

Global Hindu - Buddhist Initiative on *Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness*

Organized by

Vivekananda International Foundation, India

In collaboration with

International Buddhist Confederation, India &

The Tokyo Foundation, Japan

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I. THE BACKGROUND

A “*Global Hindu - Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness*” is being organized by the Vivekananda International Foundation in collaboration with the International Buddhist Confederation and Tokyo Foundation.

The conference would be addressing the unprecedented threats and challenges related to peace and environment the world is facing today. Besides traditional, ideological and cultural rivalries, new challenges have emerged in the form of lawless forces backed up by extremely violent ideologies that challenge de-jure states formed on the rule of law. The world order is under threat as never before. In addition, the world is also facing a high degree of ecological degradation due to contemporary life style based on ideas contrary to the environment friendly philosophies that regard nature as sacred and also refer to it as “*mother*”.

2. Overuse and exploitation of nature in the name of development has transformed it into a source used for satisfying our never ending human needs. Driven by myopia of profits, such exploitative nature of humans and their commerce led life styles is threatening the sustainability and survival of our planet. Reckless exploitation of the resources has triggered an environmental breakdown on a planetary scale. Shortage of resources has resulted in mass displacement which further leads to conflicts over control of resources. Majority of the issues are largely related with “*life style*” and cannot be regulated by law or global treaties. A

philosophical reorientation is required for which a larger constituency has to be reached by creating more awareness and having dialogues and discussions.

3. The two main themes for discussion, specially '*conflict avoidance*' bases itself on a democratic framework along with a philosophic tradition which should be friendly and support all forms of lifestyle and governance models, as without a democratic and philosophical foundation having a dialogue or debate on conflict resolution, environment protection and a change in lifestyle based on environmental friendly philosophy wouldn't be possible. Therefore to overcome these emerging challenges an innovative, non formal and strategic planning has to be done. In the era of rapid globalization, it is also important for countries now emerging on the global spectrum to take over their responsibilities.

4. The Global Buddhist Initiative on Conflict avoidance and Environmental Consciousness is an initiative taken to overcome these challenges. The initiative has a foundation of a strong non- conflicting philosophical paradigm of the two oldest and vibrantly active civilization forces: Hinduism and Buddhism where non violence is fundamental to both and, is compatible with the modern democratic values and institutions. The concept on non violence here extends beyond humanity but also includes "*nature*" as a part of human life. Hinduism and Buddhism are centered on non violence and compassion towards not only humans, but also animals and plants- labeling them as ecologically compatible philosophies. In context with environmental consciousness the foundation of these two philosophies as well as those of Shinto and Confucianism is based on "*Ethical Behavior*". A short sutta in the Anguttara Nikaya (4:115), provides a discerning piece of counsel on treatment of the environment, distinguishing between actions that are pleasant in the short run but harmful in the long term, and actions that are disagreeable in the short run but conducive to long term benefit. A detailed narrative of the background to this initiative thus will bring home its need and the rationale.

II. WORLD NEEDS A PARADIGM SHIFT FROM CONFLICT RESOLUTION TO CONFLICT AVOIDANCE

The prognosis, once dismissed, that the traditional religious and ideological rivalries and clashes along cultures would return, seems to be very much on the horizon. The world

today is on a totally different tangent emanating from galloping religious and ideological conflicts escalating and thus leading to terrorism and massive violent destruction. Terrorists, who were once described as “*non state actors*” are now controlling large parts of territories and also challenging the power and authority of de jure states that are responsible for the so called “*world order*”. Massive violence has been unleashed against innocent people who differ even a shade in faith or thoughts from the extremists. All these extremely violent and destructive activities have pressurized the intellectuals, the leaders and the strategic thinkers to develop an alternative ways to tackle these situations.

Despite the danger signals being quite evident since a couple of decades, no significant collective or strategic efforts were made to prepare and shape the world opinion to avoid present conflicts. This is solely because the world, since world war II has moved the paradigm of “*conflict resolution*” instead of “*conflict avoidance*”. This paradigm has severe limitations and therefore, there is a need to modify the future paradigm as “*conflict avoidance*”.

III. PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUES FOR CONFLICT AVOIDANCE

“No peace among the nations, without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions, without dialogue between the religions”- HANS KUNG

The intellectuals of today have excluded the idea of philosophy and are caught up in the cobweb of rigid ideologies which exclude “*the other*” view along with dialogue which leads to conflicts. The current approach towards conflict resolution is also largely based on western and simplified perspectives of conflict between faiths and civilizations. Therefore, It is in this context that the world is increasingly noticing the benign nature of Buddhism vis-a-vis western ethics. Therefore, it is important to recognize the importance of historical Asian traditions and values to make them more relevant for the future of world peace and harmony, especially the culture of understanding and acceptance of the alternative view beyond that of mercy and tolerance. Unfortunately, learning from traditions has been lost in Asian discourse, which now requires close attention due to alarming global threats. The Hindu- Buddhist values can be used as a tool to shift the paradigm to “*conflict avoidance*” and the path of “*ideology*” to “*philosophy*”. Clearly, both understanding as well as mapping of Asia with its dynamic cross-cultural pollination needs new focus to determine how we could apply such

values of “*acceptance of the other view*” as integral to diversity across national boundaries, and not merely within them. Therefore, identification of the key elements of the Asian civilizations is important in order to find an alternative democratic vision and also consolidate cooperation among nations so that people collectively participate and prosper.

IV. NON CONFLICTING CULTURES AND FUSION OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES

It’s quite evident that high risk situations cannot be handled by the existing geo-political arrangements and institutions therefore besides the new paradigm of conflict avoidance; new strategies are required to de-escalate terrorism, disorder and extremism. Another important cause of extremism and violence, besides the centrifugal power of violent ideologies, is the absence of “*democratic governance*” in many parts of the world along with a lack of space in the global discourse for the non- conflicting civilizations which have an accommodative anti-dote for conflict prone ideologies. There is thus a need for a democratic approach, which not only accommodates but also harmonizes diversities. The world today requires medium and long term efforts from the non-conflicting faiths and cultures to combine with democratic forces, and to confront the rising tide of violence threatening the world order. It shall also help us build a non-formal intellectual and geo-political architecture to appeal, influence, persuade and moderate the forces of violence. In order to acquire this, intense studies through established and new think tanks about the sources and impulses of violence to effectively counter them is required. For this purpose, non-formal interaction and strategic co-operation among all non-conflicting and democratic societies and nations would be needed unravel the causes of conflict and preventing from escalating.

V. ASIAN THOUGHTS: UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The practice of “*ethical values*”, which basically refers to personal restraint in consumption and “*environmental consciousness*” are deeply rooted in the ancient Asian philosophical traditions especially in the virtues of Hinduism and Buddhism. It is remarkable how effectively Hinduism and Buddhism in their extremely flexible and responsive stances in the

history have been able to nurture and preserve the culture of not just tolerance, but also acceptance of all faiths and cultures along with inculcating democratic and ethical values.

The diversity of Asian value systems particularly the role of Buddhism, as a form of thought and the traditions of Indian thinking reflected and incorporated in Hinduism, have had a profound impact on the rest of Asia. Being inherently inclusive and therefore naturally tolerant of diversity of cultural conventions, both have been able to overcome the ready arguments of Asian divisibility at various turns of history. Therefore, by placing themselves in the interstices of local cultures and polities, Buddhism and Hinduism effectively interweaved myriad societies and built a culture of ethical values among social and political elites in Asia.

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AND ROLE OF RELIGIONS

Humankind is on a collision with the biological limits of the earth and now “*conversation*” has become a moral issue of beauty, ethics and spiritual values. Buddhism along with other faiths such as Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism has undertaken a much greater responsibility for protecting the environment upon which the survival of all depends. Over exploitation of natural resources, deforestation, melting of glaciers, ever increasing exploration for hydrocarbons and pollution in general etc have become the causes of climate change and is leading the world towards catastrophe.

Alas these pitfalls will not stop mankind from its unbridled indulgence. On the contrary we are witnessing flash points across the globe due to the race, to control and harness these resources among nations and communities. Horrendous crimes against both humanity and nature are being committed with alarming impunity.

Therefore, Hinduism and Buddhism with their well defined treaties on respect for Mother Nature can create a huge impact and lead towards a “*sustainable world.*” Buddha’s 2600 year old message about kindness, personal responsibility, and the path to happiness holds the key to a new way of relating to each other and to our environment. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a strategic action to mitigate the merging environmental woes which lead to conflict at various levels. The conference shall thus examine the environmental

changes we are facing at present and how Buddhism and Hinduism can/should respond to them.

VI. THE INITIATIVE

We are of the view that adaptation of a non-conflicting paradigm which is inclusive of philosophic streams such as Buddhism and Hinduism whose adherents account for more than one-fifth of the world's population; cognates cultures such as Indian and Japanese which can effectively undertake the initiative in promoting democratic values, religious understandings and conflict avoidance in the larger interest for the world.

We believe that Asia can certainly offer a new model and vision for a world order based on its democratic tradition that espouses the spirit of human cooperation, ethical behaviour, universal responsibility and prosperity of all nations.

It is with this aspiration and conviction that the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), New Delhi proposes to hold a Conference in collaboration with Tokyo Foundation and International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) on "*Global Hindu-Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness*" to be held in India on September 3-4, 2015.

VII. THE OBJECTIVES

The identified objectives for the proposed conferences are:

- To emphasise and espouse that democratic and non-conflicting philosophies, which are fundamental to conflict avoidance, and inherent to Asian values found in Hinduism, Buddhism and other indigenous religions and philosophies;
- To review historical sources and literature on the practice of democracy, analyze and enhance the contributions of Asian spiritual and political thoughts to the foundation of democracy in Asia, as well as, reassess their value as the basis of democracy in contemporary Asia;
- To seek plan of actions for creating a conducive and compelling eco-system with the final objective of avoiding conflicts inherent in exclusive ideologies, and emphasizing the importance of dialogue and understanding;

- To launch a transparent dialogue among non-conflicting philosophic traditions in Asia and discuss the prospects of evolving long-term perspective for promoting democratic values and institutions critical to future development;
- To institute a sustainable model of open and frank dialogue with and within conflict-prone ideologies
- To engage with ideological groups and persuade re-interpretation of rigid ideological premises to make them moderate, inclusive and accommodative of other views;
- To conduct studies and global level dialogues and debates to find and suggest ways and institutional means by which the conflict-prone elements in the exclusive ideologies could be moderated or eliminated for the good of their adherents and for the good of world peace and harmony;
- To bring environment consciousness in global discourse and promote significant changes to the way our present economic system is structured that is in conflict with nature and unsustainable
- To establish a global network of leaders in a wide range of social, political , environmental and intellectual arena committed to the promotion of democratic values, conflict avoidance, environmental consciousness, universal responsibility and ethical behaviours rooted in Asia;
- To encourage regular dialogue in order to promote constructive debate on issues critical for promoting Asian values of peaceful coexistence between humanity, and also with nature, in the context of establishing genuine global peace and secure earth.

THE OUTCOMES

- Institution of a mechanism to work for transparent philosophic discussions on conflict avoidance and environment protection at the global level

- Co-opting Global Institutions to take up the agenda of the Initiative and carry on dialogue and debate on the themes
- Taking the themes to leading thought institutions, academia of the world

IX. SESSIONS & TALKS

The format of the two day conference will be thematic and the topics beings discussed on the respective days are listed below:

- **Conflict Avoidance**
- **Environment Protection**

Besides inauguration and valedictory there will be full two technical sessions namely pre and post lunch sessions. However, themes for the technical session will remain same as mentioned above. There will be one key note speaker per session and ten speakers per theme.

Discussion papers will be circulated on both themes with adequate background papers well in time for the participants to understand the issues.

It is aimed to comprehensively seek to address myriad challenges in Asia i.e spread of conflict, transnational terror networks and sectarian violence, climate change, environmental degradation and conservation issues etc from an Asian perspective and also suggest creative solutions and sustainable social, economic and political framework for management of conflict and fostering cooperation and promote environmental consciousness and interdependent universal responsibility. .