

2497 (1954) The Third General Conference Rangoon

The Third General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists was held in Rangoon (now Yangon), Union of Burma (now Myanmar) from 3 to 6 December 2497. The meeting took place in the midst of the *Chaṭṭha Saṅghāyanā*, the Sixth Buddhist Synod. The then Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu, a devout Buddhist, had called the Sixth Buddhist Council to bring all Buddhists, whatever their persuasions, to meet and *purify* the doctrinal texts. *The Union of Burma Buddha Sāsana Council* who were the official hosts for the W.F.B. conference intended that the W.F.B. meeting should be an historic gathering of international Buddhist leaders and representatives of Buddhist organizations and communities with a view to revealing Buddhism to humankind and demonstrating the Buddhist Way of Life *to our distracted and threatened world*. The opening of the Third W.F.B. Conference was held in the *Mahā Passana Gūhā*—the Great Glorious Cave, which according to the Burmese authorities, was constructed for the purpose of giving mankind the combined benefits of their age-old wisdom and profound learning in the noble Doctrine of Deliverance. It was one of the most well-attended of the W.F.B. General Conferences. The meeting's report stated that it was originally anticipated that not more than 15 countries would be represented by about 50 delegates, but when the conference got under way there were 215 delegates and over 500 observers representing 28 countries excluding Burma.

That experimentation of the organizational structure was going on could be seen from the fact that 4 Sectional Committees functioned during this meeting. They were: (1) Education; (2) Social Services; (3) Dhammadūta, and (4) Expansion of Buddhist Activities. On the recommendation of these Committees, the Conference adopted no less than 31 resolutions. Among the noteworthy ones were those dealing with Lumbinī and Kusinārā. The resolutions concerned requested that these sacred sites be improved and further developed. Buddha, himself, before his parinirvāṇa had recom-

mended that these two sites combined with Bodh Gayā and Sarnath should form the primary pilgrimage sites to be reminded of his Teachings.

Another resolution called for the establishment of an International Buddhist University with the objective of *helping scholars from various parts of the world to have the chance of investigating the Buddha Dharma more thoroughly, thereby sending Buddhist missionaries all over the world.* In fact, there was considerable optimism that such an institution would be coming into being either in Burma, Sri Lanka or Thailand. At that time, the Buddha Sāsana Council of Burma had under construction a Buddhist University in the World Peace Pagoda complex where the W.F.B.'s Third Conference was being held. In Sri Lanka a similar project, but smaller in scale, was underway; and, Thailand expressed its interest in having such an institution also. By the next W.F.B. conference, the Buddhist University in Rangoon received recognition from W.F.B.; since then, however, it had ceased to function as a international institution.

It was at the Rangoon conference that the question of the international expansion of Buddhism received further attention. A resolution requested that steps should be taken to secure the active participation of W.F.B. in the work of UNESCO, so that the Buddha-Dharma may be enabled to play its rightful role in establishing cultural and moral solidarity of mankind.

Another resolution, on behalf of the Buddhists of the world, called upon *all nations and governments to take steps for the prohibition of the manufacture and use of all atomic, nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.* In this connection, as a follow-up to the decision made at the W.F.B. Second Conference in Tokyo, the Third W.F.B. General Conference fully supported the construction of the pagoda at Hiroshima to enshrine the Buddha Relics presented by Sri Lanka to Japan in 2495 (1952), *as a token of the desire of the buddhists for promoting Peace in the World.*

Lastly, mention may be made of the internationally relevant resolution dealing with human rights wherein W.F.B. pledged to cooperate with similar organizations to remove laws creating discrimination on grounds of color, race, creed or caste.

Thus, the Burma conference of the W.F.B. seemed to have expanded its activities to cooperate with international organizations in the pursuit of world peace.