

2509 (1966) The Eighth General Conference Chiangmai

The Eighth General Conference of W.F.B. was held at Chiangmai, in Northern Thailand, from 6 to 11 November 2509. For the first time in its history, the conference had a theme: *Buddhism Promotes Peace and Harmony Among Men*. This practice was to be followed by all the W.F.B. General Conferences since then. It may be said that the 7 general conferences which preceded this, formed a phase in W.F.B.'s history, its early years of teething and growth, not without some unexpected turn of events, such as the political element entering the work of the Organization.

After an evaluation of the Organization made at Sarnath, it was geared to go forward under the stewardship of its new President Princess Poon. A new chapter of W.F.B.'s history was to begin with the Eighth W.F.B. General Conference. There was agreement between the past President and founder Dr. Malalasekera and the reigning President Princess Poon that the foundation for future progress lay in W.F.B.'s achievement in successfully bringing together Buddhists of all schools, sects and groups from all parts of the world. This unifying of all the Buddhists held the promise of joint action to promote social action throughout the Buddhist world.

Continuing with the practice started at Sarnath, a panel discussion was part of the conference. The lead speakers were, Dr. G.P. Malalasekera, Ven. Kanthipalo Bhikkhu and Mr. Christmas Humphreys; all examining the conference's theme of *Buddhism Promotes Peace and Harmony Among Men*. In addition to the panel discussion, an opportunity was afforded the participants to hear several lectures: (i) on Theravāda Buddhism by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu; (ii) on Buddhism by Ven. Sama Gombojiv of Mongolia; (iii) on Zen Buddhism by Dr. Irmgard Schloegl, and (iv) on Tibetan Buddhism by Mr. John Blofeld, a well-known authority on the Northern Schools of Buddhism. In the President's summing up of the conference, it was mentioned that the systematic presentation at the panel

Buddhist youth (b) to encourage the exchange of Buddhist publications pertaining to youths and children; (c) to undertake a survey of the literature suitable for Buddhist children so that W.F.B. Headquarters could act as a clearing house, and (d) to request W.F.B. Regional Centres to send in periodical reports of their youth activities for cross dissemination among all Regional Centres. In adopting the report of this newly created Committee on Youth, the W.F.B. was to germinate the establishment of the World Fellowship of Buddhist Youth (W.F.B.Y.) as a permanent auxiliary institution to W.F.B..

The Conference decisions regarding two other matters may be briefly mentioned as they were recurring themes. The question of observing Visakha Day on the first full moon day of May each year was further discussed. After differing views were expressed as to such a feasibility, the W.F.B. Headquarters was requested to determine the day for Visākha and *make it known to the Regional Centres from the next year on.*

Secondly, the Steering Committee also submitted a resolution which read:

The World Fellowship of Buddhists resolves: (1) That an appeal be made to the United Nations protesting against the testing of nuclear weapons and urge that effective action be taken to stop such aggressive activities; (2) That another appeal be made to the United Nations against religious persecution in any country.

In connection with W.F.B.'s appeals to the United Nations and its agencies, it may also be noted that the Committee on Publication, Publicity, Education, Culture and Arts recommended that the W.F.B. should take the necessary steps for UNESCO to be cognizant of the W.F.B. as one of the competent and representative international organizations dealing with human culture, education and philosophy which were *internationally and increasingly interpreted as a peace promoting force.*

At the conclusion of the W.F.B. Eighth General Conference, President Princess Poon, presented to the delegates of the Regional Centres, in alphabetical order, their Charters, which had been newly instituted. From thereon, at every W.F.B. General Conference, newly admitted members were to receive the Charters of their Regional Centres.