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with the Celebrations on the Auspicious Occasion of His
Majesty the King's Eightieth Birthday Anniversary



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Symposium :: International Buddhist Conference 2550 (2007)

First Circular
The Symposium of All Buddhist Universities
Bangkok
26-29 May 2007/2550

Dear Esteemed Representatives of Buddhist Universities and Colleges to the Symposium of All Buddhist Universities,

In this First Circular, we shall discuss briefly of (1.1) the aims, (1.2) membership and (1.3) functions of the proposed association of all Buddhist universities. Then, let me suggest (2) a format for running of the symposium.

This symposium is going to be held as a part of the international Vesak (Buddha Day). So, obviously there will be participants who have little or nothing to do with the symposium at the events. The international Vesak events begin on 26 and end on 29 May. The symposium itself commences, however, on 27th afternoon and goes on until 28th .

1.1 Aims
We are coming together to help ensure the future of Buddhist scholarship. The aim is that it should continue to grow, its quality should continue to rise and its importance should be ever more widely accepted. In this way, the brightest and best young people will come to understand and practise the Buddha-Dharma, and will make a full contribution to meeting the challenges that humanity faces.

1.2 Membership
The Members of our Association will be Institutes of Higher Education. All relevant institutions are encouraged to join.
Some will have only one mission: to educate students to understand and practise the Buddha-Dharma. Others will cover a full range of academic subjects. But all will have a significant commitment to Buddhist Studies, and will operate according to Buddhist values and promote Buddhist principles.
Some will bear the formal title 'university'. Some will be Colleges, Academies or whatever. All will teach Buddhist Studies and have the power to award degrees.
There is also a place in the Association for units from within larger bodies. If a Buddhist Studies Centre is more or less autonomous and can award degrees via the higher-level institution of which it is part, then it too should be a Member.

1.3 Functions
1.3.1 General
The Association will be a way for Members to understand and help one another. Members will recognise each other's qualifications and collaborate in administration, teaching, research and outreach. This sort of cross-fertilisation will help us all to benefit from the richness and variety of the multinational Buddhist tradition. The Association will also develop a public profile, so that the work of Buddhist Universities is better understood.

1.3.2 Specific
The Association will arrange conferences and publish journals. It will facilitate the interchange of students and teachers between Members.
Via the secretariat, it will function as an information exchange, collecting data from Members and sharing it between them. For instance, it will compile databases on Members' PhD programmes and on qualified PhD supervisors-and-examiners available to work in/with Member universities. On that basis, it will be able to support Members' endeavours in this area and so over the long term to develop an effective research orientation across the Association.

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In addition, there should also be a programme to help member institutions who have no PhD degree programmes. This programme should help train teachers and support their research work. Again, Members will be able to collaborate in developing their administrative structures. The secretariat will build an index of Members' adopted policies and will provide facilities for Members to share experience on policy implementation.

(2) Format

2.1 27 May, 13:00- 16:45PM

There will be a panel discussion on "Buddhist Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges".

The panel discussion will be divided into two parts: at 13:00 -15:00PM, presentations will be made by five panellists and three respondents (15:00-15:30PM tea break), and at 15:30 – 16:45PM there will be a session of questions and answers.

(a) The moderator for this panel is to be confirmed on 23rd May at the International Organising Committee meeting.

(b) Panellists are,

1. Venerable Bhikkhuni Dr. Yifa, PhD (Yale), Chair, Department of Religious Studies, University of the West, USA
2. Venerable Professor Geshe Ngawang Samten, Rector/Director, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies [Deemed University], Sarnath, India
3. Dr. Tamás Agócs, PhD (Budapest), Lecturer & Foreign Relation Manager, Budapest Buddhist University, Hungary
4. The Most Venerable Dr. Ashin Nyanissara, PhD & DLitt., Chancellor, Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, Myanmar & Chairman, Association of Theravada Buddhist Universities (ATBU)
5. Professor Chisho Namai, PhD, President, Koyasan University, Japan

Respondents

1. Professor Richard Gombrich, DPhil (Oxford), Emeritus Professor & Academic Director, The Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Oxford, UK
2. Professor Tim Coburn, PhD (Harvard), President, Naropa University, USA
3. Venerable Weiwu, MSc (New Zealand), Founder-Chairman, Council of International Buddhist College, Hat Yai/Penang , Thailand/Malaysia

I personally believe this panel and the respondents widely represent various sections of the Buddhist academic as well as the cultural world. I would like to thank all the would-be panellists and respondents for agreeing to be on the panel.

However, if you have any suggestion to this, please do not hesitate to pass it to me!

2.2 28 May, 8.30 AM – 10.30AM

The representatives of Buddhist colleges and universities will be divided into several small working groups to discuss (1) how to collaborate and, more importantly, (2) how to facilitate any envisaged collaboration.

A draft document to be discussed will be circulated to you through email in a few days time.

13:00 – 16:45PM

Finalise the document and formally form an association of all Buddhist universities. Here, for the first part (13:00- 15:00PM), we all will assemble in a hall where we hear reports/inputs from each group leader. (11:00AM – 13:00PM lunch break)

In the second part (15:30-16:45PM), we hope to finalise a document which will spell out a framework for all of us to work on as a group and bring about collaboration in the near future.

3. Future symposium.

Here, we wish to inform you that Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU), our host this year, is willing to bring all member-institutions together again next year in Bangkok for the second symposium. This will give us a chance to divide our task into (a) an immediate plan and (b) a future plan.

4. Our common task.

Finally, for this first-ever gathering of all Buddhist universities and colleges to be a success, we depend on your vision, experience and participation from all Buddhist higher academic institutions from all over the world. Therefore, please feel free to contact me with your inputs and suggestions. They will be most appreciated.

Venerable Phra Dr. Khammai Dhammasami, DPhil (Oxford)
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