

**Environmental Preservation and Restoration Closing Remarks**  
**United Nations Day of Vesak**  
**Bangkok, Thailand**  
**May 14, 2011**

Venerable Chair, Distinguished guests, Venerable Bhikkus and Venerable Bhikkunis, Friends in the Dharma

Good afternoon. My role is to report to you on our workshop. We had 15 speakers from 10 countries, 6 in Asia. This is the third time I have done this, and since the first time, in Hanoi, in 2008, the environmental crisis has worsened substantially worse by more obvious climate change, increasing global hunger, continued loss of species and animal populations, and the rising cost of energy and food. Population size in poor countries is rising steeply, as described by Professor Lancaster in his keynote speech on Thursday.

In parallel with these declines, some hopeful actions are being expressed globally, such as the Earth Charter as an accessible set of principles for environmental preservation and restoration. New sources of alternative energy are being developed and used globally.

Because of the burning of coal, oil and the clearing of forests, the polar ice caps and many glaciers are continuing to melt, helping to further raise sea level. This threatens many cities and food bowls with worse flooding, including Bangkok and the Mekong Delta.

Deserts too are expanding. Despite these growing crises, it is unfortunate that the Buddhist world, as a whole, seems to lack mindfulness and knowledge with regard to environmental damage.

This is disturbing, because as we heard yesterday, the Buddha was greatly concerned with the protection of nature and the importance of hygiene, and he showed great compassion and empathy for other forms of life. We also heard impressive modern stories of reverence not only for human life, but also for nature, such as rocks, pottery shards, deceased whales and sacrificed laboratory animals. We heard of tree planting encouraged by monks in China and the rescue of captured animals. We also heard a mention of the structural violence of our modern economic and political world, in which much suffering and exploitation, both of humans and nature is hidden.

But there is insufficient combining of Buddhist teaching with modern knowledge. It is not enough for Buddhists to plant trees, release captured animals or to be vegetarian and to reduce meat consumption. More right action is needed, such as "training the trainer," as one of our speakers advocated. Buddhists need to set a good example, especially Buddhist leaders and monks, not just of morality but of environmental protection.

We also heard yesterday about the intentional release of the snake-head fish in the US, by someone to make merit for a sick relative. In the US this fish has no natural predators, and it caused unintended ecological damage that continues years later. We also observed yesterday the waste of plastic at MCU, for example in drinking water bottles; again, the motivation is good; to protect our health and to show generosity - but there are ways to provide clean drinking water that do not waste as much plastic, which comes from oil, and which requires energy to produce.

How can Buddhists contribute to ecological restoration? First, we must reduce the harm we are doing to the planet both individually and collectively, especially by burning fossil fuels such as oil and

coal. This does not mean to abandon transport and electricity, but to develop and use new technologies to generate energy, heat water and for mass transport such as trains and subways rather than cars. Buddhists can also reduce environmental harm by extending compassion to sentient beings other than humans today, but also to humans in the future.

Finally, we heard yesterday about the degradation of the Rajgir-Gaya area and Lumbini; two places with sites sacred to Buddhists. We heard appeals to the international community and to Buddhists around the world to better protect and to restore these sites. These places show that the industrial processes that have degraded much of the world are also affecting the Buddhist heartland. But just as we Buddhists want the help of others, we in turn should not be indifferent about the many ecosystems and cultures which are threatened elsewhere. We must go beyond rhetoric and set a good example to others.

I thank the panellists, staff and the audience for our excellent sessions. I hope in future, to see more evidence that the global Buddhist community is going beyond rhetoric by incorporating environmental mindfulness into daily practice and by social action that inspires the world.

Respectfully, in the dhamma,

Colin Butler,

Chief Moderator environmental preservation and restoration