

International Buddhist-Muslim Joint Statement ***Shared Commitment of Action***

Bangkok, Thailand | 16 June 2013

Buddhist and Muslim leaders from South and South East Asian countries including India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, have gathered in Bangkok, Thailand to address escalating tensions between two communities and potential spread of hatred across the region. The consultation was co-organized by the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), and *Religions for Peace (RfP)*.

We recognize these challenges facing the two communities in the region:

- 1) Rise of extremism, hate speeches and campaigns and instigation of religious discrimination and violence;
- 2) Prejudice, fear and hatred caused by ignorance, misperception, stereotyping, negative impact of traditional and social media, simplification and generalization, and communal pressure;
- 3) Misuse of religion by certain religious, political and other interest groups and individuals;
- 4) Socio economic dimensions of conflict; and
- 5) Spillover effects across the region.

We are also deeply aware that if Buddhist and Muslim communities can overcome the challenges that confront them, there is tremendous potential for the growth and development of ideas and values that may help to transform the region. For Buddhist and Muslim philosophies embody gems of wisdom about the purpose of life, the position and role of the human being and her relationship with all other sentient beings and nature which could well liberate contemporary civilization from its multiple crises. The young in these two communities in particular should be imbued with these profound ideas and values about life and its meaning.

We endorse the Dusit Declaration of 28 June 2006 and commit ourselves to implementing its shared action across the region. Our actions will include intra-religious and inter-religious initiatives in education, advocacy, rapid reaction/solidarity visits/early warning/conflict prevention, constructive engagement with the government, strategic common action, and the effective use of media for positive messages. We will also engage in multi-stakeholder partnerships with governments, inter-governmental bodies such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the United Nations.

Dusit Declaration

28 June 2006, **Bangkok**

A Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue on the theme 'Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia working towards justice and peace' was held at the Suan Dusit Place of Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, Bangkok from 26-28 June 2006. It was organised jointly by the Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute (SPDI), International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and International Movement for a Just World (JUST).

A total of 35 participants from eight countries attended the three-day Dialogue. Most of the participants were Buddhists and Muslims from Southeast Asia. A number of them were socially-engaged scholars and grassroots activists.

The Dialogue was part of a continuous process of interaction and engagement among individuals from the two communities that had begun ten years ago. Since Buddhists and Muslims constitute the overwhelming majority of Southeast Asia's 550 million people, dialogue aimed at enhancing understanding and empathy between the two communities is vital for peace and harmony in the region. In view of the critical situation in Southern Thailand, the Dialogue on this occasion assumed special

significance. Apart from Southern Thailand, the Dialogue also reflected upon issues of concern pertaining to the two communities in a number of other Southeast Asian countries.

The Dialogue observed that for most of history relations between Buddhists and Muslims have been relatively harmonious. This has been due largely to a certain degree of mutual respect and a willingness to accommodate differences. This historical backdrop should provide the two communities with the strength and resilience to overcome the challenges that confront them today.

In order to overcome these challenges, the Dialogue made the following proposals:

1. Civil society groups should utilise to the fullest various information and communication channels with the aim of increasing knowledge and understanding among Buddhists and Muslims of the principal teachings of their respective religions. Towards this end, SPDI, INEB and JUST undertake to produce a series of monographs in all the Southeast Asian languages which will emphasise the fundamental values and principles in Buddhism and Islam that give meaning to justice and peace. An attempt will also be made to disseminate documentaries on inter-religious harmony that embody real life episodes through various local communication channels as well as via webcasting, podcasting and broadcasting.
2. The mainstream print and electronic media should highlight those moral values and ethical standards that Buddhism and Islam share in common, and at the same time explain differences in doctrines and rituals with sensitivity. It should also regard it as a duty to eradicate stereotypes and prejudices about the two religions. The media should not aggravate inter-religious ties by distorting and sensationalising events that have implications for religious harmony. In this regard, the media should not allow itself to be manipulated by opportunistic politicians and public personalities who abuse religion and nationalism for their own agendas. Civil society groups should establish 'media watches' to monitor media reporting on matters pertaining to inter-religious ties.
3. Schools and universities should introduce and expand courses that seek to promote better understanding between Buddhists and Muslims. Since both religions are committed to justice and peace, it would be worthwhile to increase peace studies programmes at all levels of formal education which focus on non-violence in conflict resolution. School and university curricula should not contain materials which create animosity and perpetuate prejudice between religious and ethnic communities. Civil society groups can help to initiate the development of curricula that reflect Buddhism's and Islam's concern for justice and peace. At the same time, they should monitor school and university curricula to ensure that they do not have a negative impact on inter-religious ties.
4. Buddhist and Muslim religious leaders should within the context of their respective faiths emphasise those ideas and values which conduce towards inter-religious harmony and the celebration of our common humanity. They should discard the tendency to be exclusive in their outlook and consciously cultivate a more inclusive and universal orientation towards religion. Differences between the two religions should not be allowed to create cleavages between their followers. Buddhist monks and the *ulama* should work together to eliminate prejudices, hatreds and misconceptions that sometimes tend to separate the two communities. Both should adopt a principled position against violence, especially the killing of civilians, and the destruction of places of worship regardless of who or what the target is. In this connection, civil society groups should engage with religious leaders in order to encourage them to become more inclusive and universal in outlook and more positively orientated towards justice and peace.
5. Government leaders and politicians should consciously nurture harmonious relations between Buddhists and Muslims and among people of other faiths through both their public pronouncements and policies. It would be utterly irresponsible of government leaders and politicians to exploit religious sentiments for narrow political gain. They should instead initiate meaningful reforms to existing political structures which would protect and strengthen the rights and dignity of the different religious communities. In certain situations it may even be

necessary to devolve political authority through the empowerment of disenfranchised religious communities. To endow substance to the empowerment of the community, government and political leaders should adhere to moral principles such as transparency and accountability. Civil society and the media should not hesitate to expose irresponsible leaders who divide the followers of different religions in pursuit of their self-serving political agendas.

Apart from looking at the challenges facing Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia as a whole, the Dialogue also addressed immediate and urgent issues obtaining in specific country situations. The focus was of course on Southern Thailand.

6. In the case of Myanmar, there was concern over attempts by the government to control religious activities to the detriment of the communities in question. The state itself appears to be a purveyor of prejudice against certain religious communities. In Indonesia, the adverse socio-economic and socio-political situation has had a negative impact upon inter-religious relations. Unethical methods of proselytisation by groups within a particular religious community allegedly supported by foreign elements have led to a further deterioration in majority-minority ties. There is also a need for the Malaysian state to be more sensitive to some of the legitimate interests of its non-Muslim minorities.
7. The Dialogue was of the view that the recommendations of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) established to study the situation in Southern Thailand deserve the wholehearted support of the nation. It is significant that the NRC declared in unambiguous terms that religion is not the cause of the violence in the South. Injustices arising from the existing judicial process and administrative system and poverty and deprivation are more important contributory factors. Historical and cultural conditions have also played a role in prodding militants to resort to violence which has been met with excessive force by the state. The NRC recommends a whole gamut of measures to overcome the violence. Among them is the establishment of a Peaceful Strategic Administrative Center for Southern Border Provinces (PSAC) which inter alia would seek to promote understanding of the situation and methods to solve the problem in all government agencies among people in the region in Thai society at large and in the international community. There is also a proposal for the state to engage in dialogue with the militants and to act decisively against state officials who abuse their power. There are also other recommendations for solving the unemployment problem, building confidence in the judicial process and improving the education system.
8. The Dialogue also proposed that civil society undertake to ascertain the sentiments of the people in the three troubled provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala about the form of local governance that they prefer. A petition with at least 50,000 signatures on the form of governance they opt for should then be presented to Parliament for deliberation. This would be in accordance with the Thai Constitution and would reflect the democratic will of the people of the three provinces.
9. Monks and the *ulama* and Buddhist and Muslim religious leaders in general in the three provinces should make a concerted effort to break down barriers that have created a wide chasm between Buddhists and Muslims and instead build bridges of understanding between the two communities. This process would require honest and sincere introspection on the part of the religious leaders and others about their own flaws and foibles. Critical self analysis should go hand-in-hand with Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in the three Southern provinces.
10. INEB and other NGOs should initiate efforts to form a “People’s Watch” comprising both Buddhists and Muslims drawn from various sectors of society whose primary purpose would be to protect and safeguard places of worship, institutions of learning and hospitals among other public institutions. A “People’s Watch” would not only ensure the safety and security of these institutions but more significantly, it would also help foster a spirit of togetherness among Buddhists and Muslims.
11. Both Buddhists and Muslims from neighbouring countries especially those representing the influential strata in religion, politics and the media should assist in whatever way possible in the

process of dialogue and reconciliation in southern Thailand. More specifically they should try to strengthen a more inclusive and universal approach to both religions informed by values of justice, compassion and forgiveness.

Enhancing understanding and empathy between Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia has become imperative in view of the overwhelming power and influence of contemporary global capitalism rooted in global hegemony. The hegemonic power of global capitalism is the new 'religion' which threatens to undermine the universal, spiritual and moral values and world views embodied in Buddhism, Islam and other religions. This is why Buddhists, Muslims and others should forge a more profound unity and solidarity which will be able to offer another vision of a just, compassionate and humane universal civilization.

It is with this mission in mind that we hereby announce the launch of a permanent Buddhist-Muslim Citizens' Commission for Southeast Asia.

Interactive Dialogue on Actions for Peace and Sustainability Consultative Meeting on
Contemporary Issues in Buddhist-Muslim Relations in South and South East Asia
 15-17 June, Risho Kosei-kai, Bangkok Dharma Centre, Bangkok

Participants List:

Country	Name	Religion	Organization
Burma/ Myanmar	Al Haj U Aye Lwin	Muslim	Chief Convener, Islamic Center of Myanmar and a Founder of Religions for Peace Myanmar
	U Myint Swe	Buddhist	President, Ratana Metta, and President of Religions for Peace Myanmar
Sri Lanka	Harsha Navaratne	Buddhist	Sewalanka Foundation
	Dr. M.A. Mohamed Saleem	Muslim	President of Mahatma Ghandi Centre in Sri Lanka
	Ven. Professor. Kotapitiye Rahula	Buddhist	Department of Pali & Buddhist Studies, University of Peradeniya; Sri Lanka Council of Religions for Peace
	Ven. Dr. Divulapelesse Wimalananda thero	Buddhist	University of Peradeniya
	Ven. Kalayanamitta Dhammapala	Buddhist	Wat Thong Noppakul
Malaysia	Ven. Balangoda Manju Sri Thero	Buddhist	Senior Buddhist Sangha for Inter-faith Peace
	Dr. Chandra Muzaffar	Muslim	President, International Movement for a Just World (JUST)
	Anas Zubedy	Muslim	Secretary General, JUST
	Fah Yen Yin		Program Coordinator, JUST
Indonesia	K V Soon Vidyanda	Buddhist	Malaysia Engaged Buddhist Network
	Muhammad Habib Chirzin	Muslim	Islamic Forum on Peace, Human Security and Development
	Abdul Mu'ti	Muslim	Central Board Muhammadiyah
Thailand	Wintomo Tjandra	Buddhist	Hikmahbudhi
	Sulak Sivaraksa	Buddhist	Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation
	Ven. Phra Bhanu Cittadhanto	Buddhist	Wat Phra Ram IV (Kanchanobhisek)
	Parichart Suwannabuppha	Buddhist	Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Salaya,
	Saroj Puaksumlee	Muslim	Leader of Bann Krua Community, Bangkok
International	Ratawit Ouaprachanon	Buddhist	Spirit in Education Movement
	Somboon Chungprampree	Buddhist	International Network of Engaged Buddhists
	Patcharee Conmanat	Buddhist	International Network of Engaged Buddhists
	Rev. Kyoichi Sugino		Deputy Secretary General, Religions for Peace
	Rev. Shin'ichi Noguchi		Niwano Peace Foundation
	Russell Peterson		American Friends Service Committee
	Prashant Varma		Deer Park Institute, India