

2501 (1958) The Fifth General Conference Bangkok

The Fifth General Conference of W.F.B. was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 24 to 30 November 2501, at Śālā Santitham, the Hall of Peace, where United Nations agencies were also located at that time. It was 8 1/2 years since W.F.B. came into being, and its principal founder, Dr. Malalasekera, having been the President since the Organization's inception, was to turn over that office to U Chan Htoon of Burma during this session.

The conference functioned with five sectional Committees apart from the usual Plenary meetings and those of the Steering Committee. The 5 Sectional Committees were (1) Finance, Constitution and Miscellaneous; (2) Publications, Publicity, Education, Culture and Arts; (3) Dhammadūta Activities; (4) Humanitarian Services and (5) Unity and Solidarity Committee.

Among some of the salient questions to come out of the Committees, the Finance, Constitution and Miscellaneous Committee mooted several amendments to the Constitution of W.F.B. including such a question as the number of Regional Centres that could be members from any one country. It was felt that limitations on membership, for example, one Centre from one country, would not be advisable, thus leaving the question of membership open and flexible. An issue which arose at the meeting concerned China. The Committee's opinion, quoted here, was: *Tibet should be a region for the purpose of a Regional Centre, because it was the spiritual Centre of Lamaism which had considerable following in areas outside China. This matter may, however, be taken up by the Executive Council after consultation with Tibet, since no representatives were here at this Conference. As regards the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China, Taipei, the Committee considered that it may be recognized, on its application as a Centre.* This is worthy of note because the World Fellowship of Buddhists, although primarily a non-political body, was soon

to recognize that despite its objectives of unity and peace among all the Buddhists of the world, when it came to political differences, they were not easily reconciled.

The gist of some of the other decisions made at the Fifth W.F.B. conference included strengthening the President's authority, who would be assisted by 11 Vice Presidents. Ex-Presidents would automatically become Honorary Presidents on relinquishing their posts. It was at this meeting that Dr. Malalasekera became an Honorary President upon handing over the Presidency of W.F.B. to U Chan Htoon.

Another resolution called for Universities in every country to be urged to include in their curriculum studies of the teachings of the Buddha, to be supervised by competent Buddhist scholars. The W.F.B. had, from the very beginning, given strong support to education on Buddhism, not only at the University level, but also at lower school levels. This conference also called for the promotion of new methods and the improvement of existing standards of teaching of Buddhism in all Buddhist countries especially concerning children.

A continuing thread, to recur often at many a W.F.B. meeting, was for Buddhists to give support to all efforts at international peace and harmony. The Fifth Conference in Bangkok adopted a resolution calling for each W.F.B. Regional Centre to further its efforts relating to world disarmament and to continue appeals to the concerned international organizations by appropriate means at each Centre's disposal in order to achieve these ends in their particular regions.

As decided at the Fourth W.F.B. General Conference in Nepal, after U Chan Htoon of Burma took over the Presidency of the Organization, the Headquarters of W.F.B. was moved from Colombo to Rangoon, for the period 2501 to 2503. It was also confirmed that following Burma, Thailand would become the Headquarters of W.F.B.. The transfer of the Headquarters did not occur in 2503, however, but later since U Chan Htoon remained the President until 2506 when he was incarcerated by reason of political changes which took place in Burma.