

## *Preface*

The people, the Supreme Sangha Council and the Royal Government of the Kingdom of Thailand, in general, and Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, in particular, have been very honored to have successively and successfully organized for three years the United Nations Day of Vesak Celebrations in Thailand.

The Fourth International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak Celebrations of 2007 was held on a bigger scale because the people of the whole Kingdom of Thailand wanted to show gratitude on the Auspicious Occasion of His Majesty the King's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary.

So much understanding and cooperation between different Buddhist traditions have been achieved through the recognition by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1999 of Vesak as an internationally important day. And, since 2005 when the representatives of the Buddhists from different nations to the international Vesak in Bangkok agreed to make Thailand the hub of the Buddhist world. We, the Buddhists in Thailand, with the blessing of the Sangha Supreme Council, have been working tirelessly to maintain that understanding and cooperation.

Amongst the many achievements of 2005-2007 celebrations, I am grateful for the trust placed by the International Organizing Committee (IOC) upon Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University making it the International Secretariat of the IOC and the headquarters of the International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU). We are confident that we will be able to repay your trust with the kind of dedication and activeness, evident in the services this university has offered to the Buddhist world for the last four years.

Last, I wish to offer my sincere thanks to the leaders of the Sangha, scholars, artists, performers and all the participants from the 61 countries for making the 2007 celebrations a great success. It is my earnest wish that we build on this success for the better of the whole world.



(The Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn)

Rector, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

Chairman, International Organizing Committee

For the United Nations Day of Vesak Celebrations

# *Table of Contents*

## *Preface*

<b><i>Part I: History of UN Day of Vesak Celebrations</i></b>	1
---	---

<b><i>Part II: UN Day of Vesak Celebrations 2007</i></b>	7
--	---

<b>Opening Ceremony :</b>	8
---------------------------	---

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ● Royal Address from <i>HRH Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana</i> | 8 |
|---|---|

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ● Report to HRH Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana | 9 |
|---|---|

by *H.E. Paiboon Wattanasiritham,*

Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| ● Report to H.H. Somdet Phra Phutthachan | 11 |
|--|----|

by *Most Venerable Prof. Dr. Dharmakosajarn,*

Rector of MCU

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| ● Speech by <i>H.E. Gen. Surayud Chulanont</i> | 13 |
|--|----|

Prime Minister of Thailand

<b>Keynote Speeches:</b>	17
--------------------------	----

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| ● <i>Most Venerable Phra Visuddhisamvara Thera (Ajan Brahmavamsa)</i> | 17 |
|---|----|

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| ● <i>Most Venerable Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh</i> | 30 |
|--|----|

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| ● <i>Most Venerable Phra Ratchasumedhachan</i> | 42 |
|--|----|

<b>Panel Discussions:</b>	48
---------------------------	----

<b>Buddhist Contributions to Good Governance and Development</b>	
--	--

- |                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| ● <i>Prof. Dr. Ian Harris</i> | 48 |
|-------------------------------|----|

- |                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| ● <i>Prof. Dr. Oliver Abeynayake</i> | 50 |
|--------------------------------------|----|

- *Mr. Phallop Thaiarry* 52
- *Mrs. Claudine Shinoda* 53

**Buddhist Universities Symposium:** 55

- *Most Venerable Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn* 55
- *Venerable Bhikkhuni Dr. Yifa* 57
- *Dr. Tamas Agocs* 59
- *Prof. Dr. Chisho M. Namai* 62
- *Most Venerable Dr. Ashin Nyanissara* 64
- *Venerable Prof. Geshe Ngawang Samten* 66
- *Prof. Dr. Le Mahn That* 68
- *Prof. Dr. Richard Gombrich* 70
- *Dr. Thomas Coburn* 73
- *Ven. Weiwu MSc* 75

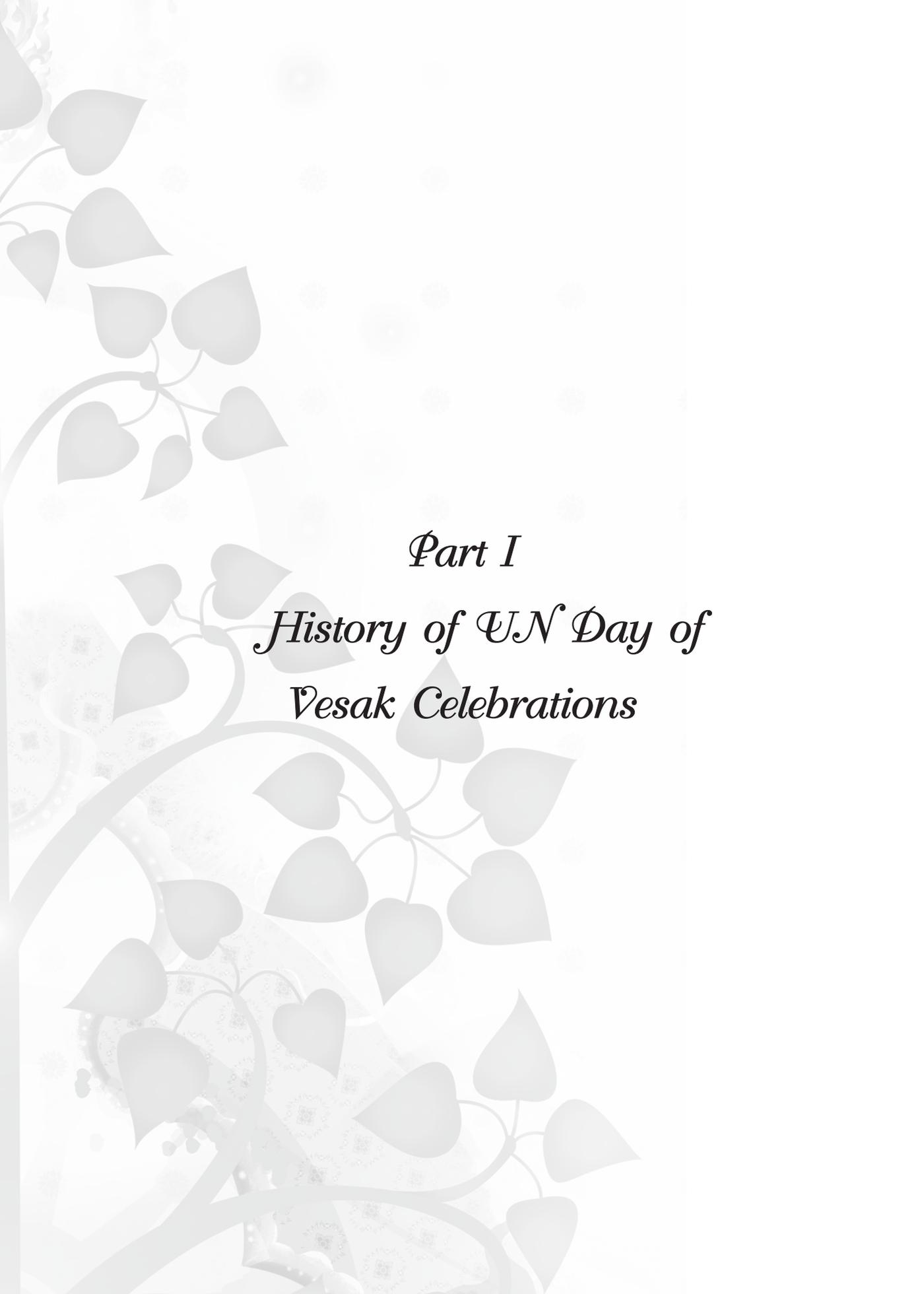
**Conclusion** 79

Concluding Statement 79

by *Most Venerable Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn*

*Part III: Appendix* 83

- Bangkok Declaration 2004 84
- Bangkok Declaration 2005 86
- Bangkok Declaration 2006 88
- Bangkok Declaration 2007 91
- Charter of the International Organizing Committee 94
- International Association of Buddhist Universities 110
- International Organizing Committee (OIC) 129

The background of the page is a light, textured pattern. On the left side, there are stylized, dark grey leafy branches that curve upwards and across the page. The rest of the background is filled with a repeating pattern of small, light-colored floral or star-like motifs.

*Part I*  
*History of UN Day of*  
*Vesak Celebrations*



## *History of UN Day of Vesak Celebrations*



In Theravada countries, the day that celebrates the Buddha's birthday is more affectionately known as the Vesak day. However, the celebrations extend not only to his birth but also his enlightenment and commemorates of his passing away. Vesak is actually the name of the fourth month in the lunar calendar and the day that celebrates Buddha's thrice sacred events occurs on the fifteenth day of the same lunar month.

This day, millions of Buddhists from around the world will celebrate the occasion with pomp or in quiet introspection, either way, it is an occasion to give honor to the Buddha for his teachings to the world and to be reminded of the great compassion that he had to seek and attained enlightenment. As the Buddha, the Prince of the Sakyan kingdom spent his entire life after as the enlightened one teaching and guiding many people towards enlightenment and as a social reformer, he gave the society strong reasons to exercise charity and compassion towards all sentient beings for the well-being of all.

This great act has touched and transforms many lives and in a message by the former Secretary-General, Javier Perez de Cuellar to the Buddhists on the Day of Vesak in May 1986:

“For Buddhists everywhere it is indeed a felicitous opportunity, while commemorating the birth, enlightenment and passing away of Guatama Buddha, to celebrate his message of compassion and devotion to the service of humanity.”

“Peace, understanding and a vision of humanity that supersedes national and other international differences are essential if we are to cope with the complexities of the nuclear age.”

“This philosophy lies at the heart of the Charter of the United Nations and should be prominent in all our thinking, especially during this International Year of Peace.”

This struck a chord with many Buddhist leaders that during an International Buddhist Conference held in Sri Lanka on November 1998, a resolution to submit to the United Nations to recognize this day held sacred by all Buddhists.

An International Buddhist Conference held in Sri Lanka in November 1998 expressed the hope that the United Nations would accord the Day of Vesak international recognition.

The International Buddhist Conference also hoped that the Day of Vesak would be accorded the status of a holiday of the United Nations. However, we are informed and appreciate that a number of difficulties of an administrative, budgetary and other nature would arise if the General Assembly were to seek to create an additional annual United Nations holiday.

We would, in the circumstances, request, as an alternative, that the General Assembly considers the adoption of a resolution that would;

(a) Recognize that the Day of Vesak, the Day of the Full Moon in the month of May each year, is the day most sacred to Buddhists, who commemorate on that day, the birth of Buddha, his attainment of enlightenment and his passing away;

(b) Permit appropriate arrangements, without cost to the United Nations, to be made (in consultation with the relevant Offices of the Secretariat and the Permanent Missions that also wish to be consulted) for international observance of the Day of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations Offices.

The draft resolution clarified the need to obtain international recognition of the Day of Vesak celebrations by United Nations:

### **Draft resolution**

#### **International recognition of the Day of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations Offices**

*The General Assembly,*

*Acknowledging* the hope expressed by the International Buddhist Conference, held in Sri Lanka in November 1998, that the Day of Vesak, the Day of the Full Moon in the month of May each year, be internationally recognized and, in particular, at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations Offices,

*Recognizing* that the Day of the Full Moon in the month of May each year is the day most sacred to Buddhists, who commemorate on that day, the birth of the Buddha, his attainment of enlightenment and his passing away,

*Considering* that international recognition at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations Offices would constitute acknowledgement of the contribution that Buddhism, one of the oldest religions in the world, has made, for over two and a half millennia, and continues to make to the spirituality of humanity,

*Resolves* that, without cost to the United Nations, appropriate arrangements shall be made for international observances of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations Offices, in consultation with the relevant United Nations Offices and with Permanent Missions that also wish to be consulted.

At the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the request was made to the assembly to include into their agenda the International recognition of the Day of Vesak.

### **Request for inclusion of an additional item in the agenda of the fifty-fourth session**

#### **International recognition of the Day of Vesak**

Letter dated 28 October 1999 from the representatives of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly.

We have the honour to request, in accordance with rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly of an additional item, entitled "International recognition of the Day of Vesak".

*The signatories for the inclusion into the agenda are:*

(Signed) Anwarul Chowdhury Permanent Representative of Bangladesh	(Signed) Narendra Bikram Shah Permanent Representative of Nepal
(Signed) Om Pradhan Permanent Representative of Bhutan	(Signed) Inam ul Haque Permanent Representative of Pakistan
(Signed) Ouch Borith Permanent Representative of Cambodia	(Signed) Felipe Mabilangan Permanent Representative of the Philippines
(Signed) Kamallesh Sharma Permanent Representative of India	(Signed) Lee See-young Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea

(Signed) Khenthong Nuanthasing  
Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the  
Permanent Mission of the Lao  
People's Democratic Republic to  
the United Nations

(Signed) Inocencio Arias  
Permanent Representative of Spain

(Signed) Hussain Shihab  
Permanent Representative of Maldives

(Signed) John de Saram  
Permanent Representative of  
SriLanka

(Signed) Jargalsaikhany Enkhsaikhan  
Permanent Representative of Mongolia

(Signed) Asda Jayanama  
Permanent Representative of  
Thailand

(Signed) Win Mra  
Permanent Representative of  
Myanmar

(Signed) Volodymyr Yu. Yel'chenko  
Permanent Representative of  
Ukraine

The item was considered and passed through the General Assembly without putting to a vote. During a press release GA/9686, the General Assembly has decided to observe Buddhist' Sacred Day at United Nations. Following are some of the comments made by the representatives of the General Assembly:

**VORAVEE WIRASAMBAN** (Thailand) said the universal message of peace, goodwill and compassion preached by Lord Buddha more than 2,500 years ago had never been more relevant than today. Buddhism had always stressed the peaceful resolution of disputes, whether between individuals or communities. Buddhism was synonymous with peace. Moreover, tolerance was one of its central tenets. In Thailand , tolerance, particularly religious tolerance, was enshrined in the constitution and ingrained in the Thai way of life. Buddhism preached moderation, he said. The sense of moderation served as a foundation for the actions of Buddhists towards others and guarded against those excesses that all too often manifested themselves in the global village. The international recognition of the Day of Vesak would go a long way towards according recognition and respect to Buddhism and millions of Buddhists world wide and reaffirming the United Nations strong commitment to the principle of respect for diversity.

**CHRISTINE LEE** ( Singapore ) said the recognition of Vesak Day was an appropriate mark of respect for the Buddha. It was one of four major festivals celebrated in Singapore , whose population was one third Buddhist. She commended the initiative because it was in accord with the General Assembly having proclaimed the Year 2000 as the International Year for Culture of Peace and declared

the International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010). A hallmark of the Buddha's teaching was the promotion of peace and non-violence. The initiative would also pave the way for the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001.

**SHAIKH RAZZAQUE ALI** (Bangladesh) stated that in Asia , as in other parts of the world, people observed the Day of Vesak as the most sacred day in Buddhism. His country, historically connected with the Buddhist civilization, had a sizeable Buddhist population and celebrated that day as well as other festivals. International commemoration of the Day would provide an opportunity to relive the sublime teachings of the Buddha, which aimed at bringing understanding, happiness and solace to the world.

**OM PRADHAN** ( Bhutan ) said the international recognition of the contribution that Buddhism had made and continued to make to the world would promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity in societies. The teachings of Buddhism were universal in nature, he said. It stood for moderation, non-violence, peaceful coexistence and tolerance. It taught humans to safeguard and preserve resources and their natural environment, respecting the lives of all sentient beings. Many of those principles were akin to those of other major religions, and to the fundamental principles enshrined in the Charter.

**JUAN LUIS FLORES** ( Spain ) said that as a sponsor of the resolution, his country believed that the United Nations was a forum for the many religions and cultures that co-existed in the outside world to meet and exchange ideas. The recognition of Vesak Day would acknowledge the contribution made by these different religions and cultures to tolerance and the promotion of mutual understanding among humankind.

**U WIN MRA** ( Myanmar ) said the Charter called on nations to practice tolerance and live in peace. That embodied the teachings of the Buddha, which had moved millions of people. Buddhism, like other major religions, had contributed substantively to the prevalence of peace and it was fitting that the United Nations provided Buddhists with an opportunity to bring their sacred day to the attention of the international community. The Day of Vesak was also a sacred occasion in Myanmar , where almost 90 per cent of the population were Buddhists. To commemorate the Day, there was a ceremonial watering of the Bo Tree, under which the Buddha had attained enlightenment.

**NARENDRA BIKRAM SHAH** (Nepal) said the essence of the Buddha's teachings revolved around humanity, peace, compassion, understanding and non-violence, the equality of all human beings and respect for and non-denigration of the beliefs of others. Lumbini, where the Buddha had been born, was today a prominent World Heritage Site. The United Nations had historically been involved in its preservation and development. The International Buddhist Summit held at

Lumbini one year ago had declared it to be a fountain of peace. Vaishakh Purnima, or Vesak Day, was recognized in Nepal also as Lumbini Day and observed as a national holiday, an official day of non-violence.

**INAM-UL-HAQUE** ( Pakistan ) said the northwest of his country was the home of the Buddhist Gandhara civilization, which had flourished in the first century B.C. The period had also seen the birth of Gandhara art through a fusion of Greco-Roman art and Buddhist traditions. The contribution of Buddhism to the culture, art and civilization of the peoples of South Asia and beyond had been profound. The message of peace, compassion and truth given by Buddha was shared by most religions and belief systems. The recognition of the Day of Vesak by the United Nations would be a befitting acknowledgement of the contribution of Buddhism to the spiritual development of humankind.

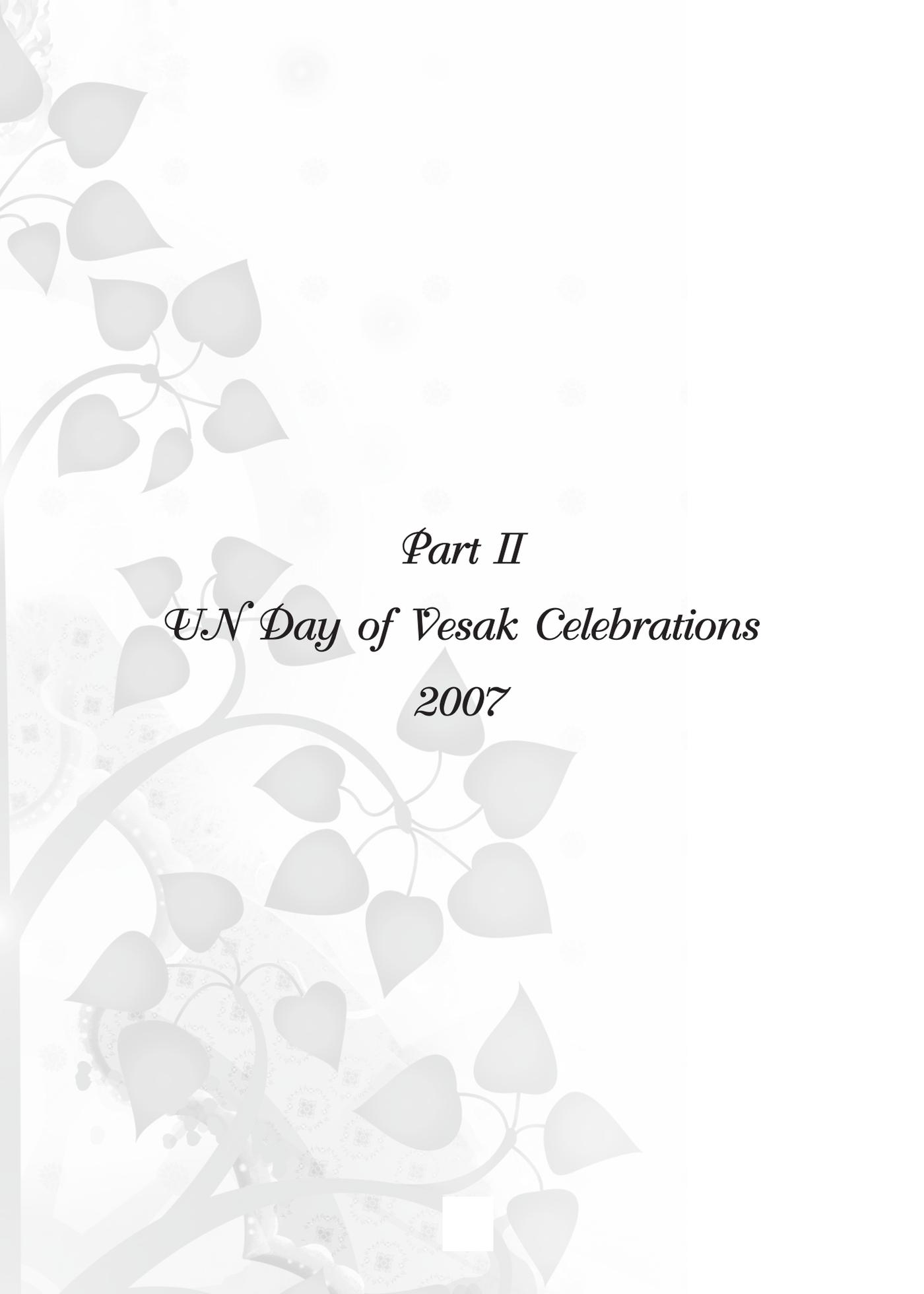
**KAMALESH SHARMA** ( India ) said that the impact of Buddhism on the spiritual, moral and ethical values of the world made it fitting for the Day to be earmarked, honoured and observed by the Assembly. The core of the Buddha's teachings had touched millions of lives with salvation and hope, he continued. His country hoped to participate actively in the observance of Vesak in the United Nations.

Lesotho, Nicaragua and the United States joined as sponsors of the draft resolution. The draft on the Day of Vesak was adopted without a vote.

Since 2000, Buddhist countries have been honored to sponsor the Vesak activities at the UN. In 2004, In 2004, the Thai Sangha coordinated and led by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University to organize the celebrations at the UN

From 2004, the International Buddhist Conferences on the United Nations Day of Vesak have been held instead at the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC), Bangkok, Thailand and at Buddhamonthon, Nakhon Pathom Province. Subsequent celebrations were held in conjunction with the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Accession to the Throne of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the Auspicious Occasion of His Majesty the king's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary respectively.





*Part II*  
*UN Day of Vesak Celebrations*  
*2007*

*Royal Address*

*From*

*Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Narirattana*

*At the Opening Ceremony of the International Buddhist Conference Vesak Day  
2550/2007*

*At Buddhamonthon Auditorium, Nakhon Pathom*

*Saturday, May 26, 2550/2007*



*H*is Royal Highness the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Thailand has very kindly asked me to represent Him in the opening ceremony of the International Buddhist Conference on the International Vesak Day 2007/2550

Buddhism offers, at the most basic level, principles to lead a peaceful and harmonious life on daily basis and at the highest level, the ultimate truth, which is the deliverance from suffering. The Lord Buddha who has given us those principles was born, attained full enlightenment and passed away on the Full-moon Day of Vesak. Therefore the utmost prominence has been given by Buddhists all over the world to this sacred Vesak Full-moon Day. The United Nations has also recognized Vesak as a very important day of the world.

The Celebrations of the United Nations Day of Vesak this year are being made more significant because at the same time Buddhists from as many as sixty countries from the five continents, participating in the International Vesak, have also joined the Celebrations on the Auspicious Occasion of His Majesty the King's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary 5<sup>th</sup> December 2007. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej Himself is a true exemplary Buddhist who has firm faith in the Lord Buddha's teaching and has practiced accordingly.

I am extremely pleased that many Buddhists from various nations are here to celebrate the sacred Vesak together in Thailand and also discuss ways and means to propagate the teaching of the Buddha. I rejoice in the faith that everyone has demonstrated in the effort sacrifice that everybody has made in all these undertakings.

In the name of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Thailand, I hereby open the International Buddhist Conference to celebrate the World Vesak Day 2007.



*Report to*  
*Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana*  
*By*  
*His Excellency Paiboon Watthanasiritham*  
*Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand*  
*On the International Buddhist Conference*  
*On the United Nations Day of Vesak*  
*At Buddhamonthon Auditorium, Nakhon Pathom*  
*Saturday, May 26, 2007*



I humbly request your gracious permission to inform Your Royal Highness of the following:

On behalf of the Thai Government, the Buddhists gathered here, and all who have come into your Presence, I, Paiboon Watthanasiritham, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, feel profoundly grateful for Your Royal Highness's kindness in coming to preside over the opening of the International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak 2007.

I request your gracious permission to describe, in brief, the historical background of this conference.

On December 13, 1999, the United Nations, in General Assembly Session No. 54, recognized that the Day of the Full Moon in the sixth lunar month each year is the day most sacred to Buddhists everywhere. This was the day, according to Theravada tradition, on which the Buddha was born, attained enlightenment, and achieved parinibbana. The Buddha taught mutual loving-kindness and forbearance among men and women for the sake of peace and happiness in society. Since these principle and shared by the Charter of the United Nations, the UN declared that Vesak was a Day of universal significance, and directed that observance be held, as appropriate, at the United Nations Headquarters and other UN offices in May of each year.

The government of Thailand, under the leadership of H.E. Surayud Chulanont, the Prime Minister, believes that recognition of Vesak by the United Nations is an acknowledgement of the contrition that Buddhism has made for over two and a half millennia- which it continues to make- for the spiritual development of humanity. The government of Thailand, therefore, wished to sponsor World Day of

Vesak, and it assigned Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University as the principal organizer.

Participating in this International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak 2007, are the Chairman of the Executive Committee for the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Sangha, and Sangha Mahanayaka and leading venerable monks and other clerical and lay representatives from 5 continents and 61 nations throughout the world. Altogether, there are 1,280 participants from abroad and 1,500 participants from Thailand, for a total of 2,780 participants. The purposes of this conference are: to collectively present the Buddha Dhamma as a significant teaching for the world through educational activities, homilies, ceremonial and community efforts; to demonstrate unity of intention among Buddhist groups and organizations of national and international standing, in accordance with the wishes of the Thai government; and to display Thai Buddhist art and culture to the world.

Moreover, this year is a very auspicious year for all Thai people. This is the year of ceremony to celebrate on the Auspicious Occasion of His Majesty the King's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary. Therefore, this year's UN Day of Vesak Celebrations have been organized on a much larger scale.

Now, at this auspicious time, I would like to make a humble request to your Royal Highness to graciously open the International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak 2007, as well as to offer commemorative presents to Their Holinesses the Supreme Patriarch and other Sangha leaders from 61 countries and regions throughout the world.



*Report on the International Buddhist Conference*

*On the UN Day of Vesak Celebrations 2550/2007*

*To*

*His Holiness Somdet Phra Phutthachan*

*President*

*Executive Committee for His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand*

*By*

*The Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn*

*At the Buddhamonthon Auditorium, Nakhon Pathom Province*

*Saturday May 26, 2550/2007*



Your Holiness, may I, the Rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and the Chairman of International Organizing Committee (IOC) of the UN Day of Vesak Celebrations, be permitted to submit a report.

On behalf of the Head of Sangha, Buddhist Leaders and scholars, monks and Buddhists from other countries in this auditorium, may I be allowed to express how humble we all feel that His Holiness Somdet Phra Phutthachan has very kindly come to preside over the Opening Ceremony of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Buddhist Conference on the UN Day of Vesak 2007/2550.

Your Holiness, on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1999, the General Assembly of the United Nations resolved that the Day of Vesak should be internationally recognized and observed worldwide. Later, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University was assigned by the Royal Thai Government and the Supreme Sangha Council to be the principal coordinator in organizing the celebrations of the UN Day of Vesak in 2005 by inviting Buddhist leaders and scholars from around the world to join the conference and Vesak activities. The conference was successfully held at Buddhamonthon, Nakhon Pathom and at the UN Conference Center, Bangkok and it has also been agreed unanimously to recognize Buddhamonthon as the Center of World Buddhism.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Buddhist Conference on the UN Day of Vesak in 2006 agreed and issued in Joint Communiqué to organize the 4<sup>th</sup> International Buddhist Conference on the UN Day of Vesak 2007 to be held in Thailand in conjunction with the Celebrations on the Auspicious Occasion of His Majesty the King's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary. H.M. the King is the one who has reigned

the kingdom with Dasa-rajadhamma, “the ten kingly virtues”, and the development projects He has initiated and involved many decades have been so numerous that the United Nations and other countries have regarded him as the role model of Good Governance and Sustainable Development.

To follow the Resolution of the 54<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly and also the agreement from the last year conference, the Royal Thai Government has sponsored the 4<sup>th</sup> International Buddhist Conference on the UN Day of Vesak held from May 26-29, 2007 at the auditorium of Buddhamonthon, Nakhon Pathom and at the UN Conference Center, Bangkok. The theme of the conference is on Buddhist Contribution to Good Governance and Development to be regarded as one of Vesak activities in celebrating the Auspicious Occasion of the King’s 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday.

In this 4<sup>th</sup> International Buddhist Conference on the UN Day of Vesak 2007, there are Supreme Patriarchs, Heads of the Sangha, Buddhist Leaders and scholars as well as observers from overseas, 1,280 in number, from 61 countries. HRH the Crown Prince has assigned HRH the Princess Sirivannavari Narirattana to be his representative to preside over the Opening Ceremony of the International Buddhist Conference today.

This is the auspicious time, I would like to invite Your Holiness Somdet Phra Phutthachan to kindly give a word of commendation and bless the International Buddhist Conference on the UN Day of Vesak 2007 for the success and happiness of everyone.



*Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Buddhist Conference:*

*The United Nations Day of Vesak*

*By H.E. General Surayud Chulanont, Prime Minister of Thailand*

*United Nations Conference Centre*

*27 May 2007*



Your Holinesses,

Most Venerable Members of the Sangha,

Most Venerable Rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University,

Mr. Executive Secretary,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here to address the 4<sup>th</sup> International Buddhist Conference to mark the United Nations Day of Vesak, the significant day of the Buddhists commemorating the birth, enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha. On behalf of the Thai people, may I first pay my respects and express the warmest welcome to all venerable members of the Sangha and participants from all five continents and 61 countries from around the world.

It is most fitting that we are gathered here at Bangkok's United Nations Conference Centre, for the Buddha's message on being aware of oneself, one's actions and the world in which one lives, and pursuing harmony and peace, is indeed close to that of the United Nations. Inspired by that message, the United Nations General Assembly at its 54<sup>th</sup> Session in December 1999 passed a resolution recognizing the Day of Vesak to be an important day for the United Nations. Since then, Vesak has been celebrated each year in May at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and at United Nations offices around the world.

It has been an honor for Thailand to host Vesak Day celebrations and the International Buddhist Conference for three successive years. And in 2007, the year in which the Thai people are celebrating the Auspicious Occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary of His Majesty the King, it is indeed fortunate for us to have the opportunity to host the event for the fourth time, and to receive the blessings of so many spiritual leaders from all traditions of the Buddhist faith.

I personally believe that the teachings of the Buddha can guide us to a peaceful and just society. For over 2,500 years, the Buddha's message of peace and the threefold principles of training, namely moral ethics (sila), meditation (samādhi) and clear comprehension of life and its true nature (paññā), have offered light to mankind. And the threefold training, as we all know, serves to remove elements that defile human heart, delude his mind and complicate his speech and action. With a peaceful heart, peaceful actions will become a real possibility for individuals and for a peaceful society at large.

Meanwhile, the Dhamma helps us achieve a just society. The Five Precepts, which are the basic moral codes, emphasize the respect for life, property and family; responsible speech; and mindful consumption of food and drink. A just society is also one in which there is no divine right for one group over another; all are considered equal in terms of the law of kamma.

We Buddhists already embrace this message. But as we celebrate the United Nations Day of Vesak, we need to examine both the theory and practice of Buddhism. As Buddhism's power comes from the Buddha's teachings, we need to see how we can make the Buddha's message more accessible, more widely known, and have universal application. This is why I very much value this ongoing dialogue and cooperation, and look forward to learning from the collective wisdom of Buddhist leaders and scholars.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of this Conference is related to the Buddhist contribution to good governance and development. This is a topic of interest not only for Buddhists, but for the whole world. Indeed, I do believe that the dhamma can help us achieve good governance and development in the modern world. Before this learned audience, let me make some humble observations:

First of all, the concept of governance is not new. It is as old as human civilization. The concept of good governance is not new either, and it is neither Buddhist nor non-Buddhist in character. It is the common interest of everyone and of all civilizations. In the Pali Buddhist scriptures, for example, the concept of cakkavatti appears as a global righteous ruler who rules through dhamma for the people. We also know that good governance is an ideal which is difficult to achieve in its totality. This, however, does not mean we cannot make efforts towards this ideal. Indeed, it is what many nations, including Thailand, have been doing.

Over the centuries, the teachings of the Buddha, particularly on the law of kamma, have had an enormous influence on the culture and life of the Thai people. In the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> century, one of our most able rulers, King Ramkhamhaeng the Great, began building what might be regarded as a society based on dhamma. Following the model of the Buddhist Emperor Asoka of India, King Ramkhamhaeng strove to ensure a peaceful and just kingdom. Accordingly, respect

for individuals' rights, concern for the people's welfare, transparency, people's participation and efficiency - things that we now consider to be the hallmarks of good governance - were characteristic of governance under King Ramkhamhaeng. It is recorded that the King paid so much attention to people's livelihoods that everyone was allowed to come and ring a bell if they had a problem, and that the King would respond to the call.

With good governance under King Ramkhamhaeng's reign, peace and development were realized. People achieved sufficiency characterized by the phrase: "There are fish in the water and there is rice in the fields." At the same time, they also prospered through commerce.

Thailand has since come a long way. But I put it to you that for us, good governance and the Buddha's teachings have never been more relevant. Good governance nowadays encompasses corporate governance, local governance, national governance and international governance. It is intimately involved with decision-making and the process through which decisions are implemented. Indeed, it is our aspiration that, at every level of governance, improvements toward the ideal of good governance are made. Only then can we ensure development in every sphere of life for the people, for good governance, peace and development are interlinked.

And it is here that the philosophy of "Sufficiency Economy" bestowed by His Majesty the King finds resonance. For the philosophy not only addresses questions of development, but also governance. Drawing spiritual inspiration from the Buddha's "Middle Path", the philosophy provides principles for appropriate conduct based on moderation, reasonableness, self-awareness and knowledge. Not only has Thailand adopted "Sufficiency Economy" as a fundamental principle of national development, but all Thai people are also encouraged to study it and adapt it to their daily lives. But contrary to what some may think, it is not an economic theory. Indeed, it is applicable to all levels and all spheres of activity. Nevertheless, with its emphasis on a just balance, it does involve special concerns for sustainable development through the promotion of self-reliance and appropriate management of resources.

As individuals, communities, businesses and a nation in search of an appropriate development strategy embrace this "Middle Path", it is a matter of finding the right balance at each level to build a firm foundation to face the challenges of the modern world. Through promoting moral values, the approach also aims to strengthen society's moral fiber. And through such a holistic approach to human development, one inspired by Buddhist principles, we believe we will attain our goal of a more just, more equitable and more sustainable society.

Indeed, this January the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) launched the Thailand Human Development Report 2007 which had the theme of

“Sufficiency Economy and Human Development”. This initiative pays tribute both to the efforts of His Majesty the King and the spiritual underpinnings of “Sufficiency Economy”. Most importantly, it has served to spread the philosophy’s message, particularly that of good governance and sustainable development, to the wider international audience it deserves.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is clear from the foregoing comments that the teachings of the Buddha are in tune with, and have contributed to, the practice of good governance and the promotion of development. As the “Middle Path” continues to inspire us toward new paradigms of sustainable development and building peaceful and just societies, all of us are enjoined to help ensure the ongoing contribution of Buddhism to uplifting the spirit of humanity.

On behalf of the Royal Thai Government, may I once more extend my heartiest welcome and thank all of you for your active contributions to this Conference. I also would like to express my thanks to the International Organizing Committee and the National Organizing Committee for their excellent work in preparing this international Buddhist event. I wish the celebration of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2007 a great success, and hope that your deliberations will serve to further advance the Buddha’s message of compassion for all mankind.

