Emory University’s States at Regional Risk Project to Host Major International Conference in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Mongolians After Socialism:
Economic Aspiration, Political Development, and Cultural Identity

On June 27-29, 2011, Emory University’s States at Regional Risk project and The Open Society Forum of Mongolia (a branch of the Soros Foundation) will host a major international conference on the future of Mongolia and ethnic Mongolians within Inner Asia. The conference takes place in the Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar. Mongolia is of key cultural and strategic significance not only as a geographic fulcrum point between Russia and China but because its extensive natural resource and mineral deposits now make it one of the fastest-growing national economies in the world. Previously part of the Soviet Union, Mongolia has become a robust multi-party democracy since gaining independence during the late 1980s. The present conference, the first of its kind for Emory in this world region, draws on support from the US Embassy in Mongolia and the Rubin Foundation in New York, and is co-organized by Dr. Richard Taupier, Associate Director of Research Development at The University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The major project funder of the States at Regional Risk Program, now in its fourth year, is the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

“Mongolians After Socialism” brings together 35 distinguished international scholars and important Mongolian government officials, policy makers, religious leaders and members of civil society to consider the relationships between contemporary Mongolian political events, economic growth, environmental issues, and cultural and spiritual identity as Mongolia continues to vividly redefine
itself in the aftermath of more than 70 years of Soviet domination. During three days of intensive presentations and discussions, participants will examine how these factors interact dynamically to inform current trajectories of Mongolian development and statehood – and how those who engage and manage this development can benefit from an enlarged perspective that connects rather than separates political, economic, and cultural or religious features.

The conference focuses on people in their social and cultural context, including the significance of long-standing Buddhist traditions shared among ethnic Mongolians in a post-socialist environment. Because Mongolians cross national borders in contemporary as well as in historic identity, the conference is regional in focus and includes Mongolian perspectives from neighboring areas such as The Republic of Buryatia and the more distant Republic of Kalmykia. Proceedings are being held jointly in English and Mongolian, with simultaneous translation throughout.

Post-socialist Mongolia is distinctive, among other things, for its proactive and progressive approaches to sociocultural, economic, and political transition in the central and east Asian regional context. In this sense, Mongolia is a case example of how “weak” or “fragile” states that have undergone political and socio-cultural trauma can become stronger and more robust. It also pointedly highlights the range of competing forces at play during this transition, both internally and with respect to regional and world order.

Under the directorship of Bruce M. Knauft, Emory S. C. Dobbs Professor of Anthropology, the broader States at Regional Risk (SARR) project addresses the causes and conditions of state instability, civil strife, and recovery in five major world areas: West Africa, East Africa, Inner Asia, the Himalayas, and the northern Andes in South America. Through organizing and convening conferences and workshops, SARR creates new bridges of dialogue and understanding among policy makers, humanitarian practitioners, and international scholars. The project is particularly distinctive in holding its conferences in key cities in the respective world areas themselves. This greatly facilitates participation and dialogue among national and regional constitutions in these key parts of the world. Previous SARR conferences and workshops have been held in Monrovia, Liberia; Bujumbura, Burundi; three cities in Eastern Congo (DRC), and Quito, Ecuador.

More information about the SARR project and “Mongolians After Socialism,” including the conference statement, participants, and presentations, is available on the SARR website at www.sarr.emory.edu.