

# The Vesak Day

History, Significance and Celebrations



# Preface

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) has been privileged to witness and play a crucial role in developing and hosting successful UNDV celebrations from the beginning in 2004/2547. For this year, 2010/2553, the UNDV celebration has returned. As always, we are all very grateful to the Royal Thai Government for its constant support, and thank the Thai Sangha Council for its blessing, guidance and support. We are indebted, also, to the United Nations for recognizing the thrice-sacred Buddhist day.

It has been 2553 years since the death of our Great Teacher, and we have gathered here from across the globe, from many nations, to again pay tribute to his birth, enlightenment, and death-occurring on the same day in different years.

For the celebrations this year, the International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU), created during the UNDV in 2007/2550 by the participating Buddhist higher institutions, plays an important role. The IABU Secretariat now, plays a major role in our celebrations, particularly in the academic programme of the conference.

As part of the UNDV Conference theme **Global Recovery: The Buddhist Perspective** I am pleased that two conference volumes are published for the convenience of all participants, with the financial grant from my university, in time for the conduct of the panels and workshops. The various sub-themes of the panels are:

- Global Recovery through Buddhist Ecology;
  - Global Recovery through Buddhist Education;
  - Global Recovery through Engaged Buddhism;
  - Global Recover through Harmonious Co-existence;
  - Global Recovery through Mental Well-being; and
- The international workshops pertaining to the IABU and Common Buddhist Texts.

This publication could not have been possible without the persistence, hard work, and dedication of MUC's scholars and staff. I wish to thank all members of the International Council for the United Nations Day of Vesak and the Executive Council of the International Association of Buddhist Universities, and the Editorial Committee for their devotion. I am also grateful to our many donors, sponsors, and volunteers.



The Most Ven. Prof. Phra Dharmakosajarn  
Chairman, ICUNDV & IABU  
Rector, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University



## Preface

## Contents

• The Vesak Day	1
• Historical Background	2
• Significance of the Vesak Day	7
• The Buddha's Birth	8
• The Buddha's Enlightenment	10
• The Buddha's Passing	12
• Celebrations of the United Nations Day of Vesak	14
United Nations Day of Vesak 2004	17
United Nations Day of Vesak 2005	19
United Nations Day of Vesak 2006	21
United Nations Day of Vesak 2007	25
United Nations Day of Vesak 2008	29
United Nations Day of Vesak 2009	33
United Nations Day of Vesak 2010	37
• Appendix	38
Charter of the International Organizing Committee of the United Nations Day of Vesak	40





Phra Buddha Chinnarat, Phitsanulok, Thailand



## The Vesak Day

The Vesak Day is one of the most sacred days in Buddhism as three important occurrences in the life of the Buddha, i.e. the Birth, the Enlightenment and the Passing, all miraculously took place on the full moon night and the exact same day in May. Hence, each year Buddhists throughout the world get together to perform many meritorious deeds to express their gratitude for his teaching, particularly for wisdom, purity and compassion of the Buddha.



## Historical Background

The Vesak Day, the second month of the Buddhist calendar, is known by its Sanskrit name, **Vaiśākha**, and derived variants of it. The word **Vesak** itself is the Sinhalese language word for the Pali variation, **Vesākha**. Vesak is also known, as: **Buddha Pūrnima** or **Buddha Jayanti** in India, Bangladesh and Nepal, **Hanamatsuri** in Japan, **Seokka Tanshin-il** in Korean, **Fódàn** (Mandarin), **Fātdàahn** (Cantonese) in Chinese-speaking communities, **Phật Đản** in Vietnamese, **Saga Dawa** in Tibetan, **Visaka Bochea** in Khmer, **Visākha Puja** in Thai, **Waisak** in Indonesia, **Vesak** (Wesak) in Sri Lanka and Malaysia, **Vixakha Bouxa** in Laos, and **Ka-sone-la-pyae** Myanmar.

The term **Vesak** is first mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa*, a very old Buddhist chronicle from Sri Lanka, where it is said that King Dutthagamani of Sri Lanka held Vesak festival some 2,100 years ago. In that work, we read: “*Mahāvesākhapūjā ca catuvīsati kārayī*”, meaning that he held twenty-four great Vesak festivals. So, Sri Lanka is honored by being the first country to celebrate the Vesak Day. Nowadays, the Vesak Day is celebrated as a religious and a cultural festival in Sri Lanka for duration of one week. During this week, the selling of alcohol and flesh is usually prohibited, with abattoirs also being closed. Celebrations include various religious and alms giving activities. Electrically lit pandols called *toranas* are erected in various locations in Colombo and elsewhere, most sponsored by donors, religious societies and welfare groups. Each pandol illustrates a story from



the 550 Jataka Katha or the 550 Past Life Stories of the Buddha. In addition, colourful lanterns called *Vesak koodu* are hung along streets and in front of homes. They signify the light of the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha. Food stalls set up by Buddhist devotees called *dansālas* provide free food and drinks to passersby. Groups of people from various communities, organizations, businesses, and government departments sing *bhakti* gee or Buddhist devotional songs.



A Vesak pandol or torana in Sri Lanka



When the Chinese monk Hiuen Tsiang was in India during the 7<sup>th</sup> century, he found that while most Buddhists celebrated the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing on Vesākha, some sects did so at other times. He wrote:

*According to the general tradition, the Tathāgata was eighty when, on the fifteenth day of the second half of the month of Vesākha, he attained final Nirvana... But the Sarvāstivādins say he died on the eighth day of the second half of the month of Kattika.*

*The Bodhisattva was born on the eighth day of the second half of the month of Vesākha... But the Sāvaka School says that it was the fifteenth day of the second half of Vesākha.*





In Thailand, the Vesak Day was first celebrated during the Sukhothai period (1249-1438 CE). It is believed that the Vesak Day was introduced into Sukhothai by Sri Lankan monks who came to spread Buddhism and brought with them the observance of Vesak Day celebrations. The ***Nangnopphamat***, a book on the Loi Krathong Festival, describes the Vesak Day celebrations as follows:

*On the Vesak Day, the King, his officials of both the inner and outer court, as well as the people of Sukhothai from every district and village cleaned and decorated the city of Sukhothai with flowers and incense, lighting the city with torches so that the whole city was bright and beautiful. The celebrations worshipping the Triple Gem continued for three days and three nights. The King and royal family observed the precepts and performed many meritorious deeds. In the evening, the King and royal family, with the officials from both the inner and outer courts, went to the royal monastery to circumambulate the chief Buddha image. The people of Sukhothai encouraged each other to observe the precepts, listened to sermons, made offerings to individual monks and to the Sangha as a whole, offered meals to the monks and novices, and gave charity to the poor, orphans, helpless, the aged and disabled. Some collected money to purchase animals of four legs and two legs, turtles and fish to preserve their lives by setting them free, with the belief that such actions would prolong their own lives.*



Although no descriptions of the Vesak Day celebrations have been found from Ayutthaya (1350 -1767 CE), Thonburi (1767-1782 CE) and early Ratanakosin (Bangkok) periods, royal chronicles record that King Rama II (1809-1824 CE), promoted a revival of the Vesak Day celebrations throughout the kingdom, encouraging all his subjects to celebrate the Vesak Day by performing meritorious deeds as a way to prolong life, bring happiness and avoid suffering, sorrow, illness and unforeseen dangers. Thus, the Vesak Day celebrations in Thailand regained due prominence during the reign of King Rama II. The celebrations have been performed and continued until the present day.

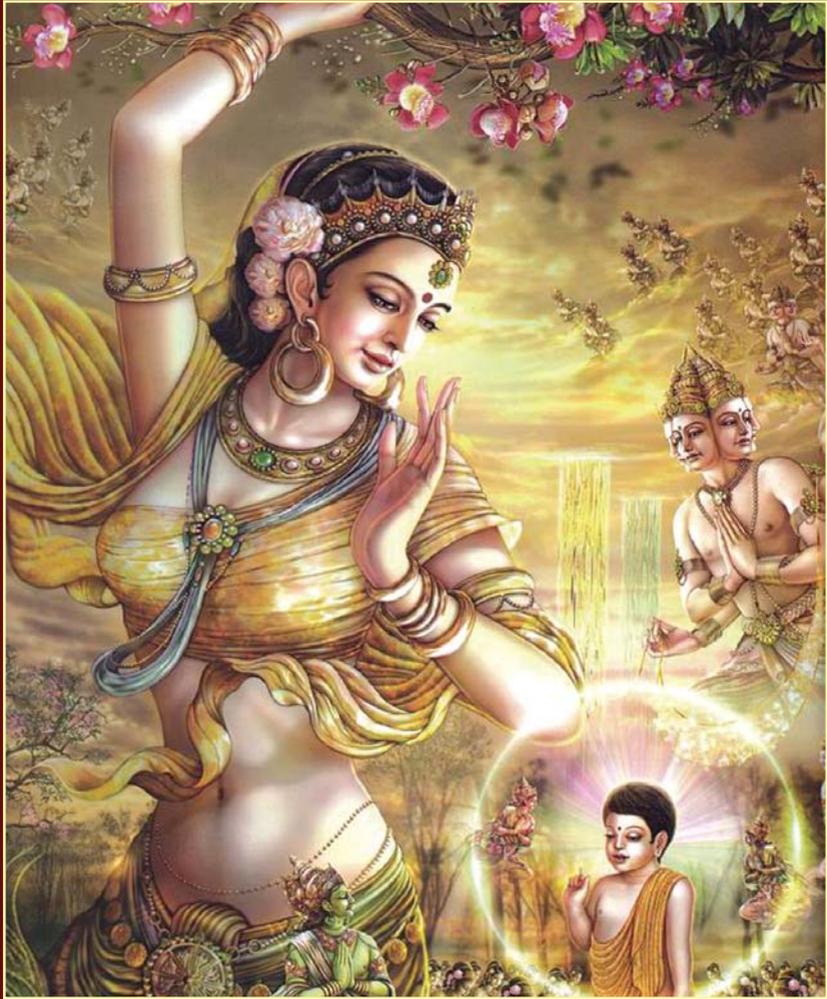


## Significance of the Vesak Day

The Vesak Day is the most significant day for Buddhists around the world. Whilst the day involves three major events in the Buddha's life as previously mentioned, the Birth, the Enlightenment and the Passing; it is believed that the Vesak Day gave rise to the Triple Gem which is the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Without the Vesak day, it is difficult to imagine how Buddhism can continue to exist in the world today. Hence, the Vesak Day plays incredibly an important role in Buddhism.



# The Buddha's Birth





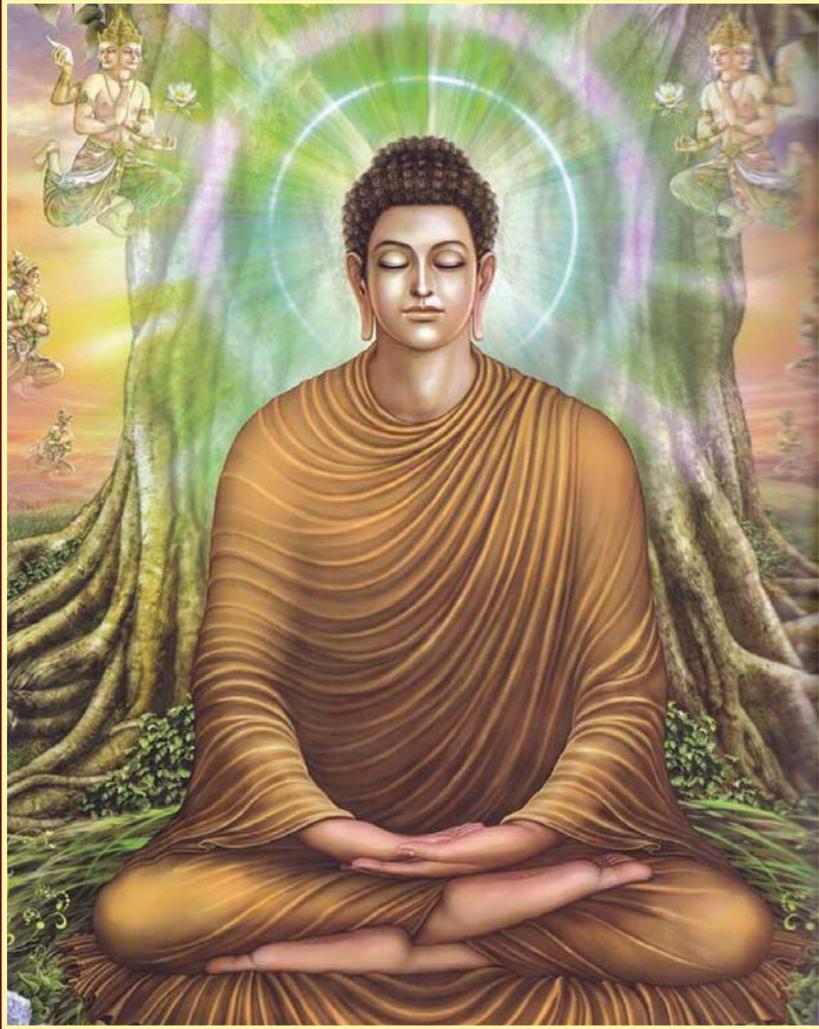
The Buddha's birth is not only a historical event that tells us when and where a great man was born, but it also reminds us of a man who believed in human virtues, potentials and endeavors; thus cultivated these values on himself over his preceding lives with an aspiration to be a Buddha. As clearly reflected, from the day he was born:

*aggohamasmi lokassa*                      *I am the foremost of the world.*  
*jeṭṭhohamasmi lokassa,*                *I am the supreme in the world*  
*seṭṭhohamasmi lokassa.*                *I am the best in the world.*  
*ayamantimā jāti,*                        *This is my last life;*  
*natthi dāni punabbhavo' ti.*        *Never will there be another existence.*

These statements reflected the Buddha's declaration of human independence from supernatural powers, an ancient Indian belief that all humans lived under the control of deities and belief in predestination.



# The Buddha's Enlightenment



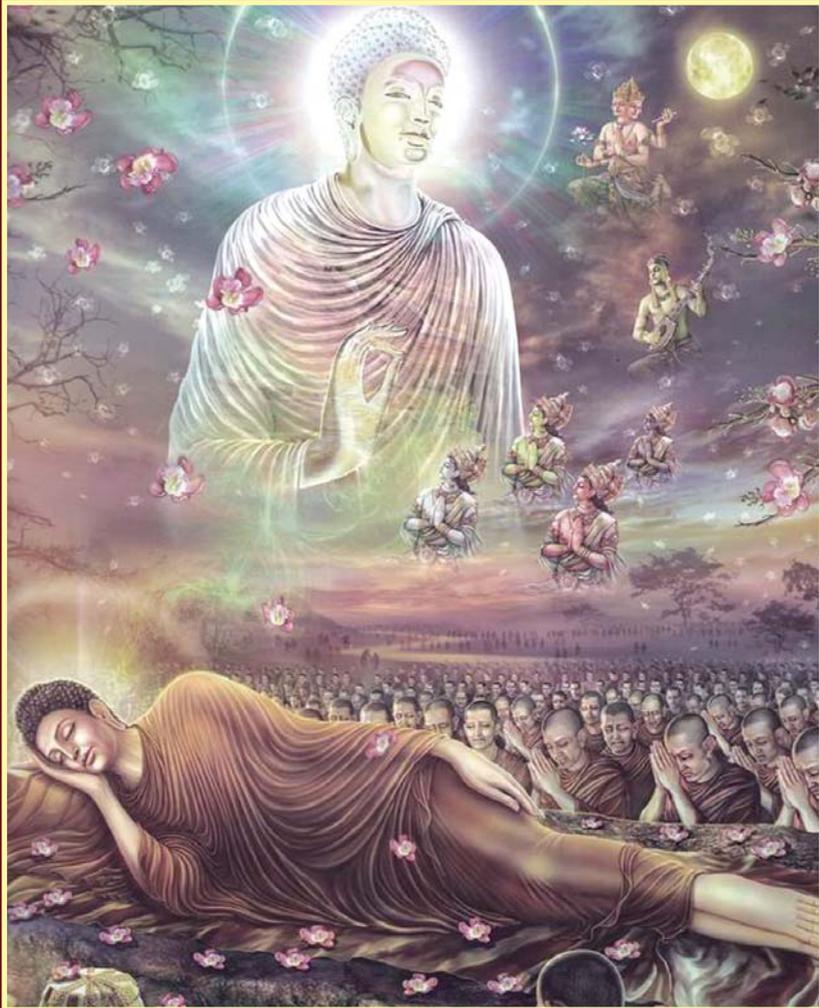


Not only does the Buddha's Enlightenment proclaim his success and realization of the ultimate reality resulting from human endeavors and self-reliance, but it also signifies the appearance of Dhamma in the world. The Dhamma expounded by the Buddha is called the Four Noble Truths:

1. **Dukkha** :suffering or life problems,
2. **Samudaya**:the causes or origins of suffering,
3. **Nirodha** :the cessation of suffering,
4. **Magga** :the way leading to the cessation of suffering.



# The Buddha's Passing





The Buddha's Passing reminds us to reflect on the reality that our lives and all conditioned things are subject to impermanence, suffering and selflessness. His final words, ***“Then, Bhikkhus, I address you now: Transient are conditioned things. Try to accomplish your aim with diligence,”*** have set deeply in each and every Buddhists' hearts for the past 25 centuries.

In brief, the Vesak Day is a very significant event for Buddhists as it evidently involves all major events in the Buddha's life. His Birth reminds us to reflect on his teaching in human endeavors and self-reliance; His Enlightenment reminds us of the great human success and his Dhamma; and His Passing reminds us of the impermanence of the conditioned things in life. Essentially, his words are fundamental principles of the Buddhist doctrine and that has convinced all Buddhists including, but are not limited to different religious believers to make every effort to gain one's own salvation.





## **Celebrations of the United Nations Day of Vesak**

The celebrations of the United Nations Day of Vesak originated from the General Assembly of the United Nations on the 13 December 1999, Session No. 54 and Agenda item 174. The General Assembly, participated by the representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Chile, Cyprus, Grenada, Greece, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Seychelles, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United States of America, proposed to recognize the Vesak Day as an international day and to organize appropriate activities at the United Nations Headquarters as well as other United Nations offices.



The General Assembly took into consideration the fact that Buddhism is one of the world's oldest religions and that, for more than two thousands and five hundred years, it has made significant contributions to human spirituality and, therefore, resolved that appropriate activities should be organized at the United Nations Headquarters as well as other United Nations offices.

As a consequence, sixteen Buddhist countries have jointly agreed to organize activities on the Vesak Day at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, U.S.A., from the year of 2000 onwards. Since then, each country has acted, in turn, as co-coordinator in organizing the Vesak Day celebrations at the United Nations Headquarters.





## United Nations Day of Vesak 2004

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In 2004 (B.E. 2547), Thailand organized **the World Buddhist Leaders Conference on International Recognition of the Day of Vesak** at Buddhamonthon, Nakhon Pathom Province, as well as the United Nations Convention Center in Bangkok, Thailand. The representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand were invited to participate in the event. The conference reached the following agreements:

1. Endeavored to maintain and protect Buddhism, objects of worship and holy places worldwide.
2. Endeavored to deliver the noble messages of the Buddha to the hearts and minds of the people of the world through Buddhist studies and practice, and to ensure propagation of Buddhism.
3. Endeavored to promote peace, harmony and understanding among the people of the world through Buddhism.
4. Endeavored to collaborate and to celebrate, on the international scale, the Day of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters, its regional offices and especially at the UNESCAP office in Bangkok, Thailand.



**International Buddhist Conference  
on the United Nations Day of Vesak  
May 18-21 2548 / 2005  
UICC Bangkok**





# United Nations Day of Vesak 2005

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In 2005 (B.E. 2548), Thailand organized **the Second International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak** at Buddhamonthon, Nakhon Pathom Province as well as the United Nations Convention Center in Bangkok, Thailand. The representatives from 41 countries and regions were invited to participate in the event. The conference reached the following agreements:

1. Decided to increase and enhance cooperation amongst all schools of Buddhism to promote unity and solidarity among Buddhists,

2. Agreed to develop education so as to promote mutual understanding, respect and inner peace amongst individuals and communities,

3. Noted to create a spiritual network by using modern science and technology for strengthening moral and ethical development among all young Buddhists,

4. Ensured to work for humanitarian and social development without prejudice for the benefit of humanity,

5. Endeavored to protect Buddhism and its sublime teachings in order to maintain its universal values,

6. Agreed to support other countries and districts to hold International Buddhist Conferences, and support the World Buddhist Forum to be held in China.

7. Decided to continue United Nations Day of Vesak Celebration in Thailand, with Buddhamonthon to be recognized as a Centre of World Buddhism, and Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University to continue as the main coordinator of the Celebrations.





# United Nations Day of Vesak 2006

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In 2006 (B.E. 2549), Thailand organized **the Third International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak** at Buddhamonthon, Nakhon Pathom Province as well as the United Nations Convention Center in Bangkok, Thailand. The representatives from 46 countries and regions were invited to participate in the event. The conference reached the following agreements:

1. To further increase and enhance cooperation between all schools of Buddhism to promote unity and solidarity among Buddhists.

2. To promote socially engaged actions to create dharmic societies through the emphasis of the central role of inner peace development, and by addressing the motivations that drive feelings/thought, speech and action that creates discord.

3. To set up more Buddhist meditation centers throughout the world and for that purpose to nurture more meditation teachers.

4. To promote the creation of consistent and easily usable educational materials for children, adolescents and adults through the establishment of an e-library as the central repository of Buddhist content in electronic medium, initially as a partnership between Buddha Dharma Education and Buddha-net and Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.



5. To compile and publish an informed work on Buddhism to be freely distributed to hotels worldwide as part of the effort to disseminate Buddhism and, in order to facilitate that, to form a sub-committee of the Joint International Organizing Committee to carry on the work.

6. To create an international body to deal with public relations for Buddhism.

7. To urge all parties, the United Nations, UNESCO and concerned governments and agencies to preserve both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Buddhists.

8. To promote practices that transform the inner being, manifesting themselves in qualities of self-discipline, volunteerism, simplicity and skilful consumption as well as proactive efforts contributing to social activism and partnering in the development of new economic paradigms.

9. To encourage a holistic approach to sustainable development based on the Buddhist central teaching of the Middle Way, which is exemplified in the philosophy of “Sufficiency Economy” put forward by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand.

10. To acknowledge the urgency of improving gender status in order to bring to an end the detriment to individuals, communities and ecology of inequitable and unbalanced development, and to redirect our efforts towards sustainable development based on the inter-dependent integration of economic and ecological concerns and towards peace and security.

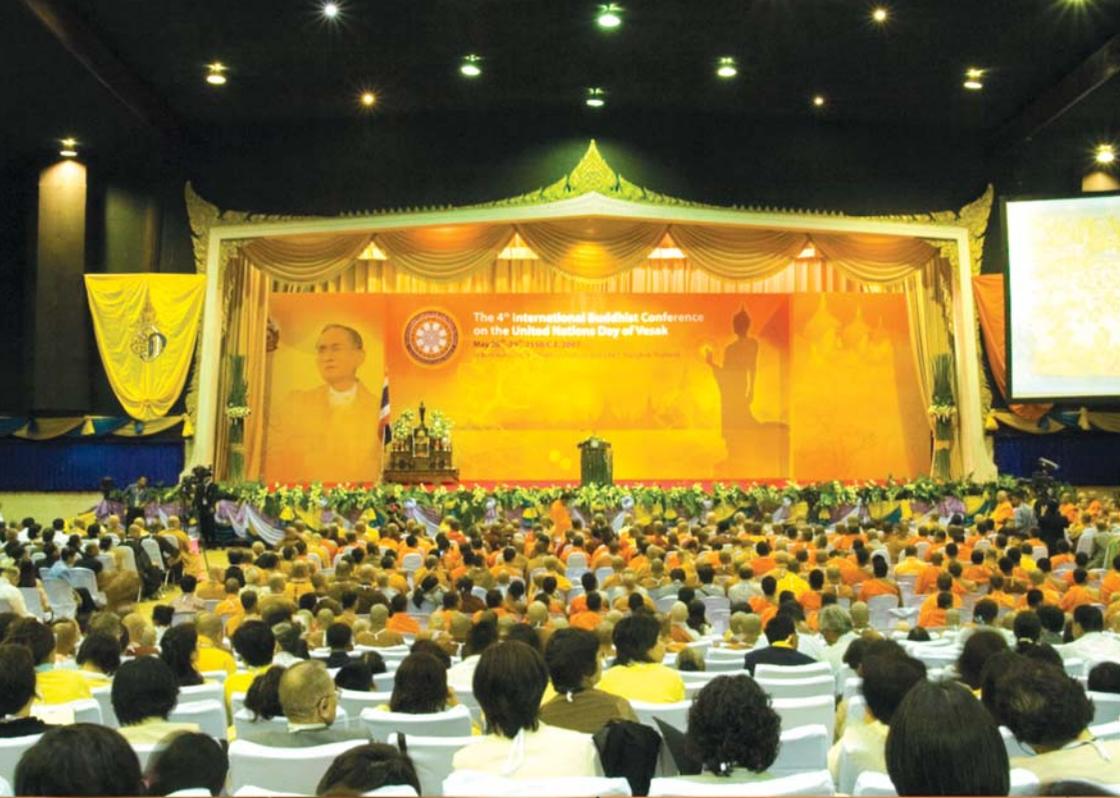
11. To record the success of the First World Buddhist Forum held in April in Zhou Shan, China, the convening of which was supported in the 2005 International Buddhist



Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak in Bangkok, Thailand, and to affirm that Falun Gong is not in accordance with the fundamental teachings of Buddhism.

12. To encourage other countries and districts to hold International Buddhist Conferences, and to hold the Fourth International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak Celebrations in Thailand in 2007 (B.E 2550) in honor of the 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and.

13. To continue to entrust Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University with responsibility for coordinating the International Secretariat of the Joint International Organizing Committee in order to facilitate necessary follow-up actions and to hold the Fourth International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak.





## United Nations Day of Vesak 2007

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In 2007 (B.E. 2550), Thailand organized **the Fourth International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak** at Buddhamonthon, Nakhon Pathom Province as well as the United Nations Convention Center in Bangkok, Thailand. The representatives from 61 countries and regions were invited to participate in the event. The conference reached the following agreements:

1. To further enhance cooperation between all schools of Buddhism to strengthen unity and solidarity among Buddhists;

2. To acknowledge the generosity of and the crucial role played by the Kingdom of Thailand in hosting the United Nations Day of Vesak over the past four years, and to approve and support the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as the host for 2008;

3. To re-affirm Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) as the permanent venue of the International Secretariat for the International Organizing Committee for the United Nations Day of Vesak;

4. To promote through Buddhist principles socially engaged actions and urge the Buddhist leaders to take a leading role on moral and ethical issues, in particular, on social justice, respect equal opportunities, good governance and transparency;



5. To acknowledge the inspiration that many countries and regions, and in particular, the Buddhist world and the UNDP, have towards His Majesty the King of Thailand on good governance and development throughout His Reign over sixty years;

6. To support the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Buddhist Forum to be held in China in 2009;

7. To continue the electronic Buddhist library project, started initially last year as a partnership between Buddha Dharma Education and Buddha-net and MCU, and to record the strong interest in the project by the many Buddhist Higher Institutions present at this conference;

8. To continue the project of compiling an informed work on Buddhism to be freely distributed to hotels worldwide;

9. To reiterate the appeal to all parties, the United Nations, UNESCO and concerned governments and agencies to preserve both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Buddhists, and to encourage visits to Buddhist holy sites as part of their revitalization;



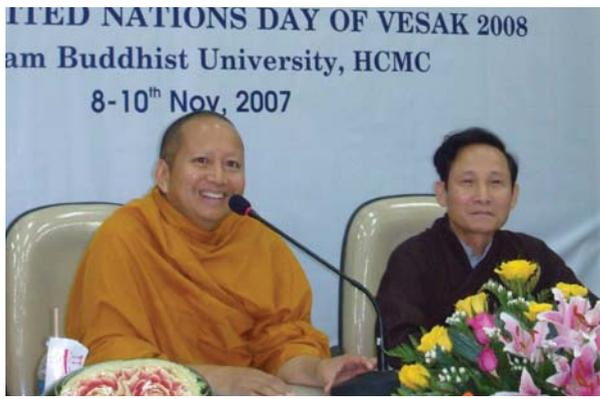
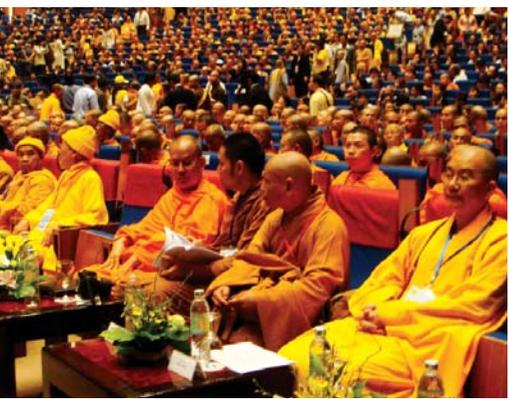
10. To record the historic formation at this conference and support the function and growth in every means possible of the International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU), comprising some eighty Buddhist Higher Education Institutions from twenty-two countries and regions;

11. To hold the 1st Conference and Symposium of the International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU) which will be hosted by MCU in September of 2008 in Bangkok and to rejoice in the generosity of MCU for undertaking to fund, at least for one year, the International Secretariat of the IABU; and

12. To highlight at every level the effective and scientific values of Buddhist meditation in human development, and to encourage both traditional means and modern technology in dissemination of the teaching of the Buddha, and to also raise awareness on the proper and respectful use of Buddha images.



Vietnam  
Langha and National Coordinating Committee





# United Nations Day of Vesak 2008

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In 2008 (B.E. 2551), Vietnam organized **the Fifth International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak** at the National Convention Center in Hanoi. The representatives from 74 countries and regions were invited to participate in the event. The conference reached the following agreements:

1. To urge international communities to strengthen their efforts towards sustainable world peace in promoting dialogue, mutual trust, respect, and human dignity among different religions and nations, through the light of Buddhist wisdom and compassion.

2. To promote prevention of conflict and war, especially by means of disarmament including prohibition of tests of nuclear weapons, production of chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons and the prevention of the pollution of oceans and inland waters.

3. To enhance economic, social, environmental and spiritual development throughout the world, in order to achieve a higher quality of life for all the people.

4. To advocate for social justice, democracy and good governance in all sectors of society, in order to bring peace and security within and among nations.

5. To acknowledge that social and economic development cannot be secured in a sustainable way in the absence of peace and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.



6. To contribute towards legal and administrative measures for the protection and improvement of the environment, at both national and international levels, in order to commit to a healthy and productive life in harmony with the environment.

7. To affirm that climate change and other forms of environmental damage are already harming human well-being and that urgent action is required to minimize these changes.

8. To stress on pursuing active measures to halt the misuse of our natural resources, a modern-life trend which has resulted in ecological imbalances, which increase the threat of climate change and endanger all life on the planet.

9. To recognize and respond to the moral and spiritual needs of individuals, families and the communities at large.

10. To recognize the need for solutions to global social problems, especially poverty, unemployment and social injustice.

11. To acknowledge the continuing need for modernization of education for monastic and laypeople, to enable them to meet challenges of local and global issues and crisis.

12. To provide basic education and improve the quality of education, especially for girls, women and deprived groups, in order to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation in social life.

13. To strengthen family bonds by emphasizing the Buddhist principles of harmony, understanding and compassion for stable marriages and individual happiness.



14. To stress on the growing importance of information technology and provide guidance for the wise use of technology to serve social interests.

15. To develop materials for the internet that can be easily accessed by users to bridge the gap between those in developed regions and those in under-developed societies with limited resources.

16. To support major international Buddhist events including the Second World Buddhist Forum in China in March 2009, the Fifth World Buddhist Summit in Japan in 2008, the First Conference of International Association of Buddhist Universities, Bangkok, Thailand, in September 2008, as well as the activities of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) and Inner Trip Reiyukai International (ITRI).”





# United Nations Day of Vesak 2009

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During the 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2009 (B.E. 2552), Thailand organized **the Sixth International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak** at Buddhamonthon, Nakhon Pathom Province as well as the United Nations Convention Center in Bangkok, Thailand. The representatives from approximately 80 countries and regions were invited to participate in the event. In addition to celebrations of the Vesak Day, the panel discussions and workshops were also organized on the following topics: (1) Buddhist Approach to Environmental Crisis, (2) Buddhist Approach to Economic Crisis, and (3) Buddhist Approach to Political Conflict and Peace Development. Moreover, the workshops covered: (4) International Association of Buddhist Universities Administrative Cooperation, (5) Common Buddhist Text Project Workshop, and (6) Electronic Resources and Networks. The conference reached the following agreements:

1. To acknowledge the unprecedented impact of the global economic crisis on every nation and also being aware of the inter-relatedness between economic, political, environmental, social crisis and spiritual vacuum, to double our the efforts in promoting spiritual values that will help redress the current global crises;

2. To encourage a transparent and caring financial and economic system as an urgent social responsibility, the value of which includes integrity, diligence, harmlessness and sharing in order to achieve social and economic stability and sustainable development;



3. To encourage good governance and maintain ethical and social justice in conflict resolution as well as in peace development and harmony in society;

4. Being mindful of the consequences of our behaviour in this interconnected world and of the need to protect the planet earth, to actively promote awareness of the Buddhist concept of causality;

5. To promote better understanding of Buddhist principles amongst the wider public by compiling a common Buddhist text, which will reflect the richness of the Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist tradition as well as the needs of today's society;

6. To develop the IABU on the basis of ever-increasing membership participation in bottom-up initiatives to promote: academic collaboration; staff and student exchanges; and joint fundraising;

7. To salute the groundbreaking work of the IABU



Electronic Resources Group in: following up the report of the Hanoi UNDV conference on Major Digital Projects in Buddhist Studies; bringing together leading specialists from 23 institutions in 16 countries in a group with generous impulse to share metadata; and forming a common plan of work to develop the first Union Catalogue of Buddhist Texts (UCBT), which will bring together the vast body electronic resources available in individual canonical languages (Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan and Mongolian) for common access via a unified portal;

8. To endorse the registration as a legal entity of the International Council for the United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV), previously known as the International Organizing Committee (IOC); and,

9. The venue for the 2010/2553 UNDV is the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok and to be co-hosted by Thailand and Japan.





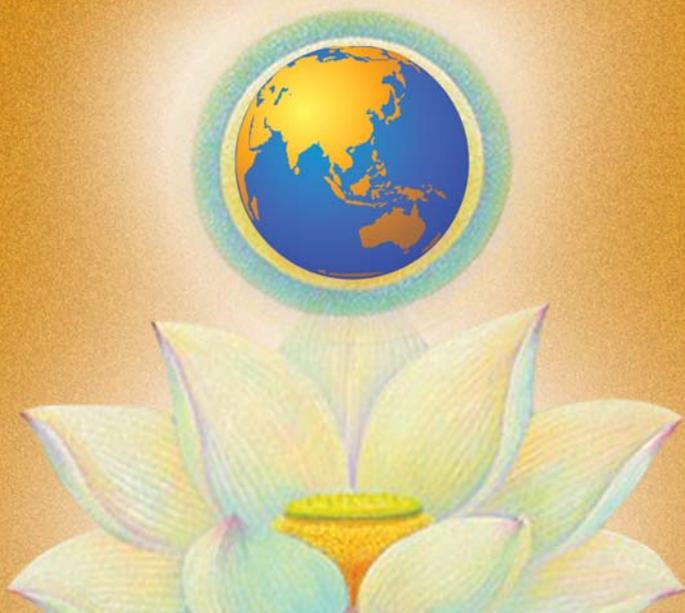
# United Nations Day of Vesak 2010

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On the 23<sup>rd</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2010 (B.E. 2553), Thailand and Inner Trip Reiyukai International (ITRI) will co-host **the 7<sup>th</sup> International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak**. The opening ceremony will be held at the 48-Years Old Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn Main Auditorium of MCU (Wang-Noi Campus, Ayutthaya Province, Thailand) on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2010.

The academic conference will be proceeded (24<sup>th</sup> of May) in the Main Auditorium as well as other four conference rooms in the same building and other four conference rooms in the Classroom Building. In light of His Majesty Bhumibhol Adulyadej's 83<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary this year, Buddhist leaders from 83 countries and regions will be invited to participate in the event. The main theme of the event this year is, **“Global Recovery: The Buddhist Perspective”** with sub-themes as: Global Recovery through Mental Well-being, Global Recovery through Harmonious Co-existence, Global Recovery through Buddhist Ecology, Global Recovery through Buddhist Education, and Global Recovery through Engaged Buddhism. In addition, the conference will also include two workshops on the International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU) and the Common Buddhist Texts.

The conference will be held at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand, on the last day (25<sup>th</sup> of May), and followed by a closing ceremony with candle-lit procession at Buddhamonton, Nakhon Pathom Province, in the evening.



# Appendix

**Charter of the International Organizing  
Committee of The United Nations Day of Vesak**





# Foreword

In 1999, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the resolution to recognize the Vesak Day as an International Day of Recognition of Buddhists and the contribution of the Buddha to the world. Since then, the Thai Royal Government has played a crucial role to help fund the celebrations while Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University was assigned to be the organizer of the celebrations, seeing the birth to the International Organizing Committee or more affectionately known as the IOC.

From 2004 to date, we have come a long way in the celebrations and we are happy to be the host and organizer, but it is time for the celebrations to grow and evolve. The United Nations Day of Vesak celebrations is coming to maturity, with four celebrations under our belt, much experience gained, it is time now to share this with others. So, we are formulating this charter as a guideline for all future celebrations. There will always be room for growth and development and we are elated to see it grow.

The teachings of the Buddha sees no boundaries, the minds of all are alike, the sufferings of all are similar and truly, the liberation of all is the same. We are happy to initiate the process, develop the scope and now it is time for others to follow in footsteps similar, evolve the celebrations into a truly international event that can be shared with the Buddhists and Non-Buddhists alike.

We like to thank all those who have contribute to the success of previous celebrations and wish all the future celebrations be successful. Let the Dhamma of the Buddha be the beacon to the world, shredding away the ignorance within our hearts, bringing development into sustainable capacity for humanity and more importantly, peace and harmony to the world.

*P.D. Kosajam*

May all beings be blessed!  
Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Phra Dhammakosajarn

# **Charter of the International Organizing Committee of The United Nations Day of Vesak**

## **Chapter 1 – Establishment of the Organization**

### 1.1. Name of Organization

1.1.1. This international Buddhist community celebrating the United Nations Day of Vesak shall be known as the International Organizing Committee hereinafter is to be referred to as ‘the IOC’ or ‘the organization’.

### 1.2. Establishment of the IOC

1.2.1. The IOC comprises of representatives from all Buddhist traditions from different countries aiming at observing and celebrating the United Nations Day of Vesak (hereinafter to be referred to as “UNDV”), annually in accordance to the resolution approved on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1999 at the General Assembly of the United Nations, Session No.54, Agenda Item 174.

1.2.2. The United Nations Day of Vesak is to recognize the Thrice Sacred Event of Vesak, celebrating the Birth, Enlightenment and Passing Away of the Buddha, as the International Day of Recognition of religion and culture.

### 1.3. The Organizational Seat

1.3.1. The headquarters of the IOC shall be located wherever the Chairman of the IOC resides

1.3.2. The Office of the IS shall be permanently situated at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.

### 1.4. Use of the Name

1.4.1. The use of the name shall be limited to the members of the committee whose affiliations are duly recorded by the IOC.

### 1.5. Affiliation Rules

1.5.1. All members who are affiliated to the IOC are required to use only the words ‘International Organizing Committee’ or ‘IOC’,



followed by the name of the region or country in their names.

#### 1.6. Forfeiture

- 1.6.1. The right to use of the name shall be automatically and forthwith forfeited on termination of any member's affiliation or any such group's formal recognition.

## Chapter 2 – Definitions

2.1. The following words and expressions have the following meanings unless contrary to the context:

- 2.1.1. 'Committee' shall mean the International Organizing Committee of the United Nations Day of Vesak;
- 2.1.2. 'Chairman' shall mean the Chairman of the International Organizing Committee of the United Nations Day of Vesak;
- 2.1.3. 'Member' shall mean a member of the International Organizing Committee of the United Nations Day of Vesak;
- 2.1.4. 'Rules' shall mean these Rules and all amendments, additions, deletions or replacements from time to time in force and effect;
- 2.1.5. 'Regulation' shall mean the regulation of the International Organizing Committee of the UN Day of Vesak as made and amended from time to time;
- 2.1.6. 'IS' shall mean International Secretariat;
- 2.1.7. 'IOC' shall mean the International Organizing Committee;
- 2.1.8. 'UNDV' shall mean the United Nations Day of Vesak.
- 2.1.9. 'IBC' shall mean the International Buddhist Conference.

## Chapter 3 – Declaration of Principles and Purpose

3.1. Declaration of Principles

- 3.1.1. The Principles of International Organizing Committee are based upon a belief in:
  - 3.1.1.1. Faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, or the Triple Gem.

3.2. Purpose of the IOC



- 3.2.1. To internationally recognize and observe the Day of Vesak, the thrice sacred day commemorating the birth, the enlightenment and the passing away of the Buddha, as the day of religion and culture.
- 3.2.2. To promote, foster and maintain collaborations between the different Buddhists traditions and schools, in order to foster and support Buddhist Culture, Philosophy and Practice for the well being and happiness of humanity.
- 3.2.3. To organize conferences, workshops and forums to discuss academic, social and religious issues.
- 3.2.4. To encourage Buddhist academics and scholars to dialogue and contribute to promotion of Buddhist studies and philosophy.
- 3.2.5. To encourage the practice of Buddha-Dhamma and to meet the challenges of the world that is faced by humanity.
- 3.2.6. To discuss matters relating to the general welfare of the World Buddhist Community and to deliberate on the issues which may arise from time to time.
- 3.2.7. The IOC in affirming its Joint Communiqué recognizes the fundamental goals of the founding members commits itself to strive for peace in the world.

## **Chapter 4 – United Nations Day of Vesak Celebrations**

### **4.1. Program**

- 4.1.1. The celebrations and conference shall include:
  - 4.1.1.1. Meetings and discussion groups of the IOC.
  - 4.1.1.2. Meetings of the outgoing and incoming members of the IOC (inclusive of handling over and reporting).
  - 4.1.1.3. Meetings of the outgoing and incoming members of the IS (inclusive of handling over and reporting).
  - 4.1.1.4. Conferences, forums and other activities centered around the United Nations, Buddhism and especially Vesak Day (which shall be the focal point of the



celebrations).

4.1.1.5. Others like symposiums, workshops and meetings of direct interest to observers attending the celebrations and to encourage maximum participation from all delegates.

#### 4.2. Date and Place

4.2.1. The UNDV Celebrations should be held every year in the month of May. The date and place of each celebration shall be decided upon by a simple majority vote by the members of the IOC.

#### 4.3. Handling and Taking Over

4.3.1. The government of the intended-host-country shall write a formal letter to the appropriate authorities to express their willingness to host the next UNDV Celebrations.

4.3.2. The original copy of the letter shall be couriered to the Government of the current host, to the liaison in charge of the current UNDV Celebrations. Another copy shall be couriered to the Chairman of the current IOC.

4.3.3. The Chairman of the current IOC must submit the application to the IOC board for selection and endorsement. The result shall be announced and to send to the Government of the current host country for endorsement.

4.3.4. The necessary preparations shall be made, duly recorded into the Vesak Declaration and announced at the closing ceremony of the UNDV Celebrations.

4.3.5. There will be a handling over ceremony from the current host to the next host. The Vesak symbol (which may be a plaque or a Vesak Day flag), shall be handed over by the current Chairman to the representative of the next host country.

4.3.6. The representative shall be current member of the IOC who is also the representative of the next host country.



## Chapter 5 – International Organizing Committee

### 5.1. Recognized Authority

5.1.1. The International Organizing Committee shall continue the authority to direct the affairs of UNDV Celebrations and the IBC.

### 5.2. Exclusive Prerogatives

5.2.1. The IOC shall have the exclusive prerogative to vote on any and all of the following matters:

5.2.1.1. Election or appointment of new members to the IOC, unless the next host for UNDV Celebrations is a new host.

5.2.1.2. Approval of appointments of persons to hold positions in the IS, unless the next host for UNDV Celebrations is a new host.

5.2.1.3. Approval of preparatory meetings and working visits to be held leading up to the UNDV Celebrations.

5.2.1.4. Determination of the next host country for UNDV Celebrations.

### 5.3. Specific Responsibilities

5.3.1. The IOC shall:

5.3.1.1. Receive and act upon reports from the Chairman and Deputy Chairman.

5.3.1.2. Receive and act upon reports and general policy recommendations from the members of the IOC.

5.3.1.3. Receive and act upon activities and project recommendations from the IS.

5.3.1.4. Sub Committees for the Celebrations (e.g. steering committee, declaration drafting committee, events and program coordinating committee).

### 5.4. Meetings

5.4.1. The meetings of the IOC shall be held at the time as when need to ensure the smooth planning of the UNDV Celebrations



and IBC participation. Special meetings may be called by a majority vote of the IOC on a mail ballot or electronic mail.

5.4.2. The quorum for any meeting shall be at least 1/3 of the members present.

5.4.3. If the quorum is not met, then the chairman is to be given the authority to form an ad-hoc committee to conduct the function.

#### 5.5. Observers

5.5.1. All past members of the IOC attending an IOC meeting shall be seated as observers without voting rights except as may be provided in this Constitution.

## Chapter 6 – Office Bearers

### 6.1. Selection of the Chairman

6.1.1. The election of chairman must be a member of the current IOC.

6.1.2. If there is more than one member from the same host country, then:

6.1.2.1. The next host country members shall select amongst themselves the next Chairman and announced to the members of the IOC.

6.1.2.2. Upon conflict of interest and the next host country members are unable to come to agreement, then the election of the Chairman shall be given to the members of the IOC to decide through balloting. The current Chairman shall conduct the Ballot.

6.1.3. The Chairman shall have the power to restructure in consultation with the IOC and to fill any vacancy in the committees or in any other sub-committees until the next UNDV Celebration.

### 6.2. Elected Officers

6.2.1. The membership of the IOC shall amongst themselves elect members capable of holding and carrying out the duties of the office to serve as officers of the IOC. The elected officers of the IOC shall be:



- 6.2.1.1. Six (6) Deputy Chairman.
- 6.2.2. The elected positions shall be held by the monastics.
- 6.2.3. At least two (2) Deputy Chairman must be filled from the host country.
- 6.3. Appointed Officers
  - 6.3.1. The Chairman shall appoint from the members not holding the above office of 6.2 to the following working positions under the direction of the Chairman. These officers shall be deemed capable of holding and carrying out the duties of the office to serve as officers of the IOC. The appointed officers of the IOC shall be:
    - 6.3.1.1. One (1) Secretary General.
    - 6.3.1.2. Four (4) Assistant Secretary Generals.
  - 6.3.2. One Assistant Secretary General must be from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and at least two (2) Assistant Secretary Generals must be from other countries.
- 6.4. Immediate Past Chairman
  - 6.4.1. The Immediate Past Chairman shall be given the position of Honorary Chairman in the next host country IOC.
- 6.5. Key Duties of the Office
  - 6.5.1. The Office of the IOC shall:
    - 6.5.1.1. Carry out duties assigned by the Chairman.
    - 6.5.1.2. Make recommendations to the IOC through the Chairman with respect to their assigned duties.
    - 6.5.1.3. Attend all meetings of the IOC.
    - 6.5.1.4. Promote the purposes of the IOC.
    - 6.5.1.5. Conduct in a manner befitting Office of the IOC.
- 6.6. Elections
  - 6.6.1. The officers named in 6.2 shall be elected by the members of the International Organizing Committee.
- 6.7. Majority Vote
  - 6.7.1. A simple majority of the votes cast must be obtained by each



officer to be elected.

## 6.8. Terms of Office

6.8.1. The term of office of each officer shall be for one (1) calendar year to commence on the day after the UNDV Celebrations following his election or appointment, and shall continue for the entire year for which he was appointed (or elected) until the completion of the next UNDV Celebrations.

6.8.2. Unless the next host country is still the same country, then the IOC shall meet only to endorse the existing officers and office they hold in 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4.

6.8.3. Members are allowed to step down from office and either election of new officers must be conducted as in 6.2 or appointment of officers as in 6.3.

## 6.9. Emergency

6.9.1. In the event of the cancellation of an annual UNDV Celebrations, the officer may remain in office beyond the term set out in 6.8 until elections can be held as prescribed in 6.7.

## 6.10. Vacancies

6.10.1. Vacancies in all offices, other than that of the Chairman, may be filled by appointment by the Chairman with the approval of the IOC.

## 6.11. Remuneration

6.11.1. All officers shall serve without financial remuneration, except that when funds become available, the host organization shall provide financial remuneration for any officer working on the project by covering the round trip airfare, food, accommodations and transportation.

# Chapter 7 – Chairman

## 7.1. Duties

7.1.1. The Chairman shall serve as Chief Executive of the IOC.

7.1.2. To make recommendations and appointment of new members

to the IOC with the approval of the IOC.

7.1.3. To invite respectable Buddhist dignitaries to be Patrons of the IOC.

7.1.4. To ensure the funds of the IOC are utilized in the best possible manner.

7.1.5. To raise funds for the IOC and request for grants from the Government or any other authorities.

7.1.6. Other Duties of the Chairman

7.1.6.1. He shall preside at all meetings of the IOC.

7.1.6.2. He shall supervise the preparation of the Plan of Action for his term, shall direct the overall operations of the IOC and if may, shall travel on its behalf.

7.1.6.3. He shall report to organization the progress of the UNDV Celebratory preparations.

7.1.6.4. The Chairman may delegate the chairmanship of any meeting to another officer designated by him.

7.2. Qualifications

7.2.1. The Chairman shall have served one (1) full term as a member of the IOC.

7.3. Vacancy

7.3.1. Succession: Upon the death, disability, resignation or other disposition that shall prevent the Chairman from serving, the Deputy Chairman of the host country shall automatically become Chairman and shall serve until a duly qualified successor has been elected as hereinafter provided.

7.3.2. Effective Date: The person so elected shall assume the office of Chairman immediately.

## **Chapter 8 – Honorary Chairman**

8.1. The Founder-Chairman shall be the Honorary Chairman of the IOC.

8.2. Duties

8.2.1. To act as the overall adviser to the current Chairman of the IOC.



8.2.2. To exercise authority as the executive Chairman of the IOC.

## **Chapter 9 – Deputy Chairman**

### **9.1. Duties**

9.1.1. The duties of a Deputy Chairman shall be to communicate with other IOC members.

9.1.2. Reporting to the members of the IOC.

9.1.3. Coordinating, supervision and chairing his assigned meetings.

### **9.2. Qualifications**

9.2.1. Except for the host country, a Deputy Chairman shall have served for at least one (1) term as a member of the IOC.

## **Chapter 10 – Secretary General**

### **10.1. Appointment**

10.1.1. A Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General shall be appointed by the Chairman.

### **10.2. Duties**

10.2.1. Administrator: The Secretary General shall be the chief administrative officer of the IOC. He shall report directly to the Chairman, and shall be responsible for the operation of the IOC and the implementation of policies according to the direction of the Chairman. The Secretary General shall chair the IS.

10.2.2. Finance: The Secretary General shall have authority to receive and disburse funds within the limits of the budget and as directed by the appropriate authority, and shall maintain complete records covering all operations of the IOC.

10.3. Other Duties: The Secretary General shall have other duties as follows:

10.3.1. Carry out duties assigned by the Chairman.

10.3.2. Make recommendations to the Chairman with respect to the assigned duties.



- 10.3.3. Attend all meetings of the IOC.
- 10.3.4. Promote the purpose of the IOC.
- 10.3.5. Conduct in a manner befitting the IOC.

## Chapter 11 – Members

### 11.1. Selection

- 11.1.1. The selection of members of the IOC shall be predicated on the experiential capacity.
  - 11.1.1.1. The member shall be elected into the office of a national, regional or local Buddhist organization.

### 11.2. Nomination and Approval

- 11.2.1. Processes to apply to selection of new members after determination of a new host country.
  - 11.2.1.1. Names of prospective candidates shall be submitted to the new Chairman who will personally verify credentials and capacity for performance.
  - 11.2.1.2. IOC members will review information and without objection, shall verify selections by majority vote.

### 11.3. Duties

- 11.3.1. Members shall assume responsibility to identify Key Buddhist organizations, educational institutions, their leaders, scholars and teachers within their areas.
- 11.3.2. Members shall serve as a conduit for information between the respective parties as to planning and functions, including travel, accommodations and other significant data relating to IOC programs.

### 11.4. Termination

- 11.4.1. Membership to the IOC shall cease in the following events:
- 11.4.2. Members who are unable to contribute to the IOC during his tenure and suitable replacement are found capable of performing the duties as in 11.3.



## Chapter 12 – Working Committee of IS

### 12.1. Selection

12.1.1. The IOC shall appoint its members to the IS.

12.1.2. The appointed officers of the IS shall be:

12.1.2.1. Five (5) Committee Members.

12.1.3. The Secretary General shall be included into the list of four committee members and to hold the IS Chair.

12.1.4. The other positions are assigned by the IS Chair to committee members.

### 12.2. Duties

12.2.1. The officers of the IS shall:

12.2.1.1. Carry out duties assigned by the Chair.

12.2.1.2. Make recommendations to the Chair with respect to their assigned duties.

12.2.1.3. Attend all meetings of the IOC and IS.

12.2.1.4. Promote the purposes of the IOC.

12.2.1.5. Conduct in a manner befitting officers of the IOC.

### 12.3. Preparation

12.3.1. The officers of the IS shall form the following portfolio, liaise and coordinate with the local planning body of the host for the UNDV Celebrations.

12.3.1.1. To create a benchmark of performance list for the celebrations to be completed successfully after making an initial survey within the first three months of the successful completion of the previous UNDV Celebrations.

12.3.1.2. To organize the Pre-conference planning portfolio from ninth to the sixth month before the celebrations:

12.3.1.2.1. Invitation Portfolio.

12.3.1.2.2. Media and Public Relations Portfolio.

12.3.1.2.3. Editorial Portfolio.

12.3.1.2.4. Logistic and Budgeting Portfolio.

12.3.1.2.5. Celebrations and Conference Planning Portfolio.

12.3.2. To establish the following sub-committees to manage the conference details from third month to the celebrations:

12.3.2.1. Volunteer Training and Management

12.3.2.2. Detail committee activities to manage the celebrations and conference (e.g. Transportation, Accommodations, Reception, Security, Publications, Performance, Secretariat, Destination Management, Editorial, News and Media, Technology, Crisis Response, etc.).

12.3.3. To establish the following committee to manage the post conference review and establish new standards and advisories for future UNDV Celebrations.

12.3.3.1. To set up a post-celebration review committee to evaluate the performance of the celebrations.

12.3.3.2. To establish surveys and questionnaires auditing and assessment of UNDV Celebratory performance.

12.3.3.3. To compile and publish the commemorative publication.

12.3.3.4. To follow up and hand over the duties of next host IS team, unless the individual is retained by the next host IS team.

#### 12.4. Terms of Office

12.4.1. The term of office of each officer shall be for one (1) calendar year to commence on the day after the UNDV Celebrations following his election or appointment, and shall continue for the entire year for which he was appointed (or elected) until the completion of the next UNDV Celebrations.

12.4.2. Unless the next host country is still the same country, then the IOC shall meet only to endorse the existing officers and office they hold in 12.1.

12.4.3. Members are allowed to step down from office and new officers must be appointed.



12.4.4. Members who are not able to perform, the Chair shall exercise the right to replace the committee member with request to the Chairman of the IOC to elect new members to join the IS.

#### 12.5. Emergency

12.5.1. In the event of the cancellation of an annual UNDV Celebrations, the officer may remain in office beyond the term set out in 12.4.

#### 12.6. Remuneration

12.6.1. All officers shall serve without financial remuneration, except that when funds become available, the host organization shall provide financial remuneration for any officer working on the project by covering for the round trip airfare, food, accommodations and transportation.

## Chapter 13 – IS Chair

### 13.1. Duties

13.1.1. The Secretary General of the IOC shall serve as Chair of the IS.

13.1.2. Planning: To organize the UNDV Celebrations in accordance with guidelines from the preparatory meeting.

13.1.3. Forecasting: Writing a performance plan and timeline of activities leading up to the celebrations.

13.1.4. Budgeting: Working out the budget for planning, meetings and celebrations.

13.1.5. Administrating: To delegate or assign portfolios to the members of the IS.

13.1.6. Reporting: To report on the progress of the UNDV Celebratory preparations.

### 13.2. Vacancy

13.2.1. Succession: Upon the death, disability, resignation or other disposition that shall prevent the IS Chair from serving,

the assistant secretary from the host country shall automatically become IS Chair and shall serve until a duly qualified successor has been elected as hereinafter provided.

13.2.2. Effective Date: The person so elected shall assume the position of Chair immediately.

## Chapter 14 – Amendments

14.1. Any proposals for amendment to these Rules and Regulations shall be presented in the IOC meeting and circulated to the members at least 15 days in advance.

14.2. Any amendment to these Rules and Regulations shall require two-thirds votes of members present at the meeting.

14.3. Amendments shall be effective when written notice of the adopted changes is sent to the IOC members. Such notice must be given within two weeks of the date the amendments have been adopted.

