non-violence and Human Rights.

## Buddhism and Human Rights

Notions of rights derive from ethical principles. There is a clear convergence between Buddhist ethics and modern discussions on human rights, particularly in the common focus on responsibility and indivisibility/interdependence. The non-dual understanding of Buddhism gives rise to an ethics of inter-responsibility, or Bodhicitta - what His Holiness the Dalai Lama calls Universal Responsibility. In the Theravada we speak of Samma-sankappa or Right Thought, which leads to Bodhi, the Awakened Mind. This principle is expressed in everyday terms by the teaching of loving-kindness,

non-violence, compassion, and particular responsibilities. For monks and nuns these are set down in the rule or Vinaya; for lay people in the Sigalovada Sutta and for rulers in the Dasarajadhamma. All human beings, according to Buddhism, are equal, and each has the potential to realize the truth by his or her own will and endeavour, and can help others to realize it. Buddhist concepts recognize the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all human beings. The teaching of the Buddha holds that all human beings are endowed with reason and conscience. It recommends a universal spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. Buddhist theory holds that the "three poisons" of hatred, greed and delusion are at the root of violence in the world, and that the solution is for us to see so deeply into these factors that we are no longer dominated by them.

In the early, organic, societies the Buddha was addressing, these specific responsibilities were assumed to be adequate guidelines for human behaviour, with no need to identify the corresponding rights. In modern, fragmented societies, however, where the fulfillment of responsibilities cannot be guaranteed by the immediate community, these guidelines or skillful means (upaya) have been supplemented by corresponding rights. These are specified and protected by States and International Organisations. In large part these bodies derive their legitimacy from their promotion and protection of human rights. A State which does not

guarantee the enjoyment of human rights by its people loses its claim to legitimacy.

Buddhism is widely regarded as the most tolerant of all religious traditions. However, Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka, Burma, and Cambodia have seen some of the highest levels of religious and ethnic intolerance in the world, with Buddhists among the main perpetrators. In other places it is Buddhists who are persecuted by the State, which fears the influence of Buddhism on the people. In Burma, Tibet and Viêt Nam, for instance, thousands of Buddhists (especially monks and nuns) have been persecuted, with well-documented instances of torture and executions. In Tibet most of the country's monasteries have been demolished.

The depiction of rights as simply a Western invention fails to understand the relationship of rights to responsibilities and ethical norms. The central values of all societies are very much the same. All ethical systems encourage people to respect each other, and discourage killing, violence and so on. Rights are skillful means designed to assist the implementation of these ethics.

Human Rights discourse has moved on during the past 50 years and has expanded and enriched the somewhat individualistic principles set out in the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' which was adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. The dialectic of

universalism and cultural relativism, for instance, is an immensely creative process as well as a cause for countless conflicts. The work since 1982 on the rights of indigenous peoples group rights is another important development. The cultural, social and political development of a nation is a dynamic process. The orientation of the process should not only be based in our own roots and traditions, but must also be shaped by innovative new ideas. Cultural diversity is a factor that enriches the modern approach to human rights, rather than hindering the universal respect for and observance of human rights.

#### **Buddhist Commitment to Human Rights**

As H.H. the Dalai Lama stressed: "I truly believe that individuals can make a difference in society. Since periods of great change such as the present one come so rarely in human history, it is up to each of us to make the best use of our time to help create a happier world."

#### **In this spirit:**

1. We call on all Buddhists to look into themselves, their institutions and teachings, in order to renew Buddhism as a way of peace and non-violence, not only in individual, but also in collective practice and theory. Buddhists must adopt an active approach to reducing suffering. This can be done by working for the active implementation of peace and human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. The activities related to the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights offer an excellent opportunity to renew and expand our efforts in this field.

2. We request all Buddhists

to show solidarity with those who are persecuted by their governments and to stand up for their human rights.

3. We urge all Governments, especially in Burma, Viêt Nam and the Peoples Republic of China, to stop immediately the severe human rights violations against Buddhists and others and to ensure that human rights become a reality in their countries.

4. We invite all Buddhist communities and organizations to include human rights educa-

tion in their programs and to distribute information and educational materials.

5. We encourage Buddhist leaders to give importance to the human rights issues in their communities and countries.

6. We support the appeal of H.H. the Dalai Lama and other Nobel Peace Prize laureates, that the UN should declare the years 2000-2010 the "Decade for a Culture of Non-Violence."

## **Tibetan Student Sponsorship & Scholarship Fund**

The Department of Education was one of the first functions within the exile government which was set up by His Holiness after leaving Tibet and beginning his ministry to the refugee community. The 85 schools now under the administration of the exile government have received much support from the Indian government, with whom their schools are accredited. However the economic contribution of non-Tibetan supporters is largest source of support for Tibetan schools. Direct, individual sponsorship of very needy Tibetan refugee children is possible through a program set up by the Department of Education. The Tibetan Community is spread out into groups in various settlements in India, Nepal and Bhutan, and CTA representatives and settlement officers seek the most genuinely needy children for the Dept. Of Education's sponsorship program in consultation with the local Tibetan People's Cmte.

Sponsorship of the education of a child is US\$240 per year. It is requested that sponsors continue their support until the completion of the child's schooling. A separate fund has been set up for scholarships for students wishing to pursue further studies.

Further information on the Sponsorship and Scholarship Funds is available from:

The Secretary, Department of Education, Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamsala, 176 215, Distt. Kangra, H.P. INDIA

## Greetings from the Secretariat

Welcome to our newsletter. From now on we will have pages devoted to Alternatives to Consumerism news in every issue of *Seeds of Peace*. To make this interesting and lively we are relying on contributions from network members and friends. In each issue we will publish network news, stories of alternatives to consumerism and other pertinent articles. The network welcomes contributions from people concerned with the negative effects of unnecessary consumption as we hurtle towards a world that is dominated by multinational corporations and the media and perpetuated by the greedy tendencies which are now taught from birth in many parts of the world. Even in the remotest areas of the world cola is craved rather than local fruit drinks, denim jeans and tee shirts rather than traditional and appropriate clothing. Rather than condemning we must simply begin to ask the question why this is so and really look into the ramifications it has for our society and the world in which our children will live. We welcome news of the challenges and successes of people working to value systems where greed and dependence on outside forces, are critically questioned as damaging and alternatives based on gentler influences such as community spirit and self-reliance are sought.

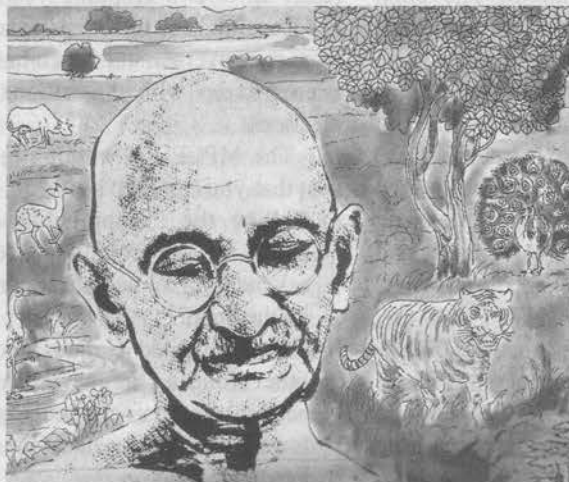
In this newsletter we include updates on the direct action protest against the Yadana Pipeline where local villagers are taking on the Burmese Military Junta, the Thai Petroleum Company and multi-national oil companies. As a follow up to the Gathering in December there is a report and update on the Alternative Politics workshop and information on alternative university education that will be of special interest to participants of the Alternative Education workshop. There is a story on Loverendale Farm, a bio-dynamic farming community in the Netherlands that considers the spiritual forces as well as the soil and the weather! Also included is information on an innovative course on Eco-Villages at the Findhorn Community in Scotland co-ordinated by ATC friends Craig Gibson & May East. An eco-village is a small community of 50 to 2000 people united by a common goal usually based on a shared ecological, spiritual or social perspectives.

We hope this is of interest to you and look forward to your lively contributions for exchange and sharing in the future. All our friends and network members should be aware of the crucial role that they play in keeping the ATC network alive. Without your comments and contributions the excitement and freshness constituted by active dialog, is lost. Any news about training or local activities by our friends and network members we really want to share with the rest of the network. Stories and comments on stories we have already published are encouraged as well. ATC is not an institution, it is a group or tribe of people who are concerned about the kind of world we live in, and the world we will leave to our children and their children. Our inspiration, information and direction comes from dialog and sharing. If you share our concern, please join our tribe and tell us what you have to say.

with peace,

JANE RASBASH  
CHRIS WALKER

for the ATC secretariat





## ATC Network News

### Spiritual Healing Seminar & Publication

The Alternatives to Consumerism network has identified a need for practitioners of spiritual healing to gather together for information exchange and learning from each other. The secretariat is currently planning a seminar in February 2000 likely to be held in Thailand. This will include an exposure trip to visit spiritual healing projects, a seminar for practitioners with a series of short workshops in various traditions. In conjunction with these activities the network would like to publish a series of papers on different forms of spiritual healing. If you are interested in writing a paper, organising or participating in this event please contact the secretariat.

### YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE -

Many of you will remember Vicky Robins from the ATC Gathering. Her book on voluntary simplicity is about changing from an over consumptive and expensive lifestyle to a more frugal one with more emphasis on personal fulfilment. The book will be translated into Thai and a workshop on this topic will be conducted in Bangkok later this year. This workshop will be aimed at the "formerly rich" Thais who are now unable to keep up their expensive lifestyles with Mercedes, portable phones and the like.

### El Niño Drought in the Philippines

The secretariat has received several disturbing reports from network friends suffering from

the effects of the El Niño phenomenon. The crops of almost all the indigenous peoples communities in South-Central Mindanao have failed due to severe drought believed to be related to El Niño. Consequently massive hunger among the people is increasing since February 1998. Starvation is expected up until the second and third quarters of the year. We are trying to survive through maximising the traditional food the Krut or wild yam, tadpoles, frogs, turtles and whatever freshwater creatures can be eaten, this is in a great effort to bridge the food shortage to the next harvest season. This kind of foraging for food is open to dangers from poisonous snakes. There is also the danger of wild yam poisoning due to the drying up of creeks and rivers which are needed in the processing of wild yam before cooking. As of this moment 17 people have died in several villages in the province of Maguindanao and more than a hundred have been brought to hospital for medication. Children are the most at risk.

The impact of El Niño could reach up to two cropping years and there has been little assistance from the government which has been tied up with the national elections.

The MPCPD Network suggest that you can help by:

- a) Calling the Philippine Embassy in your countries and ask them for immediate action on the crisis
- b) Call the United Nations and other funding agencies for help in the crisis particularly for adversely affected families.

Immediate needs are : Rice and other instant food; gadgets for water purification; medical practitioners and medicines.

Long term needs: Crops and agricultural Rehabilitation:

Please contact:

Friends of El Niño Victims:  
MPCPD

Dasasin Res. Opiate Drive, Cotabato City, Philippines

Tel: 63 64 421 3645

Email: mpcpd@ndn.fapenet.org

### Alternative Politics for Asia Update

The APA project has gone high tech! If you have access to the web you can now read all the interviews and dialogues onscreen. The Website address is: [www.envirolink.org/orgs/greengroup](http://www.envirolink.org/orgs/greengroup).

The APA interviews express the viewpoints on politics and society of leading figures from different spiritual traditions in Asia including Sulak Sivaraksa, engaged Thai Buddhist; Chandra Muzaffar, radical Muslim thinker from Malaysia; Bishop Labayan, a Filipino Christian with Marxist influence; Satish Kumar, an Indian with a Jain background who resides in the UK and is editor of the magazine, *Resurgence*. For those without access to computers copies of these dialogues/interviews are available from the ATC secretariat.

In the near future APA is planning extensive dialogues between Sulak Sivaraksa and Abdulrahman Wahid, the Indonesian leader of the massive pesanteran movement.

## Alternative Universities: let us go for it!

The participants of the 'Alternative Education' workshop (Moo Ban Dek, Children's Village school, Thailand, December 8 - 12, 1997) met to discuss new approaches to Primary Education. They also explored some of the current initiatives in higher and adult education like The Naropa Institute (USA), Emerson College (U.K.), Ganghigram University in India and Schumacher College.

After the workshop in Thailand, a course called 'Reclaiming our Culture, Re-designing the University', led by David Orr and David Ehrenfeld was the magic opportunity to undertake a new step towards realization of the action plan formulated during the workshop in Thailand.

It was John May from the Irish School of Eucumenics, who made the case during the Moo Ban Dek workshop that society-wide "change", "transformation" or "reformasi" as expressed by our Indonesian friends will first begin from a change in the university system.

David W. Orr is the author of *Earth in Mind ~ On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* and several other books, including *Ecological Literacy*. His presentation of the trend-setting model of The Oberlin College environmental studies building, not only inspired the course participants because of the building's "green records" in terms of low energy input and efficiency, but above all because the design process was based on full student partici-

pation. The value of the information and experience gained from this project fully benefits the local community and all those who wish to follow their footsteps in the 'green building concept.'

David Orr's presentation was balanced by David Ehrenfeld from the more pessimistic conservation biologists' view. Face to face with the realistic expectation of a Global Crisis, David's explanation of the true meaning of "Sabbath" constituted a meditative point in the group process which pointed the course participants towards the point of "letting go." Each seventh day of the week, Jews observe three principles at the same time: not to create anything, not to destroy anything and to celebrate life. This three-fold principle culminates in a cycle of 7 times 7 leading to the sabbatical year in every persons' lifetime. How much this "sabbatical mood" is needed in the world today was exemplified by Helena Norberg-Hodge during one of the most moving and alarming evenings of the course. Her explanation of the video 'Ancient Futures ~ Learning from Ladakh' was a message of the heart, directly pointing at the destructive forces that are transmitted through western styled education. The course also provided an opportunity for John Thomson of Emerson College, Anne Phillips and Satish Kumar of Schumacher College to discuss briefly the perspectives of cooperative action in the future. My own paper "Holistic Universities: Towards a Culture of Peace" was presented at the open

evening, engaging the local community. It was apparent how much this region of England is becoming one of the resource areas for global transformation.

I hope that our efforts to establish links between creative people in education (higher, professional and vocational education alike) will be genuinely instrumental in promoting change for the better. In the Netherlands a small INEB group is growing and we try to associate as much as possible with our friends in Asia. One of the most pressing problems is to bring about food security by sustainable agriculture and through empowerment of rural community culture.

In November 1997 Pierre Calame, France, delivered a speech at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok at the request of the International Association of Universities (IAU). He said, "a paradigmatic change is needed in higher education. One of the most vital areas of higher education is teachers training." Let us explore these impulses in the light of 'Peace Education' and the common effort towards a 'Culture of Peace'. The new paradigm for a sane and sustainable world is in the souls of the people.

Please contact:

INEB- the Netherlands  
Hans van Willenswaard  
P.O. Box 11514  
1001 GM Amsterdam  
E- mail: ini@antenna.nl

## Crusade for Creativity

*Aruvancode, a hamlet in Kerala, India is an important centre for art, craft and architectural designs practiced by a "peripheral people". K.B. Jinan, has helped these people reassemble their lives, it was a return to a collective past.*

A key element of folk art is the artist's unique vision. How can an artist teach people to bring out their full creative potential? Art is a liberating force that can feed the inner lives of teachers and students and the whole education enterprise depends on the quality of those inner lives so that they can help people grow like plants out of their own nature, not simply training them or building skills.

K.B. Jinan would say, "creativity involves drawing on sources from within, finding images, words, sounds or movements inside oneself to express one's perceptions". Teachers who develop this kind of self-confidence feel freer to draw upon their unique bank of perceptions, experiences and insights. This is particularly useful when working with children or tribal groups. A man with many creative skills, K.B. Jinan is an engineer, artist, designer/teacher and potter. It is largely to Jinan's credit that the tiny hamlet of Aruvancode in Kerala has resurrected its pottery tradition and become world renowned as a centre for exploring craft, art and architectural design based on natural instinct and hereditary knowledge.

The significance of Aruvancode is that it has become a crossroads, highlighting an array of traditions practiced by "peripheral people". Jinan first went to the village in 1987 after hearing that a group of craftspeople were struggling to preserve their iden-



K.B. Jinan.

tity by challenging the typical modern definition of art. He was amazed by their experimental approach using everyday objects to make beautiful and essentially Indian items. In their work he found an appreciation of the aesthetic and a celebration of the artist as opposed to anonymously made objects. At that time he commented, "to journey into such a world was tantamount to taking a trip into a time wspace continuum. It entailed a cultural and psychological return to the collective past." He decided to stay on at Aruvancode for a few months to help them reassemble their lives almost wrecked by modernisation and consumerism and bring them and their work into the mainstream of post-modern and contemporary life. He planned to stay for six months which has extended to many years! To probe, and sound out, to excavate the essence - subjectively to be sure - of the creative work in question, whatever the discipline, was his goal. In a way it was also a journey into his personal past, the work or theme under investigation acting as a springboard for the adventure.

Jinan, 40, who had already functioned with men and women of different regional, ethnic, and religious backgrounds who work in various media - woodwork,

pottery, baskets, textiles, jewellery, painting and murals - had soaked in the diversity of India's rich aesthetic tradition; and in working with the folk people of Aruvancode, dissolved, to begin with, all dichotomies such as image/reality and high art/mass culture and suggested that no such distinction actually existed. He also clarified that no modern elitist concept of "art" was applicable or relevant to a postmodern audience entranced in global consumerism.

"What is unique about the Aruvancode project," said Jinan, "is that very little outside resource was put to use. Today development in general means utilising technology, scientists and experts and handing over a package deal to the innocent rural community, thereby undermining their sense of self-confidence and creativity. I helped the people of Aruvancode realise their potential, their own innovativeness by directly throwing the mainstream notions about education, cultural roots and aesthetics."

For six long years from 1987-1992, he functioned like a high priest collaborating with an almost-primitive people, blurring the distinction between high art and handicrafts and directing them like hunters to look for and wrest designs from nature-flowers, leaves, animals, insects, butterflies. In this culture, creations were not gender specific, not influenced by any existing craft form, not even a traditional floor design, but the final products were "highly original and rooted to the soil." They were designs so universal that they could fit into a corporate office or a home and went beyond all traditional pottery. From this stage, the artisans went on to the next innovative stage of produc-



ing colourful tiles that could be collaged into murals, wall lamps, shades and garden lamps, all of which brought them into the mainstream of art and architecture.

Jinan organised exhibitions to bring awareness among the Aruvacode crafts people about the importance of market value, and as the message of aruvacode spread, the U.K.- based Oxfam granted funds for development of fresh designs. The Foundation for Progress of Humankind based in France invited Jinan to make a presentation of the work done at Aruvacode, and the International Alternatives to Consumerism Secretariat of the Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute of Thailand asked him to address a seminar at Bangkok. He was selected by the Institute as one of the few persons in India who could tie-in a thematic thread and provided a heightened appreciation of the three universal questions- "What is Tradition?" - "What is Culture?" - and "What is Art?" Having specialised in alternative education and self-reliance in communities, he was asked to organise a workshop on "Creativity".

Addressing the participants of the workshop, Jinan said that creativity was the quality of an independent mind. It could not flourish under the burden of the colonial education the legacy of which continued all over the country. As



Life-size "Head" made by Lakshmi.

long as the Western mode of thinking dominated our lives, Indians - be they in urban or rural areas - would continue to be uncreative because beauty would never reveal itself to them in its real form. Today what passed for creativity was market-dictated products and this was causing havoc to our spiritual and aesthetic sensibility. On the other hand, the impact of Buddhism, he observed, had helped the Thai people retain their spiritual approach despite the inevitable emphasis on consumerism.

Creative arts in learning, he said, could help us literally get inside another's culture-the feeling of it, the soul of it-not just

ideas about it. They would give us experiences through our senses-those pathways through which the world comes to us.

The Workshop upheld the Vermont Puppet theatre's proclamation on Creativity and Art: "Art soothes pain! Art wakes up sleepers! Art is for kitchen! Art is good bread! Art is for green-trees! Art is like white clouds in the sky! Art is not business! It does not belong to banks and fancy investors! Art is food! You can't eat it but it feeds you! Art has to be cheap and available to everybody! It needs to be everywhere because it is the inside of the world!"

## The Findhorn Foundation in partnership with GEN-Europe-Global Eco-Village Network presents Eco-Village Training, February 13 to March 12, 1999.

On a global level there is an increasing urgent need to have positive models that can demonstrate a viable, sustainable human and planetary future. 'Eco-Villages' or 'sustainable communities' address this need, looking at sustainability not only environmental terms but also socially,

economically and spiritually.

The Eco-Village model is a conscious response to the extremely complex problem of how to move the planet towards a society of sustainable communities. Its principles can be applied as equally to urban as to rural settings, to both developing and

over-developed countries, and provide solutions to human and social needs, whilst at the same time protecting the environment and offering an enhanced quality of life for all.

An eco-village is a small community of 50 to 2000 people united by a common goal usually

based on a common ecological, social or spiritual perspective. Working on the simple principle of not taking more away from the Earth than one gives back, eco-villages are potentially sustainable indefinitely.

The training, based at the Findhorn Foundation's demonstration Eco-village Project, is in 10 separate modules, which may be attended as a whole or separately. It contains all the essential tools and techniques, to enable participants to practice eco-village concepts in their home contexts, providing solutions which both work and are affordable to ordinary people.

It is designed to those who wish to be involved with shifting humankind towards a more sustainable existence. It will serve individuals involved in green issues and in building & sustaining communities; students and professionals from architectural, engineering and building careers; permaculture and horticultural researchers; alternative technologists; business people interested in ethical development; local and central government officers, and members of Non-Governmental Organizations.

#### **Module 1: Eco-Villages and the Emerging Paradigm.**

This introductory model intends to give an overview of the eco-village model within the context of a planetary movement towards sustainable human settlements. Based in the fundamental awareness of the interdependence of all life, eco-villages embody a holistic approach to how we live, work and play together as well as living harmoniously with Nature. This module will also celebrate the unique blend between ecology and spirituality synthesized in the Findhorn Community, and expressed as a philosophy of harmony and compassion, of dream and vision, of earth and cosmos, of technology and spirit, dance and chant, cycle and balance, death and

renewal. Tutors: May East, Craig Gibsone & John Talbott Feb 13-15

#### **Module 2: Permaculture - Design for Sustainability**

This module introduces the principles of Permaculture for the conscious design of a sustainable future, based on cooperation with Nature, caring for Earth and its peoples. Permaculture draws together knowledge and skills from many ecological disciplines - old and new - to meet our basic needs of food and shelter, as well as creating sustainable social and financial structures. Tutors: Samantha Graham & Jane Hera Feb 16-18

#### **Module 3: Building for the Next Millennium**

Using the best of natural building materials and methods we look at how to build ecologically as well as beautifully; maximizing energy efficiency with creating the healthiest possible indoor environment; using Nature's renewable energy sources easily and simply; recycling and managing our wastes; water cycles and 'living machines' based on ecological technology of Nature; land ownership issues and community design; and the maintenance and upgrading of existing infrastructures; All within the context of the United Nations' Agenda 21 charter for sustainable development. Tutor: John Talbott 19-21 Feb

#### **Module 4: Sustainable Economics**

The Eco-village as an alternative to the current macro-economic model. Topics include the practice of right livelihood; localization vs. globalisation; voluntary simplicity; stakeholder and cooperative philosophy; stewardship and the Natural Step program. We will also look at the essential need for a change in consciousness and values away from competition towards cooperation and service.

Tutors: Johnny Brierley and

David Hoyle 22-23 Feb

#### **Module 5: Earthshare, Harvesting and Creative Cooking**

This module explores the cycle of organic food production: planting, harvesting, cooking, eating and composting. This is a practical module, working on the land and in the kitchens during the day, and in the evenings looking at the basic principles and practices of organic and biodynamic food production. We also explore how to create a Community Supported Agricultural (CSA) scheme. Tutors: Randy Klinger and Christopher Raymont 24-25 Feb

#### **Module 6: Deep Democracy - Love, Power, Hierarchy and Group Dynamics**

This module is designed to develop facilitation skills for working with both large and small groups. It explores how we can listen to each other, integrating conflict and diversity in ways which increase participation and effectiveness. Topics include: rank, privilege and power; roles and intimacy; conflict, betrayal and revenge; dreams, symptoms and disturbances; goals, visions and spiritual practice Tutors: Ben Fuchs and Andrew Murray 26-28 Feb

#### **Module 7: The Healing Power of Community**

It will explore principles of community centered health service that focuses on health care (health enhancement, health maintenance and disease prevention) rather than disease care. This module intends to examine the pioneering model developed at the Findhorn Foundation Community, known as the Medical Marriage, a cooperation between complementary and orthodox medicine which has relevance for the new trends in medicine towards integrated healthcare. Coordinated by Dr. Cornelia Featherstone. Tutors: Lori Forsyth and Durten Lau 1-2 March

### **Module 8: Global Communication, Technology and Networking**

In this module there is a mix of discussion and practical training covering the use of information technology (IT) to create community within eco-villages as well as linking groups and individuals to the emerging global community. It includes basic computer and Internet skills, and more advanced topics such as multimedia and web-site design, marketing and technology.

Tutor: William Martin & Marijke Wilhelmus March 3-4

### **Module 9: Fundraising**

This module trains participants in manifesting dreams to financial reality. Identifying visions and goals and training in the preparation for fundraising from individuals, Trusts and Foundations and the Corporate Sector will be covered. We will also look at raising your organizations' profile through good practice in Public Relations and Advertising. : Susan Robinson 6-7 March

### **Module 10: Wilderness, Conservation and Eco-Restoration**

In this module we will look at the role of wilderness in planet's life; principles of ecological restoration, tree-planting and conservation of biodiversity. We also look at the principles of deep ecology and Findhorn's work with Spirit in Nature. The course features the Trees for Life project, and a visit to the Scottish Highlands to participate in their reforestation work.

Tutors: Craig Gibsone and Claire

Cummings 8-10 March

Eco-Village Training Modules will be focused by members of the Findhorn Foundation Community, coordinated by May East, Craig Gibsone and John Talbott.

Training fees £1100 for the whole program or £150 per module. The fees include tuition, accommodation, vegetarian meals and field trips.

\*If you cannot afford the full fee, please write for information on our bursars policy, mentioning your nationality.

\*If you can pay more, your donation will be gratefully received and used to fund those who can-not afford the whole fee.

Please bring 10 to 15 min. presentation of your eco-village project.

We offer Eco-village training modules to different communities, universities and groups. Write for further details to [eastgibsone@findhorn.org](mailto:eastgibsone@findhorn.org)

Findhorn Foundation Eco-Village Project. The Findhorn Foundation, since 1962 internationally known for its experiment with new models for holistic and sustainable living, is today at the heart of the largest single intentional community in the UK. Founded in an aging caravan park in the Northeast of Scotland, the Findhorn Foundation demonstrates the links between the spiritual, social and economic aspects of life. Over the years the community has grown into a major center of adult education welcoming over 14,000 visitors a year from over 50 countries.

Cooperation and co-creation with nature is a major aspect of the Foundation's work and from its earliest days it became well-known for its beautiful gardens grown in the adverse and unlikely conditions of the sand dunes of the Findhorn peninsula.

Since the 1980's the Findhorn Foundation is involved in building a demonstration Eco-Village as a natural continuation of its earlier work. There have been 25 ecological buildings erected to date, including an innovative 'Living Machine' biological sewage treatment plant. We have developed a unique environmentally sound, energy efficient construction system using natural materials and are supplying approximately 25% of our energy from renewable energy sources, including our own 75kw wind generator. We have installed numerous solar heating systems; set up a comprehensive recycling scheme; published *Simply Build Green*, the UK's first technical guide to ecological housing, based on our own research and experience; become a major resource for environmental education locally, nationally and internationally.

The Findhorn Foundation is a non-governmental organization associated with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations, member of UNESCO's Planet Society Network and member of the United Nations Environment and Development UK Committee.

## Alternative Politics for Asia, Workshop Report

On December 3rd through the 7th, 1998 a workshop was held at Wongsanit ashram in conjunction with the Alternatives to Consumerism international gathering. Participants from many countries around the world and

with diverse backgrounds gathered to make friends with each other and begin to undertake a frank discussion on how to build a paradigm of politics for Asia which honors the unique wisdom traditions in the region and is

in line with the needs of Asian peoples.

On the first day of the workshop the participants began by introducing themselves to each other and describing their background and reasons for interest in



gathering to discuss alternative politics for Asia. One point which became immediately clear is that this gathering possessed an immense amount of diversity in culture, experience and wisdom, but a common purpose was also evident. During the introductions the spectrum of participation ranged from artists who wish to build a better society through art, students of Marxism, Gandhi, and former members of the Thai communist party, tribal headmen of indigenous peoples, western NGO workers and political activists from all over Asia and the world. In spite of this diversity a common purpose was felt, that of helping society to grow more responsive to the needs of people through open and honest dialog in the political arena. Many of the participants had firsthand experience of the suffering caused by political machines which are out of touch with the people they govern. Participants from Burma commented that in their country it was dangerous to speak of politics at all, and participants from indigenous tribes in the Philippines preferred to speak of an alternative vision for society as politics in the western sense is not the norm at all in their region. Right from the start a framework for a lively and diverse discussion was found in the variety of experience and ideas that the participants would bring to the workshop.

On day one the keynote address was given by Rajagopal a prominent Gandhian and a worker in an organization which focuses on education of the young among indigenous people. In his address Rajagopal stressed the importance of putting ideas into action. If we are only 'consumers of ideas' we are like 'farmers who have seeds but can't use them.' He expresses his idea of beginning to climb out of this situation by raising awareness in stages. First we become aware of the need for change as an individual, then we may associate with a

group who also desires positive transformation. Together, individuals who desire change can dialog and produce fresh ideas. Rajagopal cites the importance of deriving ideas from dialog with people who are normally labeled as uneducated. One reason for this is that often people who are 'educated' are also 'indoctrinated.' Their ability to have alternative, fresh or even radical ideas is actually often curtailed instead of enhanced by their education. The result of a society entirely dominated by norms of education is not only silence in response to the need for change, but a tacit acceptance of the cultural and structural violence which is already built-in to most political systems. Rajagopal concluded by suggesting some of the ways in which we can harness human wisdom to help address the need for change: sensitizing educated people to structural violence, inclusion of feminine wisdom, and awakening people to their rights and responsibilities in controlling state power.

In the second half of day one, the workshop participants met in small groups and discussed the day's keynote address. Each of the small groups reported back to the main gathering. Each group had many interesting things to say and many came up with more questions to share. Some of the areas of discussion included the difficulty of defining alternative politics, the overlap of alternative politics into other areas like economics, human rights and spirituality, and the various aspects of feminine wisdom, what is it and how to incorporate it into alternative politics. It was clear that the workshop was off to a fantastic and interesting start but had much ground to cover.

During the following three days the points raised during the first day were expanded and discussed through many various activities. A panel discussion was held to present several peoples

individual vision for alternative politics e.g. from the perspective of the Green party, or agriculturists, tribal peoples, et cetera. At this point the focus of the workshop became a little more specific, beginning to articulate a definition and vision of alternative politics that can be shared by many diverse groups who all agree on the need for change but come from such different backgrounds. On day three some posters were presented one of which was a visual representation of a tribal vision of society. It showed how the tribal idea of society is highly decentralized. Most education takes place in the home and justice is applied through a wide distribution of power. It also showed the emphasis on spiritualism in the organization and leadership within a tribe. Other groups presented posters with a list of the likes and don't like in the present paradigm of society.

On the evening of the second day Chandra Muzaffa, a Muslim activist gave a talk on his vision of alternative politics. The full text of this talk is available from the ATC secretariat. In short Mr. Muzaffa presents a critique of the national and global structures of politics, and a potential revalorization of politics through religious and moral ethics. This presentation was highly informative as well as controversial, the discussion that followed was heated and lasted long into the night. Indeed it was continued the following morning.

The last segment of the workshop began to move toward identifying what the participants felt were concrete steps to be taken for addressing the issue of alternative politics for Asia. This took the form of proposals for the future made by the small groups after their discussions. The most prominent suggestion was that the members of the workshop remain in communication and available to help each other. It was suggested that later there would be a more formal alterna-

tive politics network but for the near future ATC would assist in linking all the workshop participants. Finally it was noted that

sharing and exchanging information would remain key through the entire process.

To conclude the workshop

the participants gave their feedback on the workshop itself and ATC friend, Ramesh, sang a song, 'Victory to the World.'

## Loverendale Farm - a farm with a history and a future?

The many sandstone shrines found in the remote island of Walcheren in the Netherlands tell the tale of sailors, tradespeople and farmers who thanked the indigenous deity from Roman times named 'Nehalennia' for fruitful harvests and successful trade.

Loverendale Farm lies in the shadow of the dunes on the North sea coast of the island. The farm grows natural soil crops, vegetables and fruit and the livestock provide dairy produce, meat and of course dung.

With over one hundred hectares of land it is the largest agricultural enterprise on the island. Unlike other farms in the area Loverendale has a historical link with the anthroposophic community in the Netherlands and beyond and in at various times this century has become an inspiration for those who question materialistic values and seek to live an alternative lifestyle..

Founded in 1926 Loverendale has had tremendous influence on the development of bio-dynamic farms in the Netherlands as well as Sweden, Britain and America. They were part of a group of seekers that, in those days of revolution in science, philosophy and art found inspiration in the special, spiritual atmosphere of the remote island. Marie Tak van Poortvliet, art collector and scion of a wealthy family of landowners and politicians got acquainted with Rudolph Steiner and anthroposophy and she became very enthusiastic about the movement. She placed her land near the village of Domburg on the island as a place to form an experimental farm based on the idea's of anthroposophy. Pfeif-

fer, an agricultural scientist and the righthand of Steiner was the man in charge. In the anthroposophy view human beings are a spiritual entity that return to the earth out of a spiritual existence over and over again in order to fully develop. Karma guides the development of the individual as well as the development of mankind. The ethereal quality of nourishment is a primary condition on spiritual development. In the bio-dynamic view soil is a biological organism and indivisible part of the cosmos. Agriculture should therefore not throw off its balance. Fertilizers and chemicals are pernicious.

In the first decades of its history Loverendale was in the first place a laboratory where Pfeiffer laid the foundation of everyday practice of bio-dynamic agriculture. Disaster struck at the end of World War II when floods destroyed most of the farm. The sea water came over the land every day for almost a year, salinated the soil excessively. But the farm community was able to rebuild and to make the earth fertile again. In the decades after the war, with its rational and industrial mentality, Loverendale was able to stand firm and even grow bigger.

Loverendale was rooted in society. From all over the country and from abroad scholars and students as well as people involved in social movements in the sixties and the seventies stayed on the farm. They worked there with their hands in the soil in order to get their head clear and find the balance between the head, the heart and nature. It was obvious that the spot still drew from its original spiritual resources.

Loverendale also gave the impulse to found a Waldorf-school in Middelburg, the capital of the province of Zeeland, ten kilometers south. Up until today there is a close relationship between the school and the farm.

In the eighties unfair competition of the subsidized industrial agriculture forced Loverendale to restructure to a more commercial organisation in order to survive. Over the years Loverendale changed to an organisation with a flat structure. Different families ran different projects producing the crops, the vegetables, the fruit. Over two hundred families joined in a system of subscription for the vegetables, fruit and dairy produce. The numbers are increasing each month and this continuity of income gives the farmers financial security and reinforces the ties between the farm and consumers.

Over the last couple of years people on the farm and others concerned in Loverendale, started initiatives to look into the history and the spiritual forces that gave Loverendale its important place on Walcheren and in the anthroposophic community. It exemplifies alternatives as they develop within the European cultural context. Exchange of experiences with alternative movements in other continents may add value to these reflections and imaginations. Perhaps with a renewed spiritual impulse Loverendale will be able to inspire the laborious, but fertile interaction between agriculture, science, art and philosophy.

Peter Lievense,  
The Netherlands

## Sulak Sivaraksa's Testimony on Yadana Gas Pipeline<sup>1</sup>

My name is Sulak Sivaraksa. I would like to testify as president of the Kalayanamitra Council, which comprises members from around the world, whose concern is to make sure that human beings support each other and advise each other just like the voice of conscience as taught by the Lord Buddha.

Since April 1997, hundreds of protest letters have been submitted to Mr. Chavalit Yongchaiyuth, who was then Prime Minister, by the council's members, some of whom are Nobel laureates in peace and science and literature. Every one of us has called for courage and a moral stand of the government which will ensure peace and happiness of the people in both Siam and Burma, as well as to protect the environment of both countries. We asked the government several things.

1. Annul the shameful contract with MOGE (Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise) under the former SLORC (now known as the SPDC : State Peace and Development Council) and its consortium. Then to negotiate with a legitimate government which must include Aung San Suu Kyi as a partner as she led the party which won the election in 1990.
2. Ask the Burmese Junta to cease all of their human right abuses.
3. Ask the Burmese Junta to allow freedom in every aspect of life.
4. Ask the Burmese Junta and the Thai government itself to

strictly observe the requirements of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Herewith, I would like to hand you three documents as follows;

1. A copy of our letters addressed to the prime minister last April.
2. A brief report on the history of Kalayanamitra Council and a report on the deadly impacts of the gas pipeline project.
3. Our most recent letter to the prime minister which was officially acknowledged.

In June 1997, the issue of the gas pipeline was raised to the People's Tribunal, which was held in Denver. The trial took place almost at the same time with the G8 Summit. After hearing the case, several statements were made.

1. The court condemned Unocal and Total for their irresponsibility as far as human rights abuse and environmental destruction are concerned. Moreover, by co-partnering with SPDC, they end up earning the Burmese junta a large sum of money, most of which will be used to purchase arms to suppress and kill their own people.
2. It condemned the American and French governments for their responsibility in allowing the two corporations to be based in their respective countries.
3. It asked the Thai government to annul the contract they signed with the Burmese regime which is known to be one

of the worst administrations in the world, and lacks any legitimacy to rule over the country.

4. It proposed that a neutral organization be formed to assess the impacts of the construction on the ecological balance as well as the well-being of people along the pipeline route.

The People's Tribunal may lack authority to ask all concerned parties to abide by their rulings, similar to the World Court at the Hague which cannot force the offending governments to comply with its rulings. However, even if concerned parties refuse to abide by them, our judgments are equipped with political legitimacy and morality. A case in hand was a ruling on the U.S. government by the People's Tribunal in which Bertrand Russell was presiding, that helped to end the Vietnam War.

I would like to ask the government via this committee that even if we suppose that we did not rush to buy the gas from Burma, other countries would have taken the chance, do we have any other good reasons to support the purchase? Is it really true that our country is badly in need of energy for industry? I would like to ask knowledgeable and concerned authorities to give their opinions on these issues. And to ask whether the gas will be used for the benefit of Thai people, or more for the benefit of the big multi-national companies and investors. Moreover, according to the contract, the illegitimate

<sup>1</sup> The speech was read for the committee as established by the Thai Prime Minister to hear information from both the supporters and opposing groups of the Yadana pipeline project, at the governmental house on 14 February 1998.



Burmese regime will be able to use the gas as well.

Another fact is that our power plant will not be completed in time for the scheduled commencement of delivery. This means that we are now rushing to complete the pipeline and to pay the Burmese regime and its consortium without getting any benefit from the gas. Also, the pipeline is the instrument by which the Burmese regime has and will crush down strongholds of ethnic groups in the country.

The Thai government has never had concern over the state of human rights, moral values, and impacts on natural environment, not to mention legal aspects of democratic government.

I would now like to begin looking at the problem from legal perspective. First of all, SLORC has no legitimacy to govern the country as it was they who lost the last general election. Its new name "SPDC (State Peace & Development Council)" signified no change, but a yet more Orwellian regime.

Members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) won most of the seats in the election, but instead of handing back the power, the junta has detained them and tortured them. Eventually, they have had to flee their country and form their government in exile.

SLORC was in many ways comparable to NPKC (National Peace Keeping Council), a junta which seized power from the Thai civilian government in 1991. However, they are worse than the Thai junta for at least the latter allowed civilians to form a government which was composed of people of high caliber and moral concern who could help push through a new and more democratic constitution in a short period of time. One of the coup

leaders broke his promise not to take the position of prime minister, and when he accepted it, he was ousted by public uprising even though there were deaths and casualties involved. In stark contrast every peaceful uprising by the Burmese people has been met with brutal violence by the Junta, as if the law was not in existence there.

Burma, in my opinion, should learn lessons from the former Soviet Union. Right after the end of World War I, the Soviet Union was praised by all progressive intellectuals as a model of socialist state. George Orwell was the only critic who predicted that the regime would crumble due to its violent measures waged against the people and its lack of moral legitimacy. No one believed in the prediction, but what we witnessed in 1992 confirmed it.

It seems that the Thai government has not been aware of this illegitimacy, for they signed a contract with SLORC, the brutal Junta. If SLORC were to be demolished, then the contract would be annulled. They may have forgotten that we made a contract during the World War II with Petain's government (Petain, Henri Philippe) and supplied them with army personnel, weapons and a large sum of money in the hope that they would return Battambang, Seam Reap, Mongkhol Buri, Srisophon and Laos to us. However, after the war, the new French government refused to recognize the contract we signed with Petain's government, and Siam had to return all the cities back to France without any gain. If the NLD and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi can peacefully overturn SLORC's power, she and her party might not recognize the contract we had signed with SLORC. Therefore, the Kalayanamitra

Council's request for the Thai government to include the rightful Burmese leaders in the signing and make it a tri-partite contract which would make the contract more legally commendable. Moreover, are we aware that we are doing business with a dictatorial regime widely known to be involved with drug trade, and which has been using most of the country's resources to purchase arms to suppress their own people, whether they are opposed to them or not? Does the Thai government feel it is right to do so? Are we ready to buy cheap gas reaped from the blood and sweat of the Burmese people as well as the ethnic minorities such as Mon, Shan, Karen, Kachin, etc., with no moral consciousness, and even though the "cheapness" of this gas is yet to be substantially proved?

If we are courageous enough to overturn the contract, the benefit is not only that we will be able to save up to one million U.S. dollars a day, but the Junta will have lost their biggest revenue, and it might fall down more quickly.

Why do we forget Buddha's teaching and fail to look at things more inter-dependently? If we follow his words, we have to try to cultivate the four heavenly abodes inside of us. Namely, we have to cultivate loving kindness (Metta), a wish for the happiness and well-being of all beings; compassion (Karuna), a wish for all beings to be free from suffering; Mudita, a neutral position towards those corrupted, and hope that even the brutal SLORC may one day turn good; and equanimity (Upekkha) which does not literally mean non-engagement, but stillness, which is necessary to be cultivated before we can properly treat every being with the three preceding qualities.

I hope that the Thai government will not be blinded by their greed and their desire to buy things cheaply from their neighbors with no consideration of how much suffering the action will cause for the Burmese people, and eventually for the people of Kanchanaburi and other provinces whose livelihood will be threatened by the presence of the gas pipeline. The wildlife will suffer from the destruction of the best forest we have. Thai people will feel threatened by the possibilities that the ethnic forces might resort to violence and terrorize the pipeline in Siam. Even though some people are lured by money to believe in the goodness of the project, the majority are well aware of how corrupted and hypocritical the ruling classes are.

Siam has been widely accused of looking only for short term benefits from logging in Burma and from exploitation of ethnic groups in Burma who fled to take refuge here but have been extorted for money if they want to live here.

These are serious accusations. Without co-operation from the ruling class, whether it be openly or discreetly, this exploitation would not have occurred. Even if they are really not involved with the exploitation, the fact that they disengage themselves from this suffering and allow the exploitation to go on, is tantamount to a breach of equanimity.

According to Buddhism, if we always feel desirous to possess all of the natural powers we discover, that attitude is called greed. If we are confronted with those opposed to the use of power, we should not hate them. We should refrain from thinking and accusing that they are our foes or that they protest because they

receive money from foreign agencies, etc.

If we just keep disengaging ourselves from acknowledging the suffering and do not care at all for how much forest will be destroyed, this kind of attitude is called ignorance (*Avijja*), and of course it does not represent equanimity.

Our Prime Minister is an honest person, and he often overtly expresses his disgust toward suppressive and dictatorial regimes, as he himself suffered from dictators during the 1976 uprising. He even personally declares that he will not visit Burma for that very reason. I believe that he has properly cultivated equanimity and critical awareness, and the fact that he ordered the setting up of this hearing committee on the Yadana gas pipeline proves his wisdom.

Another committee established by the prime minister's order previously voted with majority that the construction of the gas pipeline can be suspended in the case of *force majeure*, and with that reason, the Thai government will not be considered breaching the contract, and will not be fined. Moreover, the Prime Minister also follows the will of the present constitution and allows the protesters to continue their protest in the forest, the position of which is commendable.

All that I have said should encourage the committee to find that this shameful contract can be revoked, and that decision will greatly help to uplift the moral legitimacy of the present government, and will earn the country praise from international communities. If needed, we might allow the government to set up another committee of lawyers to study seriously whether or not the contract can be revoked with righteous reasons. Otherwise, we

will only concern ourselves with the desire for money and economic benefits and forget that in fact economic prosperity can only be sustained on moral and legitimate operations.

The revocation of the contract can be realized only when the ruling class has enough moral courage, and when they have properly cultivated the four heavenly abodes, especially loving kindness and compassion. They would be praised for their sympathy for the sufferers, and their wishes to see that every being is free from exploitation and suffering.

By revoking the contract, we will not only revive our pride, we will also reduce the chance for the brutal government to secure US \$ 400 millions every year to purchase arms. When the regime loses their substantial revenue, it would be difficult for them to continue in power, and the opposition, with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will have more chance to win over them peacefully. The exploitation and human rights abuse in Burma will be reduced or stopped. Even though we cannot revive all natural balance in Burma, at least the damage will not increase. This will contribute to a better quality of life for the Burmese people. For Thais, without the gas pipeline, they will feel relieved that the forest is saved, and they will be assured that terrorism against the pipeline will not happen, and the abundant forest in Kanchanaburi will also greatly benefit the ecology of the whole country.

If a charge is to be raised by the other two multi-national corporations against us, it should be as well appreciated because the wise would not fear of accusations and the results of the trial, as they care more for justice.

If the government is coura-

geous enough to stand for justice, the majority will stay behind them, and all concerned people around the world will bestow on them their support based mainly on the following two reasons;

1. The Burmese Junta is brutal and corrupted so much so that it has been condemned by international communities including President and the Congress of the United States, from which a resolution was made to prohibit any joint investment with Burmese partners in Burma. Similar resolutions were also issued and adopted by different states and organizations in the U.S. In addition, the U.S. court has accepted a complaint against Unocal and Total for their investment in the project, which undermines human rights in Burma

2. Unocal and Total are multinational companies whose interests are centered around financial benefits, and they are ready to exploit any natural resources found in the name of progress. Blinded by their greed, they have no concern for how people will suffer because of their operations. To avoid opposition, they buy people out with money, a similar tactic which has been widely used by their Thai partner, Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT). Of course, they do not care if forests are destroyed, and that it will hugely affect the survival of wildlife.

As we can now envisage what is right and what is wrong I hope the Thai government will be courageous enough to pursue justice, the decision of which will eventually bring us honor and pride.



Sulak Sivaraksa was arrested in the jungle on March 6, 1998.

### **Yadana Pipeline Update**

Social activist Sulak Sivaraksa vowed to raise his campaign level against the Yadana gas pipeline to a new level yesterday by bringing three past and present prime ministers to court and campaigning internationally for compensation from the project builders for human rights violations and environmental damage.

Addressing a panel discussion in Kanchanaburi yesterday, Mr. Sulak said he will file the lawsuit with the court of justice in seven days against Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and ex-premiers Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and Banharn Silpa-archa.

He accused the three and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) of distorting the facts and telling public lies about its benefits.

The social critic said the three politicians and the PTT had violated the environmental law by producing an incomplete environmental impact assessment report to back the project.

The new constitution overrides a legal restriction for persons not directly suffering from the project to file the lawsuit in such a case and empowers a regis-

tered non-governmental organization to act on their behalf.

As chairman of the Santhirarakoses Nagapradipa foundation which is registered with the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry, Mr. Sulak said he has authorized persons to take the case to court.

Lawyers were compiling evidence and documents and were expected to be able to formally lodge the case in a week, Mr. Sulak said, expressing confidence that the lawsuit would be accepted.

"I want this lawsuit to make the country's leaders realize and respect more the rights and freedom of the people and not to undertake any action without first consulting the people," Mr. Sulak said.

A large number of Burmese minority members have been forced and even killed in building the pipeline, not to mention the damage caused to the environment, wildlife and the communities through which the project passes.

"The people who were affected by the project must be compensated," Mr. Sulak said.

*Bangkok Post*, August 2



## Anonymous Tibetan Nuns

Looking through the window  
Nothing to see but sky.  
Clouds floating in the sky,  
I wish they were my parents,  
We, captured friends in spirit,  
We might be the ones to fetch the jewel.  
No matter how hard they beat us  
They cannot separate our interlinked arms.  
The cloud from the east  
Is not a sewn on patch;  
The time will come when the sun  
Shall appear from behind the clouds.  
I am not sad. If you ask me why not,  
I'll say, "Days follow days. And one day  
I shall be released."

### II.

The fragrance of the lotus  
Eclipsed by the sun  
Attracts bees to swarm  
Due to its natural sweetness.  
Amidst the ranges of the Land of Snows  
Eclipsed by the sun  
The greenery of pastures  
And the blueness of lakes  
Are due to the waters of snow.

### III.

My country wasn't sold, it was stolen.  
But we've written letters telling the truth.  
We've written oh so many letters!  
Parents of this lifetime  
Please don't grieve for us.  
Our time of reunion will come.  
Our country wasn't sold, it was stolen.  
We've shed tears, oh so many tears!  
Parents, so dear,  
Your kindness comforts us.  
Our time of reunion will come.  
I send words of comfort to my parents.  
Don't grieve. Our time of reunion will come.

*These songs were written from prison.*

## Thich Nhat Hanh

### The Witness Remains

Firebombs bloom on the dark sky.  
A child claps his hands and laughs.

I hear the sound of guns,  
and the laughter dies.

But the witness  
remains.

## Buddha

As if he listened. Silence, far and far...

We draw back til we hear its depths no more.  
And he is star. And other giant stars  
which we cannot see stand about him here.

Oh, he is all. And really, do we wait  
till he shall see us? Has he need of that?  
Even should we throw ourselves before him,  
he would be deep, and indolent as a cat.

He has been in labor for a million years  
with this which pulls us to his very feet.  
He who forgets that which we must endure,  
who knows what is withdrawn beyond our fate.

*Ranier Maria Rilke*

## Excerpt from the Bodhicaryavatara

As when a flash of lightning cleaves the night,  
and in its glare shows all that the dark, black  
clouds had hid,  
Likewise rarely, through the Buddha's power,  
Virtuous thoughts rise, brief & transient, in the  
world.

*Shantideva*

## Haiku on the Way

Stuffing old zafus  
black robes flecked with kapok  
a monk sneezes.

The dojo bell  
spreading its silence:  
a monk's mobile phone  
rings.

*Sean O'Connor*

*from the Irish Journal of Haiku and Related Forms*

[anonymous Tibetan nuns and 'The Witness Remains'  
reprinted from *What Book!*?  
Buddha Poems from Beat to Hip-Hop (1998)  
edited by Gary Gach, Permission of Parallax Press, Berkeley,  
California]

## Center for Global Nonviolence

6/6/98

Dear Sulak,

What an inspiring moment to receive your kind note-written amidst your courageous sacrifice for every good eternal human value! What an inspiration you are to all of us around the world! I follow you in *Seeds of Peace* and other communications with reverential awe.

The images you gave me are behind my writing desk and inspire my too long overdue efforts to finish with diminishing abilities this year the little book *Nonkilling Global Political Science*.

Have been deflected recently by unrefusable requests to join (1) peer review session in Vilnius, Lithuania on "a new political science" with political scientists from Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Latvia and Lithuania. I raised the question "is a nonkilling society possible?" Expectedly 12 said no 1 yes and 2 yes and no. This was May 21-23, sponsored by Soros Open Society Institute in Budapest. (2) Miami, May 17-20 with African-American M.L. King jr. friends in an international conference on "Nonviolent Education and Training for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Coretta Scott King gave a visionary address calling for global education, training, action, and solidarity for nonviolent global change. She called on the conference (about 300 persons) to send a message of solidarity to the Indian peace movement and to the Indian government versus nuclear weapons (this was before the Pakistan tests). (3) I am off tomorrow for Edmonton, Alberta for a "nonkilling workshop" and banquet talk for an international conference on "Values for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the challenge and the Gandhian response," sponsored by the Mahatma Gandhi Canadian foundation for World Peace. Your work and examples will be on my mind for that banquet talk. I may not know what to say until that moment. Such a great gap between the conference "talk" and the realistic action demanded by the Dharma and everything Gandhi and other heroes and heroines of nonviolence have stood for throughout history.

Glenda, Lou Ann, George Simson and your Hawaii friends salute you.

With a profoundly respectful aloha,

Glenn Paige

## Open Letter from Thai Farmers to the United States Government Regarding American Intellectual Property Claims to Jasmine Rice

Bangkok, 22 July 1998

To the attention of H.E. Ambassador, US Embassy in Thailand

Dear Ambassador:

As you are surely aware, RiceTech Inc. of Alvin, Texas, was recently granted patent # 5663484 on Basmati rice from the US Patent and Trademark Office. The patent covers germplasm taken from India and Pakistan and is considered an act of biopiracy. RiceTec Inc. holds another form of patent—a Plant Variety Protection Certificate #9000075—as well as a trademark on Jasmati rice. These intellectual property claims are a defamation of Thailand's prized aromatic rice, Jasmine.

The Thai Farmer Group Planting Jasmine Rice at Tung Ku-la-rhong-hai and Traditional Plant Protection Network, Thailand—a network of farmers, local communities and non-governmental organizations all over Thailand representing the five million Thai farmers planting jasmine rice—strongly calls for the cease of US government policy which permits the monopolizing of plant varieties from Thailand, India and other Third World countries.

### Specifically, we demand the following:

1. We call on the US government to revoke the patent on Basmati rice and to reject any IPR application from RiceTech Inc. and other companies in the US related to Jasmine rice and other plant materials from Thailand and other Third World countries. Thai farmers and Indian farmers have developed rice varieties over thousands of years. Jasmine and Basmati are two such rices widely known and appreciated across the planet today. By rewarding minor genetic modifications of these materials through patent and other monopoly rights in the United States is nothing less than stealing the natural resources and cultural heritage from the poor farmers in Third World countries for the sole and totally illegitimate benefit of the

rich in industrialized countries.

2. We call on the US government to cancel and prohibit the use of any form of the name Jasmine on any rice grown in the United States. The trademark "Jasmati" is a blatant defamation of both Jasmine and Basmati and gives deliberately false information to consumers. People are being led to believe they are buying a product related to Thai Jasmine rice. The qualities of Thai Jasmine rice such as its smell and taste, not to mention the rice itself, come from the genetics of Thai Jasmine rice variety, how to plant it, and the particular soil and land in which it is cultivated. Therefore, selling other rice varieties or even Thai Jasmine rice grown in your country as "Jasmati" defames our farmers, destroys our rights and deceives your own consumers.

3. Thai people and Thai farmers urgently demand that the US government stop forcing developing countries, both unilaterally through Special 301 related measures and multilaterally through the TRIPS Agreement of World Trade Organization, to enact laws for the patenting of life forms or to establish other intellectual property regimes related to biodiversity and indigenous knowledge. These regimes are tools to transfer rights to control and benefit from biological resources from Third World farmers and local communities over to transnational companies and industrialized countries. As such, they amount to legalized theft and monopolization of biological resources imposed through trade sanctions.

Your government claims that poor countries owe you billions of dollars of unpaid royalties on US-recognized intellectual property. However, we do not recognize your exclusive intellectual property to the basis of our livelihoods. Biodiversity is the foundation of our food and health systems. It represents much more to us than any collection of self-proclaimed IPRs in the US and could be worth millions of billions of dollars on the world market. It is not the poor who should subsidize the rich. We reclaim our just freedom, and our own collective rights, to develop and utilize biodiversity as we see fit and without paying illegitimate royalties to biopirates.

We will resolutely protest in countless ways against the interference of transnational companies and governments of industrialized countries which disapprove of and thwart initiatives to protect local plant varieties in developing countries. The American Embassy in Thailand sent a strong signal against the bill on protection and promotion of Thai traditional medicine in mid-1997.

On behalf of Thai farmers and Thai people, we announce that we will persevere and fight by all means for the successful implementation of our three demands outlined above.

Sincerely,

The Thai Farmer Group Planting Jasmine Rice at Tung Ku-la-rhong-hai  
Traditional Plant Protection Network, Thailand

Copy furnished to Mrs Charlene Bershevsky, US Trade Representative,  
Washington, D.C.



THE DALAI LAMA

August 12, 1998

Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa  
KALAYANAMITRA COUNCIL  
127 Soi Santipap, Nares Road  
Bangkok, 15000  
THAILAND

Dear Sulak Sivaraksa,

Thank you for sending me a copy of your book: Loyalty  
Demands Dissent. I shall look forward to an opportunity to read your  
autobiography. Your thoughtful gesture is much appreciated.

With my prayers and good wishes.

Yours sincerely,



## Gandhi Peace Foundation

17 June 1998

Dear Sulak, Greetings!

We have sent an appeal to the prime minister of Thailand regarding the Yadana pipeline and to release Sulak Sivaraksa on March 10, 1998. I have faxed you a copy of the same.

We have received a reply from the Office of the Thai Prime Minister which I am enclosing herewith for your perusal.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely

Babulal Sharma  
Public Relations

Office of the Secretariat of the Prime Minister,  
Government House, Nakhom Pathom Rd., Bangkok, Thailand

May 27, 1998

Mr. B.L. Shanu (sic)  
Public Relations  
Gandhi Peace Foundation

Re: The appeal to halt the Yadana Pipeline Project and release Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa

Dear Mr. Shanu (sic):

Following the reference about your request for the government to stop the Yadana pipeline project that would lead to the destruction of the rainforests and to release Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa, a Right Livelihood award winner of 1995. Office of the Secretariat of the Prime Minister would like to inform you the facts as follows.

The Yadana pipeline project was one of the most difficult decisions this government had to act upon. The final decision regarding this project was based on a consensus of all parties concerned. I would like to assure you that the majority of Thai people agreed with the solution that had been taken.

This administration already took many extra steps in order that all questions were carefully addressed before the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) was ordered to go ahead with the project. The government could not afford to have the debate go on forever because of the contract deadline. When Chuan Leekpai became Prime Minister last November, the Yadana Pipeline project was nearly completed. The government cannot halt the project but only to abide by the contract between PTT and Myanmar government. Once the contract was signed, the government must honor it.

It is crucial for Thailand that the future of energy security is guaranteed for the next 30 years. This is the reason why the Yadana Pipeline project has been repeatedly supported by all administrations since 1990. The final decision to continue with the project was reached openly and fairly and after the review of information provided by a public information panel, which chaired (sic) by the former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun.

On March 1, 1998, the Prime Minister, based on the findings of the panel, decided that the project was to go ahead. All groups except Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa agreed to withdraw from the project site. PTT had no choice but to file a complaint of obstructing the construction. Police invited Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa from the site. He accepted the charge and was released under his own reconnaissance (sic).

I would like to thank you for your opinions and your concerns. Office of the secretariat of the Prime Minister would like to emphasize that the government handled this situation with regard to the rule of law under the democratic process.

Sincerely,

(Mr. Nipon Boonyapataro)  
Deputy secretaries-general  
to the Prime Minister for  
Political Affairs

**Forest Recollections:  
Wandering Monks in the  
Twentieth-Century:**

By Kamala Tivavanich  
University of Hawaii Press  
(Honolulu, 1997)

History and anthropology professors at Cornell University were very impressed with this Ph.D. dissertation written by a student of Southeast Asian history at the prestigious college. And rightly so. This book is a valuable study of those wandering ascetics in the Northeast.

The author includes mini biographies of Ajaan Man Phurithat (1871-1949) and nine of his disciples, who too are now no more in this world. The nine, all ethnic Laotians from the Isaan are: Waen Sujinno, Dun Atulo, Fan Ajaro, Thet Thetrangsi, Li Thammatharo, La Khempatato, Cha Photiyan, Juan Kulachetho and Wan Uttamo.

Her account of the lives of these holy men is woven into a history of Siam, beginning in the middle of the Fifth Reign as King Chulalongklon implemented a series of sweeping reforms, including centralisation of the bureaucracy.

The increase of central authority over outlying regions of the kingdom had a direct impact on the Sangha (the community and hierarchy of Buddhist monks) and the forest tradition which is a fusion of Buddhism, animism and local customs that had been practiced for centuries.

The book provides a background account of how regional Buddhist traditions were affected by various Sangha reforms, and is divided into three sections: forest communities prior to 1957; the "forest-invasion" period (1957-1988); and the "forest-closure" period (1989 to the present).

For centuries wandering monks had acted as both physical and spiritual healers for villagers they encountered on their travels. However, with the notable exception of Ajaan Man Phurithat, most of them did not realise the very real threat posed to their way of life by an increasingly powerful centralized administration.

This resulted in wandering monks being co-opted and used by the elite. In the name of development, monks endorsed the construction of dams and wide modern roads, the wearing of Buddhist amulets, and the erection of ever more elaborate temple buildings. Many were eventually to lose the influence they had once exerted over rural people.

Tivavanich has utilized Thai-language sources extensively; an effort that is hardly matched by any previous Western scholar. It's rather unfortunate, however, that she did not interview wandering monks who are still alive such as Ajaan Maha Bua, Ajaan Viriyang or foreign-born monks of the same ilk like Pannavaddho Bhikkhu (of English birth) and Ajaan Sumedho Bhikkhu (an American).

However, despite the excellent research and the obvious care she took in writing her dissertation, Tivavanich has failed to fully grasp the complexity of the Sangha order and the reality of the wandering monks themselves.

What we get instead is a wide-angle portrait which lacks depth. Another weakness is that her English spellings of Thai Buddhist names for monks are often not true to their Pali origins.

Some important figures have been left out too. There is no mention, for instance, of Ajaan

Bunnag; and this is a great pity, for his life story reflects the failed attempts of a wandering monk to gain independence from the centralized power of the state.

Conservationist monk Phra Prajak Khuttajitto only gets a brief mention and even the world-famous Buddhadasa Bhikkhu receives scant attention. If the author had been acquainted with the Sekiya Dhamma group of monks or if she had ever read Sanitsuda Ekachai's excellent *Seeds of Hope* she would probably better acquainted herself. None-theless, reservations aside, *Forest Recollections* is to be commended because it provides a lucid introduction to an influential Buddhist tradition, which may now will be on its way out, to those with little or no background knowledge at all of the subject.

Sulak Sivaraksa

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**Ethics of Consumption:**

*The Good Life, Justice and  
Global Stewardship*

Edited by David A. Crocker and  
Toby Linden

The *Ethics of Consumption* is a collection of essays put together by the University of Maryland Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy. It is an extension of previous research by the Institute into the subject of ethical issues in population policy. They felt that the logical next step was to investigate consumption patterns in the global community. The quality of life for populations around the world is of course influenced not only by the number of people but how they live. Thus the essays in the book center around how lifestyles, especially in the industrialized nations, affect the rest of

the world. As it turns out, the investigation of what seems at first to be primarily an economic question, rapidly broadens out to include moral and ethical questions as well. The diversity of essays in the book reflect this broad range of approaches when considering the ethics of consumption.

There are twenty-seven essays divided into six sections. The first section focuses on consumption, natural resources and the environment, and the essays written to this topic are primarily concerned with economic theory. However economics is itself a multifarious topic. It can take the shape of complex equations, assessing supply, demand, carrying capacity, value added/physical transformation etc.. Or economics may let itself be concerned with subjects such as the inequality of food supply created by diets which consist heavily of grain fed meat. This question obviously enters the psychological domain of economic studies, questioning consumer choices (or even further asking what is choice and who does/should have it) in economic decisions. It also implies an ethical dimension. Assuming we have real choices to make, is it our duty to base our choices as consumers on moral/ethical grounds. If this is so then on what ethical grounds should we base our consumption patterns? Even the basic question of whether self interest is an appropriate yardstick for social behavior must at least be looked at in order to go on to complexities involving choice, choices and their consequences.

The second section of the book is called 'Explaining Consumption'. On a more basic, at times philosophical level, the foundation for considering the

ethics of consumption is put forth in several essays. These essays present different viewpoints aimed at setting the parameters for a coherent discussion by defining consumption. This section also looks at some of the fundamental assumptions or prejudices people often hold about consumption. These prefigured ideas, knee jerk reactions such as consumption is always automatically bad, or consumption is only a factor of hedonism, utility etc., get in the way of a real discussion of the different facets of consumption. If definitions aren't carefully considered, one cannot get at the real message someone may try to communicate about their ideas regarding consumption and related ethical considerations. One may hold the view that consumption is always bad, stemming from an association between consumption and hedonism, and a puritanical synthesis of the two ideas leads inevitably to a blanket condemnation. One may hold that consumption is definitely not bad, that it is based on utility. We all need to eat and wear cloths appropriate to our climate, self image etc.. In the first case the proprietor of the puritanical view must be defining consumption as a level of acquiring goods beyond ones needs. In the second, one is obviously defining consumption as a basic process of life. This level of discussion could go even farther once the parameters are clear by then assessing what different people view as needs. In section two of the book there is a very interesting evaluation of the different ways in which needs may be perceived. A social custom or standard of decency may render an item a necessity when in an absolute it sense is not. Women in hot climates of the United States still must wear a

shirt in public. It sounds like a silly example at first but it is only an illustration of the relative necessity of many things we may be used to assuming as necessities without thought. A car for a family whose only economically viable housing is located in the suburbs-Is it a necessity? Most suburban families say yes, many green activists say no. The point is simply to underscore the complexity of defining consumption and especially to define it such a way that coherent ethical premises about it emerge.

Part three of the book is titled: 'Assessing Consumption.' It delves even deeper into the gray areas of consumption. We may be able to agree roughly on what we need to live, starting with air, water, food, shelter and clothing. It can get sticky if you begin to discuss what kind of clothing, how much clothing etc., but nonetheless it is perhaps possible to reach a rough consensus. But what if you will allow the premise that one thing we need is to be happy? You will find the discussion of consumption quickly moving into areas like spirituality, self expression, freedom etc.. The four essays in this section do just that. It makes for thought provoking material, to realize how deep the roots of our economic behavior may go, when for most of us the assumption is that consuming is a purely secular activity. Many religious traditions have teachings related to consumption and economic behavior. However these teachings rarely seem to occupy a prominent place in the practice of their respective religions. That in itself makes an interesting discussion.

Sections four and five, present essays on 'Consumption and the Good Life' from two general



perspectives: 'The Capabilities Approach' and 'Religious and Theological Perspectives.' These sections address the questions brought up previously. Assuming that there is some general idea about consumption and its ramifications, what level of consumption is ethical, desirable or justified? In essence, by what yardstick will we measure consumption and by what rational/moral guidelines might be used to prescribe appropriate behavior? The capabilities approach is putatively more rational. Economists already try to measure the 'standard of living' by means of various indicators. The essayists in this section take the idea of standard of living farther, they try to include the human equation; What makes us happy or

how do we define well being? The religious approach is presented in three essays: a Jewish perspective, a Roman Catholic view and an essay on frugality as a Protestant value.

The final section is "Consumption and International Justice." It looks at the consumption of natural resources by richer and poorer countries and the ethical questions of such. Also discussed are the consequences of consumption patterns, pollution, environmental degradation etc. versus the consequences of rampant population growth. Both need to be included in a well balanced picture of the ethics of consumption.

**The Ethics of Consumption** is in essence a resource book. So many essays put together creates

a panoply of ideas, a mosaic which roughly describes the arena for debate on this issue. It is not a popularizing book, the essays are written by specialists and aimed at other specialists if not in the exact same field as the essay, in a related field. Any social scientist will find this a very informative and thought provoking book. Others may find certain sections relevant to questions they address in their work as environmentalists or humanitarian workers in underdeveloped nations or, perhaps, even strategists and policy analysts for the powerful elite who make decisions which have global effects via the medium of consumption.

*Chris Walker*

## When the Spirit Moves You

The philosophy of SEM is that true education should bring learners to understand the essence of life so that they can work on creating social justice and ecological balance. No diploma is handed out at the end of a Spirit in Education Movement course, but students say they have learned something far more important - how a life should be lived. Alone in a forest, away from any sign of civilization, Kittichai Ngarmchaipisit becomes aware of the slightest movement in his surroundings. He finds that everything in nature fascinates him, be it the gentle swirl of a falling leaf before it touches the ground, or the maneuvers of a tiny butterfly around the pearls of sweat gathering on his arm.

This is one of the fond memories Mr. Kittichai cherishes

since he joined a course titled "Deep Ecology" organized by the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM). "We spent almost two weeks on a sort of spiritual pilgrimage in a forest up North," explained the 27-year-old social worker who works with northeastern children. "Part of the program was to live by yourself without any food and other diversions for a couple of days. No reading and writing, just observing yourself," he said. "When the stomach is empty, the mind becomes clear and free. I have learned how to attune myself to the rhythms of nature." While the methods of "Deep Ecology" may appear esoteric, other courses offered by SEM are directed more towards dealing with current social problems. They range from lectures on alternative econom-

ics, workshops on how to foster model communities and peaceful ways to resolve conflicts, to an intensive three-month program in which young village leaders from the Forum of the Poor lived together and learned about politics.

Founded in 1995, SEM is a non-profit organization aimed at providing an alternative education to the Thai people. Its driving force, Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa, has long criticized mainstream schooling for producing people who are intellectually smart and competitive, but also selfish and unconcerned about the society. "Why not give each and every new-born baby a Ph.D. so they can stop worrying about a degree and really start learning something," Mr. Sulak wrote a few years ago. Observed Mr. Phipob

Dhongchai, another SEM founding member: "Even schools and colleges that are supposed to offer alternative education end up becoming places for the privileged and alienate themselves from the communities they are in."

After winning the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the "Alternative Nobel Prize", in 1995 Mr. Sulak used the 1.5 million baht prize money to get the SEM educational fund off the ground. The acronym, SEM, is partly in honor of Dr. Sem Pringpuangkaew, a physician widely respected for his dedication to treating the country's poor. Mr. Sulak's aspiration in spearheading the SEM project is to revive what he claims is the traditional spirit of Thai education called "Trai Sikkha" (the three fundamentals of the learning process). They are *sila* (virtuous conduct), *samadhi* or *bhavana* (concentration or meditation), and *panna* (wisdom).

Each course at SEM, particularly those that require a few days' living-in, is designed to give participants not so much a chunk of knowledge to take away with them as an example of a way of life. There are meditation sessions at dawn and dusk, and a special period for "public service" scheduled each day. Here, participants as well as teachers are expected to contribute their time and labor to cleaning, cooking, dishwashing or tending small vegetable plots around the Ashram Wongsanit in Nakorn Nayok province where many of the courses have been held. "We emulate the Schumacher College where even the principal helps clean the toilets," explained Mr. Pracha Hutaniwat, who has led a few SEM courses at the Ashram. The Schumacher College in Eng-

land offers similar courses to SEM such as "Ecology for the Future World", "Politics Toward Change" and "Art for Spiritual Refinement". Some instructors from the college have come to Thailand to oversee courses for SEM. Mr. Phipob added that one advantage of a live-in course is that students can "check whether the teachers practice what they preach. A good example would be Phra Paisarn."

Phra Paisarn Wisalo is a former social activist turned monk. He has led several workshops on Buddhist ways to mediate and resolve conflicts, deep ecology, and how to abandon consumeristic lifestyles. The non-hierarchical nature of SEM extends to the background of teachers. Although some are university graduates, a few are simply villagers who have an intuitive understanding of, or personal experience with ecological or rural problems. Among the latter is Joni Odoshao, a Karen elder who has led several conservation projects in the northern forest, and Wibul Khemchaloem, who has turned his back on commercial agriculture and is now acknowledged as an expert in agroforestry and Thai herbal medicine. Some of the "imported" teachers have also been engaged in social projects. For example, John McConnell who leads a course on Buddhist mediation and conflict resolution has worked in Sri Lanka as a mediator. Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, the main instructors for the "Deep Ecology" course, are environmental activists and founders of the Institute of Deep Ecology Education in Boulder, Colorado. Referred to as "facilitators," the teachers act more as guides who accompany the students on a search into themselves

rather than delivering pre-packaged knowledge. "The conventional way is to look at each person as an empty glass waiting to be filled," noted Mr. Kittichai. "But at SEM, everyone is given respect that they already come to the class with something. There is no right or wrong answer - each of us just shares what we know with others. This is a very useful attitude especially when you work with villagers." "In many cases, the society has dictated that what you know is meaningless," added Mr. Pracha. "But here we listen to each individual and we emphasize real-life experience. A few villagers told us now they know that their bamboo huts are in fact very ecologically friendly. So is the idea of chemical-free farming."

A typical class at SEM sees participants actively engaging in discussion, be they monks and nuns, villagers and hilltribe people, NGO staffers, students, doctors or businesspeople. Half-day lectures regularly held in Bangkok are offered free of charge, but donations are welcome. For longer courses there is a daily charge of 600 baht for room and board. Those who cannot afford to pay may be subsidized by SEM. Although the general public can join any class - there is no educational prerequisite besides a curiosity to learn - some subjects such as those on community building, deep ecology and peaceful mediation involve several levels and must be attended in a step-by-step manner. Such courses tend to be relatively long, about one week on average. As they require participants to stay together in the same compound, a sense of camaraderie grows, enhanced by a few activities designed by the instructors.

"In another course I took on

community building, we gradually learned to respect and trust members of the group, enough to confide secrets that had been plaguing each of us," recalled Mr. Kittichai. "It helped dissolve our egos and complexes. We become a group that was not just there to work together, but to help each other." According to Mr. Kittichai, the benefits of attending an SEM program is not only confined to the personal but extends into the public arena as well. As an NGO worker, he has been promoting peaceful ways for villagers to voice their problems to the public and state agencies. A group of youths that Mr. Kittichai is working with has launched a campaign to raise questions on whether or not a dam should be built in their village. Another concrete application of the programs is creating an "ecological map". Villagers are asked to record the places they like or consider to be the hub of the community, as well as where natural resources are available in their local area. The map will be updated over the years and Mr. Kittichai hopes the comparison of changes on paper will raise the local people's awareness of the need to conserve the environment.

In the spiritual realm, Mr. Pracha, a former monk himself, said monks and nuns who have attended SEM courses have returned to their communities with better tools for preaching. They learned to link various religious teachings to better analyze social problems, something they didn't seem to find in the ecclesiastical education system. "A few monks and nuns say they feel more confident to convey dharma to their people back home," said Preeda Ruengwichatorn of the Sekiyatham group, another initiative of Mr. Sulak. SEM has been work-

ing closely with the Sekiyatham group, which comprises Thailand's progressive monks engaged in social reform and environmental conservation movements. And according to Mr. Preeda, some younger monks at Suan Mok Temple, likewise known for their relatively liberal outlook, have adopted the SEM curriculum to conduct workshops with their peers.

Be it in the secular or religious realm, SEM hopes to be, in Mr. Pracha's words, a catalyst or breeding ground for a new generation of leaders. An initiative early this year to conduct a workshop for young leaders from the Forum of the Poor is one such attempt. Over a three-month period, participants learned about the historical development of Thai politics, why the leftist movements (of peasants, workers, students and the Communist Party) have failed, and the significance of the new Constitution which allows them to assert their rights. "These villagers already know what their problems are," explained Mr. Pracha. "We only provide them with the macro-picture, to get them to look beyond the immediate and specific issues such as land compensation, and to link their problems to the inherent flaws in the social structure. "Actually, this will help the government in the long run. It will make it more accountable and legitimate as an institution that serves the people rather than big businesses."

Similar projects have been conducted in neighboring countries with the aim of creating a network among local leaders in the region. But despite their lofty aspirations and hard work, after three years in operation SEM continues to find itself in a marginal position. It seems to have an

appeal to a very limited circle - those who are regarded as a little "unusual" or even "crazy", according to one participant. "It's as if we belong to two different worlds," Mr. Phipob lamented. "I'm puzzled myself that during this economic crisis when a lot of people are going back to school, why they continue taking the same subjects - MBA courses - which would perpetuate the same old attitudes and problems." Tuning into nature is part of the curriculum at an SEM course. However, certain individuals at mainstream educational institutions have considered incorporating the SEM curriculum into their own courses. A Rajabhat College in Ratchaburi province is planning to launch an ashram for education for life. Yet SEM's ultimate target of sparking reform of fundamental ideas on a large scale looks remote. "The process of changing people's ideas, of course, takes a long, long time," said Mr. Pracha. "But we believe that a radical change will come to the world sooner or later, as more and more people become disillusioned with the present consumeristic way of life. "We may not look like a fancy institution. In fact, we sometimes don't have any baht left in our pockets. It's a wonder sometimes how we manage to keep things running. Perhaps it's faith and support from our friends around the world," Mr. Pracha concluded.

*Vasana Chinvarakorn*





## SEM

### Spirit in Education Movement Course Prospectus 1998

60/2 Soi Tivanont 34, Muang Nonthaburi 11000 Siam (Thailand) Tel. 9506601-3 Fax. 5803711

Date/time	Trainers	Title/Place	Fee
7 October 1998	Ravindra Varma Chatsumarn Kabilsingh	Lecture "The Alternative Way for the Twentieth Century : Gandhian and Buddhist Approach" Anekprasong Building, Thammasart University,BKK.	Donation
9-11 October 1998	Ravindra Varma	Workshop "Gandhian Paradigm for Changes" at Ashram Wong Sanit, Nakorn Nayok	2,000 B.
7-8 November 1998	Phra Paisal Visalo Betsy Taylor	Workshop "New Path to Simplicity Life" at Ashram Wong Sanit, Nakorn Nayok	1,700 B.
9-13 November 1998	Pracha Hutuanuwatra Ouyporn Kheunkaew	Workshop "Community and Team Building" level two at Ashram Wong Sanit, Nakorn Nayok	2,500 B.
20-24 November 1998	George Lakey Pracha Hutuanuwatra Ouyporn Kheunkaew	Workshop "Community and Team Building" level three at Children Village School, Kanchanaburi	2,500 B.
25 November 1998	Doris Karena Guntars Godins	SEM Annual Public Lecture : "The Path to Live Harmoniously in The Present World" in Bangkok	Donation
27Nov.- 1 Dec. 1998	George Lakey Pracha Hutuanuwatra Ouyporn Kheunkaew	Workshop "Community and Team Building" level four at Children Village School, Kanchanaburi	2,500 B.
4-7 December 1998	Sulak Sivaraksa Magaret Supaporn Pongprueng	Workshop "Voluntary Simplicity Life for Middle Class" at Ashram Wong Sanit, Nakorn Nayok	2,500 B.
11-21 Decemer 1998	Joni Odochao Elias Amidon Pracha Hutuanuwatra	Forest Walk "Dhammayatra and Solidarity Walk" walking meditation, fast and retreat at Mae Wang, Chiang Mai	6,000 B.
27 Dec.1998 - 5 Jan. 1999	Phra Paisal Visalo Eliabeth Roberts Taenjai Deethes	Forest Walk "Dhammayatra and Solidarity Walk" walking meditation, fast and retreat at Mae Salong, Chiang Rai	6,000 B.
December 1998	Team	Workshop "Alternative to Education" at Children Village School, Kanchanaburi	

### Schedule of Sulak Sivaraksa September-December 1998

- |       |           |  |
|-------|-----------|--|
| 1     | August    | Keynote address : Human Rights and the role of the media in the South East Asian region for ACFOD's workshop Bangkok   |
| 12-15 | August    | The Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief: Oslo, Norway   |
| 5-10  | September | Expanding People's Spaces in the Globalising Economy: Hanasaari Cultural Centre, Espoo, Finland  |
| 23    | September | The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization has given the UNPO Award for 1998 to Buddhist Master Cheng Yen of Taiwan and Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa: Award ceremony to be in Taipei, Taiwan R.O.C. |
| 7-10  | October   | Universal Ethics: from the Perspective of Religious Traditions: Sitges-Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain)  |
| 27    | October   | Court date for Yadana Pipeline protest   |
| 3     | November  | "  |
| 13    | November  | "A human economy and the dynamics of Development in the age of globalization" on Lebrete Day at UNESCO, Paris, France  |

# Prayer of Peace and Meditation

Let us pray for World Peace, social justice and environmental balance which begins with our own breathing.

I breath in calmly and breath out mindfully.

Once I have seeds of peace and happiness within me, I try to reduce my selfish desire and reconstitute my consciousness. With less attachment to myself I try to understand the stuctural violence in the world.

Linking my heart with my head, I perceive the world wholistically, full of living beings who are all related to me.

I try to expand my understanding with love to help build a more non-violent world.

I vow to live simply and offer myself to the oppressed.

By the grace of the Compassionate Ones and with the help of good friends, may I be a partner in lessening the suffering of the world so that it may be a proper habitat for all sentient beings to live in harmony during the next millenium.

*Sulak Sivaraksa*



Sulak Sivaraksa, Dr. Judith Simmer Brown and Eagle Cruz at The Naropa Instiute Seminar "Spiritual Models of Social Action." April 1998