Regional Seminar

Toward an Environmental Ethic in Southeast Asia

5 to 7 November 1997

Center For Culture and Vipassana
Takhmao, Kandal Province
Kingdom of Cambodia

Organized by The Buddhist Institute

Notes

ROYAL MESSAGE
from
His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk Varman
King of Cambodia

Addressed to
His Compatriots and International Friends
during the opening of the
Regional Seminar
on
"Toward an Environmental Ethic in Southeast Asia"
organised November 5-7, 1997 by
The Buddhist Institute
in Takhmau, Kingdom of Cambodia

My dear and beloved Compatriots!
Dear Friends!

I feel especially happy to greet all our International Friends from the region participating in this important inter-religious Seminar and all my beloved Brethren, Children, and Compatriots. especially the ones who are present here on this occasion either as speakers or audience or sponsors of this gathering. I warmly welcome this meeting of religious scholars and environmentalists. under the honorary patronage of the Cambodian Buddhist Sangha, in seeking to develop a spiritually-based ethic for the environment in our part of the world.

It has been nearly three decades now that our people in the whole of Cambodia have suffered much misery and devastation in their lives and their surroundings. Khmer blood has incessantly flowed during the decades of war and is continuing to flow further as you gather to meet. During this period, the turmoil and anarchy has allowed our country's forest cover to be reduced from 73 percent to nearly 30 percent, resulting in increasing problems and consequences for our agriculture including fish stock not to mention the social consequences.

In order to respond to the appropriate purpose of the people, the leaders and people responsible for environmental degradation here and in the neighboring countries must be re-mindful and apply the Buddhist principle of Ahimsa Dhamma, or non-violence toward all living things. When they do so, they also re-learn that they are part of the environment, meaning that when they exploit and hurt the natural and cultural resources around them, they also hurt themselves.

Therefore, I wish all my Bretluren. Children and Compatriots, speakers and audience as well as supporters of this important Buddhist-sponsored International Seminar on "Toward an Environmental Ethic in Southeast Asia" to be successful in seeking ways in which we all can regenerate ourselves spiritually as a way to regenerate the environment around us.

NSihanouk

NORODOM SIHANOUK

List of Honorary Patrons and Co-Chairs, Organizing Committee, Seminar Secretariat and Seminar Venue Members

Honorary Patrons

Samdech Sanghareach Tep Vong
Wat Unnalom
Samdech Sanghareach Bour Kry
Wat Botumpadai Raj Wararam
Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda
Dhammayietra Center, Wat Sampeau Meas

Honorary Co-Chairs

Ven. Yos Hut Khemacaro
Dhammathut Association, Wat Langka
Ven. Nhem Kim Teng
Santi Sena, Wat Prey Chlak, Svay Rieng

Organizing Committee

H.E. Chhorn Iem, Chairman
Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs
Mr. Sam Khan Dy, Chief
Department of Education and Communications, Ministry of Environment
Mr. Om Khem, Director
The Buddhist Institute
Mr. Mao Youran, Vice-President
LIDEE Khmer
Mr. Koji Tezuka, Country Representative
Japan Sotoshu Relief Committee (JSRC)
Dr. Hema Goonatilake, Seminar Co-Coordinator
Heinrich Böll Foundation
Dr. Peter Gyallay-Pap, Seminar Co-Coordinator
UNDP's Environmental Technical Advisory Programme (ETAP)

Seminar Secretariat

Buddhist Institute
Mr. Hak Thy, Seminar Co-Secretary
Mr. Yon Sovann, Seminar Co-Secretary
Ms. Ly Kimlin, Accountant
Ms. Hem Sokhouen, Assistant
Mr. Sim Vandy, Seminar Venue Coordinator

Seminar Venue

Center for Culture and Vipassana
Prof. Chheng Phon, Director
Un Tim, Secretary

6 pm	**Dinner**
7:30 to 9 pm	**Evening Programme** Video showing / Free time

Friday, 7 November

6 to 7 am	**Meditation** (optional)
7 am	**Breakfast**
	- Day of Reflection, Discussion, Reporting -
7:30 to 8:45 am	Prof. Padmasiri de Silva: A Summary of the Seminar-in-Progress and Identification of Issues for Discussion
9 to 11:30 am	Small Group Discussions
11:30 am	**Lunch**
1:30 to 3:50 pm	Small Group Reports / Discussions
	- Break 10 minutes -
4 to 5:30 pm	**Summary and Conclusions** Chair: Prof. Padmasiri de Silva
6 pm	**Dinner**
7:30 pm to 9 pm	**Evening Programme** Traditional Khmer Dance Performance introduced by Prof. Chheng Phon

Saturday, November 8

6 am to 7 am	**Meditation** (optional)
7 am	**Breakfast**
7:30 am	**Departure, Sightseeing** (optional)

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Rapporteurs:	Ms. Ruth Bottomley Ms. Elizabeth Weight
Translators:	Mr. Srey Chanta Mr. Chap Sotharith

Message from the Chairman of the Seminar Organizing Committee

It is my pleasant duty to welcome on behalf of the seminar organizing committee, our distinguished invitees, foreign guests, and participants from Cambodia.

It is a moment of pride for the Buddhist Institute to be able to play its historical role once again in the intellectual revival of Cambodia by hosting this regional seminar. It is a great pleasure to see a galaxy of eminent scholars and activists on the environment who have come together to embark on a regional task hitherto not attempted in this country. We hope and believe that all of us together will be able to come up with a white paper and proceedings that would contribute to conceptual work on the development of an environmental ethic in Southeast Asia, drawing theoretically on Buddhist and other traditional belief systems as well as on practical environmental initiatives in the region.

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with the Buddhist Institute, may I take this opportunity to say a few words about the history and the role of the Buddhist Institute. The Buddhist Institute, originally part of the Royal Library established in 1921, was founded in 1930, and remained until the civil war in the 1970s, as the premier center of learning, research, and dissemination on Buddhism and Cambodian culture. The Buddhist Institute's Tripitaka Commission completed the translation of the *Tripitaka*, or the Pali scriptures, into Khmer in 1969, making Cambodia the first country in the Buddhist world to complete a translation of the entire *Tripitaka* into a national language. The Institute's library contained an important research collection of over 40,000 volumes in languages such as Khmer, French, English, Siamese, Burmese, Sinhalese and Laotian. After the tragic recent events which beset our country, it was only in 1993 that the Ministry of Religious Affairs reorganized the Institute with the support of Japanese Sotoshu Relief Committee (JSRC) and the Heinrich Böll Foundation of Germany.

I would like to express our deep gratitude to His Majesty Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia, well as to the Environmental Technical Advisory Programme (ETAP) of the United Nations Development Programme, Heinrich Böll Foundation of Germany, the Canada Fund-Singapore, and the Japan Sotoshu Relief Committee (JSRC) for their sponsorship of this seminar.

Chhorn Iem
Under Secretary of State
Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs

Mr. Yi Thon (Cambodia): *The Role of Buddhist Wats and NGOs in Environmental Preservation in Cambodia*

Phramaha Jerm Suvaco (Thailand): *Buddhism and Natural Conservation in Thailand*

- Tea Break -

9:40 to 11:30 am — **Islamic Perspectives Panel**
Chair: Dr. William Collins, Center for Advanced Study

Prof. Zaini Ujang (Malaysia): Remarks

Mr. Zacharia Adam Osman (Cambodia): Remarks

Mr. Abdullah S. Zatkasyi, MA (Indonesia): *The Role of Pondok Pesantren in Developing Community Environment*

11:30 am — **Lunch**

1:30 to 3:30 pm — **Highland / Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives Panel**
Chair: Dr. Supote Prasertsri, UNESCO (Cambodia)

Sr. Rosario B. Battung (Philippines): *Cherish and Nurture the Life Breath: Indigenous and Feminist Ecological Ethics in the Philippines*

Mr. Chupinich Ketmanee (Thailand): *A Comparison of Karen and Hmong Environmental Values*

Mr. Gordon Paterson (Cambodia): *Environmental Initiatives in Northeast Cambodia*

- Tea Break -

3:45 to 5:30 pm — **Buddhist Perspectives Panel II**
Chair: Dr. Neth Barom, Vice-Rector, Royal University of Phnom Penh

Ven.Yos Hut Khemacaro (Cambodia): *Causes and Effects of the Environmental Crisis*

Dr. Souroth Senekhamphone (Laos): Remarks

Ms. Phum Vichet (Cambodia): *Ethical Aspects of Cambodia's National Environment Plan*

Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (Thailand): *Buddhist Ethics: People and Nature*

- Break 10 minutes -

9:30 am — Message at Formal Opening of Seminar from His Majesty the King Norodom Sihanouk

Keynote address by
Prof. Padmasiri de Silva, Department of Philosophy, Monash University, Australia: *Buddhist Perspectives on the Environmental Crisis*

11:30 am — Lunch

2 to 3:30 pm — **Panel: Buddhist Perspectives on the Environment and the Environmental Crisis**
Chair: Dr. Hema Goonatilake, Heinrich Böll Foundation

Ven. Dr. Thich Chon Thien (Vietnam): *A Buddhist Concept of the Environment and Environmental Ethics*

Ven. Dr. Rewata Dhamma (Myanmar / UK): *The Human Environmental Crisis from a Buddhist Perspective*

Ven. Dr. Melpitiye Wimalakitti (Sri Lanka): *Buddhist Perspectives on the Natural and Social Environment*

- Break 10 minutes -

3:45 to 5:30 pm — **Roundtable and Plenary Discussion**
Prof. Padmasiri de Silva and panelists

6 pm — Dinner

7:30 to 9:00 pm — **Evening Programme:**
Discussion with Ven. Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda
Free time / Video showing

Thursday, November 6

6 to 7 am — Meditation (optional)

7 am — Breakfast

7:30 to 9:20 am — **Buddhist Perspectives Panel I**
Chair: Dr. Peter Gyallay-Pap, UNDP/ETAP

Seminar Introduction

Twenty-five years ago, the first United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden declared that "to defend and improve the environment for present and future generations has become an imperative goal for mankind." Five years ago, governments at the Rio '92 Earth Summit agreed to implement programmes to protect the global environment. Today, environmental degradation continues to be a major problem in Southeast Asia and around the world as governments have been unable to act in a decisive and meaningful way. Since the 1972 Stockholm conference, it has become evident that reducing pollution, planting trees, recycling, and other environmental protection measures, while vital and necessary, have not been sufficient. It has also become evident that a corresponding need exists for a change or transformation in our relationship with the Earth. Preserving the environment for present and future generations needs a rationale and justification that is broader and deeper than the narrow confines of human self-interests.

A need exists to develop a holistic[1], ecology[2]- based environmental ethics based in part on the indigenous and traditional belief systems and cultures of peoples in the regions of the world. The organizers of this scholarly seminar on an environmental ethic for Southeast Asia hope that by drawing on the conceptual systems of Buddhism, Islam, and the indigenous and highland peoples, it will assist educators, policy-makers, businessmen, academics, media personnel, and others in providing greater meaning and emphasis to environmental concerns – as a way of life.

The purpose of the seminar is to contribute to conceptual work on the development of a spiritual social ethic on the environment in Southeast Asia, drawing on sources such as religious scriptures and the experiences and perspectives of environmental initiatives in the region inspired by Buddhist and other belief systems. The objective is to bring together scholars and scholarly environmental activists from diverse religious cultures to share their thoughts and experiences as a means toward articulating an environmental ethic relevant to the peoples and cultures of the region. There has been intense scholarly discussion and debate in recent years, both globally and in the region, on the question of religious and spiritual sources for an environmental ethics. This seminar hopes to contribute a synthesis of the thinking and experiences on this subject by those involved in the region.

Another seminar objective is to document and disseminate the seminar results in the form of: seminar proceedings in English, Khmer; a digest white paper directed at the media, policy-makers and other interested parties; and a video short in English and Khmer for broadcast and use as an educational tool. Outcomes not included specifically within the scope (and budget) of this seminar are translation and dissemination of the proceedings, white paper, and video into the languages of other Southeast Asian countries; using and distilling seminar results to formulate curricula and materials for

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[1] An approach emphasising the importance and inter-relatedness of the environment as whole (human-natural-cultural) and the interdependence of its parts.

[2] Ecology and environment are not the same thing. Ecology is a biological science term connoting the study of relationships of living organisms with each other and with their environment. The environment is the aggregate of external conditions ("surroundings") that influence the life of an individual organism or population.

formal and non-formal education, including monk education (where applicable) and community-based workshops and initiatives; influence public opinion and policy through print, broadcast, and electronic media in other countries; engage policymakers by disseminating white paper through meetings.

The seminar is will be conducted over a three-day period at a meditation retreat, the Center for Culture and Vipassana, near Phnom Penh for approximately 50 participants representing nearly all Southeast Asia countries. As a regional event, the seminar will be conducted in English with simultaneous translation into/from Khmer provided. Under the patronage of the Cambodian Buddhist clergy, the seminar is organised by the Buddhist Institute. Since the 1930s, the Buddhist Institute has been in the forefront of intellectual, cultural, and religious research and change in Cambodia. Honorary patrons of the seminar are the two Supreme Patriarchs of Cambodia, Samdech Sanghareach Tep Vong and Samdech Sanghareach Bour Kry as well as Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda. Honorary Co-Chairs of the seminar are Ven. Yos Hut Khemacaro and Ven. Nhim Kim Teng, both of whom, with Ven. Ghosananda, have made contributions to a socially-engaged Buddhism in Cambodia in the areas of human rights, environmental preservation, and peace.

The Organising Committee is chaired by H.E. Chhorn Iem, Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Religious Affairs responsible for the semi-autonomous Buddhist Institute. The committee consists of governmental and non-governmental organisations, both local and international. Technical and financial support has being provided by UNDP's Environmental Technical Advisory Programme (ETAP) and the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF), which represents the Green party of the Federal Republic of Germany. Organising committee members Dr. Hema Goonatilake, country representative of the HBF, which assists the Buddhist Institute, and Dr. Peter Gyallay-Pap, environmental educational advisor at UNDP/ETAP, are co-coordinators of the seminar. For a complete listing of Patrons and members of the Organising Committee and Secretariat, refer to the inside back cover of this Programme.

Programme

Tuesday, 4 November

2 to 6 pm	**Arrival and Registration**
6 pm	**Dinner**
7:30 to 9 pm	**Evening Programme** Welcome remarks by Prof. Chheng Phon, Director, Center for Culture & Vipassana Free time / Video showing

Wednesday, 5 November

6 to 7 am	**Meditation** (optional)
7 am	**Breakfast**
8:30 am	**Opening Ceremony** The chanting of monks' blessings Welcome remarks by the Chairman of Organizing Committee His Excellency Chhorn Iem Under-Secretary of State Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs Remarks by Ms. Susanne Baumann Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of Germany Remarks by His Excellency Mr. H. Gordon Longmuir Ambassador of Canada Remarks by His Excellency Mr. Paul Matthews Resident Representative United Nations Development Programme Remarks by His Excellency Mr. Hean Vanniroth Secretary of State Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs Remarks by His Excellency Dr. Mok Mareth Minister Ministry of Environment