

Welcome Speech

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His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister Major General Sanan Kachornprasart, Most Venerable Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn, Buddhist leaders, pious men and women, it is a great honor for us Japanese as a co-hosting country to have the Celebration of the UN Day of Vesak together with you here in Thailand. We would like to express our gratitude to the Royal Thai Government and the Thai Sangha who provided full support for this event. We also appreciate the efforts by Most Venerable Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn, ICUNDV members, and office staff in preparing this event.

Our group, Inner Trip Reiyukai International, which is a lay people's Buddhist organization in Japan, have participated in this event of the past 6 times together with Most Venerable Kakuhan Enami, who is the chairman of the Japan Buddhist Conference for the World Federation and a high priest of Tendai Buddhist Denomination which is one of the representative denominations in Japan, and other Buddhist priests of various denominations in Japan. We have continued to participate in this event, because we sympathized with Most Venerable Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn's way of thinking and the principle of United Nations Day of Vesak. Then, we, ITRI, together with some Buddhist priests of various denominations as Japanese representatives accepted the offer to play the role of co-hosting the event this year from Most Venerable Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn and ICUNDV who wish for the further internationalization of this event. It is really a pleasure for us to play such an important role as Buddhist.

It was approximately 1500 years ago when Buddhism first reached Japan which is called the Far East from India through the Central Asia, China, and Korea. Since then, Japan has been developing the Japanese style Buddhism by sending priests to China to study modern Buddhism in those days and bring back a lot of sutras, or by inviting some Chinese high priests. Nowadays it is said that 96 million people which is 80% of the total population in Japan are Buddhist, and there are about 75,000 temples and more than 300,000 Buddha statues of which quantities are incommensurable to other Buddhist countries.

Though Japan is such a big Buddhist country, the real teachings of the Lord Buddha have not permeated enough among Japanese Buddhists, and still less implemented. There are a lot of political and social problems occurred due to lack of ethics and decline of Buddhist values. It seems to be quite serious situation, but it has happened not only in Japan.

In such situation it is very meaningful to participate in such a great international Buddhist conference as the Conference of UN Day of Vesak. Buddhists in the world gather together, celebrate the birth, the enlightenment, and the passing away of the Buddha, think about the teaching, and pray for peace of the world. The participants shall take this opportunity to pledge to practice the teachings more, and propagate this movement of UN Day of Vesak to the people of themselves or among the people in the world. Furthermore, if we promote the understanding and practice of the Buddha's teachings among the people, they will recognize the importance of the Buddhist values, and are well aware of the necessity in solving social problems. That will lead the realization of the peaceful and livable world.

It is necessary to expand the network of this movement of UN Day of Vesak to invite more people for further development of itself. For instance, last year we established the Japan Establishment Committee of the UN Day of Vesak with those who are interested in it, and started its propagation in Japan which is a Mahayana Buddhist country without traditional practice to celebrate the Vesak. We expect that we can have a celebration of Vesak of our own with all Buddhists from various denominations in accordance with the principle of the United Nations Day of Vesak in the near future. We also expect that the activities in accordance with the principle of the United Nations Day of Vesak will increase even in the Theravada Buddhist countries where the Vesak is celebrated at a national level.

What the principle of the United Nations Day of Vesak means here is to seek for the peaceful co-existence of human-beings beyond the differences of religion, race, or nation. If this principle permeates each country, the peaceful co-existence itself will be realized. In this conference of the UN Day of Vesak we do not only chant the peaceful co-existence, but also have a theme every year to find the practical way of co-existence with wisdom of participants. The theme of this year is "Global Recovery – The Buddhist Perspective". It means that we will try to find the Buddhist way how to recover from the global economic crisis which evolved from the Lehman Shock two years ago. To think and discuss about the theme is not enough, of-course. Implementation is important. All participants shall take the results of discussion back to own country and try to put them into action.

Anyhow, we can find no international Buddhist conference which has so many participating countries and religions, so large scale, so rich contents and is organized every year like this conference of the UN Day of Vesak. It is a very worthy and significant conference. We are happy to be able to participate. We have to thank the Buddha for leading us to come here. Let's think about the birth, the enlightenment, and the passing away of the Buddha and ponder deeply about the peace of the world for three days from now. And let's share this happiness with the people in the world after this conference.

We appreciate you all for participating in this conference today.

Thank you for your kind attention.