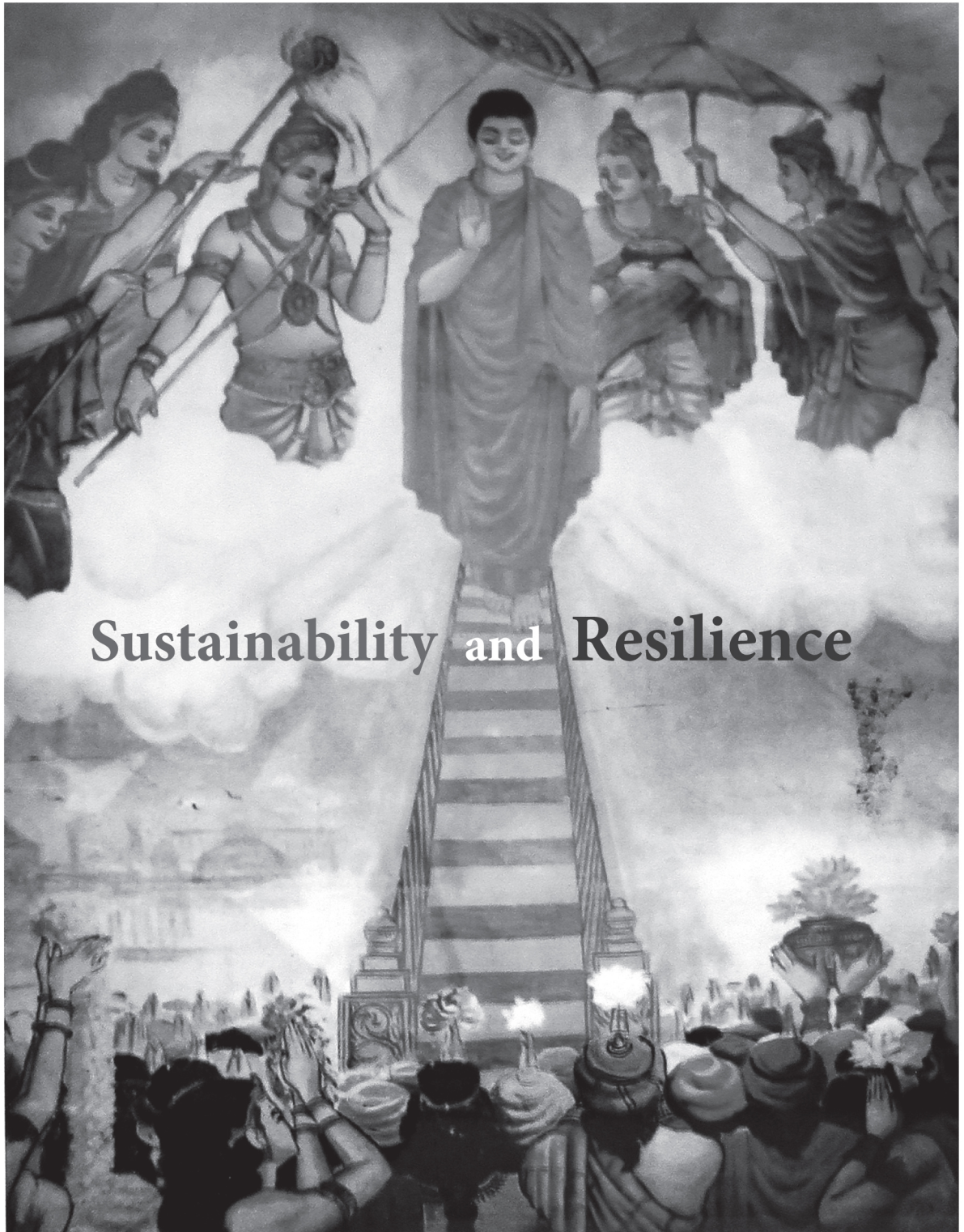


# SEEDS OF PEACE

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Research.

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## Editorial Notes

Looking back over the recent period, there are three things I want to highlight here. The first is the very successful conference of the ICE Network (Inter-religious Climate and Ecology Network) in South Korea last April. The INEB staff and I want to express our admiration and appreciation for the outstanding efforts of the Korean team and their coordinator, Junghee. Thanks for all your hard work in making this a meaningful conference! In this edition of *Seeds of Peace* you will find numerous articles describing and reflecting on various activities that were part of this conference or related to it. Following the conference, and in light of the powerful initiatives of Pope Francis on climate change, there has been some discussion of working to unify Buddhist efforts on climate change at the international level via something like a Buddhist Climate Action Network (BCAN). We see the possibility of such a higher level network as a chance for ICE and INEB to link with other existing Buddhist networks and organizations already working on climate change.

The second thing I would like to highlight is the

successful completion of our first internship program carried out in collaboration with Matthew Weiner of Princeton University. Matt had the idea of working with INEB to create internship opportunities in Buddhist, social change, and non-governmental organizations in Thailand. The aim was to make it possible for students with a keen interest in exploring a broader range of internship sites to do so as an alternative to the standard internships with large-scale institutions like the World Bank. Our first intern was Princeton student Yun-Yun Li, whose task was to familiarize herself with the range of such internship opportunities in Thailand, and to provide a report of her experiences. Her report would then be the basis for establishing well-run internships for perhaps three to five Princeton students every summer. Yun-Yun used her time very productively, and we enjoyed the added spark of her presence and contributions to the INEB office and its projects.

Thirdly, the INEB secretariat team recently held an annual review of INEB's work. As a result of this meeting we are in the process of forming a three-year strategic plan to organize and clarify the work that we are already doing so as to be more focused and results-based. We are hoping to present this plan to the INEB AC/EC Meeting next year in Sri Lanka. We welcome your suggestions and ideas on what to include in the plan, and on how best to make use of it for our ongoing work.

Looking forward there are two exciting initiatives in the planning. The first is the INEB Biennial Conference and AC/EC Meeting in Sri Lanka, January 22 – 28, 2016. The conference is now open for registration, and it is notable in at least two respects: a) the degree of participation not only by leading Buddhist scholars, activists, practitioners, and youth, but also high-level speakers from the world of international organizations and government; and b) a fuller integration than ever before—in terms of both discussion and critique—with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). You can find detailed information on the very first pages of this issue or at [www.inebnetwork.org](http://www.inebnetwork.org).

Finally, we are very excited about a new initiative sponsored by the INEB Institute. This is called English for Engaged Social Service, a program of holistic and socially conscious English training for those who want to combine personal growth with work for harmonious societies and a truly liveable planet. The first training is scheduled for 22 February to 20 May, 2016, in what we hope will become an annual program. Please see the last two pages of this issue for more information. Also, please let us know if a) you can recommend potential students (including yourself); c) you would like to be a volunteer tutor; or d) your organization can sponsor one or more students with a scholarship.



# Converging Streams: Engaging for Holistic Development An Inter-Faith Dialog for Peace and Sustainability

## INEB Biennial Conference

<b>Venue:</b>	Colombo & Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka
<b>Dates:</b>	January 22 - 28, 2016
<b>Organizers:</b>	International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) Sevalanka Foundation, Sri Lanka

### 1. Background and Rationale

The social and environmental issues we face today affect people of all religions. Modern trends towards materialism, consumerism, urbanization, corporate globalization, and nationalism are contributing to a wide range of inter-connected challenges: depression, loneliness and suicide, poverty and inequality, communal conflict, environmental degradation, and climate change.

As we search for new paths, our religious traditions have a critical role to play. Religious teachings and practices help us move beyond the material. They shape our understanding of the world, our values, and our behavior. Religious teachers and practitioners recognize that personal transformation is the root of social transformation and is key to making the entire planet a better place to live.

In recognition of these shared challenges and opportunities, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) has been expanding its programs to increase dialog, understanding, and collaboration across traditional religious divides. This includes divides between institutions and sects within the Buddhist tradition and divides between religious traditions. In recent years, INEB has participated in and organized inter-faith programs on greed and consumerism, women's leadership and gender issues, peace and human rights, and climate change and biodiversity.

Every two years, INEB organizes an international gathering of kalyanamitra, which means spiritual friends. In these bi-annual gatherings known as the INEB Conferences, opportunities to discuss and formulate ways to address these social issues are openly created. The location rotates each year. INEB held its first bi-annual conference in 1989 in Bangkok. The INEB Conferences have since been held in Thailand, Bodhgaya (India), Nagpur (India), South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Malaysia. The 2016 INEB Conference will be held in Sri Lanka, in Colombo and the holy city of Anuradhapura. The gathering is an opportunity

to learn more about the specific contexts and challenges faced by the host country and to exchange more broadly among participants from all of the countries.

In 2012, INEB, the Sevalanka Foundation, IUCN, and the Commission on Environmental Economic and Social Policy (CEESP) organised in Sri Lanka an international conference on Inter-Religious Dialogue on Climate Change and Bio Diversity, which resulted in the formation of the ICE (Inter-Religious Climate and Ecology) Network. ICE works on spreading awareness and education about climate change, supporting climate action projects, and advocating in local and international levels on various issues.

The 2016 INEB Conference in Sri Lanka will build on past programmes and include a public talk, study tours, and a dialog on holistic development. Participants from all countries will have an opportunity to learn about and experience Sri Lankan culture with inter-sectoral and inter-faith dialog and collaboration. Besides the public talks, dialog, and study tours, all participants will be given a chance to share stories and meet other participants, while building new kalyanamitra friendships.

The 2016 conference provides an opportunity to increase understanding and engagement in holistic development. Throughout its 25 year history, INEB members and partners have been playing an important role in advancing the understanding and practice of holistic development, especially within Asia, from very small local grassroots initiatives to nationally and internationally recognized NGOs. So many of these initiatives have made major contributions to the eight core UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). INEB affiliated groups have been especially strong in educational development, poverty alleviation and community self-reliance, and in environmental sustainability. However, INEB's greatest legacy has been in advancing a central foundation for holistic



development not found in the Millennium Development Goals: that is, the importance of spiritual development as a foundation for sustainable personal health, non-harming human relationships within communities, and harmonious interconnections between diverse communities from local to national and international levels.

In this way, the upcoming INEB Conference will provide an excellent opportunity to reflect on the agendas of the Millennium Development Goals, while supporting their further articulation and expansion in the new mandate for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The INEB conference will give participants the opportunity to engage in discussions about the MDGs and SDGs, while being exposed to a wide variety of examples of sustainable projects that can show how to actually proceed with more confidence into such initiatives. Sub themes such as environmental resilience, pluralistic societies, gender equality, youth empowerment, and sustainable development will be strongly emphasized during the conference. Representatives from all social sectors—NGOs, INGOs, government, the UN, and the private sectors—will participate at the 2016 conference, giving a wide perspective of what holistic development can mean.

## 2. Objectives

The conference organizers share the overall goal of creating just, peaceful, and sustainable societies from the grassroots on up to national and global levels. The specific objectives of the conference are to:

- \* Reflect on the agendas of the Millennium Development Goals, while supporting their further articulation and expansion in the new mandate for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- \* Increase knowledge and understanding of holistic development and develop new programmes and projects to address such needs, especially in the areas of environmental resilience, pluralistic societies, gender equality, youth empowerment, and sustainable development
- \* Promote inter-faith dialog, exchange, and collaboration on issues of common concern
- \* Celebrate and expand the spirit of kalyanamitra and inter-faith friendship

## 3. Conference Program

The conference will include six affiliated events. A day-to-day detailed schedule of the conference program is provided in Appendix 1.

### 3.1 Sharing and Discussion on Revival of Ordained Nuns (Bhikkhunis) in the Theravada Tradition

A sharing and discussion on the revival of the lineage of fully ordained nuns (bhikkhunis) in the orthodox Theravada Buddhist tradition will be conducted on the morning of January 22, 2016 at the Gothama Thapo Wanaya--close to Diyatha Uyana-- with senior bhikkhunis from Sri Lanka, Bhikkhuni Dhammananda from Thailand, and Bhikkhuni Chao Hwei from Taiwan.

### 3.2 Public Symposium and Opening of the Conference

The conference will officially start with an evening public symposium on January 22nd based on the UN Millennium Development Goals, their achievements, and lessons learned as well as a new proposal on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The opening speech of the evening will be given by the President of Sri Lanka, followed by a speech by the head or a senior representative of the UNDP regarding the past MDGs and future SDGs. There will then be a series of responses and contributions from senior Buddhist social activists and scholars as well as from those representing other inter-faith perspectives. The evening will end with a cultural show followed by dinner.

### 3.3 Visit to the Good Market (a market for eco-friendly and fair trade products)

A half-day visit to the Good Market on the 23rd morning will be organized for all participants to talk with the main organisers as well as vendors and customers. Participants will be able to enjoy organic foods and drinks and buy some local fair trade products to take back home.

### 3.4 Study Tours

On the 23rd, 24th, and 25th of January 2016, participants will be able to participate in study tours, divided into 2 different themes:

- \* Ecosystems, climate change, and sustainable development
- \* Pluralistic and inclusive societies

The ecosystems, climate change and sustainable development study tour will travel to visit the Sinharaja World Heritage rainforest, Selyn Handlooms in Kurunegala, and the Millennium Elephant Foundation in Kegalle. Participants will be able to experience one of the most unique rainforest ecosystems in the world at Sinharaja and learn how the forest and the surrounding communities are adjusting/adapting to the problems of climate change as well the

effects that humans have caused to such habitats. They will also learn about what the neighbouring communities are doing to protect their heritage. At the Good Market, Selyn Handlooms, and the Millenium Elephant Foundation, participants will also see what these organisations are doing in terms of sustainable, holistic development and get an idea of how to set up eco-friendly establishments successfully.

The pluralistic and inclusive societies study tour will travel to Nagadeepa, Jaffna where participants will be able to see and experience how three cultures and religious communities co-exist on one small island, approximately 10km in length. The island is home to around 2,500 Sri Lankan Tamils and around 500 Sri Lankan Muslims, with many Sinhalese visiting throughout the year to pay homage at the Nagadeepa Buddhist Vihara. Participants also will have a closed-door session with the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) Sinhalese Buddhist organization and Muslim leaders on the 23rd afternoon to discuss Buddhist and Muslim relations, current issues being faced by each party, and how to tackle these issues and co-exist peacefully.

### 3.5 INEB Biennial Conference

The main INEB Conference with a thematic focus on Converging Streams: Engaging for Holistic Development and Inter-Faith Dialog for Peace and Sustainability will be held from January 26th to 27th, 2016, at Islander Center, Anuradhapura. This biennial event will be expanded to invite inter-faith leaders to participate actively in the program. This event will be organized around key INEB program

areas and will provide opportunities for participants active in various ongoing working groups to update, give and receive input, and expand their outreach. The INEB biennial conference provides an opportunity to look beyond regional politics to see issues of common concern and opportunities for collaboration and exchange.

The program schedule is given in Appendix 1. The event will open with keynote speakers and panel discussions in the morning on both dates. The afternoons on both dates will be interactive sessions allowing participants to exchange their own views and ideas in response to the morning themes in the style of World Café and Open Space. They both use an informal non-structured format in which participants can propose a topic or issue of concern and invite others to join in a group discussion. As mentioned above, this will also include time for pre-existing INEB working groups to meet and continue their collaborative work. A session for ideas on a general INEB collaborative platform will also be held. All participants will then come back together for a facilitated sharing and summary session. A closing ceremony on the 26th will be a Cultural Performance and Exchange.

### 3.6 INEB Advisory Committee (AC) and Executive Committee (EC) Meeting

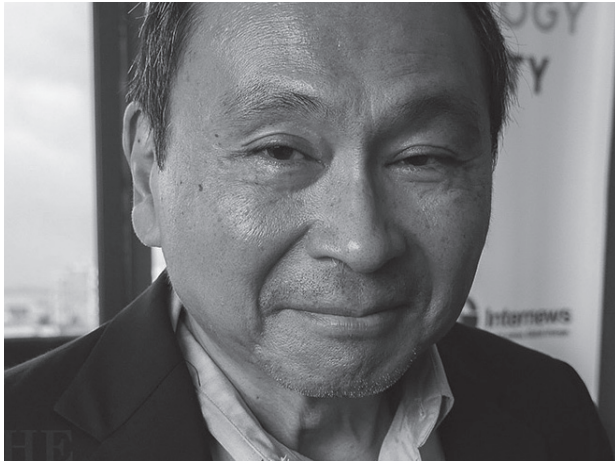
The annual INEB AC and EC meeting will be held January 28, 2016. Current AC and EC members will review reports from 2015 and budgets and plans for 2016 while discussing long-term strategy for strengthening INEB regional networks, program activities, and inter-faith partnerships.

Date	Affiliated Events
January 22, 2016(Morning)	Sharing and Discussion on the Revival of Ordained Nuns (Bhikkhunis) in the Orthodox Theravada tradition
January 22, 2016 (Evening)	Public Symposium and Opening Ceremony of the INEB Conference at Sri Lanka Foundation Institute
January 23, 2016 (Morning)	Visit to the Good Market (a market for eco-friendly and fair trade products)
January 23-25, 2016	Study Tour Groups A: Ecosystems, Climate Change, and Sustainable Development Group B: Pluralistic and Inclusive Societies Group
January 26-27, 2016	INEB Biennial Conference Proper Converging Streams: Engaging for Holistic Development--An Inter-Faith Dialog for Peace and Sustainability at Islander Centre, Anuradhapura
January 28, 2016	INEB Advisory Committee / Executive Committee Meeting

Burma

# Fukuyama's Flawed Take on Burma

Jared Naimark



*Image by Tin Htet Paing / The HE Irrawaddy*

Over the past year I have worked alongside indigenous ethnic communities from Burma who fled mass atrocities committed by the central government and military. Despite violence and repression, these communities have built up incredible civil society organizations, and are tirelessly advocating for peace, justice, and human rights. But the international community is not listening. When foreign experts come to Burma, they usually focus on only one thing: foreign investment. Political theorist Francis Fukuyama is only the most recent in a long line of academics, development professionals, and ambassadors to ignore the calls of ethnic activists in order to promote

neoliberal economic policies as the cure for Burma's failing transition to democracy.

In an interview published earlier this month by *The Irrawaddy*, Professor Fukuyama remarked that economic reforms should be prioritized over seeking justice for past abuses. While this approach may jive with zoomed-out political science models of democratic transition, it is utterly inconsistent with the needs of Burma's war-torn ethnic communities. Fukuyama seems to be forgetting that violent conflict in Burma is far from over. Just before Fukuyama's visit, the Myanmar Peace Monitor reported 31 armed clashes and more than 2,000 new

internally displaced persons in the month of July alone, despite the government's purported commitment to pursue a Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA). These ethnic communities—who have endured torched villages, rape, forced labor, and arbitrary killings at the hands of Burma's military—deserve genuine peace and for perpetrators to be held accountable for war crimes.

That is why ethnic civil society activists are so urgently calling for peace and justice in Burma—to end the suffering and begin the healing process for millions of refugees and conflict-affected people. Fukuyama seems to be telling these activists to cool it and wait quietly while economic reforms take hold. Meanwhile, Burma's military continues to undermine the peace process and launch massive military offensives, often targeting civilians, in Kachin, Shan, and Karen states.

Even worse, the economic reforms Fukuyama so eagerly recommends would only serve to further enrich the generals and cronies responsible for mass atrocities and human rights violations, and entrench the centralized control of a deeply undemocratic government. But he does present a convenient way to root out the cronies: investment from a company like General Motors. According to his analysis, foreign investment, specifically competition from American companies, will

magically force the cronies to fold, leading to economic growth which will then lead to democracy. However, Fukuyama has grossly misinterpreted Burma's crony-capitalist system. It's not that military cronies operate specific sectors (i.e. the auto industry)—it's that they control the entire economy. And as Coca Cola recently found out when its links to the notorious jade business were revealed, no matter how much “due diligence” is done for business in Burma, enriching a crony is inevitable.

Let's imagine an American company comes to open a factory in Burma. Their executives might fly there on Air Bagan, originally owned by blacklisted crony Tay Za. They'll arrive at the new international terminal and purchase an office block at Hledan Center, both constructed and operated by Asia World, a crony company founded by one of Burma's most notorious drug kingpins Lo Hsing Han. They might buy land that was confiscated from villagers by KMA Group, and use Max Myanmar cement to build their factory, profiting regime favorites Khin Maung Aye and Zaw Zaw. They might have no choice but to purchase electricity produced by a dam that flooded the homes of thousands of villagers without their consent, built by crony company IGE (a firm run by the sons of the late industry



minister and alleged Depayin massacre mastermind Aung Thaung). Burma's cronies aren't afraid of foreign investment; they've been planning for it, knowing it will line their pockets with American cash.

Perhaps most troubling is Fukuyama's recommendation that Burma needs a technocratic brains trust to design its economic reforms, inspired by the Berkeley Mafia in Indonesia and the Chicago Boys in Chile. The privatization, deregulation, and liberalization policies of the Chicago Boys and Berkeley Mafia may have spurred "economic growth", but they also propped up the brutal Pinochet and Suharto regimes. Their failed neoliberal policies led to ongoing rampant, unsustainable natural resource extraction in both Chile and Indonesia, causing devastating environmental damage and dispossessing indigenous peoples from their land and livelihoods.

Is Fukuyama really suggesting that Burma should emulate this model? If so, the country stands poised to make the same mistakes, welcoming a flood of foreign investment and resource extraction, without adequate safeguards for the environment or human rights. Burma's indigenous peoples are already being forcefully displaced from their land by foreign investment in palm oil, rubber, dams,

roads, mines, and industrial zones—all in the name of economic growth. And without political agreements between the government and ethnic groups for how decision-making power and the benefits of development will be shared under a decentralized, federal system, increased foreign investment is likely to derail the fragile peace process and lead to more violent conflict.

Fukuyama's recommendations for Burma—holding off on justice, increasing foreign investment, and recruiting a neoliberal brains trust—are packaged as a prescription for achieving a liberal democracy, but are actually only the key ingredients for a liberal economy. Economic growth might bring some benefits for the people of Burma, but not before a full peace agreement is reached, ethnic grievances resolved through political dialogue, human rights and environmental safeguards implemented in policy and practice, and justice achieved for conflict-affected communities. If foreign investment continues without these crucial steps, it will only exacerbate poverty, displacement, environmental destruction, and conflict, further stalling Burma's tenuous path to democracy.

Fukuyama himself admits he is not very knowledgeable about Burma, and he is just one of many influential figures touting foreign investment as the key to the country's

transition. Those who wish to see meaningful change in Burma would do well to cut through this brand of obsolete neoliberal rhetoric, and instead listen to the voices of local people who have suffered for so long. After all, true democracy in Burma will only come from the people, not from the military-controlled government. And the people of Burma are urgently calling for peace

and justice—only then can they begin to build a sustainable and inclusive economy.

.....  
Jared Naimark is an International Public Service Fellow from Stanford University working for human rights and environmental justice in Burma.

## India

# Explore Buddhist Diplomacy

G Parthasarathy, 16 Jul 2015

FACING growing isolation and hostility from the US and its western allies, Myanmar's military rulers turned to China for economic and military assistance. With reports emerging of Chinese military bases and the monitoring of facilities across Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, concern grew in India. I raised our concerns with a senior Myanmar minister. He replied: "You have nothing to worry about. I may go to China for weapons and support, but I have to go for salvation to Bodh Gaya." Not surprisingly, even when isolated, Myanmar provided no naval bases to China, and it widened its diplomatic options by joining

ASEAN.

Can we leverage our Buddhist heritage to promote our strategic interests across our eastern neighbourhood? Do we have the resources to welcome visitors from our eastern neighbourhood to our Buddhist heritage sites? Can we become a tourist destination that caters not just to Americans and Europeans, but also to our increasingly cash-rich eastern neighbours? Describing the tourist facilities for Buddhist pilgrims in India, particularly in Bodh Gaya, the US-based Bhutanese scholar Dzungsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche remarked: "Whatever the historical antecedents, today's sad reality is that the government and people of



*Tourist facilities for Buddhist pilgrims in India are 'notoriously poor'.*

Nepal, India and Bihar are notoriously poor hosts to hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who come here every year to pay homage and respect to the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha."

Referring to India "squandering" its Buddhist heritage, Kyhyentse observes: "India and Nepal gave the world one of its most precious resources — the Buddha. Yet neither country truly values this extraordinary legacy, let alone takes pride in it." Eminent Buddhists note that even the historic Nalanda University, which was home to Buddhist scholars from Tibet, China, Korea and Central Asia for centuries before being razed to the ground by Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1193, has adopted a syllabus that virtually excludes teachings on Buddhist heritage. In marked contrast, China, which endeavoured to discard its religious heritage during the Mao era, opened up in the 1970s. There are now emerging signs of Buddhist

revival, albeit under strict state control. China today boasts the richest collection of Buddhist heritage sites. The UNESCO World Heritage sites in China include the Mogao Caves in Gansu Province, Longmo Grottoes in Henan, Dzu Rock carvings near Chongqing and the Leshan Giant Buddha, carved out of a hillside and looking down on a confluence of three rivers. There can be no comparison in the quality of facilities available to Buddhist pilgrims, tourists and scholars in China and the crude facilities that we have in India.

When members of the Thai Royalty or others visit Bodh Gaya and other Buddhist sites and pilgrimage sites in India, they cannot help but notice the poor quality of infrastructure and tourist facilities available in India compared to those in their own homeland. The entire Thai landscape in tourist havens like Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Authiyya (Ayodhya) is illuminated with Buddhist shrines. Likewise, in

Cambodia, the magnificent and 12th century Hindu Temple in Angkor Wat is respected, preserved and cherished, like Buddhist shrines elsewhere in the country. In Myanmar, the gold-plated pagodas in Yangon, Mandalay and elsewhere, and the 2,200 Buddhist temples and shrines constructed between the 9th and 12th century in Pagan, are preserved with pride. Tourists are warmly welcomed. These traditions are also observed meticulously in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

There are today an estimated 600 million Buddhists in the world. China alone has an estimated population between 220 and 240 million Buddhists. This number will inevitably rise, as its society becomes more open over time. This is, however, a matter that a one-party Communist dictatorship will tread on warily. It was, after all, a Polish Pope who set the stage for the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and, ultimately the unravelling of the Soviet Union. In these circumstances, India's 'Act East' policies will receive a boost if it acts imaginatively in building infrastructure that will serve as a catalyst for increasing Buddhist tourism and promoting academic and other exchanges on the life and message of the Buddha. With the Nalanda University focusing, according to its

former Chancellor, on "secular" education, the University for Buddhist and Indic Studies in Sanchi needs to step in expeditiously as the country's premier institution for Buddhist Studies.

A serious effort will have to be mounted by New Delhi, in partnership with the state governments concerned, to develop India as the Asian epicentre for Buddhist tourism and studies. Connectivity has to be established and improved through road, rail and air linking Buddhist sites, starting from Lumbini on the Indo-Nepal border and heritage sites like Bodh Gaya, Bharhut, Amaravati, Nagarkonda Sharavasti, Sankashaya, Nalanda and Rajgir, together with other commemorative monuments in Sanchi, Amravati, Ajanta, Ellora, Kanheri and Karli. Gujarat is also the home of several Buddhist heritage sites. There are thousands more pilgrims from immediate neighbours like Sri Lanka and Myanmar who will visit pilgrimage sites, provided that relatively cheap ferry and road transport services are available.

At the same time, India would also be well advised to carry out a detailed study on facilitating high-end tourists, who may desire more comfortable surroundings for visits that combine pilgrimage and holidays. In countries like Thailand, pilgrimage is combined with golf by many high-income tourists from countries like

Japan and South Korea.

Developing India as the epicentre for Buddhist pilgrimage and tourism will receive external funding and support if the countries of East and Southeast Asia are associated as partners. There would be substantial interest if foreign investment in tourism infrastructure is combined with offers by governments of Buddhist countries to construct temples and pagodas, portraying their distinct national architectural

styles in select Buddhist heritage sites in India. All this will require an imaginative and massive effort by the union and state governments, in partnership with the domestic tourism industry and its foreign counterparts. Not only are the foreign policy benefits of such measures self-evident, but also the tourism industry will immensely boost local employment across vast areas of India.

.....

### Reinstate Ramu Manivannan As Our Department Head, Defend The Right To Protest



Dr Ramu Manivannan is a professor at the University of Madras, in Chennai, state of Tamil Nadu, India.

We, his former and current students, consider him as one of the best men we know, probably one of the bravest!

This man is fighting for JUSTICE! This man will always have our support! You should support him too.

This guy is a very important Human Rights Defender, not only is he a Professor, Head of Department of Political Sciences, he made several speeches at the UN to denounce the Tamil Genocide in Sri Lanka . Recently, he wrote *Sri Lanka: Hiding the Elephant*; a comprehensive narrative on the genocidal war in Sri Lanka. However,

recently he was targeted by his own university because he sided with the students in their water protest. He wrote to the management asking for better facilities for bathrooms, computers, printers, wifi etc. citing what kind of funds they get and how they can afford it.

During the protests, Ramu Manivannan was arrested. He was dismissed from his functions as Head of Department from Madras University, because he denounced some unlawful practices from this same university, in his absence while he was out of town.

This petition is a call for

solidarity. Student protests have been dismantled by the police, some of them were not allowed to reach campus. International students were threatened to be thrown out by making one phone call to the embassy. The authorities are using intimidation tactics, dummy diplomacy and clout. The students were deeply disappointed and hurt by the lies and deceit experienced at the hands of the authorities. The struggle for getting our Head of Department back will continue until necessary, until justice is reached!

Lao

### Koreans speak out for Sombath

A petition calling on the Lao government to take action on Sombath Somphone's disappearance, organised by the May 18 Memorial Foundation, has been signed by 8,697 organisations and individuals. These include the Gwangju Christian Council, The Roman Catholic Archdiocese and Archbishop of Gwangju, the Mayor of Gwangju, members of the Korean National Assembly, and many others. The petition states in part:

Mr. Sombath Somphone had neither engaged in

politics of any kind nor has he been confrontational or antagonistic to government policy. Rather he is widely respected by the community for his work on behalf of the rural poor.

As members of a global community, we cannot overlook this tragic incident of Mr. Sombath in Laos.

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Siam

# From the Ripples Grows the Tide: Toward a New Democracy in Thailand

Tyrell Haberkorn



On Thursday morning the “Thai 14” walked out of prison in Bangkok and vowed to continue their struggle. These fourteen members of the New Democracy movement are university students and recent graduates, arrested and remanded for twelve days by the military court for a peaceful protest they held against the military dictatorship on 25 June 2015. They face possible prosecution and six months imprisonment for the protest and for the vague accusation of sedition, which carries a possible seven-year sentence.

When asked about his experience in prison, Chaturapat Boonyapatraksa, a member of Dao Din and a law student at Khon Kaen University, commented, “Jail isn’t a scary place, just a boring one. Don’t be afraid of it...The

real scary thing is if we let the dictatorship—as well as the cultural strains that permit it to stay—to continue its tyranny in Thai society.”<sup>1</sup>

New Democracy represents both the most significant protest movement against the military junta to emerge and the most viable possibility to end the political deadlock that has dominated Thai society since the 19 September 2006 coup that ousted Thaksin Shinawatra. Over a year after General Prayuth Chan-ocha and his National Administrative Reform Council launched a coup in the service of reform and “returning happiness” to the Thai people, this may be the beginning of its end.

The reason is that New Democracy may be able to bridge the social, economic, and political inequality that

festers in the gap between the urban and rural citizens. Seven of the freed students are members of Dao Din (stars on earth), a student group that works on natural resource and livelihood rights in northeastern Thailand, and the other seven are student activists from various universities in Bangkok. They stand for a five-point platform of democracy, human rights, justice, public participation, and non-violence that is not connected to any political party or political figure.

University students have a storied role in the history of democratic struggle in Thailand that dates to 1973 and the ousting of dictatorship by a student-citizen alliance. The release of the members of New Democracy came after sharp international criticism, but more significantly, and

dangerous to the junta, the emergence of widening domestic opposition. This began when students’ professors and parents visited them daily, and citizens organized candlelight vigils outside the prison each evening.

As the date for the military court hearing of the renewal of their detention approached, two protests were held, one in central Bangkok and the other at Thammasat University, the historic center of the student movement. Each protest garnered 500-600 participants. While the military and police authorities observed both protests, they did not shut them down or make any arrests. This may not seem like a tidal wave, but it is the largest ripple of protest since the first days after the coup.

## Thai Scholar Defends Himself against Lese-Majeste Claims

Max Constant

An investigation is ongoing into an outspoken Thai intellectual facing fresh accusations of insulting the monarchy over his reported remarks on the behavior of two past kings.

Sulak Sivaraksa, an 83-year-old prominent intellectual and Buddhist scholar, has defended himself against the lese-majeste accusations, telling Anadolu Agency that “the judges are extending the scope of the lese-majeste law

in order to prevent all kinds of freedom.”

Although Sivaraksa’s exact remarks cannot be reproduced – as that itself could be considered lese-majeste - the writer and social commentator had spoken about the reign of King Chulalongkorn, who ruled between 1868 and 1910, and King Prajadhipok who reigned between 1925 and 1935.

Sivaraksa, known for

<sup>1</sup><http://prachatai.org/english/node/5287>



fighting against military dictatorships and corrupt civilian governments, had also spoken about the attitude of Prince Rangsit -- the current king's uncle -- at the time of the mysterious death in June 1946 of King Ananda, the current king's brother.

Under Article 112, anyone who "threatens, defames or insults the King, the Queen, the Heir apparent or the regent" can face a jail term of 3 to 15 years.

Strictly speaking, past kings are not covered by the lese-majeste law.

But when a Thai journalist who moderated the seminar in June where Sivaraksa made the comments pointed to this fact when interrogated by police last month, a police officer told him that a person had already been sentenced for a similar offense.

The convicted was handed a jail term of two years in a 2013 ruling for allegedly criticizing the reign of King Mongkut, who ruled Siam between 1851 and 1868.

The judges considered that "if there are insults or defamation of a deceased king, they may still have repercussions on the feelings

of the people and that may lead to dissatisfaction and may have repercussions on the national security of the kingdom."

Judges have been implementing the lese-majeste law more and more widely amid increased political tensions in Thailand. Many critics consider the law to be anachronistic and mostly used by authorities to stifle political enemies.

"I am known to be a royalist," Sivaraksa, who is regularly invited by international organizations to speak at events overseas, told Anadolu Agency Sunday.

"I am now 83. If they want to charge me 15 years, I would pass the end of my life in jail happily," he added.

Sivaraksa, who has been charged with lese-majeste several times in the past, expressed hope that the newly reshuffled government, headed by junta leader-cum-Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-ocha, will adopt an understanding attitude on the case.

"Now that there is a civilian foreign minister, maybe authorities will want to show that they want to improve the rule of law," said the scholar, who is among 50 members of the World Future Council, a group of "alternative Nobel peace prizes" composed of civil society and academic personalities who are working for a healthier and more sustainable planet.

Lese-majeste cases have surged since the May coup last year when the military overthrew the elected govern-

ment of Yingluck Shinawatra and seized power.

According to the United Nations Office for Human Rights, at least 40 people have either been convicted or are in pre-trial detention for lese-majeste offenses since then.

Among the latest cases are the sentencing earlier this month of two accused to record terms under article 112.

On Aug. 7, a suspect identified as Pongsak S. was sentenced to 30 years in prison for several Facebook posts deemed insulting to the royal family while a certain Sasimol, an hotel employee

and mother-of-two, was also handed a 28-year term for six comments on the platform.

The United Nations Human Rights Office had responded by saying it was "appalled by the shockingly disproportionate prison terms," and calling for the "immediate release of all those jailed or held in prolonged pre-trial detention for the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression."

Release on bail is systematically denied for those charged and all lese-majeste trials since the coup have been held on camera in front of military courts, where there is no right to appeal.

## USA

# Buddhists Go to the White House

Hozan Alan Senauke

Buddhist teachers, monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, academics, and organizers met on Thursday May 14 for the first "White House—U.S. Buddhist Leadership Conference," the subject at hand being "Voices in the Square—Action in the World."

While I am ambivalent about a designation of Buddhist "leaders" — and can think of many other friends and elders who could have and should have been in the room—in this event the notion of leadership cuts in two directions. A remarkably diverse group of women and

men were meeting to shape a common understanding of how to bring our various Buddhist practices into a troubled world. At the same time there was a unique opportunity to be in dialogue with White House and State Department staff interested in finding Buddhist allies to work on issues of climate change, racial justice, and peacebuilding.

The point person for this all-day event was William Aiken, public affairs director for Soka Gakai International, with help from Ven. Bhikhu Bodhi of Buddhist Glob-

## Country Reports



al Relief, Dr. Sallie King of James Madison University, the International Buddhist Committee of Washington DC, and Dr. Duncan Ryuken Williams of University of Southern California. With all their respective contacts and networks, this was a remarkable gathering, with wide and unique diversity in race, nationality, gender, and Buddhist traditions.

Beginning with welcome and a short meditation, the morning program at George Washington University featured brief presentations on some broad and pressing concerns. A video from Mary Evelyn Tucker and a strong analysis by Bhikkhu Bodhi laid out the Four Noble Truths of Climate Change. Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams of the Center for Transformative Change made the compelling connection between climate justice and racial justice, saying, "We have in our hearts the willingness to degrade the planet because we are willing to degrade human beings." Duncan Williams of USC unpacked just one historical strand of U.S. Buddhists' long engagement with society.

Even more briefly we

heard accounts of social change work taken on by a half dozen communities and organizations among us. These presentations could have continued productively for days.

After a vegetarian box lunch and a brief time to make new acquaintances in four topical breakout groups, we all strolled a few blocks to meet with staff at the "working White House" of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. There was a quick hand-off to White House staffers of two Buddhist declarations—one on climate change and another on racial justice. Then followed two and a half hours of staff briefings along with sometimes pointed q&a between Buddhists and staff.

Our discussants were: Melissa Rogers of the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Partnerships; Dr. Shaun Casey, the State Dept.'s Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs; Rev. Susan Hayward, Interim Director, Religion and Peacebuilding, US Institute of Peace; and Angela Barranco from the White House Council for Environmental Quality (CON).

Four things stand out

from the day. First, that we gathered in collective concern for compelling issues that threaten the survival of all sentient beings, not the interests of Buddhists alone. Second, the rich opportunity and frustrating brevity of being with so many friends and allies. Third, that declarations and tinkering with policy will not bring about the change we need. Particularly in relation to the climate emergency, we cannot go forward on an implicit assumption that our quality of life and consumption can continue as is; that we just have to find cleaner sources of energy. This is not possible. Fourth, that in the "working White House" of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, we were able, Buddhist practitioners and White House staff together, to chant the four Bodhisattva vows, beginning with: Beings are numberless; I vow to save them. Now we must live those vows.

The organizers' intention and participants' hope is that this would be the first in a series of meetings in Washington. For this first step to lead in a productive direction, that must be the case. It is

good to meet for the first time, but it is only through relationship—among ourselves as Buddhist practitioners and with the ear of those in government—that we will accomplish anything and turn to the work of bodhisattvas.

*In his eloquent closing words, Jack Kornfield drew our attention to a quotation at the foot of one of our White House briefing pages. He likened it to the teachings of our great and ancient teacher Shantideva. But the source is rather different.*

*"Instead of driving us apart, our varied beliefs can bring us together to feed the hungry and comfort the afflicted; to make peace where there is strife and rebuild what has broken; to lift up those who have fallen on hard times."*

*—President Barack Obama, February 2008*

...and after leaving the White House grounds, twenty or thirty of us unfurled banners that had been hand-made by BPF friends in Oakland. We walked around the corner from the Eisenhower Executive Office Building to stand at the Pennsylvania Avenue side of the White House holding three banners that read:

- The Karma of Slavery is Heavy—I vow to work for racial justice

- U.S. Militarism Breeds Violence, Not Safety—I vow to work for peace and freedom

- The Whole Earth Is My True Body—I vow to work for climate justice

Then we all walked back into our own lives and worlds.



# Solidarity and Action for Climate Justice Network

by Emilie Parry



“Bandh! Bandh! Bandh!” Ajay, my taxi driver for the past 12 hours, shouts out to passing lorry drivers who will only have to turn around and follow our tracks, once they discover for themselves: the road ahead is ‘bandh!’ or closed, blocked by a massive pile of earth and boulders delivered by landslide just a few moments prior. It is 1 AM, raining. No one will pass through until somehow bulldozers can access this stretch of hilly, twisting road, and begin the work of clearing it. This will not be happening tonight.

Here we are, two souls in a night taxi on its way to Deer Park Institute in Bir, Himachal Pradesh. It is telling that the first Hindi word I learn, my first night in northern India, has to do with landslides and closed roads. We are,

after all, in the age of anthropogenic climate collapse, and I’m seeing yet another symptom, close up and personal.

Earlier in the night, Ajay explained to me that the reason he was speeding wildly over the mountainous hairpin turns, around foot and vehicle traffic, was to avoid the landslides he knows will come with this heavy rain at the foot of the Himalayas. I think of racing through rain on my bicycle. In the end, instead of avoiding, do I manage to catch every raindrop as it falls? Will we be racing to meet every landslide as it crashes down the mountainside?

“Are you scared?” he asks.

“No, just alert. I’m alert.”

As we make our way onward upon one diverted road after another, hitting impasse

after impasse due to a landslide or a washed out road, we pass great lorries perched upon the precipice. They line the edge of the narrow roadway, sharp downward drops just inches from their parked tires. Their drivers inside, also alert, appear deeply vulnerable to me. What would it take to tip vehicles and human cargo tumbling down into the deep and twisting ravine below? Very little, I sense. Trapped on the mountainside with no other option, they must wait it out until morning.

Since sleep has no chance, my mind begins to wander. I find myself remembering the 2012 INEB Inter-Religious Dialogue on the Human Drivers of Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss at the Islander Center, Sri Lanka. The conference was organized in a visual

and interconnected manner. During the first day keynote and introductions, we were provided an overview of anthropogenic climate change and climate science as it directly relates to the Asian continent. We were given a map from the high Himalayas, stretching across Asia down to the Asia Pacific islands, examining the 3 interlinked eco-systems and their experiences with biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and the impacts and vulnerabilities of climate change. 'Mountain Ecosystems,' 'Plains and Agriculture,' and 'Marine and Coastal Changes' workshops traced the climatic changes, vulnerabilities, risks and impacts from mountain to sea of the Asian continent.

Rising global temperatures and 'black carbon' have caused accelerated ice and snow melt of Himalayan glaciers and mountain tops, resulting in landslides, flooding and disruptive and extreme climate patterns (including rain in places like Shimla, where rain used to be a rarity), and all the ensuing interconnected biodiversity loss, climate risks and disasters. Flooding increases in low lying places like Bangladesh, as snow and glacial melt flows downstream.

As planetary eco-systems are increasingly imbalanced, extreme drought and extreme flooding in the plains and agricultural stretches across southern India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and other countries of this region manifest. From flooding we trace the continent to the oceans and island nations, where the regional sea level has been rising at rates faster than predicted. Island

nations of Tuvalu, Fiji, and Kiribati are becoming engulfed by the rising sea levels, entire nations turned climate refugees, while cyclones and floods rip through the Philippines and Indonesia, and the Mekong Delta countries struggle with protracted drought followed by intense rains and flooding.

At this point in time, in 2015, none of the above should be any news to the reader. During the 2012 INEB conference, the focus quickly became about what actions and influence can this broad span of religious and community leaders take together, collaboratively. It was decided that the Inter-Religious Climate and Ecology (ICE) Network would be formed, in order to leverage the experiential and skilled knowledge of its affiliates, to facilitate and support the climate change education of monastics/clergy and other spiritual leaders, to create platforms for Asian communities to have a voice in the regional and global climate discourse, and to support collaborative climate/environmental problem solving and applied learning exchanges across the network.

This past April, the ICE Network held its 2nd conference in Seoul, South Korea, with pre-conference programming of a JNEB Japanese visit of Fukushima, nuclear activists, and eco-temples and alternative energy cooperatives in Tokyo; an A-Z climate change workshop for faith leaders in Seoul; 'exposure trips' around South Korea to see the impacts of dams, environmental degradation,

nuclear power and displacement around the country; and the efforts of communities to counter these threats and to create sustainable solutions.

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"You are here for a reason. You are here for a reason. We are here for a reason!" So rang out the words of Mr. Nadarev Yeb Saño, former official representative for the Filipino government to the United Nations Forum on Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC) and the Conference of Parties (COP) Climate Talks, in his keynote speech at the ICE II "Climate Change, Sustainability and Resilience" interfaith conference in Seoul, South Korea.

The ICE Network, in coordination with the Asian Civil Society Conference on Climate Change and Ecology (ACCE) in Korea, facilitated a gathering of spiritual leaders, diverse faith practitioners, and community activists--from Buddhist to Muslim, Hindu to Christian, Animists and Shamans, and a broad inclusive swath of belief systems to engage with many facets of Climate Justice. In its own Small-is-Beautiful way, the ICE Network is seeking to respond, not just philosophically, but with applied conscious and intentional action, to these climate-change induced existential questions of our anthropogenic era.

Spring-boarding from this conference, several working groups have been formed to strengthen and facilitate concrete actions to reflect the awareness and education programs, and the



heightened capacities of network affiliates created by joining together within a network. One such working group is a Climate Change Yathra or COP 21 pilgrimage working group, which has been formed to support and facilitate network affiliates' climate Yathras for education, awareness and messaging toward the Paris Climate Talks this winter at COP 21. It functions in cooperation with Yeb Saño's People's Pilgrimage to COP 21 Paris, the We Have Faith African Caravan Campaign to COP 21, and the broadly reaching 'people's platform' for COP 21 messaging, Our Voices. This climate Yathra group may coordinate with the Education Working Group, which is exploring ways to regionally expand the A-Z Climate Change workshops for faith leaders.

Another working group is initiating support for building eco-temple and sustainable sacred spaces across network affiliates, including sustainable energy systems, water management systems, sustainable harvesting

and building, chemical-free buildings, permaculture, biodiversity restoration and organic farming or food forests. The Eco-Temple Group may also collaborate with the Disasters & Climate Working Group, to incorporate eco-temple and sustainable or natural building with permaculture for climate adaptation and mitigation/disaster risk reduction rebuilding following a disaster.

Climate Change, or climate disruption, collapse, or crisis as it is more often referred to of late, immediately issues a 'call to purpose' within a call to action, and an existential examination of who we are as beings on this planet. What and who do we treasure or hold sacred? Where and how do we find or create meaning? What is our role, as spiritual beings, as accountable humans whose species have instigated-- and are perpetually intensifying-- our own planetary environmental collapse? How have we arrived at such an urgent point of ecological and existential crisis? Why are we here???

Like the great lorries on the mountain roads, we as a planet are perched upon a precipice, in danger of existential suicide. According to former NASA climatologist James Hansen ('The Point of No Return,' Rolling Stone, 5. Aug.2015), we may have already been tipped off this precipice, and are now tumbling down the slippery, rocky terrain of a forever-changed planetary ecosystem. Hansen, with his team of climate scientists, suggest that mean sea levels could rise 10 feet by 2065, or 10 times more quickly than previously predicted. They warn that, if emissions aren't cut, "We conclude that multi-meter sea-level rise would become practically unavoidable. Social disruption and economic consequences of such large sea-level rise could be devastating. It is not difficult to imagine that conflicts arising from forced migrations and economic collapse might make the planet ungovernable, threatening the fabric of civilization." (Holthaus/2015)

For quite some time now, most vividly since the 1970's, climate scientists, indigenous leaders, community activists and environmentalists have been warning us that if we do not change the way we live and relate to the other beings on this planet, we will reach a point of no return, where we cannot salvage and restore our sacred ecological balance. Resilience, as one defines it within ecology and social ecology, is the ability to restore the balance of an eco-system following a severe trauma or shock. Once we pass the point of no return, it may be that



resilience is no longer an option--only transformation.

The question then moves towards how we will engage in and guide this transformation. What is my part to collaborate with this living planet to transform, heal, and find a new balancing point? And you? Why are we here? What will we do?

Here we are, a multitude of souls perched on the precipice, on small surface patches of the great blue planet. We're in a bit of a difficult situation. We are falling and it is going to hurt each time we bounce and tumble. Can we go through this compassionately, with love, with respect and protection for the wellbeing and care of all beings on the planet?

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As Ajay and I bounce along the potholed, pitted mountain roads (smooth only 3 days before according to Ajay, but now bearing the damage of falling rocks), I contemplate the value of an 'interfaith Kalyanamitra,' how important it is that humans actively join together in solidarity, compassion and care as we navigate a planet in crisis. INEB and the ICE Network are planting these 'seeds' for another, more balanced way of living, of compassionate coexistence for all beings on this planet, within a context of rapid, unpredictable and disruptive climatic shifts. These efforts emerge in order to mitigate and adapt, yes, but also to forge relationships that can help carry us, with informed intention, through the many challenges on the road

ahead. You are invited to join in solidarity, to engage together in community creating a new path.

Playing in a loop in my mind until we reach safe haven-- the warm, solar-sourced lights of Zero-Waste, organic and off-the grid Deer Park where my INEB/

ICE Network friend greets me-- is this song:

"If the sky that we look upon should tumble and fall, or the mountain should crumble to the sea-- I won't cry, I won't cry, no I won't shed a tear, just as long as you stand by me." --Ben E. King

.....  
The Inter-religious Climate & Ecology Network came together as an interfaith initiative to address the complex and combined challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and human insecurity. The first conference was held in 2012 in Sri Lanka. ICE emphasizes a combination of community-based actions for resilience and increasing advocacy to bring political, policy and awareness changes. Our purpose is to draw on our diverse experiences of responding to impacts and managing vulnerabilities, our understanding of science and risks, and drawing on our value systems and cultures as a source of solidarity and inspiration. This purpose will be approached through joint education on the science of climate change, exchanges of belief and understanding of our role within our sacred eco-systems, and discussion and sharing of solutions to improve adaptation, to mitigate against climate risks, to improve biodiversity, and to overall increase resilience to climatic change. ICE Network's goals include an intention for the wise influence of national climate change-related public policy discourse within Asia, and to stimulate and strengthen diplomatic discussions around climate change at an international level. We aim to do this in cooperation with an inclusive variety of stakeholders representing a cross-section of faith-based and civil society organizations, climate scientists and social entrepreneurs. ICE strives for gender, age and identity-equitable participation. We seek to encourage healing in a world struggling for equality, justice and wellbeing, as resource/access inequality and complex vulnerability is intensified by climate change.

.....  
ICE Network is a pan-Asian, local-to-local, collaborative network of diverse spiritual communities seeking to share experiences, learning, and wisdom that will build resilience and empowerment in the face of climate change. Our purpose is to wisely influence national public policy within Asia and to stimulate and strengthen diplomatic discussions around climate change at an international level. We aim to do this in cooperation with various stakeholders, such as faith-based and civil society organizations, gender and age based groups, and business networks. We seek to encourage healing in a world struggling with inequality and vulnerability, both intensified by climate change. <http://inebnetwork.org/ice2-south-korea-2015>

# JNEB Energy Tour

by *Ratawit Ouaprachanon*  
Myanmar Program Manager  
Spirit in Education Movement (SEM), Thailand



*Participants at Dokei-ji Temple with Abbot Toku-un Tanaka inside the evacuation zone*

## Background and Introduction

In conjunction with the 2nd International Conference of Inter-Religious Climate and Ecology (ICE) Network in Seoul, the Japanese Network of Engaged Buddhists (JNEB) organized and sponsored a group of 9 civil society actors in South and Southeast Asian countries including Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Vietnam and Korea to participate in a study tour to:

- Expose foreign Buddhists, other religious professionals, activists, and media to: a) the realities of life in Fukushima, b) the dislocations caused by nuclear energy in wide sectors of society, c) community support and activism

by Japanese Buddhists and other religious professionals throughout Japan, d) renewable energy initiatives by Japanese Buddhist groups and other religious organizations.

- Share through experiential workshops the perspectives and skills of: a) South and Southeast Asian Buddhists in community development and b) Japanese Buddhists and other religious professionals in anti-nuclear activism and renewable energy.

- Create an international network for sharing best practices on building “green temples” and “green temple communities”

The main organizer for this

event was the Japan Network of Engaged Buddhists (JNEB), which provides an informal network and umbrella for a wide range of Buddhist social activists to engage in social activities. The Interfaith Forum for the Review of National Nuclear Policy, the AYUS International Buddhist Cooperation Network, and the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC) of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship provided support to the organization of the project. Within Fukushima, the 3 organizations above work with a wide range of civic and religious groups who supported this project, such as Dokei-ji Temple, the JIPPO

Rape Seed Project, and the 3A children's safety CSO. The project also collaborated with Juko-in Temple, the Edogawa Citizen's Network for Thinking about Global Warming (ECNG), the Tochigi Young Buddhist Association, and the Religious and Scholarly Eco Initiative (RSE).

## Activity Description of Trip in Japan

### Visiting Eco-Temple and Sustainable Energy Initiatives in Tokyo

On the first day in Tokyo, Rev. Hidehito Okochi, one of the main organizers and the abbot of Kenju-in Eco Temple, provided an overview of Japanese energy issues and nuclear energy, highlighting the structural problems in the support of the nuclear industry involving construction industries and large corporations in Japan. He also explained the impacts of nuclear energy on local communities as well as how religious leaders and CSOs respond with anti-nuclear activities.

The group also visited Kenju-in Eco Temple and Juko-in Solar Temple to learn about how Rev. Okochi, a Japanese Buddhist priest, organizes eco community housing with chemical free and local timber products and organizes community cooperatives for local sustainable energy. We also met with Mr. Motohiro Yamazaki, the Director of the Edogawa Citizen's Network for Climate Change, an NPO promoting sustainable energy and local resilience, to learn about their initiatives for supporting solar energy as an

alternative to nuclear energy. During this time, we discussed about the energy situation in Japan by comparing it with other countries. Later, a journalist who covers the nuclear issue came to share with the group on the role of the media in this Fukushima incident and how mainstream media has been influenced by corporations and has failed to expose the reality of the Fukushima incident.

### Visiting Fukushima

A 2-day visit to Fukushima was organized for us to learn the on-the-ground situation of the nuclear disaster in Fukushima. Though the tsunami and nuclear fall-out incident happened four years ago, several problems still exist. We had a chance to visit Namie-cho, located 9 kms from the Fukushima #1 nuclear complex where we learned the stories of a deserted school and an area affected by both the tsunami and nuclear contamination. We also learned from Rev. Toku-un Tanaka, a Japanese priest who is an abbot of a monastery in that area, about the situation and his involvement after the incident. It was inspiring to learn that he came back to the village after his family's evacuation to bring gasoline and supplies to local villagers. He has continued to give moral support to local people, especially the elders who do not want to move out from their ancestral lands. He and one local villager also expressed the lack of trust in the government and how the government has tried to cover up the situation despite

problems. TEPCO (the Tokyo Electric Power Company), which is the key responsible agency for this nuclear disaster, is now reporting an annual profit, even though numerous court cases are pending for them to take more complete responsibility for the livelihoods of people in Fukushima ruined by the incident. It was also tragic to learn that many of the large construction firms involved in the building and maintenance of the Fukushima reactors are now gaining huge profits from various radiation decontamination projects. One example of the ongoing corruption in the region is how the government rejected an idea from the local community to grow mangrove forests on the coast to prevent another tsunami disaster in the future, instead choosing to benefit construction companies by building a big wall on the coast.

On the evening of the first day, we met with Mr. Takumi Aizawa, a local school administrator from the town of Itate, which is located in the mountains to the northwest of Fukushima #1 and was affected heavily with nuclear radiation. He explained how some academics have exploited this opportunity to get funding for their research, especially research called "Risk Communication" which has been used by the government propaganda to suppress concerns of local people and convince everyone that these regions are safe to live in. On the second day, the group visited the Nano-Hana Rapeseed Decontamination project in Minama Soma city which JIPPO, a Japanese



NGO, has helped to promote among local farmers to decontaminate the soil using the unique properties of rapeseed. This is in contrast to another huge government decontamination project benefitting the construction firms that involves scraping away the contaminated but nutritious top soil from the area and then re-covering the land with soil taken from small mountain tops that are being excavated. In the afternoon, we also met a mother's group called "3A" trying to monitor and protect their children from high radiation areas in Koriyama City by using radiation equipment to track and create a mapping system.

### Networking Seminar on Nuclear Energy and Sustainable Energy Issue.

On 25 April, the group participated in a networking seminar on nuclear energy and sustainable energy at Toyo University in Tokyo. 15 other Japanese participants joined the seminar from CSOs, media, a number of high level universities such as Waseda and Sophia universities, and including the host Prof. Makio Takemura, President of Toyo University. Two of the participants from India and Korea spoke on the situation of nuclear power in their respective countries. This was followed by a two hour session of 4 groups discussing these issues using the Buddhist concept of the Four Noble Truths: 1) Human Rights of Citizens and Laborers in Localized Nuclear Power Plant Areas (dukkha-suffering); 2) Export of Nuclear Technology from North



*hundreds of bags of radioactive topsoil with no place for disposal*

to South and the Structures and Culture of Building a National Nuclear Industry (samudaya-causes); 3) Value & Lifestyle Change and the Role of Buddhism (nirvana-vision); 4) Localized Energy Generation & Consumption and Community Development (maggā-path). The seminar concluded with reflections on collaborative international action on these issues as the participants headed to South Korea the next day for the international ICE conference.

### Participant Reflections

#### Mr. Thant Zin from the Dawei Development Association, Myanmar

On the trip to Japan, I learned that social mobilization in Japan is more difficult than in Myanmar due to the social structure and political culture. The impacts from nuclear radiation will last longer than 30 years. Every government tries to neglect these kinds of problems, including the case of Japan in Fukushima. I got more knowledge and ideas about the role

of religious leaders. This conference led me to think that we need to mobilize more with religious leaders, especially by organizing exposure visits for monks to learn about renewable energy and sustainable practices organized by religious leaders in other countries like Thailand. It seems that among the many people whom I met in the conference and trip in Japan, most are not involved in very large scale activities but are trying their best in what they can do.

We might assume that climate change is scientific, but I found at the conference in Korea that there are moral aspects for people concerned about climate change. To make things different, we should focus on moral aspects to promote the climate change issue. I plan to share ideas with the monks in Dawei and communities I work with to initiate the "Green Temple community" concept. The temple should be a model for the community. As many villagers become more consumeristic and consume more junk food, often offering this food to monks, monks



*Prof. Hisashi Nakamura of Ryukoku University and the JIPPO Rapeseed Project gives concluding*

need help to raise the awareness of local people to encourage sustainable living and less consumption.

**Mr. Ratawit Ouaprachanon from the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM), Thailand**

The most important knowledge I gained in the JNEB trip was about nuclear disasters and how religious leaders are responding to this issue. The active roles of Rev. Tanaka in Fukushima and Rev. Okochi to organize anti-nuclear awareness activities is very inspiring. At the ICE conference, I also learned more about the role of religious leaders in sustainability, especially from Rev. Okochi's plenary presentation. After I return to Thailand and Myanmar, I would like to share this knowledge as much as I can with Buddhist monks in Myanmar in our training programs, especially on the role of religious leaders in Japan.

I would like to explore the possibility of connecting our work with SEMS and CPME in monastic schools with Harn's network. I learned more about

Harn's network on microfinance. It is growing very fast, and they are now at the level of forming cooperatives. I think it would be good for monastic schools in SEMS and CPME network to learn from Harn's network in Shan state. I will also explore how to integrate the topics around climate change and sustainability into different trainings we organize in the near future as well as how to share the experiences from Japan and Korea. For our work on Dawei, I want to keep connections with the Japanese people whom we met at both the conference and the JNEB trip to explore the possibility of their support on raising awareness of Japanese investment in Myanmar and in Dawei.

**Mr. Sanat Barua from the Atish Dipankar Society (ADS), Bangladesh:**

The JNEB energy tour was most helpful to learn about sustainable and unsustainable energy issues in Japanese society. I think Japan is one of the most orderly countries

in the world. The people are very polite, gentle, and dedicated to the country. However, in the consumer society everyone is running after capitalism. No one has time for social and religious activities. I think the Japanese government and most consumer oriented people hardly practice religious values, or apply them to their national life and modern issues. It seems the Fukushima nuclear disaster is a failure of humanity and the ultimate result of running after capitalism. However, it is a great sign that Buddhist monks and faith-based NGOs are closely involved in trying to develop socio-cultural ethics and morality in Japanese society.

The eco-temple community development project is a sustainable community oriented program, which means the followers and the members of the temple are involved in faith based environmental conversation as well as alternative energy and ecological construction. This is a new idea for the Bangladesh Buddhist community, even though Buddhist communities in Bangladesh are eco-friendly. Our temples have traditionally been completely natural and eco-friendly, made of wood, bounded with green trees and earth. We already run in my community a consciousness based project on Buddhist ethics and morality to conserve our forests and nature. Every year we conduct a green plantation project in the temple and nearby communities for the conservation of nature and the environment. Alternative energy like solar energy is now popular in the community as well. We are interested in expanding

this work and launching an eco-temple community development project in Bangladesh in the near future.

**Ms. Mina JangKim from the Korean Federation for Environmental Movement (KFEM), South Korea**

The three most valuable lessons for me from the JNEB energy tour were how they use rape flower cultivation to detox the soil; how some Buddhist monks work actively on this issue; and the bonding and developing of close relationships among the participants. I have started to lecture at universities to share my experiences visiting Fukushima to let people in Korea know how dangerous nuclear power plants really are. It would be nice to create a global nuclear issue power point and invite each of us to lecture together. I also want to share more about the tactics we use to fight with the “nuclear mafia” in Korea so that other countries can find useful tips.

**Ms. Michiko Yoshii from Okinawa University, Japan/Vietnam**

Since my attendance on the tour was to represent an absent Vietnamese participant, I sent as much information as possible to Vietnamese activists who work against nuclear power projects in their country. In the coming July 2015, I will attend an international academic meeting of Vietnamese people called “Hoi Thao Mua He” (Summer Seminar) in Berlin, Germany, and I will make my presentation entitled “The Role of the Vietnamese Government in

Child Protection – Comparing Defoliants and Radiation”. At this occasion, I will explain my experiences during the tour in Fukushima and Tokyo to other Vietnamese participants. This seminar is held every year in summer, with the official language being only Vietnamese.

The visit to the Edogawa Citizen’s Network for Climate Change in Tokyo was quite impressive to me. The information I got there helped me to make contact with other CSOs, like JIENEGUMI (自工ネ組) which tries to develop houses without electric connection all over Japan. I myself will try to build one small house in Okinawa, which will serve as a model house. Then, I will try to advertise within Vietnam to develop the same kind of activities there. I personally am a Catholic, and the networking event at Toyo University on the last day gave me a nice occasion to meet a Japanese Catholic priest and an activist against nuclear energy. Through this opportunity, I will try to communicate my activities and thinking to Catholic people in Japan.

**Mr. Gauthama Nagappan from the Foundation of His Sacred Majesty, India**

The most valuable lessons from my participation in this tour were seeing how strengthening democracy and effective participation among all individuals is quintessential; developing alternative sources of energy that are feasible and viable for all communities; such energy tours for youths and

activists should be organized for more local people; and networking with environmental movements and social movements is critical for sensitizing to the effects of nuclear energy.

As a follow-up to the tour, I plan first and foremost to construct the first Eco-Buddhist Temple in Tamil Nadu, India. At present, there is no Buddhist temple that can shelter the thousands of people who have recently embraced Buddhism from formerly untouchable backgrounds. We will launch our campaign to develop the first Buddhist temple with environmentally friendly construction and which can be replicated in other parts of the country. I also plan to develop training modules and curricula on nuclear disasters and training programs and business ventures for youths from Dalit and Tribal communities. Finally, I wish to further network with organizations in India and overseas to develop solar based energy systems.

**Ms. Emilie Parry from Oxford University, U.K. & U.S.A.**

Perhaps the biggest take-away for me from the JNEB Energy Tour had to do with the challenges in mobilizing community action for urgent safety and wellbeing concerns of people within the Fukushima sector and across Japan (including Tokyo), given a context of political, corporate, and social-cultural ‘silencing’ accompanied by a sense of voicelessness and powerlessness, along with the frustration or despair/






fear expressed by many we encountered. I was moved by those individuals and groups who have chosen to go against deeply embedded social enculturation in order to speak for their families, neighbors, themselves, or to be in solidarity with their communities. There is hope within these groups who are pushing against the tide; there is power, and this is a possibility of platforms to lend voice to needs, concerns and conditions. I would like to help bridge these folks to other people who are coping with or have coped with similar circumstances, or to see

and learn about other projects and efforts that might seed solutions adapted to circumstances in Japan.

I was deeply moved by the efforts of Rev. Tanaka, Rev. Okochi, and other faith and spiritual/ community leaders to be with people in solidarity, through such a process that they are risking their health and wellbeing and challenging their own personal lives. This is awesome, vitally important, and there is much here to celebrate, support, disseminate, and to learn from in other communities across the INEB and ICE

Network. I will continue to work with organizers for ICE network, and within the newly formed working groups, to identify ways in which I may be of support, while also documenting the efforts for self-reflective learning and for broader learning in the practice and scientific communities, perhaps including a paper to counter or bring another frame to light on "Risk Communication".

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*Grow your Own Food ... Grow your Own Food ... Grow your Own Food ... Grow your Own Food*





**Organised by:**  
**Odisha Nari Samaj,**  
(the federation of 54 tribal women's organisations) &  
**Siddharthvillages, India.**

# Grow Your Own Food Congress

**13th Nov 2015**

**Asian Ecovillage Summit 2015**  
 14th and 15th Nov 2015

Grow Your Own Food programme in Odisha, India has been spearheading a movement to facilitate all the people to grow their own food organically with permaculture principles. The Congress scheduled to be held on 13th Nov 2015 at Siddharthvillage Resorts, Kakirigumma, Ecovillage Community School of Ecology. All Indian Ecovillages are likely to participate in this congress.

**Congress and summit Fees:**  
 US \$ 150 including food and accommodation or Rs. 9000/-  
**Contact for further information:**  
 THREAD Siddharthvillage, E-mail: [threadodisha@gmail.com](mailto:threadodisha@gmail.com)  
 Website: [www.threadiddharthvillage.org](http://www.threadiddharthvillage.org) // [siddharthvillage.com](http://siddharthvillage.com) // [odishanarisamaj.org](http://odishanarisamaj.org)  
 Phone. +91 9437055487 // +91 9437036011

- THREAD - Team for Human Resource Education & Action for Development, Siddharthvillage, Odisha

# A-Z Climate Change Workshop

A multi-faith declaration on the global climate crisis and the promotion of appropriate alternative energy

Woljeongsa Temple, Pyeongchang-gun,  
Gangwon-do, South Korea

**24-25 April 2015**



Faith-based organisations in cooperation with civil society members including environmental organisations gathered at Woljeongsa Temple in Pyeong Chang, Republic of Korea for a two day workshop to study and reflect on the causes, consequences, duties and actions related to the crisis of climate change.

Delegates came from Korea, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Austria, Hungary and South Africa. Delegates included followers of Islam, Catholic and Protestant Christianity, Buddhist denominations including Zen, Pure Land,

Won, Vajrayana and Theravada, as well as the Brahma Kumaris.

The workshop studied the causes, impacts, risks and vulnerabilities caused by anthropogenic (human caused) greenhouse gas emissions. The workshop further studied the issue of ocean acidification and the serious risks posed to biodiversity, ecosystem integrity, food security and human well-being. Particular attention was given to vulnerable communities and threats to peace and social cohesion.

The meeting studied the international instruments related to resolving climate change, notably the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The meeting

reflected on local wisdom, values and knowledge.

The workshop reflected on the role of religion and scriptures, traditional wisdom and modern innovative ideas in response to climate change and its origin in human behaviour, ethics and our approach to economic development, industry and technology.

The meeting noted that we are living according to an unsustainable paradigm where certain human behaviours are placing the climate and ecosystems in grave danger. Globally, our political-economies are attached to growth-models which drive the emissions of greenhouse gases and the destruction of nature which is

the underlying fabric of life on our planet. The situation at the United Nations and in some of our home countries indicates that our political systems are not responding fast enough to the threats.

The origin of the problem is in human behaviour, and appropriate action is required to inspire personal and collective behavioural changes sufficient to prevent catastrophic loss of life, both human and non-human. Our crisis is fundamentally one of conscience and ethics.

The meeting agreed that religion is a source of ancient wisdom and a repository of our deepest values. In many countries, religious leaders are held in high regard, and it is the duty of religious leaders, organisations and congregations to understand the harm that is arising from our current behaviour and to transform this into a new paradigm that values life.

All of our religions call

on us to love others as we love ourselves. Compassion, generosity, mindfulness, love and a respect for life have to be at the heart of our civilisations if we are to survive this current phase.

We rejoice in the examples of faith-based initiatives to promote alternative energies. We make an urgent call to all religious organisations, congregations and other social movements to end the use of fossil fuels as soon as possible. Our churches, temples, mosques and schools need to be leading by example.

We noted that we should not naively leap into renewable energies without recognizing that alternative energies also bring their own environmental and social problems. As we embrace alternative energy sources, we should not be repeating the mistakes of the unsustainable paradigm. We need to be mindful to bring change through consensus and respect for diversity. Several of our participating communities

expressed particular concern about the life-negating use of nuclear power.

We call on all levels and types of leadership to promote climate and environmental solutions as contributing to moral development, as spiritual practice, as well as building peaceful, sustainable and compassionate communities.

We pray for the safety of those most vulnerable to climate change. We honour the abundance of the living world. We find inspiration in our relationship with nature. We recognize our duty to the generations to come.

Through this declaration, we share our reflections with others for the well-being of the world. May these ideas inspire positive actions by people of faith everywhere. May our ignorance be washed away and our hearts be inspired by cooperation and goodwill. May we be humble and consistent in this endeavour.

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English books on Engaged Buddhism are available.



# Towards a Social Dharma— Caring For Our Common Home, Our True Body

by Hozan Alan Senauke



The Buddha was enlightened under a tree. Sitting under that Bodhi tree on the banks of the Neranjana River, he was taunted by the demon king Mara who did his best to plant seeds of doubt. Mara asked by what right this man Gauthama claimed the seat of enlightenment. The Buddha remained steady in his meditation and simply reached down to touch the Earth. The Earth responded loudly: “I am your witness.” Mara fled and the Buddha continued to practice meditation. The Earth was partner to the Buddha’s work, as she must be our partner and our support.

In late June Pope Francis released his encyclical *Laudato Si’/Praised Be*, a passionate plea for environmental sanity and social/spiritual transformation. This eloquent document—subtitled *On Care for Our Common Home*—is addressed to “every person living on this planet,” inviting us all to

take part in dialogue and action to protect our future, that of our children, and of all beings.

In the very first paragraph of *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis references the lyrical work of his namesake Saint Francis of Assisi. In “Canticle of the Sun” St. Francis reminds us that:

*...our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.”*

For many of us Pope Francis is a breath of fresh air: a world religious figure who is not afraid to speak of the plight of the poor and the hazards of a “throwaway culture.” He can speak the truth bluntly, “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth,” and argue

wholeheartedly for an “integral ecology” which sees...

*...a relationship between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.*

Such understandings and concerns are certainly present within Buddhist traditions going back to the Buddha's awakening. In recent decades we've seen the development of socially engaged Buddhism. But it seems to me we are still lacking a rigorous Buddhist equivalent to the “Social Gospel.” We need a “Social Dharma” to care for our common home. This Social Dharma must reach across our different cultures and Buddhist traditions. That means to care for our bodies, our communities, and our planet. It means to understand the connections between climate change, poverty, racism, and militarism. All these are threads in the common garment of domination and oppression. To ignore them is to invite the destruction of all we cherish.

Rising in the early 20th century from the squalor of the industrial revolution, the Social Gospel was a fresh approach to Christ's message and Christian ethical teachings, which were interpreted in the light of social injustice including poverty, racism, child labor, war, crime and much else. While earlier popes had addressed these issues in various ways, none in memory has been as outspoken

as Pope Francis, so clear about the inequities of our world and the dangers of our way of life.

Again and again Pope Francis hammers home his Social Gospel in the pages of *Laudato Si'*:

*Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds. This task “will make such tremendous demands of man that he could never achieve it by individual initiative or even by the united effort of men bred in an individualistic way...The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion.*

As Buddhists we can embrace the Integral Ecology of the Pope's message and place it at the heart of a Social Dharma. Integral ecology is not Christian or Buddhist but truly human. The core Buddhist teachings and precepts are about our relationship to all beings, not treating anyone or anything as an object for our manipulation. In the Zen tradition Master Dogen writes, “Understand that the ancient Buddha teaches that your birth is not separate from the mountains, rivers, and earth.” This means that we are responsible to and for the world we live in. Elsewhere, Master Dogen offers these encouraging words:

*...Give flowers blooming on the distant mountains to the Tathagata. Offer treasures accumulated in our past lives to living beings... We offer ourselves to ourselves, and we offer others to others.*

A gift that has been given to us to sustain, take care of, and share with everyone, the whole earth is my true body. We all stand on the same ground and this ground is unstable. The planet is at risk. Those who are poorest, those with the least access to resources suffer most. But, really, we are all threatened. In the light of interdependent reality, in the circle of giving and receiving we all suffer. So I ask can we let go of harmful things: fear, privilege, and the vain quest for comfort at the expense of others' lives? In the spirit of Right View can we create a Social Dharma? In words from a fable written by my old teacher Robert Aitken Roshi:

*Owl said, “What are Right Views?”*

*Brown Bear said, “We're in it together and we don't have much time.”*

So...what shall we do? We don't have much time.

.....  
Hozan Alan Senauke is founder of the Clear View Project and Vice-Abbot of Berkeley Zen Center where he has been in residence for thirty years. In June of 2015 he participated in a Vatican-sponsored Buddhist-Catholic dialogue in Rome on the subject of “Suffering, Liberation, and Fraternity.”

# 'En-Gendering Justice:

Christians in Conversation with Buddhists  
on Religion, Gender, Sexuality and Power'  
Bangkok, Thailand.  
26-30 July 2015

*Organised by the World Council of Churches in Cooperation  
with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists)*



## Statement

The consultation, a collaboration of the World Council of Churches and Buddhist communities, connected different aspects of WCC's work namely Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation (IRDC) and Just Community of Women and Men (JCWM), as well as the Reference Group on Human Sexuality - demonstrating the strengths of working in a transversal manner.

This consultation was informed and engaged through the shared insights and experiences brought into discussion by theologians, religious leaders, academics

and activists from both Christian and Buddhist religions from 19 countries across five continents. We have been mutually enriched by the experiences, often presented through deeply personal stories, and indebted to the willingness of participants to share.

Participants reflected on the relationships between religion, gender, sexuality and power. The role played by religion in gender socialization was assessed from Christian and Buddhist perspectives using an intersectional analysis. Discussion explored how issues around religion and gender interact

with social, economic, psychological and political factors, and produce inequalities and injustices at various levels, including but not limited to race, caste, gender, sexuality and health.

Working together and mutual sharing was the primary methodology of the meeting. The goal of each session was to enable a dialogue on the theme of each with the intention of enabling deep reflections from an interfaith perspective.

The sessions were informative, interactive and dynamic, allowing for many voices to be heard on such themes as:

• *Sharing of Interreligious Work: The Context of Christian Buddhist Dialogue: Issues and Challenges within Buddhist-Christian Encounter; Securing ordination for Katoey (Trans) people in Thai Buddhism;*

• *Religion, Body and Power: Critical Revisiting of Attitudes to Human Sexuality in the Christian Church and Theology; Recovery of Eros in Christian Theology.*

• *Gender and Social Justice: Resources within the Buddhist Tradition that promote Social Equality and Justice; Use of Christian Scriptures in the Abuse and Commodification of Black Women's Bodies.*

• *Religion and Empowerment: Impact of Ambedkarite Buddhism on the Empowerment of Dalit (Untouchable) Women; Theology of God and Sunyata (Emptiness).*

• *LGBTI Issues - Religion and Discrimination: Raising Awareness of and Engaging Faith Communities in LGBTI Issues; The Work to Date of the WCC Reference Group on Human Sexuality.*

• *Religion and Sex Trafficking: Christian Initiatives and Sex Trafficking in Kolkata; Sex Trafficking and Child Prostitution in Thailand.*

• *Gender, Sexuality and Power in the Case of Chinamwali (Initiation Rites) in Malawi; Contextual Bible Study: Gender, Sexuality and Health.*

During the consultation, members made two exposure visits. The first was to Wat Songdhamma Kalayani in Nakhon Pathom, the first Buddhist temple in Thailand to

have bhikkhunis (Buddhist nuns with higher ordination). A keynote presentation was made by Venerable Bhikkuni Dhammananda (formerly Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh) who gained higher ordination in Sri Lanka. In sharing her personal story, she demonstrated that courage and wisdom are needed if we are to challenge dogmatic thinking.

A visit was also made to 'The Well-Urban Training Centre', a Christian ministry that serves to assist people affected by or at the risk of entering the sex industry. Through this visit and experiences shared in our sessions, we were challenged to collect and share real lived stories that confront us. These stories may make us angry; they might also challenge us to reflect on our own complicity. To what extent are our families and communities responsible in forcing children into sex slavery, for example, or to turn a blind eye, or not even be aware of the factors that lead a child into the trade?

Such experiences call Christians among us to ask where is the omnipresent God in this and the Buddhists among us to recognise that structural violence is caused by greed and craving. This is not just for one religion to respond to and to address. No one religion is superior to the other – and therefore learning is facilitated through interreligious dialogue and action inspired by what is complementary in our faith traditions. In our differences we have something to offer to each other.

We leave with many questions for future dialogue:

*How can religion be made*

*relevant for contemporary issues?*

*How can we create space for allies at the table – those voices we need to travel with?*

*How do we engage in a critical and contextual reading and interpretation of the Scriptures; as well as be alert to and challenge issues of hegemony that oppress on the basis of gender and sexuality? Indeed any interpretation of scripture, tradition and culture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain should be challenged.*

*How do we share multiple narratives and understandings of self-identity that honour personal story without labels?*

*How do we respond to doctrines that constrain the richness that interfaith dialogue can provide?*

*We invite the sharing of complementary wisdom and dipping into the wells of living waters – where for example meditation and social action might engage.*

*How can our religious resources be put together to inform and educate right intention and action?*

*How do we do our best today so that we can do better tomorrow?*

Even as we continue to engage with our Buddhist and Christian wisdoms and take responsibility for individual and collective change, we also continue to be challenged by the African song and concept of "Senzenina" – What have we done? – and what can we do better.

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## If Puey Ungphakorn Were Governor of Bangkok

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Puey once told his inner circle of associates, in which I was included, that “Everybody likes to accuse me of lacking ambition. In truth, I have ambition. I want to be Governor of Bangkok—but I want to win this position through election not selection—and Rector of Thammasat University.” Puey got to be the latter, and we have seen how the ruling elites, along with a number of progressive Thammasat students (perhaps dominated intellectually by the Communist Party of Thailand), worked unrelentingly to destroy him.

As for Governor of Bangkok, he would have won it with relative ease if he stood as a candidate for election. What would Puey do if he were to become Bangkok’s Governor today?

Judging from his personal characteristics, I think Puey would come up with a broad, visionary aim and would deftly work to convince subordinates at the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) to devote themselves for the collective good—as he had successfully done at the Bank of Thailand. We must not forget that Puey was able to overcome politics at the Bank; for instance, the deputy governor was an important military officer, and there were many high-profile individuals.

As the capital’s Governor, Puey might consider doing the following in a systematic manner: (1) improving radically the livelihood of the marginalized, especially in the slums, and granting national ID cards to the stateless (a chronic problem in society); (2) enabling street-hawkers to pursue their trade without fear of extortion, and finding a channel for them, along with local communities, to voice their grievances and concerns directly to the Governor or to hold the BMA accountable for its actions and policies; (3) making Bangkok a clean, pollution-free city that relies primarily on local wisdom, rather than Western technology, to manage flooding; and (4) allowing greater autonomy at the district level, for instance by pushing for the election of each district’s director. (Puey would also support the election of provincial governors.)

Perhaps, Bangkok itself would be divided into two provinces: Thonburi and Bangkok proper. The Governor



of Thonburi would also have to be elected like that of Bangkok. This would not only promote democratization but would also recognize the historical relevance of Thonburi, which preceded the Rattanakosin Kingdom.

Conservation of historic and cultural sites would take place in every district. Old buildings and temples would not be neglected. At the very least, the temples’ lawns or courtyards would have to be restored to life. They should be lush and tranquil places, not mundane parking lots. The temple is not a concrete jungle.

For this to work, the BMA would necessarily have to obtain the consent and cooperation of the Sangha. Likewise, for the reduction of pollution in Bangkok, the BMA would have to work with the Royal Thai Police Headquarters. This would not pose a major problem for Puey as he was a masterly coordinator. Puey would have supported the transformation of Bangkok into a city friendly to bicycle-users as well as pedestrians. And under his governorship Bangkok would perhaps become a model in this respect. At present, Penang is well ahead of Bangkok in terms of architectural conservation and creation of bicycle lanes.

It would be extremely difficult to prohibit the construction of skyscrapers. Even Puey would find this a daunting, if not impossible, task. But he would be wise enough to work closely with the Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage on this matter. And there have been warnings by leading Thai architects about the danger of high-rise buildings. At least, Puey would prohibit the construction of tall

buildings in small, narrow streets for they worsen traffic congestion.

As for the Chao Phraya River, which is the lifeblood of both Bangkok and Thonburi, I believe that Puey would have the courage to find a way to clean it up—along with the numerous canals—as farangs had done with the River Thames, the Rhine River, and Geneva Lake. Once heavily polluted, these waterways are now clean and clear. Puey would definitely not want to be beaten by farangs on this matter.

Puey stood up against the military dictatorship when it built roads cutting deeper into the Chao Phraya riverbank, destroying its scenic value and disturbing the inhabitants along the river. He had courageously but politely warned the powers-that-be about the harms caused by their policies and projects. And he would do so again if he were Governor of Bangkok. If need be, he would also join hands with the people to protest nonviolently along the lines of *santi pracha dhamma*.

Although speculative, the abovementioned things are not entirely fanciful. Puey was a courageous person. He would have the courage to do all these things with the cooperation of BMA officials and other civil servants. In addition, Puey would seek the assistance of NGOs. The important thing is that the people would also see themselves as owners of the kingdom—i.e., each of them would see himself or herself as good as anyone else in society. Isn't this an important substance of democracy?

None of the abovementioned reforms have genuinely materialized in Thai society. Is this only because we are lacking someone special like Puey? Or is it also because we have yet to enact fully our citizen rights?

## II

As Governor of Bangkok, Puey would definitely push for the construction of modern museums and art centers. He would support the exhibition or performance of various art forms, enabling young artists from the provinces to take part in them and exposing the public to works by international artists. Moreover, he would find ways to help Thai artists go exhibit their works abroad. He would also try to find spaces for communal organic farming.

Puey would not neglect the poor and the marginalized—irrespective of their nationality—as

mentioned above. As for the middle class, he would strive to protect them from unjust eviction, to ensure that they live in healthy environments, to create a reliable mass transportation system, to empower workers and shield them from over-exploitation, to make them have adequate time and places for leisure, especially those that are not commercialized or privatized, and so on.

Turning to the economic elites, Puey would find ways to convince them to donate lands for the creation of public parks, art and science parks, etc. throughout the city. The BMA would duly honor the philanthropists. Puey might even go as far as asking that royal certificates be granted to the land donors. Means would be found to curb the power of the economic elites and transnational economic class so that they wouldn't squeeze small business owners out of the market, feed the people with unhealthy, dangerous products, ruin the natural environment, abuse animal rights, etc.

Although Puey wouldn't intervene in the workings of the mainstream mass media (which cultivates the herd mentality) and higher education institutions (which are often mediocre and rarely progressive), he would promote the creation of alternative media and education channels. He would support the organization of public activities for discussions and debates not only to broaden the intellectual horizon of the people but also to cultivate in them the spirit of tolerance, open-mindedness, and respect for diversity. In other words, these activities would help to foster moral courage among the younger generation. The more these activities would be extended throughout the kingdom, the more we would have local sages and independent poets and artists.

To sum up, my speculations on what Puey would do are based on the essence of *santi pracha dhamma*, which upholds Beauty, Goodness, and Truth. The more *santi pracha dhamma* disseminates in society, the less likely that there will be another military coup in the future. Legal scholars who serve the military dictatorship will gradually become extinct. Soldiers will return to their barracks. The military budget will be slashed, and the military will be smaller and leaner. Police officers will truly be keepers of the peace. And so on. I believe Puey would be able to transform Thai society by first reforming Bangkok, changing it from a mediocre city into one approaching excellence. Perhaps, I am being overly idealistic. But as Puey often claimed, idealism is a noble dream, and we must strive to realize it.

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# Harmonization in Diversity and Moderation

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High-Level Seminar on Peacebuilding, National  
Reconciliation and Democratization  
United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan

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by Harsha Kumara Navaratne

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After thirty years of war, people in Sri Lanka are looking for healing and genuine reconciliation. On January 8th of this year, they sent a message loud and clear that there would be no more tolerance of authoritarianism, hate speech, discrimination, fear, or repression.

The people brought change through the ballot box. With their votes, they told an iron-fisted regime that it was time to go, and they gave a clear mandate to the newly elected President to bring peace and reconciliation to our motherland.

After years of negative international press suggesting that Sri Lanka was becoming a failed state, this non-violent transfer of power demonstrated that Sri Lanka is still a democratic society.

It's with that background that I am here with you in Tokyo. It's with great happiness that I'm able to say that Sri Lanka not only stopped terrorism within its borders, but our people are now on a path to peace.

For many years, whenever I met people from other countries, they would ask me the same question. How is it possible that a country like yours, where the majority of people are Buddhist and Hindu—two great religions which preach and practice non-violence—becomes a place of such incredible hatred, destruction and violence, a place with massacres and suicide bombings?

It was a difficult question to answer. I used to respond with what the student activists would say in our college days. I would explain that it came from old colonial masters and the destruction of our traditional social systems. I would explain that it came from divide and rule policies and that we are

still carrying that baggage today.

Telling that, I would know that it's only a piece of the story. It's not the full picture. My generation is now in leadership and it's clear that we are all responsible for what has happened, and it is our duty to correct this.

The Sri Lankan story is different from many other post-war experiences. There was no peace agreement. It's a situation where one side completely lost to the other side. Even though the elected government and its forces eliminated a group that challenged them by military means, people were divided as winners and losers.

Some of you might have seen the breaking news in May 2009, when the government security forces killed the leader of the LTTE, and the war came to an end. In the south, where the majority Sinhala community lives, there were day and night parties. People were singing and waving flags, and celebrating the great victory over terrorism.

At the same time, in the north, thousands and thousands of people were walking out of a deadly war zone where they had been hostages between two fighting groups. They were looking for food, water, shelter, and safety. They ended up spending months in camps while waiting for landmine and security clearance.

While the experiences in the north and south were very, very different, everyone had hope that the war was finished, peace was coming, and they'd be able to experience normal life without worrying daily about the safety of their loved ones. It's true the war was won, but peace was postponed for another day. Now, with the change of government,

it truly looks like there is a window of opportunity.

We've learned so many lessons. In the past, we did horrendous things to each other. It was a culture of violence and revenge. There was no trust, only feelings of suspicion and hatred. How can a society with so many bad memories and bad feelings move forward, beyond this troubled past? How can minority communities develop confidence that an era of discrimination and repression is behind them? How can we come out of a winner-loser mentality and embrace reconciliation? These are the challenges of an inclusive peace and reconciliation process.

The first priority is strengthening and empowering the moderate political forces who have a mandate from the people. We need to encourage them to look at best practices in other parts of the world and find examples of post-conflict situations where an inclusive process has helped with healing.

A clear signal has to be sent from the national level to address any doubts or skepticism. All avenues for hate speech and extremism must be closed. It needs to be demonstrated that the government will never allow what happened in the past to happen again...that they will protect the safety of all citizens.

It needs to be demonstrated that we can have compromise without risking the sovereignty of the country...that power can be shared in a democracy, and political decision making and power can be devolved.

For the reconciliation process, it is essential that the media remain moderate and balanced. In the past, different news and different narratives were produced for each community. The media was used to inflame emotions and tribal instincts. Singers and super stars came out to "save" their community and give words of encouragement to their warriors. New words were created. An LTTE militant was a terrorist in the south and a freedom fighter in the north.

The media helped create the culture of division. Sinhala villages near the front line of fighting were called border villages and were protected. Nearby Tamil communities had to abandon their homes and flee to camps, losing all their belongings. Holy sites were bombed. Innocent

villagers were slaughtered. Buddhist monks and other religious leaders were killed. What happened was ugly. There are terrible memories for communities on all sides.

It's the responsibility of the media to help rebuild the trust that was there in the country's history. There are some new initiatives moving things in a positive direction. One example is a music festival that alternates each year between the northern tip and the deep south of the country and brings together music, culture, and other art forms from all the communities.

Another example is an inter-faith group of religious leaders called Religious Action Alliance that have joined together to have their own dialog on peace and reconciliation activities and organize activities that promote inter-religious understanding. Farmers from different communities are working together on organic production and activists. Environmental activists have been forming networks across traditional divides to work on common issues.

Some of these activities are linked to regional initiatives. For example, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists in Bangkok has been organizing Muslim-Buddhist dialogs throughout the region, and the International Buddhist Confederation in Delhi has been organizing Hindu-Buddhist dialogs. There are also links with Towards Organic Asia and the Inter-Religious Climate and Ecology Network (ICE Network).

Instead of highlighting the things that divide us, the media has the potential to highlight these positive initiatives that bring us together. These initiatives should also be supported by international development partners.

The role of international actors in a peace building and reconciliation process is not easy. They are often criticized and viewed as outside interference. Even the very people that invite them to facilitate the peace process may later attack them as biased. In Sri Lanka, we say that Western facilitators like the Norwegians were not trusted even when they were trying their level best to be neutral. There's always a suspicion when Westerners are involved in the country that they have a hidden agenda. Some see the Western focus on accountability and truth



commissions as unwanted foreign interference and a threat to sovereignty.

Japanese initiatives were more likely to be viewed as friendly interventions even by the more traditional groups. At the same time, the slow wait-and-see policy of Japanese intervention has caused many observers to feel like Japan has missed the bus. Many Sri Lankans expected Japan to play a lead role in post-war rehabilitation. When that was delayed, China jumped in to fill the gap bringing many regional political and security issues.

Japan is able to bridge the gap between Sri Lanka and the West and Sri Lanka and the United Nations. When Japan is in that role, policy makers are able to explain their views and understand the concerns of the international community more easily. If Japan had played a larger role in reconstruction and economic development in the immediate post-war period, it would have opened more space to engage on issues of peace and reconciliation. The United Nations and other friendly Western countries would have had more access through the credibility built

by Japan.

Understanding the Sri Lankan experience is important for future interventions. Many Asian countries have polarized societies due to historical reasons like colonialism and modern reasons like rapid socioeconomic change. Extremism, communalism, and nationalism are challenges in many countries in the region. Even when extremist ideas have not entered mainstream society, they make a huge noise through the media.

Ultimately the biggest lesson is the message that was sent on January 8th this year. The majority of people rejected extremism and brought about change through democratic means. In the end, it's the people who will decide what is best for their country. The people's decision opens a new chapter for Sri Lanka and stronger relationships with other democratic nations.

The path to long-term peace and reconciliation is not an easy one, but there are signs of progress. This is an opportunity that shouldn't be missed.

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## The Maran Brang Seng I Knew: An Interview with Lahpai Seng Raw on the Late KIO Chairman

By Pangmu Shayi



Given that Kachin societal relationships are governed by kinship ties, what is your family connection to the late Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) Chairman?

My mother and the late Chairman were first cousins, her mother and his father being siblings.

I spent my first three years of schooling at the Kachin Baptist High School at Myitkyina, where the Chairman was headmaster. He often came by to our house as it was quite close to the school.

When Chairman Brang Seng came to Germany on the first leg of his European trip in 1987, you were living in Bonn, West Germany. How did he make contact with you?

Early one morning at 2 am in October 1987, my phone rang. Picking it up, I was astonished to hear the voice on the other end say “This is your uncle Brang Seng.” He was calling from Bangkok to tell me he was coming to Germany.

He was accompanied on the trip by the current

KIO Chairman Lanyaw Zawng Hra (who was then Secretary General), with James Lum Dau, the KIO Representative in Bangkok at that time, and Jessie Gam Seng who acted as translator.

It was quite audacious of Chairman Brang Seng, the leader of an outlawed ethnic armed group, to venture on an international trip. What was the purpose of the trip? How was this managed, do you know?

The Chairman likened the Kachin conflict to a football match without a referee, where there can be no clear winner, only an increase in the suffering of innocent civilians. He was convinced that international mediation was essential to resolve the conflict.

With the mission of drawing international attention to the Kachin struggle, the Chairman and his deputy Zawng Hra, embarked on a 6-month long trek from the KIO Headquarters of Pa Jau, on the Chinese border, to Thailand. Along the way, they met with other ethnic armed groups, and once in Bangkok, made the necessary contacts and arrangements for their international travel.

The itinerary included visiting regional neighbors before making the European trip. The German visit was prompted by Mr. Jurgen Hoffmann's invitation, extended through the Chairman's wife whom he met during a trip to China, and the Chairman recollecting that I was in Germany.

What was your role in helping him put his message across in Germany?

When they arrived, I put the KIO team in contact with friends at the Foreign Office, Ralph Hermesdorff and his wife Maria Hamerlak-Hermesdorff. Impressed by the Chairman's sincerity, they arranged for him to meet with influential Germans like Mrs. Brigitte Erler (Secretary General of Amnesty International Germany), Dr. Michael Baumann from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and retired Ambassador Dr. Pier Fisher, among others.

Mr Hermesdorff also arranged a Justice and Peace roundtable conference which gave the Chairman an opportunity to talk about the humanitarian crisis in war torn Kachin State.

Without the understanding and compassion of these friends, the KIO trip would not have been such a success.

The Chairman's message – the same as the KIO stance today – was that the Kachin conflict is political in nature, and must be resolved at the negotiation table. He stated this position strongly and consistently at all the meetings.

What in your opinion, are some of the positive outcomes of the Chairman's European trip?

For the first time in its 20-year existence, the KIO received international attention as an ethnic revolutionary group seeking to resolve decades of civil war through political dialogue.

A direct result of the round table conference was that for the first time ever, Kachin war refugees received humanitarian assistance when the Women's World Day of Prayer-Germany earmarked its 1988 offerings for Burma. Another tangible result was the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom's sponsorship for the Constitution Study Group of the Democratic Alliance of Burma<sup>1</sup> to attend workshops in Germany and Thailand in 1990.

The Chairman considered the opportunity to meet with expatriate Burmese groups during his visit a valuable outcome. He was always very happy to meet with people from Burma and was full of praise for the Berlin Burmese group that came to meet him, upon learning of his presence in the city.

From Germany, the KIO team went on to London, where they had another fruitful visit due to the kind assistance of Martin Smith, a British journalist and writer of books on Burmese and ethnic minority affairs.

You have credited the KIO Chairman with directing you on the path of humanitarian work. How did that come about?

After taking up the Chairman's challenge and seeing for myself the desperate humanitarian situation in the border areas, I decided to involve myself in relief work for people affected by armed conflict. In 1990, I left Germany and moved to Bangkok to immerse myself full time in humanitarian work.

In 1997, in consultation with ceasefire groups, faith based groups and existing Myanmar NGOs, and the help of peace negotiators and other friends, I was able to establish the Metta Development Foundation. The aim of the Foundation was to help communities rebuild after the ceasefire agreement of 1994, as complement to the peace process. I believe that unless the root causes of armed conflict are resolved, humanitarian crises will keep occurring.

Chairman Brang Seng has been described as a shrewd politician and a visionary leader. Any comments on this observation?

His groundbreaking 1987 international trip was a bold move which allowed him to articulate the political nature of the Kachin struggle to a worldwide audience.

Going against the grain of popular opinion of the time, he was against international sanctions. His view was that isolation does not work, and that a better way would be to provide development assistance in keeping with the situation on the ground.

I would like to echo the assessment of his leadership capabilities given in an issue of Burma Debate: Although an ethnic minority Kachin, many

contemporaries believe that, in a more peaceful world, he would have made an able leader of the country.<sup>2</sup>

How would you characterize his leadership style?

During Chairman Brang Seng's time, as is the practice today, every major decision within the KIO was made through consensus. It was never a one man show. Having said that, the fact remains that he was a charismatic figure and was able to sway opinion to go his way.

He was someone who firmly believed in dialogue and engagement. I believe his headmaster experience put him in good stead in reaching out to others.

He was one leader not addicted to maintaining the status quo.

What do you think are some of Chairman Brang Seng's most innovative contributions, in terms of strengthening the KIO organizationally?

It was during his time that the separation of the military and political wings was effected, with the political wing being given dominance over the military.

Although the KIO suffered a military setback in 1987, having to let go of its Pa Jau headquarters, it scored a major political coup; the KIO received the international recognition it sought through the Chairman's international foray.

The level of access the Chairman received in neighboring China, India and Thailand was something not accorded any other ethnic leader.

Some detractors of the 1994 ceasefire agreement are of the opinion that the Chairman was too eager to negotiate peace, that he was blindsided by the government and peace negotiators. How much traction would you give this statement?

I can only say that he seized upon the promise of a national convention whereby ethnic armed groups and political parties of all stripes and ethnicities could come together to dialogue with the government and army and hammer out a process that would bring peace and stability to the country.

He decided to give peace a chance but the fact is that the national convention did not turn out as he had envisioned.

In light of your close relationship with Chairman Brang Seng as mentor and family elder, do you have anything more to add regarding his personal characteristics?

He taught me by example to always show respect for others regardless of age, social standing or ethnicity. He never used his position to impose authority or instill fear in others. His compassion and desire to help the down trodden were qualities that drew me and others to the Kachin cause.

He believed that all ethnic groups, including the majority Bama, must learn to coexist and work together towards the common goal of making our country a peaceful, developed nation.

One other important lesson he taught me was not to be hasty in passing judgment, to take time to listen to other points of view, and not dismiss them off hand.

The Chairman's positive outlook was something I found quite remarkable. His reaction to the media no-show at a KIO press conference in Rome, during his second European trip in 1988, was typical. It so happened that PLO leader Yasser Arafat was in town, arriving on the heels of the declaration of the Palestinian statehood, and naturally all attention was on him. Instead of being discouraged, the Chairman said he was happy about the Arafat media frenzy as it gave him hope that one day the Kachin struggle would likewise receive due attention when the world came to know more about its political goals.

If you were to write an epitaph on his tombstone, what would you say?

A man of great Metta or Loving-Kindness.

<sup>1</sup> Chairman Brang Seng was Vice Chairman of the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), established in late 1988 that brought together over 30 groups of armed ethnic minorities and Burmese students and exiles.

<sup>2</sup> Maran Brang Seng: In His Own Words. Interview by Martin Smith and Larry Jagan; Burma Debate: Vol 1, No. 3 (December 1994/January 1995); a publication of the Burma Project of the Open Society Institute.



# Demanding Democracy Is Seditious in Thailand

By Rangsiman Rome

Most people feel that it is nearly impossible for unarmed citizens to overthrow and wrest power back from an armed dictatorship. To fight against dictatorship is tantamount to hanging one's life by a thread.

Immediately after the coup d'état on May 22, 2014, my friends and I began protests calling for democracy. We were well aware that this was dangerous, yet we held firm to our principles. We could not allow a dictator to simply snatch power from people. This is our time. We cannot sit here motionless.

The authorities did not stand still either. Some of us were arrested and detained in police stations and some in military camps. But it was not enough to stop us.

The one-year anniversary of the coup, May 22, 2015, was the turning point for our struggle. We held a peaceful protest, and in response, military and police officials used force to disperse the event and arrest students and other citizens. Many were injured and taken to the hospital. Nearly two months later, some of the injuries have not healed.

Even though it was clear that force was used against us, none of the officials were punished. Worse yet, some of us were summoned to hear charges against us for violating the junta's order prohibiting political gatherings of more than five people. We are living in a society in which the wrongdoers can then accuse and prosecute their victims. When the state fails to provide justice, we must claim it ourselves.

On June 24, 2015, we went to the police station, but to file a complaint of brutality rather than respond to the summons against us. At last, our powerless bare hands, which had been unable to shake the junta's power, began to cause them worry. The next day, we went to the Democracy Monument and people

streamed there to listen to our speeches and cheer. The roaring silence created by the junta's suppression of people from speaking their minds was destroyed.

Our protest received widespread attention and the dictatorship grew anxious. If they allowed us to continue, more people might join us in the streets. So they arrested us: Seven students from Bangkok and seven students from Khon Kaen in the northeast. On the evening of June 26, we were first taken to the police station and accused of both violating the junta's ban on protests and of committing sedition. We were sent to military court at midnight, and then returned to prison. We stayed there for 12 days until being released on July 7, 2015. The charges against us remain.

Many in the prison thought that we were foolish to sacrifice our freedom for our ideals. But for me, every minute spent in prison is a minute well-spent in the struggle against the military dictatorship. I want to awaken the conscience of my fellow citizens and make them aware of the injustice we face from the dictatorship. If we can make Thai society realize this, then it will count as one battle won, of many to come.

Finally, the reason I must struggle is so that I can answer my children and grandchildren when they ask me where I was at the time of the coup and what I did for them. The consequences from this coup will continue to be felt by the next generation. The responsibility of my generation is to do the best we can in our struggle against dictatorship so that less of the burden will fall on their shoulders.

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*Rangsiman Rome* is a 2015 graduate of the Faculty of Law at Thammasat University in Bangkok and one of the "Thai 14," the fourteen students imprisoned for protesting against military dictatorship in June 2015.

# Sulak's position in the Thai Kingdom

By Kasidit Anandhanonthorn

Sulak Sivaraksa is a controversial figure who is often misunderstood and unwanted by the majority of Thais. It may be difficult to classify Sulak politically. Professor Kasian Tejapira has pointed out that the Left thinks Sulak is conservative while the Right sees him as leftist. Professor Nidhi Eoseewong has depicted Sulak as the brightest symbol of the alternative strand in Thai society and as one of the kingdom's leading independent intellectuals. The Director of the Crown Property Bureau once informed an audience of foreign dignitaries that "[Sulak] is the conscience of the nation." Many academics from both Chulalongkorn and Thammasat Universities agree that Sulak is the 'Socrates of the Chao Phraya valley.'

We must not forget that a jury, which was comprised of a sizeable panel of citizens during the time of Athenian democracy, found Socrates guilty of injustice by corrupting the youth and manifesting impiety towards the city's divinities. Ultimately, the jury voted to sentence Socrates to death. Socrates was a "gadfly" who challenged the foundations of society. He had shown that the Sophists—the sages of the day—were really ignorant, although they charged students hefty fees to study the skills of social climbing. Socrates argued instead that truth is something a person can discover for himself or herself. It is not necessary to believe in the sages. Real truth will free one from self-attachment and make one upright and virtuous.

Human life must not be reduced to consumption of goods, sexual gratification and lust for power and social status. Rather human life must be always guided by Goodness, Beauty, and Truth. And the quest for Goodness, Beauty and Truth cannot be guaranteed by blind obedience to any sacred scriptures or leading sages because they can benefit as well as harm us. Socrates declared that he was an ignorant person and claimed that if we begin by accepting our ignorance we

will have the possibility of achieving wisdom on our own.

Socrates and Sulak may be in different leagues. But Sulak is also a gadfly, and his critiques have likewise threatened a society still by and large organized around Country, Monarchy and Religion. For instance, Sulak questions our blind nationalism (i.e., the tendency to elevate our nation above others) and the *raison d'être* of the monarchy (i.e., whether it is for the well-being of the people and acts as a unifying symbol or whether it is really an unaccountable, non-transparent, and unanswerable institution that indoctrinates and dominates the people; and if it's the latter case, wouldn't it be better not to have one?)

Sulak is a practicing Buddhist. He however argues that the Buddha isn't looking for blind and passive followers. Rather the Buddha wants us to question and doubt his teachings, especially whether or not they will truly help us to lessen self-attachment and transform greed into generosity and hatred and vengeance into amicability and solidarity. More importantly, the Buddha shows us that it's possible to lessen or weaken (if not overcome) delusion. In contemporary society delusion is often associated with 'modern knowledge' and mainstream science and technology. Delusion blocks our path to wisdom, which must be based on holistic, rather than compartmentalized, knowledge. Once holistic knowledge is cleansed of selfishness, wisdom will merge with compassion, enabling us to live a virtuous life for the benefit of all sentient beings. Sulak has consistently argued that mainstream Buddhist institutions and agents have neglected this dimension of Buddhism—to the detriment not only of the religion, but also of the people. Nowadays, Buddhist monks in the kingdom are no longer the model of simplicity and humility for laypeople. Rather, they have become masters of religious ceremonies that are often inseparable from mysticism, superstition and occultism—and of course, they charge hefty fees for performing them.

It is not surprising that most Buddhist organizations and institutions couldn't tolerate Sulak. Bluntly, they despise him. Those who are royalist and/or fanatically nationalistic also can't stand him. They regularly devise ways to get rid of Sulak. Military figures have been at the forefront of the efforts to bring down Sulak, especially because they perceive themselves as the protectors of Country as well as Monarchy. (The many ways that the military as an institution has corrupted Religion must also be critically examined.)

During every period of dictatorship, Sulak has to brace himself against the notorious Article 112. The first time Sulak was charged with lese majeste was in the context of the power struggle between General Arthit Kamlangek (Commander in Chief of the Army) and General Prem Tinsulanonda (Prime Minister). Arthit wanted to depose Prem from power. Arthit ordered the police to seize Sulak's book *Lork Khrab Sangkhom Thai* (*Unveiling Thai Society*), which was still at the printing house and to charge him with defaming the king. He hoped that this would trigger a mass protest that would bring down the Prem government. Sulak was arrested and had to appear before a military court. Subsequently, the attorney dropped the case because of a royal pardon. (Recently, Arthit's son came to see Sulak and asked for forgiveness on behalf of his father. Shortly after, Arthit passed away. This is the 'beauty' of Buddhism and Thai society.)

The second time Sulak was charged with lese majeste was when General Suchinda Kraprayoon and the National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC) seized power from the democratically-elected Chatichai-Choonhavan government. Suffice it to say that it concerned a speech Sulak gave at Thammasat University. In the speech, Sulak pointed to how bad the first six months under NPKC rule were. Sulak also claimed that Suchinda's coup constituted a case of lese majeste because it violated the Constitution signed by the King. Suchinda retaliated by suing Sulak for defamation of character and lese majeste. Fearing for personal safety, Sulak had to flee to exile abroad. Sulak returned to the kingdom to fight the charge of lese majeste when NPKC was out of power. As is well-known, the Court ultimately dismissed the case against him, acknowledging that while Sulak had used "strong, impolite and inappropriate" words "the defendant sought to teach the students to be conscious of the essence of democracy, which has the king as head of state. He warned the



students not to live a luxurious, consumer-oriented lifestyle, not to worship being rich, not to admire people in power, and to be concerned about justice and righteousness."

The third time took place during the Thaksin Shinawatra administration. There were several attempts to sue Sulak for defaming the King, but the police didn't submit these charges to the attorney. When Thaksin was toppled and Abhisit Vejjajiva became premier, it was the same old story again. Old charges were brushed up. Sulak was accused of lese majeste for a speech that he had given at KhonKaen University quite a while back. Sulak has to appear before the court in KhonKaen province every month to fight the charge.

And the fourth—though perhaps not the last—time concerned an article on the death of King Rama VIII published in *Seeds of Peace* magazine edited by Sulak. Fortunately, after a period of deliberation, the attorney decided to dismiss the case.

These cases serve as evidence that Sulak possesses moral courage and always wants to speak the truth. He is loyal to the monarchy, but argues that it must be subject to criticism in order to be transparent and truly under the Constitution, which will make it beneficial to the people's wellbeing. It is also clear that the military—which is a deep state or state within a state—has never really understood this point. Interestingly, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) has thus far been surprisingly (some say suspiciously) lenient toward and tolerant of Sulak. NCPO has not used Article 112 to threaten and silence Sulak despite the numerous criticisms of the junta by him on his personal Facebook page. (These posts were later compiled and transformed into four Thai books.) Given the NCPO's leniency, many have suspected that Sulak is the junta's fellow traveler.

On 22 June 2015 Sulak gave a speech on the 83rd anniversary of Thai democracy at Rangsit University, an event organized by the Faculty of Economics. Dean Anusorn Tamajai delivered the keynote address and later served as discussant. The other panelists included Prateep Ungsongtham Hata and Wittayakorn Chiengkul. Pravitt Rojanaphruk served as moderator. The police later summoned all of them, except for Sulak, to the police station. It was later revealed that a group of military figures had pressured the police to persuade the summoned individuals to agree on the following points:

1) Sulak had committed lese majeste against King Rama V by pointing out that despite the king's greatness he also had significant flaws. When a legal expert interjected that Article 112 only applied to the King, Queen, and Crown Prince of the present reign, the police cheekily pointed to the Supreme Court's decision that sentenced a person to imprisonment for defaming King Rama IV. It served as a precedent case according to the police. If we cannot criticize—even less defame—past Siamese kings, then wouldn't teaching Thai history be reduced to reproducing hagiographies?

2) Sulak had defamed King Rama VII by claiming that new historical evidence suggests that the king wasn't really planning to grant the Siamese people a constitution, as traditional scholarship asserts, and therefore the revolution in 1932 was truly necessary.

3) Sulak pointed out that the name of the university called "Rangsit" is from Rangsit Prayurasakdi, Prince of Chainat, who was a pivotal character in the mystery around the death of King Rama VIII. When the young monarch was found dead in his bed chamber, Pridi Banomyong as premier and a number of leading ministers went to inspect the scene. They all agreed that an unlawful event had taken place and wanted to interrogate the seven suspects and witnesses. Prince Rangsit intervened and persuaded Pridi not to do so. The latter consented despite being a legal expert and knowledgeable in criminology. Ironically, Pridi was later accused of master-minding the murder of the king. Sulak maintained that truth is of primary importance. It must stand above hypocrisy and the use of political power or high social status to threaten others. Such an act is illegitimate.

Sivaraksa appreciates the fact that the NCPO chief has worked hard to control the hawks and doves

in the military. When the hawks wanted to arrest the 14 students who disobeyed NCPO orders, try them in military court and burden them with the legal process for years, the NCPO chief intervened and ordered their release. When protestors gathered in front of Government House to oppose the construction of a coal power plant in Krabi province, the head of NCPO froze the construction project. He is a prudent man and understands well that both cases may turn out to be the proverbial last straw that will not only bring down his government but also put into serious question the effectiveness of state governance in the kingdom. If Sulak is harassed or threatened by the NCPO, it too may serve as the last straw.

Naropa University in the US gave him the Founder's Award, which is an equivalent to honorary Doctorate in 1994.

Internationally he received the Right Livelihood Award from Sweden in 1995. His own Alma Mater made him an honorary fellow of the University of Wales (Lampeter) in 1996. He won The Niwano Peace Prize from Japan in 2001. He was invited to be Eugene M. Lang Distinguished Visiting Professor of Social Change at Swarthmore College, USA in 2002. He held a similar position at University of Toronto, Canada and other places in the USA, like Smith College, Harvard University, Cornell University and University of California (Berkeley).

He also was honored at the Jamnalal Bajaj Awards for Promoting Gandhian Values Outside India, Mumbai in 2014. The Tibetan Buddhist University in India granted him an Honorary Degree in Literature in 2008. He was declared the most distinguished Buddhist layman dedicated to social justice and peace by Amarapura Maha Sangha Sobha, Sri Lanka in 2009.

His writing in Thai and English includes more than 300 titles, some of which are translated into up to 12 languages, including French, Spanish, Dutch, German, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Singhal, Tamil, Tibetan, Burmese and Lao. His best sellers in English are (1) *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society*, (2) *The Wisdom of Sustainability: Buddhist Economics for the Twenty-first Century*, and (3) *Powers that Be: Pridi Banomyong through the Rise and Fall of Thai Democracy*.

He is one of the founders of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists and the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation.



# Thinking of Luang Por Naan

*Original writing in Thai by: Pracha Hutunuwatr*

*Translated by: Chirapon Wangwongwiroj*

I didn't feel sad when Mr. Chalermchai Thongsuk gave me the news of the passing away of Luang Por Naan. In fact, I felt heartened, knowing that Luang Por Naan died with mindfulness.

Mr. Wisit Wangwinyoo introduced me to Luang Por Naan around thirty years ago. Back then Wisit was working at the Thai Interreligious Commission for Development, and I was still in the monkhood. I traveled to pay respect to Luang Por and to study and document his story in order for the public to learn more about him.

Around the same time I was also learning more about the work of another revered monk at Wat Yokkrabat (in Baan Paew District). The book that was subsequently published included stories of both him and Luang Por Naan. Both of them were the first Buddhist monks to pioneer community development after witnessing the hardships that the villagers faced every day.

Luang Por Naan helped to lift the spirits of the villagers who were once desperate and hopeless by teaching them how to practice mindfulness. He led a meditation retreat for the villagers annually for many years. I was very interested in this initiative of his.

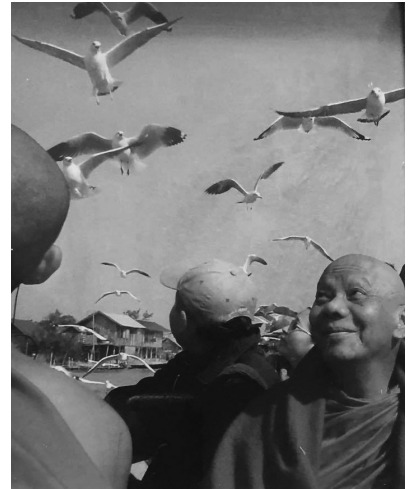
The locals in the Tha Sawang community at the time were very poor, but it didn't used to be this way. The first phase of the government's initiative to develop the area brought in new roads and infrastructure, which transformed the community from a self-sufficient and nature-based livelihood to one dependent on trade. The villagers were not used to the

culture of using money to exchange for goods and services. Soon, the people became indebted to the capitalists and middlemen. There was no way they could repay their debts because the interest rate was so high—a 100% per year in some cases! This applied to both loans of money and of rice.

This ordeal was the cause of the community's hopelessness. Most turned to alcohol to cope, but it only made the majority of villagers alcoholics.

Luang Por Naan went to learn about the rice bank in Lampang Province, and saw that it could help his villagers. So at every Buddhist holiday his teachings would include something about the rice bank idea. He also mentioned it when he was teaching meditation. Finally, the villagers were willing to start the rice bank with him. Slowly, people started to have hope. The cooperation expanded to include a buffalo bank, savings groups, and then a small cooperative store. All of these were managed by the villagers themselves.

When the villagers started to be more financially self-sufficient and reduced their debt burden, the name of Luang Por Naan became more widely known. However, he didn't just help his subdistrict. He enlisted the help of the monks in nearby subdistricts to diligently and efficiently expand the rice bank concept. He also added another initiative—organic farming—and marketing assistance to the concept. More organizations and community workers started to help him with this work, until the rice from the Tha Sawang community became an export



commodity in an international fair trade venture. Volunteers from the international community started to flow in. Some stayed as long as ten years. Even the provincial governor got involved. Many students also used his work as the basis for their theses. Some turned out well, and some did not. A few of them received a doctorate degree and became lecturers.

When Luang Por Naan reached the peak of his reputation, I was not as involved with his work. However, I still visited him consistently. Once, I brought an International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) meeting to his temple. We used the nature area of the temple as the meeting space. Luang Por Naan was very gracious and welcoming, and all the participants were happy with both the simplicity of the space as well as the work he had done for the community.

One day, I started to notice that when I visited him, he spoke more and more at length about the economic success story of his community. He spoke less and less about their spiritual development or the meditation retreats.

Later on, when an INEB volunteer who was working with me went to the Tha Sawang community, he discovered that the people in the

community had become indebted again. This time it was because they were victims of consumerism, not so different from our society as a whole.

Maybe I was dreaming when I was hoping that the story of the Tha Sawang community could become a model of community development led by a spiritual and cultural foundation. I wondered whether most, if not all of the similar initiatives, started by either monks or lay NGO's in other places have ended up the same way.

However, this did not mean that the life's work of Luang Por Naan was worthless. The villagers overcame the exploitation practices of the middlemen, learned how to work together, and became conscious about organic farming practices, all to improve their quality of life. Luang Por Naan was also an inspiration for many others—both monks and laypeople—who dedicated themselves to community development. Luang Por Naan gave everything to his community work. It is a pity he could not find a disciple to carry on what he had built.

Most importantly, he never abandoned his mindfulness practice, no matter how many commitments he had. Actually, his life had many lighthearted moments too, both about himself, the villagers, the social workers, and the government officials. If one of his students could compile his life story, it would be a very enjoyable and beneficial read.

Another valuable life has left us. What will we do now to not make our lives spiritually worthless? Luang Por Naan set an example for us. I believe this is the most important goal in life. For this life to be worthwhile, we need to cross the threshold to "the other side". It is not easy, but it is a challenge well worth taking on.

## Ken Jones

David Loy



Ken Jones—dharma teacher with the UK-based Western Chan Fellowship and an important and original voice in socially engaged Buddhism—left this dew-drop world Sunday August 2, at the age of 85, after a long illness. His professional career was in higher education, supplemented by many years as a peace, ecology, and social justice activist. His Buddhist practice began when he realized that it was not enough to work for social emancipation: inner liberation was also necessary.

As a teacher in the lineage of the Taiwanese Chan master Sheng Yen and John Crook, Ken led many meditation retreats and workshops on various aspects of Buddhism. He was a founder of the UK Network of Socially Engaged Buddhists, a good friend to the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, and for many years a member of the International Advisory Committee of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. His most important book on socially-engaged Buddhism is *The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action* (Wisdom Publications, 2003).

Of himself, Ken recently

wrote:

*He intends to die (in the not so distant future) as an unrepentant phenomenological Marxist. Now well embedded in the Land of His Fathers, he was recently received into Plaid Cymru – as the only socialist party of any significance in the island of Britain. Like his fellow Welshman, David Lloyd George, he enjoys the gift of the gab, though now much tempered by years of sitting on his black Zen cushion. Nonetheless he holds playfulness to be one of the greatest spiritual virtues.*

Ken was also an accomplished poet, whose haiku and haibun were awarded many prizes. A few of my favorite haiku are below.

*Strolling for miles  
arm in my pocket  
hoping she'll take it*

*Ageing address book  
the living squeezed  
between the dead*

*This fine evening  
Stacking firewood  
How simple death seems*

I was fortunate to become his friend and to be hosted by him and his Irish wife Noragh in their rustic home near. Aberystwyth, in his beloved Wales. Our condolences go out to her and to Ken's countless friends in Britain and around the world.

For more about Ken, his writings and teachings, see:

HYPERLINK "<http://www.kenjoneszen.com>" [www.kenjoneszen.com](http://www.kenjoneszen.com).

HYPERLINK "<http://www.aber.ac.uk/>"



Stockholm, 27 July 2015

**Honorable Sulak Sivaraksa,**

I am writing to you in your important role as a religious and spiritual leader and a global champion of peace and sustainable development. Your efforts to lead humanity on a more sustainable and peaceful pathway are admirable and lauded by people all over the world.

As Chair of the Earth League, a group of climate scientists and economists including John Schellnhuber, Nicholas Stern, Mario Molina, Leena Srivastava and Jeffrey Sachs, I am writing to you to introduce the Earth Statement. The Statement is a summary of the most recent climate and Earth systems science, the challenge for all humanity in the face of emerging climate risks, and what we believe to be 8 essential elements for a global deal on climate change in Paris in December 2015.

As scientists, we believe that 2015 is a critical year for humanity, and that we have a moral obligation to speak out. Our civilization has never faced such existential risks as those associated with global warming, biodiversity erosion and resource depletion, with effects on peace, stability, and particularly on the rights of the world's poorest and most vulnerable. At the same time, our societies have never had such an opportunity to advance prosperity and eradicate poverty, safeguard the right to development, and create the conditions for a prosperous and peaceful future. We have the choice to either finally embark on the journey towards sustainability or to stick to our current destructive "business-as-usual" pathway.

Among its key messages, the Statement calls on world leaders to adopt an ambitious, equitable and science-based agreement that can limit climate change to below 2 degrees, enable deep decarbonization in all countries and set a long-term goal to phase out fossil fuels by 2050-2070, with rich countries taking the lead, as key steps to a more prosperous and sustainable future. You can find the full Statement at [earthstatement.org](http://earthstatement.org).

We are now seeking broad support for these key messages among leaders from all walks of life, including political leaders, business leaders, mayors,

religious leaders and Nobel Laureates. Supporters so far include Elders Desmond Tutu and Mary Robinson, as well as Sir Richard Branson, Winnie Byanyima, HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan, Paul Polman, Al Gore, the Mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Eduardo Paes, and Chemistry Nobel Laureate Yuan T Lee.

Given your admirable leadership and engagement in sustainable development, we would be honored if you would consider showing your personal support by agreeing to support the Statement's call on world leaders to deliver an ambitious, science-based and equitable outcome in Paris that sets us on a path to avoid dangerous climate change. If you would agree, your name would be featured on our web site with a photo, and added to the list of supporters that will be presented along with the Earth Statement to world leaders ahead of the UNFCCC COP 21 in Paris in December. We also appreciate any efforts on your side to help us share the message on social media, using the hash tag #EarthStatement.

Your support as a religious leader would help us amplify the message to world leaders, showing that our call comes not only from scientists but also from global leaders from a wide range of disciplines and sectors.

I would be honored to hear from you and hope that you will consider supporting the Earth Statement and its call for a more sustainable future for our planet.

Best Regards

Professor Johan Rockström  
Chair, The Earth League  
Executive Director,  
Stockholm Resilience Centre  
[Statement@the-earth-league.org](mailto:Statement@the-earth-league.org)

### On behalf of the Earth Statement authors:

Guy P. Brasseur, Max Planck Institute for Meteorology, Germany; Ottmar Edenhofer, Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change, Germany; Sir Brian Hoskins, Grantham Institute - Climate Change and the Environment at Imperial College London, UK; Pavel Kabat, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Austria; Mario J. Molina, Centro Mario Molina, Mexico; Jennifer Morgan, World Resources Institute, USA; Nebojsa Nakicenovic, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis and Vienna University of Technology, Austria; Carlos Nobre, National Institute for Space Research (INPE), Brazil; Veerabhadran Ramanathan, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, San Diego (UC), USA; Jeffrey Sachs, Earth Institute, Columbia University, USA; Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Germany; Peter Schlosser, Earth Institute, Columbia

University, USA; Youba Sokona, The South Center, Switzerland; Leena Srivastava, TERI University, India; Lord Nicholas Stern, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK; Guanhua Xu, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China

The Earth League is an international alliance of prominent scientists from world-class research institutions, who work together to respond to some of the most pressing issues faced by humankind, as a consequence of climate change, depletion of natural resources, land degradation and water scarcity. The Earth League aims to provide decision makers with multiple options for addressing pressing sustainability issues, by delivering robust background information and enhancing transparency of the choices available.



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Centre For Bhutan Studies & GNH Research



## 2015 GNH CONFERENCE

International Conference on Gross National Happiness,  
'From GNH Philosophy to Praxis and Policy'  
3-6 Nov 2015 – Paro, Bhutan

The main objectives of the conference are to:

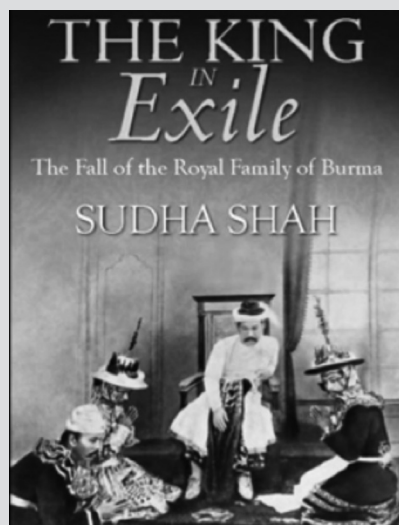
1. Share research findings and indicators/frameworks/approaches/methodologies that measure happiness, wellbeing and sustainability;
2. Take stock of the state of the art in terms of development alternatives with a focus on GNH, and guide strategic orientation for future research and practice;
3. Encourage and emphasize the application and linkages of such indicators to guide policy and decision-making; and
4. Review challenges for the implementation of GNH in terms of policy and practice.

If you have any question regarding the conference, write to the conference coordinator,

Mr. Tshering Phuntsho at

[gortshompa07@gmail.com](mailto:gortshompa07@gmail.com) or visit <http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/>





## The King in Exile: The Fall of the Royal Family of Burma

Sulak Sivaraksa

Readers must beware that Kukrit Pramoj's book on Burma is filled with grave distortions. The author merely used his characteristic pompous rhetoric to dress up what is essentially a summary of the Orientalist views and findings from English books that sought to reify the inferiority of Burma vis-à-vis Britain in every dimension. His book on Empress Dowager Cixi shows the same lack of originality and critical-mindedness. By comparison, Jung Chang's *Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China* is in a different league. Readers will be impressed by her extensive use of primary documents and will be exposed to a hitherto unknown Empress Dowager who was quite progressive, highly capable and filled with leadership qualities. Unfortunately, she could not halt the demise of the Chinese Empire under the Qing dynasty.

Sudha Shah's *The King in Exile* is a fascinating read and comparable to Chang's great book. Her research was meticulous and relied on many primary documents as well as interviews. Its time frame

is not only the period when the royal family was in exile but continues to post-independence Burma. However, King Thibaw was no Empress Dowager Cixi. He was a poor leader. In fact, the actual leader seemed to be his wife, Queen Supayalat. The queen's mother was also a strong and crafty character. Although both the queen and her mother claimed to be true Buddhists, they could order the killing of others, including relatives, in cold blood. Queen Supayalat was not as brutal as her mother but she had no qualms when it came to exterminating political opponents. As for King Thibaw he was a 'good' Buddhist in the fashion of several Thai premiers; that is, possessing a great deal of loving-kindness but severely lacking in moral courage. Fortunately, their wives weren't power-hungry and cold-blooded. In his youth, the king was ordained as novice for three years. If he didn't disrobe, he might have attained the renunciation of the world. He lost Burma in large part because of his weakness and his manipulative wife. He also didn't draw appropriate lessons from history that since Britain had already annexed Lower Burma, deft statecraft and diplomacy was needed to hold on to Upper Burma. At least his father, King Mindon, was relatively

successful in halting the British land grab.

The British conceded that their successful conquest of Burma was by and large due to military and technological superiority. They also commended the courage of the Burmese troops. If King Thibaw had better weapons, he might have been able to resist the British Empire. When Burma fell, the British unceremoniously shipped the royal family from Mandalay to Ratnagiri, an isolated town in the British Indian Empire. The Burmese royal family spent decades living there in exile. The annual stipend provided by the British Indian Empire was not sufficient to sustain their majestic way of life. As such, they became indebted. Used to living extravagantly, they couldn't get down to earth and were attached to ornate ceremonies. The king and queen also expected their four daughters to marry equally high-born men. However, the First Princess married an Indian household servant who not only already had a family but also seemed to be more interested in her stipend than her happiness. The Second Princess married a Burmese who was from a much lower social status. The Third Princess initially married a qualified man who was much younger than her. Her second

husband was conversely much older than her.

Apparently, the Third Princess was the queen's favorite. And the Fourth Princess was perhaps the most similar to the queen in terms of being decisive and possessing leadership qualities. She was thus entrusted with the task of managing the activities of the royal family in exile. After King Thibaw's death, the British allowed the queen to return to Burma. Back in Burma the Fourth Princess was still in charge of family affairs on behalf of her mother.

On the whole, the Dhamma didn't help the Burmese royal family to adjust to life in exile. King Thibaw, however, was the exception. He

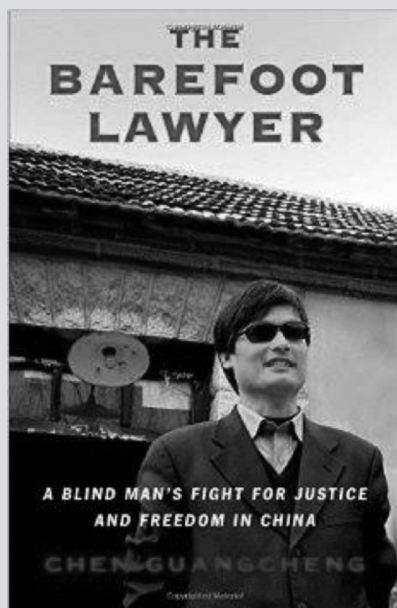
prayed every morning and evening. He often meditated with his beads. After praying, he would extend merits to all sentient beings to the protest of the queen. The queen complained that the British who had ruined their lives and dynasty were not worthy of receiving any merit.

I wonder how the members of the Siamese royal family would react if they happened to be toppled and sent to live in exile. Would they be able to adjust to a new way of life after the fall in which they would not be profusely respected and lavished with honor and praise? Would they struggle "to be number one" in society and protect their status, power, and wealth or would they accept this

tragic fate? King Thibaw's dynasty lasted 133 years. Without Pridi Banomyong's intervention, the Thai Chakkri dynasty would have lasted only 150 years.

### Postscript

When I went to Mumbai to receive the Jamnalal Bajaj International Award on 28 November 2014, Sudha Shah was kind enough to pay me a visit. She informed me that she has become increasingly interested in Buddhism. During my most recent trip to Rangoon I attended a conference. I was informed that the lady who gave the talk right after me was related to King Thibaw. But no one seemed particularly excited about her blood ties.



When we see lots of Chinese tourists in our country, our spontaneous reaction is that the Chinese are getting richer. Their middle class want to travel abroad and see the world—like our middle class who love to go on holidays in

## Blind Lawyer Fighting against Blind Power of Chinese State

*Sulak Sivaraksa*

Japan.

Are the middle class in both countries oblivious to the fact that members of the lower class such as manual workers and farmers—i.e., the majority of people in the two countries—are exploited in every conceivable way? The pollution in Beijing is also far worse than in Bangkok.

Most Thais don't know that the Chinese government has denied me an entry visa. What have I done to China? Sulak Sivaraksa not only meddles with Thai affairs but now also has the gall to interfere with China's internal issues?

My greatest offense is to always want to speak the truth. A state crime is a state crime, irrespective of the state's identity. Therefore, I have condemned the Chinese invasion of Tibet. I have chosen to side with the Tibetans, helping them to expose the human rights violations committed by the Chinese state.

I sided with the students and protestors during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. Likewise, I supported the students and protestors during what came to be known as the October 1976 massacre in the Thai kingdom.

If human beings don't choose

truth and don't stand for human rights and freedom of expression, then they are no different from herd animals.

It is heartening to know that an increasing number of people and movements in China are challenging the Communist Party. They are willing to risk torture and oppression so as not to kowtow to injustice.

What follows below is a brief summary of the book *The Barefoot Lawyer: A Blind Man's Fight for Justice and Freedom*, a memoir by Chen Guangcheng.

Chen was born into a poor family in the rural areas of Shandong province, China, in November 1971. His family survived Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward by eating grass and tree barks. Chen was the fifth son and the youngest in the family. When he became older, he changed his name to 'Chen', meaning honesty.

When Chen was five months old he became seriously ill, but his family didn't have two yuan to take him to the hospital. This was in the context of the Cultural Revolution, which consumed and unsettled the whole country. Chen cried non-stop for two days, and this ordeal blinded him. He put it later that Communism and decades of propaganda made him blind. And because he was blind, he didn't go to school. Instead, his parents read him books, including great Chinese literature. As a result, he wasn't brainwashed by the authoritarian education system.

It was only when he was 18 years old that Chen was enrolled in a formal school learning braille.

He was chosen as a student representative. As student representative, he successfully demanded sufficient bathing water for students, their right to leave the school's premise, and an increase in the number of music programs offered by the school.

When the mayor invited him to give a speech Chen stated "I hope we all will have better lives". Ultimately, he crossed the line. The Chinese state no longer deemed his protest acceptable. This happened when he mobilized the people to oppose the state's one-child policy. He even brought the case of his mom's and wife's forced abortion to court. (Chen is a self-taught lawyer.) Chen lost the case, but the judge told him that although the Court sided with him it couldn't grant him justice because of interference by the powers-that-be. (Would Thai judges be brave enough to admit this too?)

Chen asked, "Why do the Chinese Communists, who have influence around the world, as well as absolute political authority, wish to lose their international prestige, in order to oppress the small people in the country side?"

What does the powerful Chinese state have to fear from a powerless individual like me? How could I incite unrest in China? Although most Thais don't know that I have been denied entry into China, the international media paid significant attention to it. As expected, the Thai media was by and large silent on this matter.

There's also the case of Liu Xiaobo, the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Winner. He was sentenced to

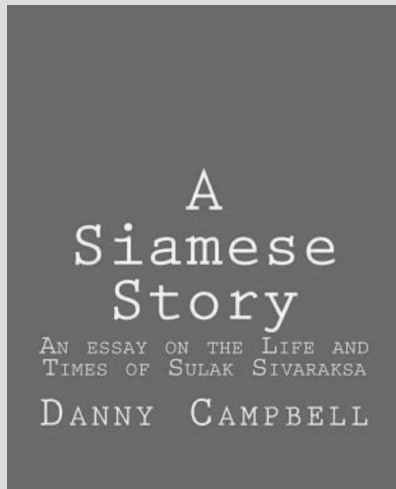
11-year imprisonment for "inciting the subversion of state power." The Chinese state even prohibited a representative to go to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize on his behalf.

China has deployed numerous means to promote its good image or 'soft power' worldwide, including the establishment of Confucius Institutes on various continents. Domestically, however, the Chinese government can't tolerate the slightest sign of dissent or disobedience, such as the uprisings in Tibet in 2008, in Xinjiang in 2009 and Hong Kong in 2011.

When foreigners see Chinese people in general they think that these people just want to make a living and avoid getting involved in politics. This might have been true a decade ago. Now, an increasing number of rural folks in various provinces who haven't capitulated to the 'new' capitalism represented by high-rise buildings in mega-cities have come to despise the government and corrupt bureaucrats along with their abuse of power and nepotism. The Communist Party is rapidly losing its credibility in the eyes of the people.

Although Chen is blind and placed under house arrest and police surveillance, he managed to escape with his wife to the US Embassy in Beijing. A movement of freedom-loving people assisted his escape. Subsequently, his safe passage to the US was negotiated successfully. But those who helped him escape are now imprisoned.

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*A Siamese Story* was published in honour of Sulak Sivaraksa's 82nd birthday. Most of the information, as the author acknowledges, can be found in Sulak's English language biography, *Loyalty Demands Dissent*. That book, however, dates from 1998. *A Siamese Story* serves to plug some of the time gap, briefly covering the Thaksin, Abhisit and Yingluck years.

The book, packed with interesting anecdotes and facts, is written in an evocative, literary style and is easily digested by any educated reader. It reads like a hybrid of a biography and a novel. One excerpt reads 'Picture a beautiful girl walking along the Surawong Road, the chatter and music of the metropolis, and the smell of chillies and lemongrass cooked at a frenzy in a wok...'

Describing the shifts in ideas in the early 20th century from religion and morality to hard reason (Sulak has been trying to keep morality in the modern public conscience throughout his life), it charts Sulak's life and intellectual and spiritual development, starting from early exposure to the substance

## A Siamese Story: A Biographical Essay on Sulak Sivaraksa

By Danny Campbell,  
Suksit Siam Publications, 2015

*Zia Collinsfree*

of Buddhism through his experience as a junior monk at Wat Thong Nopphakhun, under the tutelage of Pra Pattaramuni, a true practitioner of Buddhist mindfulness in his daily life, despite his (not so Buddhist) practice of astrological readings.

After his father's death, Sulak moved to his mother's home in a rural community outside Bangkok, his first encounter with simple, honest country life as it was in those days. This experience probably laid the foundations for his insistence that true democracy is the system practised among rural villagers, where decisions are made communally and everyone's voice is heard. Sadly, the reality these days is somewhat different due to urbanization and industrialization.

After finishing his education in Britain, Sulak was spoilt for choice as to what career to pursue. Thanks to his talent with speeches and writings, he was even offered the job as ghostwriter for Field Marshal Tanom Kittikachorn. Despite the enviable privileges such a position would have given him, Sulak decided to turn down the offer. Instead, he turned his skills to diverse fields varying from translation to reporting for the BBC's

Siamese section. Eventually, he found his calling when he joined a group of intellectuals aiming to improve university textbooks. This was the start of the *Social Science Review*, in which Sulak oversaw the inclusion and spread of new artistic, social and political ideas. Sulak was never afraid to publish criticism of the dictatorial regimes ruling the country at the time, as well as certain pompous individuals. One of them, Kukrit Pramoj, held a vendetta against Sulak ever since, attempting to smear him with lese-majeste (the 'crime' of insulting the monarchy), punishable by a long prison sentence without bail.

Apart from his original mentor at Wat Thong Nopphakhun, Sulak engaged in dialogue with the famous Buddhist monastic scholars P.A. Payutto and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. The latter greatly influenced Sulak's attitude on the relation of Buddhism to other religions, whose teachings and followers were equally valid and worthy of respect. We can witness this influence in Sulak's interfaith work with people of vastly different religions and cultures and his reference to "Buddhism with a small 'b.'" It was also through his interaction with monks, including the Dalai Lama, as well as his witnessing



of the monastic community's response to repression from Vietnam to Tibet, that Sulak's view of 'sowing the seeds of peace in one's own heart' and spreading that peace to one's fellow creatures and the surrounding community, developed.

Part II of the book deals, among other issues, with Siam's notorious and ruthless lese-majeste law, something which Sulak has repeatedly fallen foul of but has always managed to avoid prosecution in the end. Some have said that this is because of his vast network of establishment connections (his presence on the Yellow Shirt stage, apparent aversion to Thaksin Shinawatra and association with figures in the Yellow Shirt camp has been criticized by some), but Sulak presents himself as a royalist. He also knows how to use words for what he wants to say, adopting his stance as a *kalayanamitta* (virtuous friend) of the monarchy, whose purpose is to give praise where it is due, but also to criticize and warn against danger if necessary. Even so, he is also capable of scathing criticism of dictatorships such as that of Suchinda Kraprayoon, who forced Sulak into exile in fear for

his life.

Of course, Sulak continues to keep his eye on political, social and environmental happenings in this country and abroad. The book mentions his opposition to the Kanchanaburi gas pipeline, but there have been other instances such as potash mining in the northeast and the proposed Mae Wong dam, endangering pristine forest habitats in western Siam. An entity which Sulak has been particularly critical of is the Crown Property Bureau, which evicts mainly poor tenants only to build luxury residences and shopping complexes. Nevertheless, Sulak is open to working with the same institutions he chastises, as we can see from the restoration of Pridi Panomyong's former riverside residence, a place instrumental in the Free Thai movement.

The book also talks about Sulak's criticism of Thaksin's allegedly cosmetic pro-poor policies, corruption and heavy-handed crackdown on drug dealing. Of course, like any politician dependent on votes, Thaksin did not do these actions out of the goodness of his heart, but in the hope of securing a loyal following,

which he succeeded at time and again, much to the displeasure of the old guard. The book could have dealt more with views opposed to Sulak (namely, why single out Thaksin when all elites have been just as corrupt; at least Thaksin, unlike others before him, has slightly improved the lives of the poor, which is why they vote for his parties). This could have been addressed in more detail, seeing as Thaksin and his associates are such divisive figures in modern Siamese society.

All in all, this is an entertaining and informative book to read regardless of whether or not the reader knows Sulak personally or through his works. Sulak is still relatively strong, up and about at the grand old age of 82, when others younger than him are immobile. The book finishes with the line 'As for Siam, there is perhaps, no one else like him, a kind of intellectual Last Emperor, who ties the new Siam to the old'. Despite his shortcomings, Sulak's legacy is well worth keeping alive.

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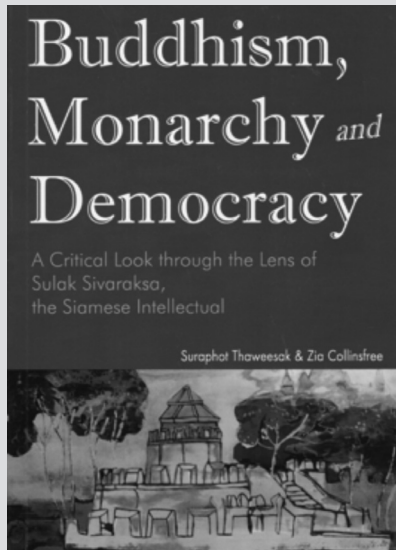
## In Praise of Sulak and the Need for a Sulak of the Left

Soravis Jayanama

Suraphot Thaweesak's *Buddhism, Monarchy, and Democracy: A Critical Look through the Lens of Sulak Sivaraksa, the Siamese Intellectual* is not a page turner, but it does pro-

vide a concise and accessible—though at times dense—introduction to the troika apparently constitutive of Sulak's social and political thought. This book is a useful

primer not because Sulak's views on these issues are sparse and scattered, and therefore difficult to track down, but because they are overly abundant. Sulak is a prolific writer. More bluntly, Sulak's work is characterized by overproduction (he publishes a few books every year along with dozens of articles—sometimes I wonder if he really loves trees as he



says he does) and self-plagiarism (he recycles the same ideas, passages, facts, examples, etc. over and over). Suraphot does a fine job at sifting through the wealth of materials and weaving them into a coherent account.

However, given that it is intended as a short introduction, Suraphot's book focuses on only the thoughts of the 'old' Sulak. As such, his picture of the octogenarian Sulak is quite static and non-relational. It is as if Sulak has never changed his mind or that his views on these matters were innately pre-formed. Surely, there must have been twists and turns as well as turning points in Sulak's views. How and to what extent did he unplug himself from the limitations, prejudices, narrow-mindedness, tendencies, etc. of his particular upbringing, social class, tradition, education, historical context, and so on? We also don't see much of Sulak's contemporaries—even those whom Sulak acknowledged as his masters and virtuous companions

or who served as his intellectual sparring partners. How did they influence Sulak, and vice versa? We don't see events (e.g., that tested his faith, that served as his road to Damascus, that he finds himself caught up in, etc.) that might have impacted Sulak's intellectual development, disturbed his ordinary way of being in the world, and made him the way he is today. Is Sulak simply a cold, autonomous thinking-machine?

According to Suraphot, the three interconnected rings that constitute Sulak's social and political thought are Buddhism, monarchy and democracy. He is correct to begin with Buddhism because these rings don't have the same 'weight.' It is Buddhism, especially the mature Sulak's brand of engaged or activist Buddhism, which sees the religion as an indispensable route to personal and social transformation, that is the center of gravitas and that shades his interpretations and analyses of monarchy and democracy. Perhaps we should add another ring to supplement Sulak's Borromean knot: conservatism. Of course, it is a peculiar kind of conservatism, of which more below.

Conservatives are a varied lot. It's not always easy to pin them down. Some are localist or nationalist. Others are globalist. Some strongly advocate for the free market system, while others are anti-capitalist. Some are God-fearing or religious. But many of them are also atheist. And so on. Moreover, it is worth pointing

out that conservatism is not necessarily against change. Conservatives don't have to spontaneously defend the status quo or the old regime. Rather they are for a particular kind of change. Corey Robin puts it well this way: "Far from yielding a knee-jerk defense of an unchanging old regime or a thoughtful traditionalism, the reactionary imperative presses conservatism in two rather different directions: first, to a critique and reconfiguration of the old regime; and second, to an absorption of the ideas and tactics of the very revolution or reform it opposes. What conservatism seeks to accomplish through that reconfiguration of the old and absorption of the new is to make privilege popular, to transform a tottering old regime into a dynamic, ideologically coherent movement of the masses."<sup>1</sup> Conservatism says that the real grave-diggers of the old regime are the ancien regime itself and its mindless defenders (e.g., those who are more royalist than the King). Reconfiguration is necessary in order for the old regime to prosper, especially by incorporating the 'lowly' masses. In other words, conservatism is about reforming and popularizing the old regime, making it appealing and agreeable to the masses.

How does Sulak fit into conservatism? His conservatism is the loyalty-demands-dissent kind, which is also the title of his English autobiography. For instance, Buddhism has to be reinvented and a modern Buddhist path for emancipation (that serves as an alternative to secular versions<sup>2</sup>) must be created

lest it simply serve as the opium of the masses. For the Thai monarchy to survive and Siam to be a balanced and harmonious kingdom like in the good old days before the ‘Fall’ (beginning in the Fifth Reign and reaching a crescendo during the “American era” after WWII), socially as well as ecologically, change must take place by critiquing the old regime through a Buddhist lens and assimilating the new democracy. (This does not mean that Sulak uses democracy opportunistically or cynically. Rather it has to do with the “empty form” of democracy as will be evident below.) It is hence because of his conservatism that Sulak is able to speak truth to power, employ the progressive language of democracy and reform, sputter liberal platitudes, refer to left-leaning ideas such as class antagonism and the dismantling of structural violence and inequality rooted in capitalism<sup>3</sup>, serve as a node of various intellectual and activist networks, encourage civil disobedience and insubordination, or simply be a gadfly. Radical or militant conservatism is not an oxymoron. It’s because of his conservatism that Sulak seems unclassifiable<sup>4</sup>, that the Left mistakes him for being right wing, while the Right for being left wing. At the same time, Sulak also criticizes the old regime and status quo for being insufficiently ‘authentic’, and contemporary Thai society for severing its roots from the past. And if, according to Sulak, Buddhism is inherently democratic—e.g., the Sangha was the first democratic

institution—then democratization is akin to a return to Buddhism and the good old days. Paradoxically, the new leads straight back to the old.

To elaborate, Sulak’s socio-political imaginary is highly conventional if not fundamentally conservative. The trinity of Nation, Religion and King (or the basis of Thai identity) still forms its main coordinates. It offers nothing essentially new. It does not rupture but emphasizes continuity—that is, the same ball game but with more options or some reforms. Without rupture, however, there cannot be emancipation. Sulak has courageously criticized (at times fiercely) and struggled to redefine this trinity and by logical extension Thai identity (at great personal risk), but does not supplant it. There will still be a monarch, but one who is under the constitution. Democratization will save the monarchy. In Buddhist parlance, the monarch is a *sommuti deva*, not a God-king, and therefore does not possess divine rights. The monarch and monarchy must be righteous, accountable, transparent, open to criticism, and so on. There will still be a state, but one that is perhaps more ‘tolerant’ and ‘pluralistic’ like the old Siam described by Sulak. There will still be rulers, but they are virtuous, filled with loving-kindness and moral courage, and respectful of the will and voices of the ruled, the ‘lower orders.’ The kingdom will still be capitalist, but capitalism will be regulated to have

a ‘human and charitable face’ and the (welfare) state will act to curb capitalist excesses by implementing fair, redistributive (Rawlsian, as Suraphot chooses to see it) policies; these policies will also help the majority hold in check the powerful minority. The Thai nation will still be around, but once returned to its authentic Buddhist roots, it will be less chauvinistic and more inclusive. The Sangha will also be around, but once reformed it will serve as the Wheel of Dhamma that checks and balances the Wheel of State (as in bygone days). And so on. Suraphot does a fine job at summarizing and clarifying Sulak’s views on these matters. Undoubtedly, these suggestions and reforms will be beneficial to many people in society. Contrary to conservatives in general, Sulak is not hostile to “the wretched of the earth” and does not see a dilution of privileges as a threat. Nevertheless, let me highlight Sulak’s conservatism by asking a series of naïve questions: Are democratic rights and welfare the reward the masses get for accepting the monarchy-nation-state-religion-capital framework? Is this all that we can hope for? Does not real emancipation require the overcoming of this very framework? Does not *sapere aude* entail daring to think beyond this hegemonic nexus? Or is there a mental block against this questioning? Shouldn’t a modern Buddhism focus on this very question?

Suraphot’s Sulak is a liberal, Kantian Buddhist. Like Kant, Suraphot argues, Sulak thinks it is necessary

“to shine a light in the darkness, or in other words, to use enlightening wisdom to dispel the darkness of ignorance around us.” Suraphot writes, “Sulak is an independent thinker critical of society in an era devoid of freedom of thought, where questioning and debating religion and the monarchy is forbidden.” And, we can add, where capitalism and bourgeois parliamentarism serve as the only game in town. This idea of unveiling or dispersing the fog of ignorance, however, should be further problematized. Domination or exploitation does not only feed on the manufacturing of ignorance, lies, distortions, half-truths, propaganda and so on (by ideological state apparatuses). Power does not only dupe us. Rather it also seduces us. It plays with our feelings, fantasies, passions, fears, anxieties, etc. As such we can be passionately attached to servitude or being dominated. Under the grasp of seduction, we may know full well that we are being deceived, but we act as if we don’t know. In other words, no amount of knowledge—however critical—will be able to unhinge the hold of seduction. A common experience is knowing full well that a product’s advertisement is out to deceive us, but we end up buying that product nonetheless because we like the feeling of being able to see through the deception and because it secretly appeals to our fantasy. Likewise, the people may be chauvinistic, fawning of military generals or ultra-royalist not simply because they were

duped, not primarily because of false consciousness. Answers to how nationalism, military dictatorship, or royalism seduces them must also be elaborated. Perhaps Sulak has focused inordinately on the knowledge side, but not on seduction.

The comparison with Kant is also apt for another set of reasons in the context of revolution. Kant, along with a number of German Idealist philosophers, contended that the French Revolution possessed universal significance while many others were turning their backs on it. At the same time, as Stathis Kouvelakis points out, Kant argues that “the ‘German road’ is the road of reform, not revolution, which is (and continues to be) restricted to the French case. More precisely, the German road is that of a ‘reform from the top downwards’, charged with undermining the feudal order and ushering in the reign of freedom while avoiding a break with the legal order...”<sup>5</sup> Here “the reign of freedom” is compromised by enlightened absolutism (i.e., a “reform from the top downwards”). Under enlightened absolutism is there a limit to freedom of thought? Not to thought itself or the right to think freely for oneself, but to the potential audience of the free thoughts of a thinker such as the philosopher. Kouvelakis explains it this way: “The philosopher, unlike ‘official’ professors of law or ‘jurists’ working in the service of absolutism, is undoubtedly duty-bound to elaborate a theory of freedom and

put it to public use. However, he addresses himself, first and foremost, to a cultivated public and the king, whom he seeks to enlighten; he does not turn to the people with a view to inciting it to rebellion.”<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, Kouvelakis continues, “Kant allows himself to air a doubt as to the ability of the princely courts to undertake reforms and tolerate public criticism, even if it comes only from philosophers and respectable citizens.”<sup>7</sup> Revolution is thus an answer to “What is Enlightenment?”, or at least this question is inextricable from “What is the [French] Revolution?” Again Kouvelakis puts it well thus: “In the final analysis...it may be the task of revolutions<sup>8</sup> to bring about the acceleration needed to ensure the historical progress of freedom.... Kant now goes so far as to legitimize popular rebellions and the use of force, at least in certain extreme cases—but is every revolutionary situation not, precisely, a state of exception?”<sup>9</sup> Unlike Kant in the beginning, Sulak has sought the ears of both the powers-that-be and the people. But he addresses the people with a view to inciting critical mindedness and nonviolent resistance to injustices, not riots and violent rebellions. The ‘Thai road’ is that of top-down as well as bottom-up reform. But would Sulak go as far as the later Kant in radically proposing revolution as the answer, especially to the question of how to move beyond the monarchy-nation-state-religion-capital framework?

Suraphot writes that “Democracy is a journey towards building



the meaning of liberty, equality, and fraternity and towards realizing these ideals, or making them as tangible as possible in people's lives and at every level of the sociopolitical structure." He portrays Sulak as a bodhisattva activist on this journey. A quick naïve question: can't these ideals be realized in other political regimes or social formations? Why are these ideals found wanting in 'really existing democracies' everywhere? In other words, what if democracy does not necessarily lead to liberty, equality and fraternity? What if democracy is a journey without the comfort of any guarantees? What if there is no pre-existing democratic path, if this path is created only by walking on it, and if it may also lead to an abyss? Wendy Brown's insight is a good starting point to help us unpack these questions. She writes,

**"[D]emocracy does not promise to save us from domination by either the direct imperatives or wily powers of capitalism. Democracy is an empty form that can be filled with a variety of bad content and instrumentalized by purposes ranging from nationalist xenophobia to racial colonialism, from heterosexist to capitalist hegemony; it can be mobilized within the same regimes to counter these purposes. But if democracy stands for the idea that the people, rather than something else, will decide the fundamentals and coordinates of their common existence, economization of this principle is what can finally kill it."**

The idea of the people ruling themselves together in a polity is important for many reasons, but not least because the alternative is to be ruled by others. Yet by no means does this render democracy a pure good or suggest that it can or should be exhaustive and comprehensive in political life. Even a radical or direct democracy, or one not saturated with capital, racialism and so forth, is capable of dark trajectories or simply of neglecting critical issues such as climate change, species extinction, or genocidal warfare beyond its borders. Thus there are times when democracy may have to be intermixed with practices of nondemocratic stewardship or contained by moral absolutes. Moreover, democracy is not inherently self-sustaining; it often requires undemocratic or ademocratic sources of supplementation or reinforcement. Rousseau is openhanded about this, infamously proclaiming that we must sometimes be 'forced to be free' and underscoring the problem, as well, in the importance he places on a founder or lawgiver external to a self-ruling demos. The degeneration of democracy and its conditions is also no small problem; democracy has no intrinsic mechanisms for renewing itself....In sum, democracy is neither a panacea nor a complete form of political life. Without it, however, we lose the language and frame by which we are accountable to the present and entitled to make our own future, the language and frame with which we might contest

the forces otherwise claiming that future.<sup>10</sup>

Suraphot seems to fetishize democracy. To a certain extent Sulak does too, especially when he talks about participation, accountability, transparency, human rights, etc. However, when Sulak doesn't make Buddhism synonymous with democracy, he seems to suggest that the religion contains (nondemocratic or ademocratic) resources and practices that may be used to supplement and help sustain and rejuvenate democracy (within the framework of his sociopolitical imaginary). For instance, Sulak talks about the value of breathing mindfully, of practices to transform greed into generosity, hatred into loving-kindness and delusion into wisdom, of Buddhist education in which mind and heart are connected, of simplicity, and so on. Also, we can see this when Sulak is a Platonic Buddhist, defending the absolutes of Good, Truth, and Beauty.

The final dimension that this review will touch on is Sulak's role as a Buddhist sage with a sizeable following. My wager is that this role is not related to Sulak's critical thought per se but more importantly to his presence as a new kind of leader or Master. Slavoj Žižek explains the role of a real Master this way:

A true Master is not an agent of discipline and prohibition. His message is not 'You cannot!,' nor 'You have to!,' but a releasing 'You can!' But 'can' what? Do the impossible, i.e., what appears impossible within the coordinates

of the existing constellation—and today, this means something very precise: you can think beyond capitalism and liberal democracy as the ultimate framework of our lives. A Master is a vanishing mediator who gives you back to yourself, who delivers you to the abyss of your freedom: when we listen to a true leader, we discover what we want (or, rather, what we always-already wanted without knowing it). A Master is needed because we cannot accede to our freedom directly—to gain this access we have to be pushed from outside, since our ‘natural state’ is one of inert hedonism....The

underlying paradox is here that the more we live as ‘free individuals with no Master’, the more we are effectively non-free, caught with the existing frame of possibilities—we have to be pushed or disturbed into freedom by a Master.

Sulak’s message is “You can fight. You can question and criticize Thai identity based on the ‘holy’ trinity of Nation, Religion, and King.” Not infrequently, Sulak is a perspicacious critic of this trinity. He has criticized the monarchy and gotten away with it—not once, but a few times. This is quite an impossible feat already! And Sulak must be defended for

pushing us in this direction. But we also need to take a step further than him. That is, not only can you criticize and reform the trinity, but you can also think beyond the monarchy-nation-state-religion-capital framework. Because it is only through the rupturing of this very framework that it will be possible to construct universality, solidarity, freedom, and equality based on the abandonment of social status, the failure to belong fully to any community, ‘homelessness,’ and groundlessness. We are thus in need of a Sulak of the Left.

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<sup>1</sup> Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 42-3.

<sup>2</sup> The point is thus not simply to show how Sulak’s Buddhist-inspired views may be similar to those of Kant, Gramsci, Rawls, etc. More importantly, it is whether Sulak’s views constitute an alternative perspective—i.e., are his views ‘better’ for grasping our current predicaments and for illuminating a new emancipatory path?

<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the Left has by and large accommodated to or resigned to the fact of the hegemony of global capitalism.

<sup>4</sup> Defenders of Sulak may however argue that as a good Buddhist Sulak possesses a “non-dwelling mind.” David Loy explains it this way: “a mind that does not identify with any particular forms, including thought-forms such as ideologies, whether religious or secular.” See David Loy, *A New Buddhist Path: Enlightenment Evolution and Ethics in the Modern World* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2015), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution from Kant to Marx*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London and New York: Verso, 2003), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the College de France, 1982-1983*, ed. Fredric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2010), pp. 7-39.

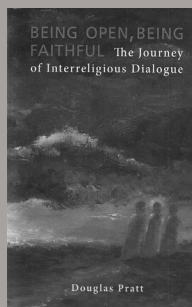
<sup>9</sup> Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution from Kant to Marx*, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), pp. 209-10.

<sup>11</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), p. 188.

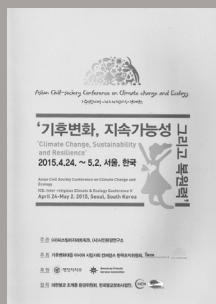
<sup>12</sup> Paul Eisenstein and Todd McGowan, *Rupture: On the Emergence of the Political* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012).

## Recommended Readings



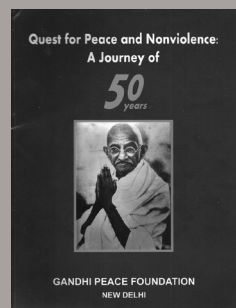
Being Open, Being Faithful  
The Journey of Interreligious Dialogue

**Publisher :** World Council of Churches  
**Writer :** Douglas Pratt



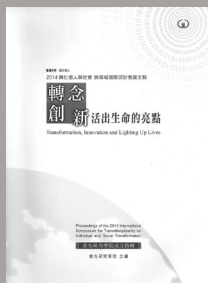
Climate Change, Sustainability and Resilience

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Conference on Climate Change and Ecology



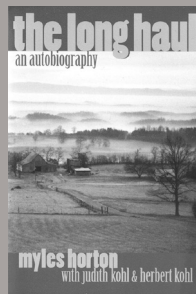
Quest for Peace and Nonviolence:  
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**Publisher :** Gandhi Peace  
Foundation



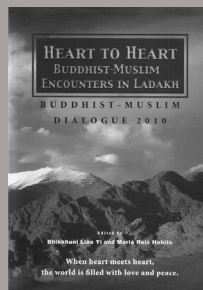
Transformation, Innovation  
and Lighting Up Lives

**Publisher :** Gaya Foundation



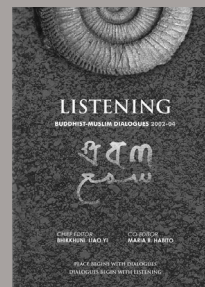
The Long Haul

**Publisher :** Teachers College  
Press **Author :** Judith Kohl  
and Herbert Kohl



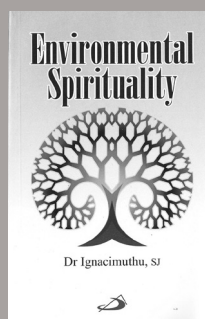
Heart to Heart Buddhist-Muslim  
Encounters in Ladakh

**Publisher :** Museum of World Religions  
**Edited by :** Bhikkhuni Liao Yi and  
Maria Reis Habito



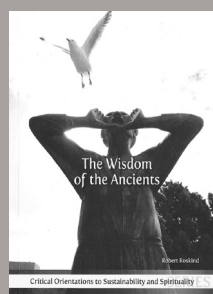
Listening

**Publisher :** Museum of  
World Religions  
**Chief Editor :** Bhikkhuni  
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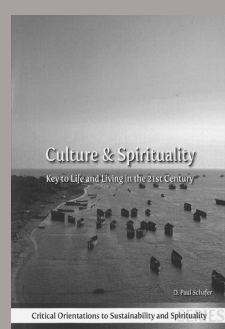
Environmental Spirituality

**Publisher :** Jose Paul at St Paul  
Press Training School  
**Author:** Rev Dr Ignacimuthu, SJ



The Wisdom of the Ancients

**Publisher :** Public Media Agency  
Sdn Bhn (PMA)  
**Author :** Robert Allen Roskind



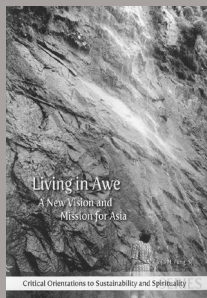
Culture & Spirituality

**Printed :** Public Media Agency  
Sdn Bhn (PMA)  
**Author :** D. Paul Schafer



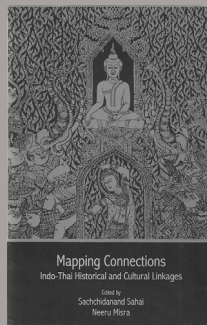
Handful of Leaves 2

**Translated :** Thanissaro  
Bhikkhu



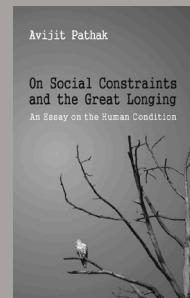
Living In Awe: A New Vision and Mission of Asia

Prepared : Public Media Agency Sdn Bhn (PMA)  
Author : Jojo M.Fung, SJ



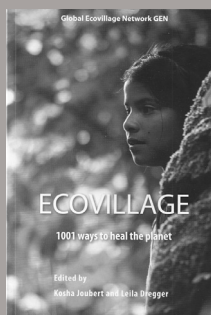
Mapping Connections  
Indo-Thai Historical and Cultural Linkages

Publisher : Mantra Books  
Edited : Sachchidanand Sahai and Neeru Misra



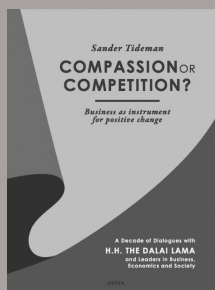
On Social Constraints and the Great Longing: An Essay on the Human Condition

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Author : Avijit Pathak



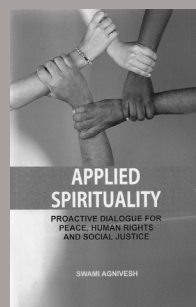
Ecovillage: 1001 Ways to Heal the Planet

Publisher : Triarchy Press  
Edited : Kosha Joubert and Leila Dregger



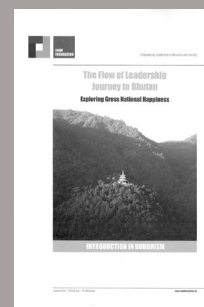
Compassion or Competition?  
Business as Instrument for Positive Change

Author : Sander G. Tideman



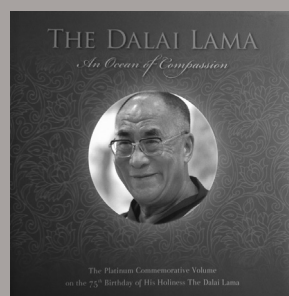
Applied Spirituality: Proactive Dialogue for Peace, Human Rights and Social Justice

Publisher : Dharma Pratishthan  
Author : Swami Agnivesh



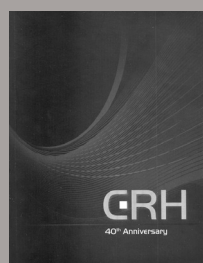
The Flow of Leadership Journey to Bhutan: Exploring Gross National Happiness

Publisher : Flow Foundation



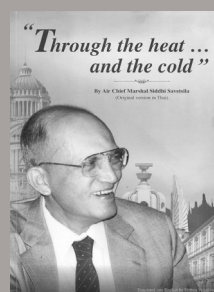
The Dalai Lama: An Ocean of Compassion

Publisher : Hay House India



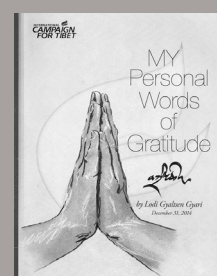
CRH 40th Anniversary

Publisher : Chuchawal-Royal Haskoning Limited



Through the Heat and Cold

Author : Air Chief Marshal Saddhi Savetsila  
Translated : Vitthya Vejjajiva



My Personal Words of Gratitude

Author : Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari



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A Project of the INEB Institute

22 Feb  
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The INEB Institute

### Our Mission:

1. To develop an English language program as a model to be shared:

- of socially conscious language learning
- that allows for rapid, enjoyable, and successful mastery of language skills
- in a rich, cooperative learning environment
- that fosters personal growth and social engagement.

2. To prepare students committed to personal growth & social service for the INEB Institute's MA in Socially Engaged Buddhism.

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20 ปี เสริมศึกษา  
**SEM Learning Space**  
 20th Anniversary of Spirit in Education Movement



Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) 20th Anniversary: Learning Space  
 31st October - 1st November 2015  
 Klongsan, Bangkok

31st October 2015		1st November 2015	
9.00 – 9.30 am	Opening remarks: Sulak Sivaraksa	9.00-12.00 pm	Workshop
9.30 – 9.45 am	Video Screening, SEM 20th Anniversary		* Participatory Learning: Network of Crown Prince Hospital
9.45 – 12.00 pm	SEM: Learn from the past, look to the future Mr. Pracha Hutauwatra Dr. Chakradharm Dharmasakti Mr. Pravitt Yeamsansuk Mrs. Wallapa van Willenswaard Moderator Dr. Sorayut Ratanapojnard		* Participatory Working: Royal Irrigation Department
1.00– 3.15 pm	20th Anniversary of SEM: Fruition of Change Representative from SEM Laos Representative from SEM Myanmar		* Dawei; Development and changes: SEM Myanmar
3.30-5.00 pm	Director of Panyapeti Institute Director of Division of Public Participatory and Promotion Royal Irrigation Department Dean of Faculty of Physical Therapy, Rangsit University Executive of Krungthai Food Public Company Moderator Ms. Nongluk Sukjaicharoenki	1.00 – 4.00 pm	* Lao Civil Society and the Way Forward: SEM Laos
5.00-5.30 pm	Cultural Shows: Dawei Traditional Dance		* Bearing Witness: SEM Thailand
			Forum: Learning for Change Mr. Wisit Wangwinyoo Ms. Ouyporn Khuenkaew: International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice Mr. Preeda Ruangwichatarn: SEM Thai Dr. Adisorn Junsuk: Faculty of Learning Sciences and Education Thammasat University Moderator Mr. Nuttarote Wangwinyoo

- Local products and food fair by SEM Laos, SEM Myanmar and networks.
- The exhibitions of the organization's learning for change.

**Attendance is free of charge, donation is welcome**

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