

Report: INEB Biennial Conference 2013

Inter-Faith Dialogue for Peace and Sustainability

Venue: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dates: October 27 to November 5, 2013

Attendance: Over 200 people attended the various events

1. Executive Summary - The Need for a Inter-faith Dialogue

Background

The Biennial Conference of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) was held for the first time outside a Buddhist country, in a majority Muslim country. This was significant and inline the theme of Inter-Faith Dialogue for Peace Sustainability.

Prior to the conference the key organizing committee members made a conscious decision to give attention to the Buddhist-Muslim interfaith relations. On 16th June 2013, the International Network of Engagement Buddhists (INEB), the International Movement for a Just World (JUST) and Religions for Peace (RfP) organized a consultative meeting on “Contemporary Issues in Buddhist- Muslim Relations in South and SouthEast Asia” at Rissho Kosei- Kai, Bangkok Dharma Centre, Bangkok, Thailand in partnership with American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and Rissho Kosei- kai in Bangkok¹.

The outcome of this consultative meeting was the formation of an informal Buddhist-Muslim forum that lead the engagement with the various Muslim and governmental organizations in Malaysia in preparations for the conference.

With this background, INEB and the Buddhist-Muslim Forum led the way to explore opportunities for increased understanding and engagement with the majority Muslim community, in particular and other religions in general.

¹ <http://www.buddhistmuslimforum.org/p/about-bmf.html>

2. Pre-conference Activities

A series of pre-conference activities consisted of study tours and dialogues were held to provide a background to interfaith relations, taking Malaysia as an example. The activities as follows:

- a. **October 30, 2013.** Dialogue with the **Department of National Unity and Integration**², Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya.

In this dialogue the Director General of the Department shared integration strategies and activities to ensure the different communities³ in Malaysia. Strains in inter-communal relations were seen and the Department share special preventive measures such as community relations index and monitoring were introduced.

- b. **October 30-31, 2013.** Visit to Malacca - a city with strong historical heritage was earliest entreport in the region and the focal point for the different religion's entry into the country. The delegates visited the following places:

- i. (Host) **Seck Kia Eenh Buddhist Temple**⁴. Meeting and dialogues were held with the Committee Members. Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, gave a talk on Engaged Buddhism to the public.
- ii. **Cheng Hoon Teng Temple**⁵. Founded in Reported to be the first (Chinese) Buddhist temple. Delegates were given a tour and briefing on the founding of the temples.
- iii. **Masjid Kampung Keling**⁶ and **Masjid Kampung Hulu**⁷ Mosques. They are the oldest mosques in Malaysia. The Imam of the mosque hosted the delegates, gave a talk on the history and shared how cultures were intertwined and a sharing common resources.

The visit to Malacca provided insights into the early days during 15th century when the different religious were bought here mainly by the merchant. Driven by a common goal of economic sustainability, religion provided spiritual and emotional relief.

One learning important lesson from this study tour is that inter-faith relations can be better when faiths come together in when **common social issue** are addressed.

- c. November 1, 2013. **Buddhist-Muslim Forum at the Institute of Islamic Understanding**⁸ (**IKIM**), Malaysia. This forum was the most important and significant engagement as part of

² <http://www.jpnin.gov.my>

³ Malaysia is a multicultural and multiconfessional country. As of the 2010 Population and Housing Census, 61.3 percent of the population practices Islam; 19.8 percent Buddhism; 9.2 percent Christianity; 6.3 percent Hinduism; and 1.3 percent traditional Chinese religions. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Malaysia

⁴ <http://www.ske.my>

⁵ <http://www.chenghoonteng.org.my>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kampung_Kling_Mosque

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kampung_Hulu_Mosque

⁸ <http://www.ikim.gov.my/index.php/en/>

the INEB Conference. An organization supported by the Malaysian government, IKIM focuses on understanding of Islamic teaching. In recent years, it has embarked on selected interfaith initiatives.

In conjunction with the INEB Conference 2013, IKIM hosted, for the **first time**, an international dialogue on the theme of Peace and Sustainability. The forum was very well attended by over 200 people, including the delegates of the INEB conference, government officials and leaders from the various religions.



A video of the forum proceeding is available [HERE](#)

Strategic Engagement. The participation with IKIM was an important milestone in INEB's interfaith initiatives. The need to find collaboration touch-points and to engage in strategic engagement with governmental organizations is necessary and can help address issues, especially inter-faith conflicts.

d. October 27-31, 2013. **Interfaith Awareness Youth Camp** was held at the Than Hsiang Kalyana Mitra Center, Pajam, Selangor

60 youths from various faiths in the region participated in this five-day camp. The objectives of the youth camp are to create awareness about global issues of common concern and shared values were met.

3. Conference Proper, Buddhist Maha Vihara (Brickfields Kuala Lumpur)

November 2-4, 2013

The conference began with address by the Chief Monk of The Buddhist Maha Vihara (BMV), Venerable Dhammaratana Maha Nayaka Thera followed by welcome remarks from Dr Harsha Kumara Navaratne, Chair of INEB Executive Committee.

Keynote 1: Is Peace Possible.

The first keynote was by **Maung Zarni**. A Burmese multiculturalist & Visiting Fellow (2011-15), London School of Economics. Maung set the tone when he expressed concerns based on experiences of the conflict in Myanmar, particularly in Rakkhine state.

A dialogue among Ven. Paisal Visalo (Siam-Thailand), Dharmachari Lokamitra (India), Charlito "Kaloy" Manlupig (Philippines), YB Khalid Abdul Samad (Member of Parliament, Malaysia). The session was moderated by Veronica Pedrosa, Al Jazeera Media

Different views were expressed and all agreed that peace is possible.

Keynote 2: Is Sustainability Possible

The second keynote was delivered **Dr. Chamniern Vorratnchaiphan**, from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This was followed by a dialog with the following panelists. Ven. Chao Hwei (Taiwan), Henrique de Freitas (Brazil), Tengku Ahmad Hazri (Malaysia), Hacharan Singh (Malaysia), Amanda Kiessel (Sri Lanka/USA) and moderated by Rev. Masazumi Okano (Japan)

This keynote raised pertinent issues pertaining to social and environmental sustainability. Discussion highlighted social issues that needs to be strongly addressed. The panel felt that more effort is need to be focused to look deeper into these issues. It is also imperative that social and environmental issues needs to be looked at in detail.

Parallel Sessions: Sustainability

A total of 13 parallel sessions were held over 2 days (Nov 2-3) to discuss in depth the following topics:

1. Planet, People and Profit: Business for a New Economy
2. Tradition and Modernity: Spirituality and Religion in a Changing World
3. Loneliness, Illness and Death: Spiritual Guidance for Changing Times
4. Faith, Climate and Ecology: Inter-faith Response to Climate Change
5. Eating is a Religious Act: Mindfulness and Food Systems
6. Politics, Governance and Policies

7. The Pursuit of Happiness: Policy of Wellbeing and “Gross National Happiness”
8. Half the sky: Women in Society
9. Yuppie, Hippie, Dropout: Young Leaders Making New Paths
10. Conflict & Social Transformation
11. Responses to Nuclear and Alternative Energy
12. Spiritual Arts
13. It’s a Child’s World. Keep It! (Discourse on Child to Higher Education)



World Cafe: Extended discussions / Additional Topics to be discussed

In order to facilitate the coverage of topics raised by delegates and participants. The following were the key topics formed to develop into further action.

1. Myanmar and conflict resolution process
2. Consumerism
3. Gender Issues: Position of Women
4. Sutta Study and its importance
5. Bangladesh: Challenges of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

Closing remarks by Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, President of International Movement for a Just World (JUST) & *Sulak Sivaraksa*, Founder and Co-Chair of INEB Advisory Committee delivered the closing remarks.

Dr Harsha Kumara Navaratne, Chair of INEB Executive Committee announced the venue of the 2015 INEB Conference to be in Sri Lanka

Cultural Activities in the form of a cultural show and a separate tea ceremony was held to bring people closer together and to build stronger *kalyana mitra*.

4. Conference Sidelines

Conflict Resolution Myanmar. Throughout the conference proper delegate and contacts from the various groups (some are based in Kuala Lumpur). Discussions were held on almost a daily to develop opportunities to advance peace and cooperation in Myanmar.

One notable outcome is the is the recreation of a **Fact-Finding Commission on Relations Between Buddhist and Muslims in Myanmar.**

4. Conference Media and Social Media

Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGnQSBzJpIDJX6sQWG>

Pictures:

<https://flic.kr/s/aHsk6WD1sL>

<https://flic.kr/s/aHsk6q9ARq>

<https://flic.kr/s/aHsk72BEu6>

5. Closing reflections

The INEB conference in Malaysia concluded successful with a few key milestone. It is the first INEB Conference in a non-Buddhist majority country. It is also the first time that a clear engagement with mainstream Muslim community has developed in a positive way.

With over 40% each of Buddhists and Muslims in ASEAN, maintaining a strong and positive

relationship would be critical to ensure peace and stability in the region. The sustainability agenda articulated in this conference will help evolve this into something significant,

6. Acknowledgements

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1. International Movement for a Just World (JUST)
2. Persatuan Penganut Buddha BODHI
3. Buddhist Maha Vihara (BMV)
4. Malaysian Network of Engaged Buddhists (MNEB)
5. Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM)
6. Than Hsiang Kalyana Mitra Center, Pajam
7. Niwano Peace Foundation
8. Buddhist Solidarity for Reform
9. American Friends Service Committee
10. Sewalanka Foundation
11. JUNGTO Society
12. MMG
13. Sathirakoses-Nagapradeepa Foundation

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