

DECLARATION



BUDDHISM IN A DIVIDED WORLD: Peace, Planet, Pandemic

20th Biannual Conference of
the International Network of Engaged Buddhists

Mungyeong & Seoul, South Korea
October 24-29, 2022

Introduction

We, as spiritual friends, *Kalyanamitra*, gathered together for the 20th Biennial Conference of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists – INEB, consisting of 82 participants from 19 countries. The conference, jointly organized by INEB and the Jungto Society Korea, was intended to more fully realize the potential of Socially Engaged Buddhism that supports peace, social justice, cultural and gender equality, inclusivity and diversity, transformative learning, and harmonizing initiatives associated with ecology and economics (socially responsible right livelihood), intra and inter-faith dialogue and youth.

The challenges confronting the world, as well as the opportunities for personal and social transformation are ever present. The conference presented various approaches using our head, heart, and hands to address these challenges based on meditation and reflection, as well as creating opportunities to learn together from the INEB network and more deeply from the Korean context. This experience involved our entire being through meditation and by renewing relationships that are heart connected, by using our hands to create art, and enjoy food, and our heads through taking in new ideas, all of which collectively contribute to personal and social change. Our time together had other dimensions such as building solidarity as we visit the Demilitarized Zone, examining more closely the realities of peace and conflict around the world.

The conference theme of “Buddhism in a Divided World” aimed to further inform and develop INEB’s 10 Year Strategic Roadmap, *The Way Forward*, launched in 2017. This will also expand INEB’s outreach to emerging like-minded social movements through engagement with the major themes of Peace, Planet and Pandemic. The concerns raised and the recommendations made during the workshops form the basis of this Declaration and will help to define tangible action that can be taken in the two years before the next international INEB conference.

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Recognizing that in the second decade of the 21st century **peace** is increasingly threatened by global, regional, and internal conflicts. INEB will support a peacebuilding culture by:

promoting principled dialogue among the parties, including interfaith actors;

further developing and supporting an interdisciplinary Buddhist analytical model to examine the intersection of cultural, economic, social, historical and geopolitical causation;

continuing to facilitate humanitarian support in conflict zones.

Recognizing that a concerted **planet-wide** response to environmental degradation and climate mitigation is increasingly restricted by failure of political and economic will at the national and global level, INEB will:

continue investigating the unseen structural and cultural causes of environmental degradation that lead to environmental suffering;

develop spiritually conscious environmental activists through building capacity of religious leaders and interfaith organizations through its Inter-religious Climate and Ecology Network (ICE);

continue to grow its integrated community development model through the Eco-temple project using cross training in various sectors such as, clean energy, land rehabilitation, community gardening and ecological architecture.

Recognizing that the global **COVID-19 pandemic** has exposed many systemic failures leading to increased inequality, increased poverty and greater marginalization of vulnerable groups, INEB will:

support groups/organizations working with socially and economically disadvantaged communities to ensure equitable access to employment, education and health care, including equitable access to vaccines and treatment in future pandemic and public health crises;

support groups/organizations working with children on child rights that include the right to protection, health and education, in order to ensure that there is no “loss of education” during public health crises;

support groups/organizations working at the grassroots level with women for empowering them to achieve equality, equity and the right to live with

dignity and self-esteem, including more robust protective measures during public health crises.

Recognizing that cultural and structural alternatives cannot take root and survive without instilling values to ensure **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)**, and that there is ongoing systemic and systematic injustice against LGBTQAI+, women, youth and members of marginalized communities, INEB will:

issue a clear public stand on GESI, and take a leadership role in breaking down patterns and unlearning prejudices;

engage all network members to examine their programs and activities through the GESI lens;

organize and coordinate conversations and educational opportunities on GESI topics.

Recognizing that **bhikkhuni ordination** is still not allowed, acknowledged, or encouraged in Theravada and Vajrayana traditions, and that Bhikkhunis lack educational opportunities equal to Bhikkhus, as well as opportunities to come together for exchange and solidarity, INEB will:

issue a public statement in support of Bhikkhuni ordination;

continue to support efforts to revive the Bhikkhuni lineages through ordination;

collaborate with established Mahayana Bhikkhuni sanghas to provide educational and exchange opportunities to Bhikkunis of the other two traditions, as well as monastic education and training for lay women.

Recognizing the need to build a harmonious society where peace and justice can thrive, and the essential role of **transformative learning through education for change** in fostering personal growth and social engagement, INEB will:

encourage systems of education that become tools for liberation, not control, are more responsive to the students' diversity, goals and perspectives, foster creativity and are student-centered;

foster concrete educational pathways for personal transformation and social change, incorporate issues of inequality and environmental crisis into the curriculum and ensure that the educational rights and aspirations of minorities and disadvantaged persons are fulfilled, while respecting their linguistic and cultural identities;

encourage collaborative educational ecosystems that foster alternative, holistic learning that balances results with student well-being, and ensure space for students to express themselves and are heard.

Recognizing that **abuse and violence against children** are global in scope, and that children are exposed to them within the family, educational institutions including monastic schools, and in society at large, INEB will:

- work with Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis within its network to make them aware of what constitutes child abuse (verbal, mental, physical, sexual), and the legal recourse against it available to them in their respective countries, as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);
- approach monastic institutions through the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis of its network, to help raise awareness about abuse within monastic settings, educate residents (adults and children) about abuse, and make them aware of the laws regarding child protection in their respective countries;
- work with the monastic institutions to establish a mechanism for safeguarding children through a process that includes child participation at every stage.

Recognizing that technology can **build digital capacity for spiritual and social engagement**, that digital technology can both empower and disempower depending on access to technology, and that access to it is often determined by political, economic and educational status, INEB will:

form an internal working group (the eventual think-tank) to understand and contextualise the challenges and opportunities posed by digital technologies in areas that include artificial intelligence and ethics, digital divide strategies, data privacy and protection of individuals, and impact on climate action through the lens of engaged Buddhism;

organize a series of education and capacity building activities to understand and appreciate the opportunities and challenges;

encourage and develop specific digital projects to be implemented within the INEB network as forms of social enterprise, aimed at making the whole initiative self-sustaining and financially independence.

Recognizing that **Buddhist teachings and institutions can contribute to psycho-spiritual health**, that can be applied under diverse conditions within the family, the temple, following natural disasters, in suicide prevention and end

of life care, *recognizing* the need to mainstream Buddhist concepts and practices that strengthen or deepen the psycho-spiritual care movement, and that a crisis in mental health has been exacerbated by the global pandemic, INEB will:

raise awareness and active support for young people who have become especially susceptible to mental illness during the COVID-19 pandemic and the wanton expansion of social media;

create an INEB-based Asian Buddhist chaplaincy program, especially for South and Southeast Asia, through short term preliminary training courses;

continue to investigate and articulate new forms of psycho-spiritual therapy based on the cross fertilization of Western psychiatric science and Buddhist thought and practice.

In conclusion we, the conference participants, rededicate our commitment as described within each section of this Declaration. We affirm our engagement based on the profound and enduring teachings as guided by our teachers on the path of personal and social transformation through reflection and social action.

Furthermore, we unanimously commit to developing an action plan that responds to this Declaration as represented within *The Way Forward: INEB's 10-year Strategic Plan*.