

Welcoming Speech

by

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Member of the Supreme Sangha Council
MCU Conference Hall, Ayutthaya (Wangnoi)

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Your Holiness,
Your Excellencies,
Respected Members of the Sangha,
and Friends in the Dhamma,

As President of the International Council for the Day of Vesak, and on behalf of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and the Organising Committee appointed by the Royal Thai Government and the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand, I am very pleased to welcome you all, and especially the Most Venerable Xue Cheng, recently appointed President of the Buddhist Association of China, to this, the 12th United Nations Day of Vesak that is being held at our main Campus here in Wangnoi and, later, at both the United Nations Conference Center in Bangkok and at Buddha Monthon.

The celebration of Vesak is one of the greatest events of the year in the Buddhist calendar, in that it provides us all with an unparalleled opportunity of coming together in order to pay homage to the Lord Buddha on the anniversary of his birth, enlightenment and passing.

In 1999, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution that the Day of Vesak, which falls on the full-moon day in the month of May, be celebrated at its Headquarters in New York and at its branch offices around the world.

As a consequence, Buddhists from around the world founded the International Council for the Day of Vesak, with its secretariat at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University here in Thailand, which

has been charged over the last twelve years with co-ordinating such activities, thereby providing an international platform for all Buddhists to work together in matters of mutual interest.

The main theme of this year's conference will be "Buddhism and World Crisis." By crisis I mean a turning point, as in a sequence of events, for better or for worse. If the course of events turns to be worse man's intelligence tends to go wrong. As it is said in the Gijjhajātaka; "Yadā parābhavo hoti, poso jīvitasaṅkhaye" and so on. It is translated as follows; "When destruction comes upon a man, and fates demand his death, he fails to see causes of dangers such as snare or net although so close at hand."

As the Sanskrit proverb goes, "Vinashakale viparitabuddhi", meaning that in time of destruction man's intelligence tends to go wrong. That is why the world in time of crises needs to listen to the Buddha's words of advice to properly respond to crises. It is to be hoped that the outcome of the present conference will be of benefit to solve, through application of the Buddha's teachings, many of the crises currently besetting the world. As such, four sub-themes have been selected for group discussion, namely:

1. The Buddhist Response to Social Conflict
2. The Buddhist Response to Environmental Degradation
3. The Buddhist Response to the Educational Crisis
4. Buddhism's role in the ASEAN Community

These will be complemented by one workshop on "A Common Buddhist Text," which is a project involving the compilation of Buddhist teachings drawn from the Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions.

.We have done all in our power to provide you with a convenient environment in which to deliberate on all these issues. The outcome of such deliberation will form part of the Bangkok Declaration that will be subsequently presented to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations following the close of the Conference.

As your hosts, we will do our best to serve you. My colleagues are ready to provide you with whatever assistance you may need.

May the blessing of the Triple Gem grant you great success in all your endeavours. I thank you for your participation and trust that your stay in Thailand will be a most pleasant and memorable one.

Thank you very much.