

Emory's States at Regional Risk Project (SARR) Facilitates "Lumbini Declaration" – A Declaration of Religious and Social Rights in Nepal by Tibetan Buddhists from across the Himalayas

We are pleased to announce an important declaration supported unanimously at the conclusion of a large international gathering of eminent Trans-Himalayan Buddhist leaders, policy makers, scholars, and civil society leaders at Lumbini, Nepal on November 23-24, 2011.

The First International Conference on Trans-Himalayan Buddhism included seventeen members of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal (MPs), major present and past members of government from both India and Nepal, eleven Buddhist Tulkus and Rinpoches, Western scholars of Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism, and many of the most eminent Buddhist scholars from the Himalayan region. Senior Buddhist leaders from Nepal, India, Mongolia, Russia, and Bhutan participated, and the Gaden Tripa -- the spiritual leader of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism – gave the keynote address. The conference thus included active participation by senior representatives across the entire free Himalayas, convened at the birthplace of Buddha Shakyamuni in southern Nepal. His Excellency Vijay Kumar Gachhadhar, the Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal, gave opening remarks.

The Declaration of this gathering emerged during two days of intense presentations and open discussion of diverse points of view concerning the following issues, among others:

-The shared history of Trans-Himalayan Buddhism as strongly rooted in the Nalanda tradition. Participants emphasized how this spiritual and intellectual tradition of deep scholarship and textual study, originating in Nalanda University, which housed some ten thousand students and faculty during the second half of the first millennium CE, continues to provide an enduring unity to Buddhism as it has spread

throughout the Himalayas and as it continues to thrive in all free countries of the region.

-The challenges now faced by Trans-Himalayan Buddhism in the region were also seriously and openly addressed, including: problems of economic hardship, political pressure or repression, and demographic stress posed by larger adjacent non-Buddhist populations. Special emphasis was placed on the key importance of education, both modern education for Buddhist peoples and education in the Tibetan or Bhoti language. It was stressed by the Gaden Tripa and others that Bhoti language in its original form is vital to enabling and encouraging people to understand the teachings and of and commentaries about Shakyamuni Buddha at both basic and advanced levels of understanding.

-The support needs of monks and lamas was a focus of discussion, including support for social outreach in the civil population that draws upon but also goes beyond traditional ritual services and celebrations.

-The key importance of women in Buddhism was emphasized, both in the practical conveyance of Buddhist teaching and the importance of women as conduits, disseminators, and key contributors to Buddhism at the highest levels, both historically and in the present. The challenges that women face both as nuns and as lay practitioners were emphasized as important and needing to be overcome if Buddhism in the Nalanda-Tibetan tradition is to grow and reach its potential in the populations that span the Himalayan region and beyond.

-It was forcefully agreed that the cultural and spiritual potential and growth of Buddhism in the compassionate Nalanda-Tibetan tradition does not now depend on issues of political status or state independence but rather on cultural and religious rights as afforded by secular state and local governments in the countries where Buddhist populations now live. Cultural, religious, and civic rights afford a key practical way forward for the growth and development of Nalanda-Tibetan Buddhism across the Himalayas. This also allows social, spiritual, cultural, and moral integration across a large region, transcending differences of national or specific political affiliation.

In conclusion, the conference members unanimously supported a declaration of principles for the future growth of Trans-Himalayan Buddhism. This final declaration was read by Kenpo Nyima Dorje, Chair of the Buddhist Academic Foundation of Nepal, moved for adoption by Telo Tulku, Buddhist spiritual leader of Kalmykia, seconded by Thubten Jikdol, Buddhist Academic Foundation, Nepal, and unanimously adopted by the general membership of the conference by voice consent. The Declaration hence has the authority of consensual agreement by senior leadership and a broad general constituency across the Himalayas.

The approved "Lumbini Declaration" contains six articles that emphasize the following points, in addition to addressing other details:

- The great suffering of Himalayan Buddhists heighten and intensify their commitment to full and equal rights and full participation without distinction based on their religion or country of residence.

- Himalayan Buddhists are primary stakeholders in decisions concerning their cultural heritage and communities.

- Monastic education provides educational attainment equivalent to secular education and needs to be recognized and supported by governments.

- Nepali Buddhists are the primary stakeholders of Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha Shakyamuni, and must constitute the majority of representatives to decide the management and development of the Lumbini site.

- A Lumbini General Council will convene a Global Conference of the followers of the Nalanda-Tibetan tradition within one year at a location in India near to where Buddha Shakyamuni delivered his first teaching.

The aforementioned General Council will act to preserve, protect, and promote the following:

-monastic education, recognition of tulkus and lamas, rights of nuns and women, and economic development and health

-development of Nalanda-Tibetan Buddhism in the 21st century, including dispute resolution among followers of various Buddhist traditions, and between them and non-Buddhist tradition

-support for ethical and scientific inquiry, conducive social and living conditions, social equality, peaceful coexistence, and other issues of urgent concern.

The Lumbini Declaration was unanimously adopted and authorized by the collected assembly of Trans-Himalayan Buddhist leaders at Lumbini on November 24, 2011.

This conference was co-organized by the Buddhist Academic Foundation of Nepal and the Conservancy for Trans-Himalayan Arts and Culture and was supported in part by the States at Regional Risk Project (SARR) at Emory, based on funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

December 6, 2011

Bruce M. Knauft
Samuel C. Dobbs Professor of Anthropology &
Director, States at Regional Risk Project (SARR)
Emory University
Atlanta, GA 30322; USA