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PRESS CENTER**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK**

THE BUDDHA APPEARED IN THE WORLD FOR THE PEACE AND HAPPINESS OF MANY, THE WELFARE AND JOY OF THE GODS AND HUMANS

THE FIFTH UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK CELEBRATIONS

May 13-17, 2008, National Conference Center , Hà Nội, Việt Nam

THE BUDDHA APPEARED IN THE WORLD FOR THE PEACE AND HAPPINESS OF MANY, THE WELFARE AND JOY OF THE GODS AND HUMANS**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK**

The United Nations Vesak commemorates the thrice sacred events of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away. It is officially known as the United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV). It is a worldwide cultural celebration that was started and organized by the United Nations (UN) to venerate the Buddha as a great cultural and spiritual sage of mankind. The objective of the celebration is to venerate the moral and cultural values, the thoughts of peace, equality and non-violence of the Buddha and to create mutual respect and understanding among countries and peoples over the whole world.

Over 600 Buddhist delegations worldwide with about 5,000 representatives coming from 90 countries will meet and share, in the spirit of compassion and wisdom, the solutions to Buddhist works and worldly affairs that every Buddhist is concerned with and needs to change and transform in social life.

HISTORY OF THE UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK

On December 15, 1999, based on the proposal of 34 countries, the UN General Assembly had officially recognized the UN Day of Vesak as a worldwide cultural and religious celebration that will be organized every year at the UN Headquarters in New York, USA and at UN worldwide centers (Resolution No. A/RES/54/115 was officially promulgated on February 8, 2000).

In 2000, the first UNDV was organized at the UN Headquarters in New York . Since then, UN has organized nine times, including five times by the Buddhist community, four times in Thailand (2004-2007) and this year in Vietnam (2008).

(1) The First UNDV and the International Buddhist Conference were organized in May 2004 at the World Buddhist Center Buddhamonthon, Bangkok .

(2) The Second UNDV was organized from May 18 through 21, 2005 in Thailand . The main Vesak day (the 15th of April, lunar calendar) occurred on May 22, 2005.

(3) The Third UNDV was organized from May 7 through 10, 2006 in Thailand . The main Vesak day (the 15th of April, lunar calendar) occurred on May 5, 2006.

(4) The Fourth UNDV was organized from May 26 through 29, 2007 in Thailand . The main Vesak day (the 15th of April, lunar calendar) occurred on May 31, 2007.

(5) The Fifth UNDV will be organized from May 13 through 17, 2008 at the National Conference Center , Hà Nội, Việt Nam .

UNDV MESSAGES

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Admired by the beautiful spirituality, the instructions of humane morality and the principle of peace, as well as the great contributions of Buddhism to mankind, the UN Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan and Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, have praised on several occasions the Buddha and the valuable contributions from Buddhism as follow:

"The Buddha's message was one of peace and compassion, but also one of mindfulness - of being fully aware of oneself, one's actions and the world in which one lives. That message is one that should be taken seriously by all concerned about the direction and fate of humankind" (from UN Message, 2003).

"Let us remember that whatever our origin, race, culture or belief, we share the same home -- a small, single planet on which we are bound to live together. Let us resolve to work together towards the common good and the harmonious and peaceful coexistence of all peoples of the world" (from UN Message, 2005).

"For more than 2,500 years, the Buddha's teachings continued to guide and give meaning to the lives of millions of people across the world. This annual observance provides his followers with an opportunity to reaffirm their devotion to those ideals, and to highlight the principles of compassion, understanding and peace preached by the Buddha" (from UN Message, 2007).

THE UN DAY OF VESAK IN VIỆT NAM

LOCATION AND TIME

Sharing the joy with the peoples and Buddhists in the world, Việt Nam is honored this year to be the host of the UNDV at the National Conference Center in the capital of Hà Nội, from May 13-17, 2008 (corresponding to Lunar calendar April 9-13 in the Year of the Rat).

The Government of the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam , together with the International Organizing Committee (IOC), the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha and the National Coordinating Council, will coordinate and organize this celebration.

MAIN THEME and CONFERENCE

The main theme of the 2008 UNDV celebration and workshops will be 'Buddhist Contributions to Building a Just, Democratic and Civil Society.'

The workshops will have six major topics and a symposium as follow:

- 1) **Role of Buddhism in preventing war.**
- 2) **Buddhist contribution to social justice.**
- 3) **Engaged Buddhism and development.**
- 4) **Care for the environment: Buddhist response to climate change.**
- 5) **Family problems and Buddhist response.**
- 6) **Buddhist education: continuity and progress.**
- 7) **Symposium on Buddhism in the digital age.**

FOUR ASPECTS

The 2008 UNDV is manifested through the following four aspects:

a) Religious Aspect: This is an opportunity to establish religious bridges and share experiences in Buddhist affairs and practice from worldwide Buddhist Sangha and organizations; increase, maintain and cooperate for

development to bring to social life the religious values, peace, friendliness and happiness. There will be two retreats by under the leadership of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh: one for Buddhist families; this represents a version of engaged Buddhism, with characteristics that are special to Vietnamese Buddhism and not existing in other Buddhist countries; and the second for foreigners and local Vietnamese before and after the Vesak celebration.

b) Cultural Aspect: It is also an international religious and cultural day that will create interaction and exchange of Buddhist cultural values from various countries; at the same time it will call for conservation and development of cultural heritage worldwide, including Buddhist cultural heritage, at the national and international levels.

Cultural activities will be organized not only in the capital Hà Nội but also in Hue, Binh Duong (Dai Nam tourist site), Hochiminh city, Kien Giang, Baria-Vung Tau, Dong Nai and throughout the districts, towns and provinces according to local capabilities such as exhibits of Buddhist culture and arts; cultural fairs (200 booths in Hanoi); food fairs; parade of decorated vehicles (52 vehicles in Hanoi and 10 to 80 in other provinces); release of lanterns on rivers and in the air; hanging of flags, banners, lanterns, in particular on May 16th with the participation of 20,000 people; release of air balloons; sending UNDV congratulatory cards ...

c) Educational Aspect: The major themes of the scientific workshops on the Buddhist contributions to human life are the main focus of the UNDV, because they decide the values of the content and the practical contributions of the celebration. The main theme of the celebration is tied to the traditions and characteristics of the Vietnamese culture and Vietnamese Buddhism, and certifies the contributions of the country and Vietnamese Buddhism to the values of concern to the United Nations.

d) Tourism Aspect: UNDV official tours include those to Trúc Lâm Yên Tử in Quảng Ninh Province and Bái Đính Pagoda in Ninh Bình Province.

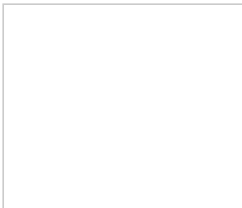
Bai Dinh Mountain is about 15 km from Ninh Binh commune. It takes climbing 300 steps up to the top of the Voi Phuc (Obeying Elephant) Mountain with the worship of the red-face Master, and next is Sang Cave (or Buddha Cave) where Buddha is worshipped. According to legend, Zen Master Nguyen Minh Thong in the Ly Dynasty (11th-13th century) came to Bai Dinh Mountain to find medicinal herbs and found this grotto. He then converted it into a pagoda. Opposite Sang Cave (Morning Cave) is Toi Cave (Evening Cave) that consists of seven small caves intercommunicating with each other with the worship of Queen Thuong Ngan.

A general of Tay Son used to make the celebration of sacrifice to the flag at Bai Dinh Mountain before dispatching troops to Thang Long in the Spring campaign of 1789 against the Chinese invaders. During the war of American Resistance, it was used to store weapon and food for the soldiers. Therefore, Bai Dinh Mountain-Pagoda (old) was recognized as a historical-cultural relic of national rank in 1997.

Four statues - three bronze Tam The statues and one Great Buddha Sakyamuni statue - are the pride of Bai Dinh pagoda. Each statue of the Past, Present and Future Buddhas weighs 50 tons and is 12m high. The Great Buddha Sakyamuni statue is 16m high and weighs 100 tons.

A "great bell" weighting 60 tons was casted and located on the hilltop on the way to the main sanctuary. Astonishingly is nothing less than is the "collection" of 500 Arhat statues on the hill to the right of Dharma Temple. The 500 Arhat statues are 2.3m high and carved from Ninh Binh stone.

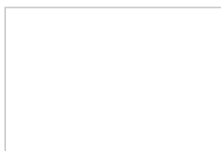
YEN TU MOUNTAIN



Yen Tu Mountain (An Tử sơn 安子山, 1.068 m) belongs to Thuong Yen Cong commune, Uong Bi Town, Quang Ninh Province . Yen Tu Mountain boasts about its rich historical heritage and therefore it was named "Vietnam Buddhism ancestral land". The peak of the mountain is covered by clouds all year round so the former inhabitants used to call it Bach Van Son (White Cloud Mountain).

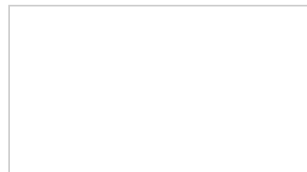


Yen Tu became the Buddhist Center after King Tran Nhan Tong who gave up his throne to become a Buddhist monk and established a Sect of Buddhism that is characteristic for Vietnam, the Truc Lam Yen Tu meditation Sect, and became the first Patriarch with the religious name Dieu Ngu Giac Hoang Tran Nhan Tong (調御覺皇陳仁宗, 1258-1308). He had built hundreds of small and big works on Yen Tu Mountain which became places for leading religious activities, *Sutra* translating and preaching. After he died, the successor of this Zen sect was Phap Loa Dong Kien Cuong (法螺同堅剛, 1284-1330), the second Patriarch of Truc Lam sect.



Ha Long Bay (Vietnamese: Vịnh Hạ Long) is a UNESCO World Heritage site located in Quảng Ninh province, North Vietnam . The bay features thousands of limestone karsts and isles in various sizes and shapes

Most of the islands on Ha Long Bay were formed over 500 million years ago, and are massed in the southeast and southwest. The schist islands scattered in the southeast have an average height of between 50-200m, and have a rich covering of flora.



There are hundreds of beautiful caves of different shapes and sizes, including many famous names such as Thien Cung, Dau Go, Sung Sot, Tam Cung and Bo Nau. Some of them are archaeological sites retaining tangible archaeological evidence, such as Dau Go, Bo Nau, Sung Sot, Soi Nhu, Tien Long, Me Cung, and Trinh Nu caves.

Moreover, there are tours before and after the UNDV. These cultural and spiritual tours are activities that highlight the celebration and popularize the images of Vietnamese Buddhism, especially the people of a Việt Nam that is stable, rich, beautiful and friendly.

UPCOMING RECORDS: During the UN Day of Vesak 2008 some records will be established:

1. Biggest Buddhist Workshops having 5,000 participants from 600 international delegations from over 80 countries;
2. Largest vegetarian group of 5,000 persons
3. **The world biggest air balloon of Buddha Birthday anniversary**
4. Buddhist flag with largest number of signatures
5. Largest number of boddhi tree planting ceremony
6. **globe balloon having largest number of international flags**
7. **theatrical piece about the Buddha's life with the largest number of free DVD distribution**

8. the Vietnam largest candle light ceremony praying for World Peace with 20,000 participants from over 80 countries

9. Biggest symphony concert in Vietnam with 500 musicians.

UNDV PROGRAM

May 12-13, 2008: arrival and welcoming the Vietnamese and international delegates.

May 14: Opening Ceremony with the attendance of the President of Việt Nam, the Prime Minister of Việt Nam, the UN Representative, foreign embassies, general consulates, diplomatic delegations, Supreme Patriarch and Executive President of the Vietnamese Sangha Council, International and Vietnamese Buddhist delegations. Musical dances representative of the culture of Việt Nam and Vietnamese Buddhism will start at 1900 PM.

May 15: International Buddhist workshops and symposium. The Vietnamese traditional and musical opera "Life of the Buddha" will be presented at 1900 PM.

May 16: Closing Ceremony, the Hà Nội Declaration, Buddhist symphony, candlelit prayers for world peace and happiness.

May 17: Cultural and religious tours

VISITING DIGNITARIES

The 2008 UNDV is honored with the attendance of Vietnamese and foreign leaders: UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, President Nguyễn Minh Triết, Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng, ambassadors, diplomats, Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh, IOC Founding President Most Ven. Dharmakosajarn and Most Ven. Thích Giác Nhiên. From the Vietnamese Sangha, there will be Supreme Patriarch Thích Phổ Tuệ, President of the Executive Council Most Ven. Thích Trí Tịnh and other dignitaries in the Supreme Council and the Executive Council. International Buddhist dignitaries include the Supreme Patriarchs of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Kampuchia and Bangladesh, and executive officers of international Buddhist organizations.

OFFICIAL AND SELF-PAID DELEGATES

Official Delegates: The Organizing Committee (OC) will provide financial sponsorship (airfare roundtrip tickets, hotel, meals, transportation) from May 13 through 18, 2008 according to the scheduled program.

Foreign Self-Paid Delegates and Foreign Observers: Pay own roundtrip airfares. Transportation from/to the airport and hotel to be arranged by the Organizing Committee during the entire stay (costs are published on the website www.vesakday2008.com). Other services such as meals and transportation to/from the hotel from/to the National Conference Center will be provided by the Organizing Committee.

Domestic Self-Paid Delegates and Domestic Observers: Roundtrip airfares, transportation from/to the airport and hotel will be arranged by the Organizing Committee (self-paid costs are published on the website www.vesakday2008.com). Other services such as meals and transportation to/from the hotel from/to the National Conference Center will be provided by the Organizing Committee.

REGISTRATION PROCEDURES

Let us together return and attend the great worldwide celebration. Let us together vow that the UNDV spirit will actually bring happiness, peace and friendliness to humankind.

Domestic Monastics and Lay Disciples: Register with the Executive Council of the local province/district using Registration Form 1A and 1B, send to Office 1/VP1 (northern provinces), Office 2/VP2 (southern provinces) or email to IOC office: unvesakday2008@vbu.edu.vn

Overseas Vietnamese Monastics and Lay Disciples: Register with Thư Viện Hoa Sen (thuvienhoasen@yahoo.com and <http://www.thuvienhoasen.org>)

Payment Office: Office 1/VP1, Office 2/VP2 and IOC Office. Payment collectors will be designated by the National Coordinating Committee.


NECESSARY CONTACTS


- **Office of International Organizing Committee (IOC): Vietnamese Buddhist University, Hồ Chí Minh City, 750 Nguyễn Kiệm, Phú Nhuận District, Hồ Chí Minh City and National Convention Center, Room 254, Pham Hung street, My Dinh district, Tu Liem ward, Hanoi. Tel. (84-8)8452-707 and 84- 4.2490036 - 4.2490036; Mobile 0908-153-160 (Ven. Nhật Từ) or 0937-103-910 (Ven. Giác Hoàng) or 0903-342-338 (Ven. Đồng Ấn). Fax: (84-8)-844-3416. Email: unvesakday2008@vbu.edu.vn Website: www.vesakday2008.com**

(VP1), Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha: Quán Sứ Pagoda, 73 Quán Sứ, Hà Nội. Tel. (04)9422427. Mobile : 0912-019-747.

(VP2), Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha: Quảng Đức Zen Institute, 294 Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa, District 3, Hồ Chí Minh City. Tel. (08)-848-3080. Mobile : 0983-094-129 (Most Ven. Tấn Đạt)

Government Religious Affairs Committee: 53 Tràng Thi, Hà Nội. Tel. (04)-825-6300. Mobile : 0918-763-798 (Mr. Bùi Hữu Dược) or 0989-998-223 (Mr. Đặng Tài Tính).

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