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FOREWORD

The 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) was not merely an international Buddhist event but a pivotal milestone in affirming the role and position of Vietnamese Buddhism on the global stage. Held in Hanoi from May 13 to 17, 2008, UNDV 2008 presented a unique opportunity to honor the spiritual values of Buddhism while showcasing the rich culture, people, and humanistic traditions that Vietnam has upheld for millennia.

Having the privilege to contribute to the successful advocacy for bringing UNDV 2008 to Vietnam, I served as Deputy Secretary-General of UNDV during 2006-2007. Throughout this period, I worked tirelessly to gain the trust of the International Organizing Committee (IOC) regarding Vietnam's capabilities and aspirations to host this significant event. Through sincere discussions and efforts in 2007 in Bangkok, my aim was to highlight Vietnam's potential to take on the responsibility of such a global celebration. The collective support from the international Buddhist community made it possible for Vietnam to host Vesak in Hanoi for the first time, leaving a lasting imprint on both Vietnamese Buddhism and the nation.

I was also honored to introduce Professor Lê Mạnh Thát to the IOC in 2007, paving the way for him to become Chairman of the International Organizing Committee for Vesak 2008. Additionally, with the endorsement of Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and the support of Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, I was entrusted with the role of Secretary-General of IOC 2008, playing a vital role in preparing and organizing this historic event in Vietnam.

UNDV 2008 provided the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN) with an opportunity to assert its influence within the global Buddhist community. A significant highlight of the event was my proposal and personal delivery of the invitation to Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh at Plum Village, New York, to serve as the keynote speaker. His presence brought a profound message of compassion, wisdom, and peace to the world. His contributions, including organizing a retreat during Vesak 2008, helped strengthen the bonds between Vietnamese Buddhism and the global Buddhist community.

The organization of UNDV 2008 encompassed a wide array of key activities. The international conference facilitated discussions among Buddhist leaders and scholars from across the globe,

addressing critical social and spiritual issues. The Buddhist art exhibitions offered a platform to showcase the beauty of Vietnamese Buddhist art to the world. Cultural performances, including the traditional "Life of the Buddha" *Cải lương* opera, provided an opportunity to highlight Vietnam's rich cultural heritage. Sacred ceremonies, such as the peace prayers and the International Bathing of the Buddha ceremony, created a profound and spiritual atmosphere for all participants.

The preparation for Vesak 2008 was meticulously coordinated between the various subcommittees of GHPGVN and the IOC, ensuring that every aspect—rituals, content, logistics, and security—was executed to perfection. The success of UNDV 2008 not only demonstrated flawless organizational capability but also cemented the stature of GHPGVN on the international stage.

UNDV 2008 gathered delegates from 87 countries and territories, surpassing the participation in previous Vesak celebrations held in Thailand. This impressive number underscored the growing importance of the event and the increasingly prominent position of Vietnamese Buddhism. The "Hanoi Declaration," adopted during the celebration, sent a powerful message of peace, justice, and development, reinforcing Buddhism's commitment to contributing to a better world.

UNDV 2008 was not only an occasion to honor the Buddha but also a demonstration of Vietnam's commitment to fostering peace, democracy, and development. The success of the event elevated Vietnam's standing in the international community and helped promote the image of both the nation and Vietnamese Buddhism to the world.

This book provides a comprehensive overview of the key aspects of UNDV 2008, from the advocacy and organization process to the positive impacts the event had on the development of Vietnamese Buddhism. It serves as a valuable document that not only captures the important milestones of this historic event but also reflects the vision and leadership of those who contributed to its success.

Venerable Thich Nhat Tu

Former Secretary-General of UNDV 2008
Standing Member, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha
Vice Chairman, Ho Chi Minh City Buddhist Sangha
Executive Vice Rector, Vietnam Buddhist University, HCM City
Co-Chief Editor, Vietnam Tripitaka Translation Project

PART I:

OVERVIEW OF THE 2008 UN VESAK AND PREPARATORY WORK





The nativity scene of Prince Siddhartha. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

HOW VESAK 2008 WAS TRANSFERRED TO VIETNAM



Journalists at work in the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 Press Center. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

On May 17, 2007, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam sent a diplomatic note to the Royal Government of Thailand (the host of the 2007 United Nations Day of Vesak) and the International Organizing Committee (IOC), expressing Vietnam's support for hosting the 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak.

A significant figure in the successful bid for hosting Vesak 2008 in Vietnam was Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, who, in his capacity as Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2006-2007, played an instrumental role in advocating for Vietnam to become the next host country. Through his dedicated efforts, Venerable Thich Nhat Tu contributed significantly to

convincing the international Buddhist community and the IOC of Vietnam's ability to successfully organize this major religious event. His leadership and vision were essential in ensuring that Vesak would be hosted in Hanoi.

On May 23, 2007, the Prime Minister of Vietnam sent a congratulatory message to the 2007 Vesak celebration. The message highlighted that the Government of Vietnam welcomed the United Nations' decision to recognize the international nature of Vesak and its Triple Gem framework. The Government expressed its readiness to host the 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak in Vietnam, reflecting Vietnam's strong support for the UN's decision to promote peace, democracy, development, and social progress.

On May 29, 2007, during the closing ceremony of the 2007 Vesak celebration, Vietnamese Ambassador to Thailand, Nguyen Duy Hung, together with Venerable Thich Tri Tam, Chair of the National Ritual Committee of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN), and Professor Lê Mạnh Thát, a Vietnamese IOC Chair, formally received the transfer of hosting rights for the 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak.

♦ Vietnam's Role as Vesak 2008 Host and Thich Nhat Tu's Contributions

As a member of the United Nations and a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2007-2008, Vietnam's hosting of Vesak underscored its goodwill and determination to support the UN's initiative to build a world of peace, friendship, cooperation, and development. This commitment aligns with the teachings of the Buddha and Vietnam's socialist development goals.

Vietnam has a nearly 2,000-year history of Buddhism, which has always accompanied the nation. Therefore, hosting Vesak 2008 allowed Vietnam to highlight the humanistic values of Buddhism and the significant role that the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has played in building and defending the country.

Venerable Thich Nhat Tu's advocacy work continued throughout the planning stages of Vesak 2008. His efforts in mobilizing resources and coordinating international Buddhist delegations were crucial to the success of the event. With his experience as Deputy Secretary-General for Vesak in 2006 and 2007, he was well-positioned to handle the logistical and diplomatic challenges that came with organizing such a large-scale, international Buddhist gathering.

Vietnam is a multi-religious country, and the values of Buddhism have been recognized and promoted by the United Nations. Hosting Vesak 2008 in Vietnam not only affirmed the value of Buddhism but also encouraged religious activities that are closely linked with social life, aiming to build a peaceful and harmonious society.

The Vesak 2008 celebration also reflected Vietnam's national unity and its commitment to building a peaceful and developed nation. The successful hosting



of Vesak highlighted the Vietnamese Government's correct religious policies and showcased Vietnam's friendly and cooperative image to the international community.

Hosting Vesak 2008 contributed to showcasing Vietnam's foreign policies and religious approaches, enhancing Vietnam's position on the international stage, and combating the efforts of hostile forces that seek to exploit human rights and religious freedom to hinder Vietnam's development.

♦ **Preparations for Hosting Vesak 2008**

After the transfer of hosting rights for Vesak 2008, the Vietnamese Prime Minister provided guidance on organizing the event to ensure its success.

Given Vietnam's multi-religious society, the government sought to ensure religious harmony and smooth coordination for this cultural and religious event, supported by the United Nations. Unlike Thailand, where the government assigned the organization of Vesak to Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, Vietnam's Government established a National Coordinating Committee to organize the 2008 Vesak celebration. This committee included representatives from state organizations, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, and Vietnamese IOC members to ensure coordination between the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, the IOC, and state organizations.

The National Coordinating Committee was established by the Prime Minister's decision, including representatives from central government ministries, four provinces (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Quang Ninh, and Ninh Binh), GHPGVN representatives, and Vietnamese IOC members. The Head of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs was appointed as the chair of the National Coordinating Committee, supported by seven subcommittees. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and the IOC directly oversaw four of these subcommittees:

- **The Ritual and Cultural Subcommittee**, chaired by Venerable Thich Thanh Tu, Vice President of the Executive Council of GHPGVN and Deputy Head of the National Coordinating Committee.
- **The Content Subcommittee**, chaired by His Eminence Thich Tri Quang, Vice President of the Executive Council of GHPGVN and Deputy Head of the National Coordinating Committee.
- **The Protocol and Relations Subcommittee**, chaired by Professor Lê Mạnh Thát, chair of the IOC and Secretary General of the National Coordinating Committee.
- **The Decoration Subcommittee**, chaired by Venerable Thich Bao Nghiem, Vice President of the Executive Council of GHPGVN and a member of the National Coordinating Committee.

These subcommittees worked closely with state agencies, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, and the IOC to ensure smooth coordination. Each subcommittee

chairperson was responsible for their respective tasks and directly reported to the Chair of the National Coordinating Committee.

Each subcommittee was staffed by personnel under the direct management of its chairperson, who worked with professionals from relevant sectors to ensure efficient collaboration.

♦ **Responsibilities of Each Subcommittee**

• **The Protocol and Relations Subcommittee** was tasked with preparing guest lists, issuing invitations, and organizing accommodation, transportation, and other logistical aspects for both domestic and international participants. The subcommittee also managed welcoming procedures and guided guests through the event.

• **The Content Subcommittee** was responsible for preparing proposals for the opening and closing ceremonies, conference discussions, and drafting key documents, speeches, and translations. It also ensured the quality of publications related to the event.

• **The Ritual and Cultural Subcommittee** planned the ceremonial and cultural aspects of Vesak, incorporating both Buddhist and Vietnamese cultural traditions. This included organizing Buddhist rituals, exhibitions, cultural performances, fairs, visits to Buddhist heritage sites such as Bai Dinh (Ninh Binh) and Yen Tu (Quang Ninh), and trips to the World Heritage site of Ha Long Bay. The subcommittee also coordinated floral lantern parades and candlelit peace vigils.


• **The Decoration Subcommittee** was responsible for decorating key locations such as the conference center, main streets, airports, and central areas of select provinces. This included producing banners, flags, and slogans.

• **The Propaganda Subcommittee** handled media outreach before, during, and after the event, ensuring comprehensive coverage across multiple media platforms. This included organizing writing contests and activities related to Buddhism and Vesak.

• **The Security Subcommittee** was tasked with ensuring smooth visa and immigration processes for international guests, while also maintaining security throughout the event to ensure safety and hospitality.

• **The Logistics Subcommittee** organized transportation, accommodation, and catering for participants. It was also responsible for preparing gifts and souvenirs for delegates, ensuring that the necessary budget and materials were available for all activities.

In conclusion, the successful hosting of the 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak in Vietnam was the result of thorough preparation, clear organization, and close coordination between the Government, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, and the IOC. The event helped showcase Vietnam's commitment to religious freedom, international cooperation, and peace, enhancing the country's international standing and promoting Buddhist values globally.



THE 2008 UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK IN VIETNAM: A JOURNEY OF HONORING BUDDHISM AND A GLOBAL MESSAGE

♦ Overview of the 2008 UN Vesak Vietnam

The United Nations Day of Vesak is one of the largest international religious and cultural events officially recognized and organized by the United Nations annually. On December 15, 1999, at the 54th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Day of Vesak, also known as the Triple Festival (commemorating the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing into Nirvana), was officially recognized as a global cultural and religious observance. Since then, Vesak has been celebrated every year at the United Nations headquarters in New York and regional centers worldwide.

In Vietnam, the 2008 UN Vesak Vietnam was held from May 13-17 at the National Convention Center in Hanoi, co-organized by the International Organizing Committee (IOC) and the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN). This was a great honor for Vietnam, becoming the second country in the world, after Thailand, to host this significant event.

♦ The Meaning and Goals of the 2008 UN Vesak Vietnam

1. Spiritual Significance

The Vesak celebration serves as an opportunity for the global Buddhist community to come together, share their experiences, and reaffirm their faith in the profound values of Buddhism. The event not only honors Buddhist teachings but also offers society the principles of peace, harmony, and goodwill. International Buddhist rituals and ceremonies will be conducted, creating a spiritual bridge between Vietnamese Buddhism and the global community.



Photo: Vo Van Tuong

2. Religious Significance

The 2008 Vesak is an occasion for Vietnam to showcase its role in the international Buddhist community, fostering unity among various Buddhist schools and nations. It also serves as an opportunity to elevate the position of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN) on the global stage, contributing to building a peaceful and harmonious world.

3. Cultural Significance

This event is not only a religious ceremony but also a cultural celebration, highlighting the rich heritage of Buddhism and its contribution to global culture. It encourages cultural exchanges between countries and calls for the preservation of cultural values, including significant national and global Buddhist cultural heritage.

4. Academic Significance

The international conferences held during Vesak 2008 aim to contribute to the global knowledge base. With topics such as climate change, war, social injustice, and education, the discussions are not only academically focused but also offer practical solutions to some of the most pressing global challenges.

5. Political and Economic Significance

Vesak 2008 provides Vietnam with an opportunity to showcase its image as a peaceful, welcoming, and open country. This event also serves to promote tourism and investment, contributing to raising Vietnam's profile on the international stage.

♦ Key Activities of Vesak 2008

1. Buddhist Rituals and Academic Conferences

During Vesak, Buddhist chanting ceremonies and international academic conferences will be held at the National Convention Center in Hanoi. Discussions involving hundreds of delegates from

over 100 countries will focus on global issues such as Buddhism's role in preventing war, promoting social justice, environmental protection, and Buddhist education in the digital age.

2. Cultural and Artistic Activities

In addition to religious rituals, Vesak 2008 will feature Buddhist cultural exhibitions, food fairs, flower parades, and streets adorned with Buddhist flags and lanterns. These cultural activities are not only aimed at the Buddhist community but also offer the public and visitors an opportunity to experience and learn more about Vietnamese Buddhist culture.

3. Meditation and Buddhist Practice

One of the highlights of Vesak 2008 is the organization of meditation and study retreats for both Vietnamese families and international participants. This offers an opportunity to apply Buddhist teachings to everyday life, contributing to the creation of a peaceful and harmonious world.

4. Cultural Tourism

Vesak 2008 is also a chance to promote Vietnam to the world through spiritual cultural tours. International visitors will have the opportunity to explore Vietnam's cultural heritage and natural beauty, thus supporting the development of tourism in the country.

♦ Conclusion: Vesak 2008 - A Cultural and Spiritual Bridge

The 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak is not only an event to honor Buddhism but also an opportunity for Vietnam to showcase its culture, people, and peaceful spirit to the world. With the participation of thousands of international delegates, Vesak 2008 has become a key bridge, fostering unity, peace, and cooperation among nations across the globe.

An archway adorned with the five colors of the international Buddhist flag. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



THE 2008 UNITED NATIONS VESAK CELEBRATIONS IN VIETNAM: A HISTORIC MILESTONE AND GLOBAL MESSAGE

♦ The Origins and Evolution of the United Nations Vesak

The United Nations Vesak Celebrations, also known as the United Nations Day of Vesak, commemorate three major events in the life of the Buddha: his birth, enlightenment, and passing into Nirvana. This occasion was officially recognized by the UN General Assembly on December 15, 1999, following a proposal by 34 countries to establish Vesak as an international cultural and religious festival. Since then, Vesak has become an official UN holiday, celebrated annually at the UN Headquarters in New York and at UN centers worldwide.

The first Vesak celebrations at the UN took place in 2000, and by 2008, Vietnam was honored as the second country, after Thailand, to host this significant event, welcoming the global Buddhist community.

♦ The 2008 United Nations Vesak Celebrations in Vietnam

From May 13-17, 2008, the United Nations Vesak Celebrations were held at the National Convention Center in Hanoi. This international event, organized by the Vietnamese government in cooperation with the International Organizing Committee (IOC) and the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, brought together over 600 Buddhist delegations from 90 countries, with a total of 5,000 participants. This marked the first time that Vesak had been celebrated in Vietnam, a milestone that highlighted the important role of Vietnamese Buddhism on the world stage.



A thematic session at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

♦ Key Themes and Discussions at Vesak 2008

The central theme of Vesak 2008 was “Buddhism’s Contribution to Building a Just, Democratic, and Civilized Society.” This global theme emphasized Buddhism’s role in addressing the significant challenges humanity faces today. In addition to this, the event featured several workshops covering six key topics and a special forum to discuss pressing issues:

1. **Buddhism’s Role in Preventing War:** Buddhism, with its philosophy of compassion and harmony, has always advocated for peace. This workshop focused on how Buddhism can contribute to preventing conflict and war, promoting global peace.
2. **Buddhism’s Contribution to Social Justice:** Buddhism is not only a religion but also a philosophy grounded in fairness and equality. This session explored how Buddhist values can help create a more just society.

3. **Engaged Buddhism and Development:** This workshop examined how Buddhism can participate in social and economic activities, particularly in the context of globalization and sustainable development.
4. **Caring for the Environment:** Buddhist Solutions to Climate Change: With the global threat of climate change, this session discussed the Buddhist approach to protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development.
5. **Family Issues and Buddhist Solutions:** Buddhism offers valuable teachings on love and harmony in the family. This session focused on applying Buddhist principles to address modern family challenges.
6. **Buddhist Education:** Heritage and Development: Buddhism is not just a religious teaching but a foundation of moral education for many generations. This session discussed the development and dissemination of Buddhist education.

♦ **Forum on Buddhism in the Digital Age**

In addition to traditional topics, Vesak 2008 featured a special forum on the role of Buddhism in

the digital age. This forum explored how Buddhism can leverage modern technology to spread spiritual values and wisdom, connect Buddhist communities globally, and support the propagation of Buddhist teachings.

♦ **Vietnam's Honor and Spirit of Dedication**

Vietnam became the second country after Thailand to successfully host the United Nations Vesak Celebrations, a source of immense pride for the Vietnamese Buddhist community and the nation as a whole. With a spirit of unity, compassion, and wisdom, monks, nuns, and Buddhists across Vietnam contributed their time, effort, and resources to ensure the event's resounding success.

♦ **Conclusion: Vesak 2008 – A Global Spiritual Bridge**

The 2008 United Nations Vesak Celebrations were not only an occasion to honor the Buddha but also a bridge connecting the global Buddhist community. It provided a platform for sharing ideas and contributing to the creation of a better world. With widespread participation from around the globe, Vesak 2008 affirmed the vital role of Buddhism in shaping a peaceful, just, and happy future for all humanity.

Panoramic view of a thematic session at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



VIETNAM HOSTS THE UNITED NATIONS VESAK 2008: A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS EVENT

♦ First Time in Vietnam

The United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 will be held from May 13 to May 18 at the National Convention Center in My Dinh, Hanoi. This significant event marks the first time that Vietnam has had the honor of hosting this celebration. Vesak, also known as Buddha's Day, commemorates three key events in the life of the Buddha: his birth, enlightenment, and passing into nirvana. It is observed annually on the full moon in May.

♦ A Global Milestone

On December 15, 1999, the UN General Assembly officially recognized Vesak as an international cultural and religious day, with commemorations held at UN headquarters and centers worldwide. This recognition underscores the vital role Buddhism plays in the spiritual and cultural lives of people around the globe. In 2007, Vietnam formally expressed its interest in hosting Vesak 2008, with a diplomatic note sent to the Government of Thailand and the Vesak 2007 organizing committee.

♦ Vietnam Assumes Hosting Responsibilities

On May 29, 2007, during the closing ceremony of Vesak 2007 in Thailand, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and the International Organizing Committee (IOC) formally received the rights to host Vesak 2008. Hosting this prestigious event in Vietnam is a testament to the growing influence of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in both the regional and international spheres. It also reflects the country's progressive religious policies and its openness to international cooperation.

♦ Diverse and Enriching Program

Vesak 2008 promises an array of activities aimed at addressing pressing global issues. Key presentations will focus on the intersections of Buddhism with economic development and social justice. Special thematic discussions on Buddhism in the digital age and the creation of a digital

cultural map will also be explored. This event presents a platform for the Buddhist community to offer insights into contemporary societal challenges.

In addition to the intellectual discussions, the event will feature cultural performances from numerous countries, showcasing a rich tapestry of traditional arts. Cultural and spiritual tours to sacred sites like Yen Tu in Quang Ninh and Bai Dinh in Ninh Binh are also planned, offering both domestic and international delegates a deeper connection to Vietnam's Buddhist heritage.

♦ Affirming Vietnam's Global Standing

By hosting Vesak 2008, Vietnam is not only paying homage to Buddhism but also reaffirming its place on the global stage. The event embodies the solidarity and deep collaboration between the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and international Buddhist communities. Moreover, it enhances Vietnam's image among the global Buddhist audience and effectively counters any attempts by detractors to undermine the nation's unity.

♦ Strengthening International Cooperation

This occasion is also an opportunity to strengthen ties between Vietnamese Buddhists and the international community, fostering further cooperation and shared cultural and spiritual values. In this way, Vesak 2008 serves not only as a religious festival but also as a bridge for cultural diplomacy, reinforcing peaceful and enduring international relationships.

♦ Conclusion

The United Nations Vesak 2008 in Vietnam is a source of pride for the country and marks a pivotal moment in promoting global religious and cultural exchange. This event allows Vietnam to assert its leadership on the international Buddhist map, while also spreading the message of peace and unity to the world.

UNITED EFFORTS FOR THE SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATION OF THE 2008 UN VESAK DAY: COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE VBS, IOC, AND THE NATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE



The presidium at the Press Conference during the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 Celebration.
Photo: Vo Van Tuong

On March 10, 2008, at the Office II of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS), the Standing Board of the VBS Executive Council held a joint meeting with the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) and the International Organizing Committee (IOC) to evaluate and consolidate the coordination efforts for the 2008 United Nations Vesak Day in Vietnam. This historic event required close collaboration among all parties to ensure its outstanding success.

♦ Progress and Challenges in the Organizational Process

Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang, Vice President of the VBS Executive Council and Head of the Content Subcommittee, emphasized that preparations for the Vesak celebration were being expedited. However, he expressed concerns about the lack of cohesion between the three main bodies: VBS, the NCC, and the IOC. Given that this is the first



Prof. Lê Mạnh Thát, Chairman of the IOC, delivering a speech at the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 Preparatory Meeting. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

time Vietnam is hosting the event with participation from over 90 countries, a high level of unity and coordination is imperative. Various subcommittees, such as the Rituals and Culture Subcommittee and the Decoration Subcommittee, had already finalized their plans, ensuring the success of major activities, including the opening ceremony, closing ceremony, and the candle-lighting prayer for peace.

♦ The Role of the International Organizing Committee and Coordination Efforts

Professor Le Manh That, President of the IOC, confirmed that both the overall and detailed plans had been submitted to the government and were ready for implementation. With over 600 international delegations from 90 countries, logistics and hospitality, which he directly oversees, were being meticulously organized. He also stressed the importance of collaboration between students from Buddhist schools and youth organizations to welcome and guide the international delegations throughout the event.

♦ Government Support and Key Requirements

Mr. Nguyen Huu Oanh, Deputy Head of the NCC, expressed confidence in the success of the Vesak celebration but emphasized that the VBS and IOC must take the lead in organizing both the content and ceremonial aspects. The Vietnamese government would provide support but not interfere in religious ceremonies. He highlighted the state's logistical support, including hosting the event at the National Convention Center with a capacity of 3,500 guests and fully sponsoring 600 international delegates. The NCC also committed to covering meals for all invited guests as per the VBS's requests.

♦ Strengthened Cooperation and the Significance of the 2008 UN Vesak Celebration

Mr. Bui Huu Duoc, Director of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs' Buddhist Affairs Department, affirmed that the establishment of the NCC demonstrated the government's commitment to unity in organizing the event. The VBS played the central role, supported by the state, with the IOC ensuring compliance with international standards. This event was a valuable opportunity for Vietnam to assert its role in supporting Buddhism and promoting national and

international solidarity.

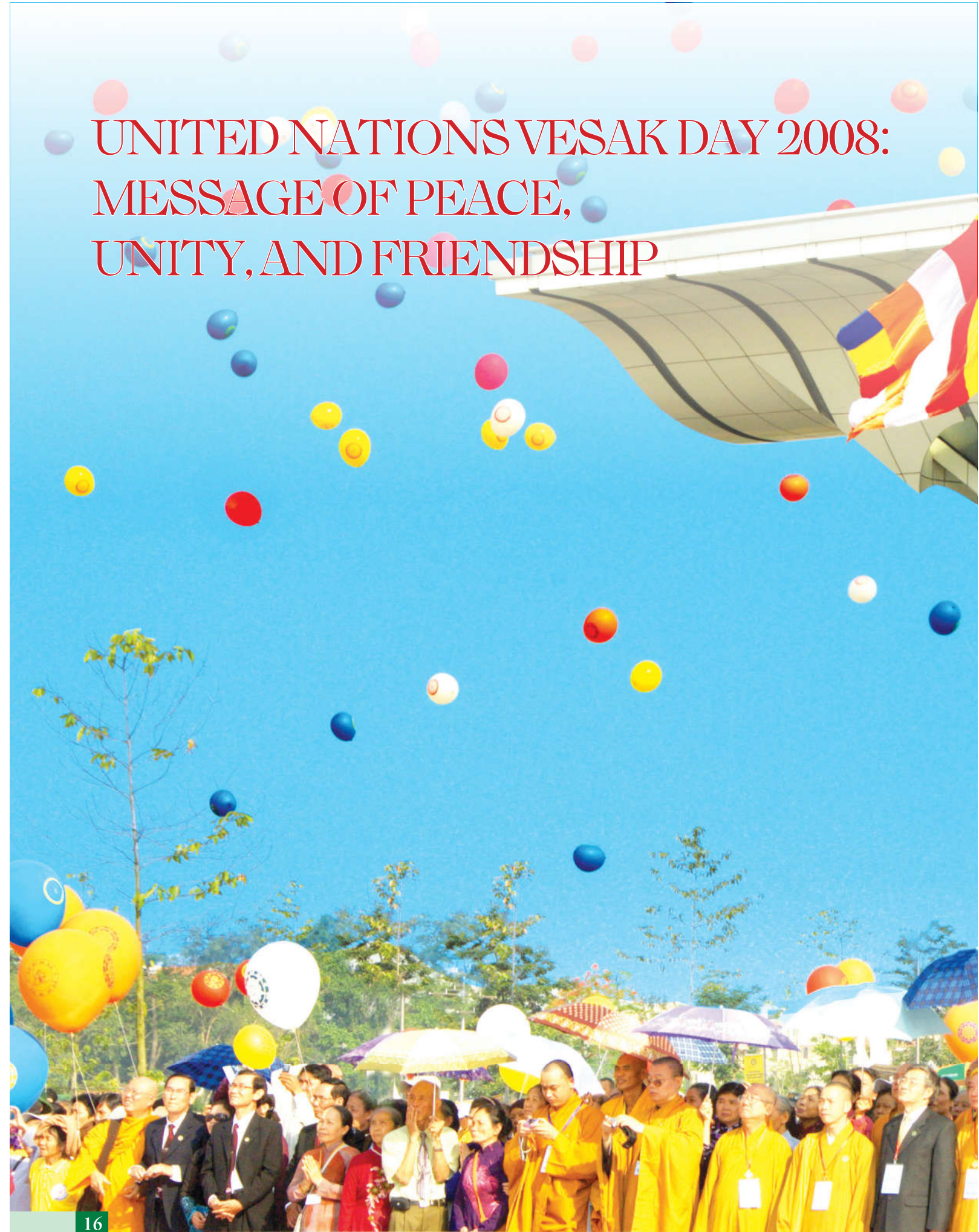
♦ Conclusion: Success Through Unity

The meeting concluded with a strong consensus to strengthen cooperation among all parties involved. The VBS, IOC, and NCC pledged to work closely together, overcome challenges, and ensure the success of the 2008 UN Vesak Day. This event was not only a significant religious celebration but also an opportunity for Vietnam to affirm its position in the international community, spreading messages of peace and solidarity.



Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Oanh, Standing Deputy Head of the National Organizing Committee for Vesak 2008.

UNITED NATIONS VESAK DAY 2008: MESSAGE OF PEACE, UNITY, AND FRIENDSHIP





A scene of balloon releasing ceremony for world peace at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

♦ Vesak 2008: Celebrating Buddhism and Vietnamese Culture

On May 12, 2008, at an international press conference in Hanoi, Mr. Nguyễn Thế Doanh, Head of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs and Head of the National Coordination Committee for the United Nations Vesak Day 2008, confirmed that preparations for the event, scheduled for May 14-17 in Hanoi, were complete. This major event, themed “Buddhism’s Contribution to Building a Just, Democratic, and Civilized Society,” includes sub-themes addressing global issues such as climate change, family conflicts, war, education, and social transformation.

♦ A Global Message from Vesak 2008

Vesak 2008 is not only a Buddhist event but also an opportunity for Vietnam to send a message of peace, unity, and friendship to the world. Mr. Doanh emphasized that this event would allow the international community to better understand Vietnam’s people, culture, and Buddhist traditions. Professor Lê Mạnh Thát, Chairman of the International Organizing Committee (IOC), stated that preparations were in place to welcome 4,500 delegates, including 1,500 international representatives from over 70 countries and territories.

♦ A Warm Welcome from Vietnam

In a spirit of enthusiasm, Most Venerable Thich Thanh Tu, Permanent Vice President of the Executive Council of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, expressed the honor felt by Vietnamese Buddhists in welcoming the international delegates to Vesak 2008. International representatives, including Venerables Dhammaratana (France) and Dhammasami (UK), shared their joy in participating in this significant event and thanked the Vietnamese government for its support.

♦ Celebratory Activities Across Vietnam for Vesak 2008

In Huế, on the morning of May 12, the Provincial Buddhist Sangha held a ceremonial bathing of the Buddha at Diệu Đế Pagoda, marking the opening of Vesak 2008 celebrations in the region. The same day, other activities such as sutra recitations at Từ Đàm Pagoda, floral tributes at the city’s Martyrs’ Cemetery and Saint Martyr Memorial, as well as cultural performances, took place. In the evening, a unique art installation on the Perfume River, titled “Seven Golden Lotus Flowers Lift the Pure Footprints,” was unveiled, creating an artistic and spiritual atmosphere.

In Đà Lạt, Lâm Đồng Province, Vesak Week 2008 opened on May 12 at Đà Lạt Square with a solemn

Buddha bathing ceremony, prayers for peace, and sutra recitations. The event also featured a Buddhist cultural exhibition at the provincial cultural center, showcasing thousands of rare Buddhist artifacts, books, and artworks. This marked the largest Vesak celebration ever held in the province, setting the stage for eight days of festivities.

♦ Impressive Activities in Đà Nẵng and Hà Tây

In Đà Nẵng, from May 12 to 19, the city’s Buddhist Sangha held its largest-ever Vesak celebration. Highlights included a procession of flower-decorated floats, a Buddhist cultural exhibition,



a vegetarian food fair, and forums discussing the significance of Vesak. On the evenings of May 18 and 19, the city hosted the Mộc Dục ceremony and the main Vesak event at Đà Nẵng Water Park.

In Hà Tây, on the afternoon of May 12, the Hà Tây Buddhist Sangha and the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism opened a photography exhibition titled “The Beauty of the Sangha and Vietnamese Pagodas.” The 83 displayed photos captured the serene and sacred essence of Vietnamese pagodas and temples, offering a

deep insight into the cultural and ethical values of Buddhism.

♦ **Conclusion: Vesak 2008 – A Bridge of Culture and Spirituality**

United Nations Vesak Day 2008 is not only a celebration of the Buddha and Buddhist values but also an opportunity for Vietnamese Buddhism to assert its role on the global stage. Through Vesak 2008, Vietnam has shown itself as a peaceful, hospitable country, ready to share its message of peace and unity with the world.



A glimpse of the Vietnamese Buddhist art exhibition at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

UNITED NATIONS VESAK 2008: A LANDMARK EVENT WITH TIGHT SECURITY MEASURES

♦ An International Religious Festival in Vietnam

The United Nations Day of Vesak 2008, hosted in Hanoi from May 13 to May 17, was a monumental event co-organized by the Vietnamese government, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, and the International Organizing Committee (IOC). This marked the first time that Vietnam hosted such a prestigious international event, underscoring the country's elevated global standing and its progressive religious policies.

Vesak, according to the Indian calendar, is the holiest month for Buddhists, commemorating three pivotal events in the life of the Buddha: his birth, enlightenment, and passing into nirvana. The UN Vesak celebration provides a unique occasion for Buddhists worldwide to honor these sacred milestones while allowing nations to showcase their Buddhist culture and values.



◆ Theme and Scale of the Event

With the theme “Buddhism’s Contribution to Building a Just, Democratic, and Civilized Society,” the 2008 Vesak celebration in Vietnam drew over 4,500 participants from more than 70 countries and territories. These included global Buddhist leaders, scholars, diplomats, and representatives from the United Nations and UNESCO. The event was not merely a religious festival but also a platform of cultural and political significance, enhancing global understanding of Vietnam’s religious freedom, national unity, and cultural diversity.

Throughout the event, delegates attended key activities, including the opening and closing ceremonies, and participated in academic forums discussing Buddhism’s role in modern societal development. Additionally, pilgrimages to Buddhist heritage sites in Yên Tử (Quảng Ninh), Bái Đính (Ninh Bình), and scenic tours of Hạ Long Bay left lasting impressions on the international guests.

◆ Security and Event Preparation

Given the high-profile nature of the UN Vesak 2008 celebration, the Prime Minister of Vietnam established a National Steering Committee and National Coordination Committee. These committees included representatives from various ministries, agencies, and key localities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Quảng Ninh, and Ninh Bình, alongside the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and Vietnamese members of the IOC. Specialized subcommittees were formed to oversee ceremonial protocols, event content, logistics, and security to ensure the seamless execution of the event.

The Ministry of Public Security was tasked with managing the Security Subcommittee, developing comprehensive plans starting in late 2007 to ensure absolute security throughout the event. This included assigning responsibilities to specific departments and regions to oversee border, aviation, and maritime security, as well as ensuring the safety of all Buddhist activities. Additionally, security

forces intensified patrols and monitoring around key venues hosting the international delegations, ensuring rapid response to any emergencies.

◆ Key Security Measures

To guarantee the safety of the event, the security plan focused on three core areas:

1. **Strengthening National and International Security Control:** Heightened border, aviation, and maritime security, coordinated with international law enforcement to prevent any disturbances that could disrupt the Vesak celebration.

2. **Crime Prevention and Counterterrorism:** Close monitoring of high-risk criminal activities, especially terrorism and hostage situations, with strict security measures at all event locations.

3. **Ensuring Public Order and Traffic Safety:** Enhanced patrols on major roads, maintaining security at accommodation sites for international delegations, and ensuring traffic flow throughout the event.

◆ Conclusion: A Successful Event Built on Rigorous Preparation

The United Nations Vesak Day 2008 in Vietnam was not only a significant religious event but also an opportunity for the country to affirm its positive role on the global stage. Thanks to meticulous preparation, especially in security, the event was a resounding success, leaving an indelible mark on international guests and elevating Vietnam’s status in the global Buddhist community.



Photo: Vo Van Tuong

CONTRIBUTING TO THE SUCCESS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK 2008:

ENSURING ABSOLUTE SECURITY



♦ **Final Inspection Before the Opening Ceremony**

Prior to the commencement of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008, the Security Subcommittee conducted a final review of security plans at key event venues, including the National Convention Center My Dinh, Bai Dinh Pagoda, and the Trang An Heritage Site in Ninh Binh Province. Any vulnerabilities or shortcomings were promptly identified and rectified to ensure smooth security operations, contributing to the overall success of the celebration.

♦ **United Nations Day of Vesak – A Significant International Event**

The United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 was a major international religious event hosted by the Government of Vietnam in collaboration with the International Organizing Committee of the United Nations Day of Vesak (IOC) and the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Taking place from May 13 – 17 in Hanoi, the event, themed “Buddhism and the Building of a Just, Democratic, and Civilized Society,” attracted the attention of over 4,000 delegates from Vietnam and abroad, including international Buddhist leaders, scholars, and government representatives from 87 countries and territories.

Key cultural activities and exhibitions were held at the National Convention Center My Dinh and the Hanoi Friendship Cultural Palace, alongside pilgrimage tours to Yen Tu (Quang Ninh), Bai Dinh Pagoda, and Ha Long Bay.

♦ **Ensuring Security: A Key Factor for Success**

Security assurance for Vesak 2008 was a top priority, with the Security Subcommittee launching preparations as early as late 2007. The Ministry of Public Security developed a detailed plan, assigning specific responsibilities to relevant agencies, including immigration control and security at Buddhist venues. Comprehensive measures for counterterrorism, fire prevention, and traffic safety were implemented. A state-of-the-art communication system, consisting of hundreds of modern devices, was installed and efficiently operated to ensure event safety.

♦ **Comprehensive Security Measures for the Celebration**

To counter potential threats from hostile forces, security agencies proactively identified and prevented disruptive activities aimed at sabotaging the event. Strict security measures were enforced in air travel, border control, and maritime transport to safeguard all international delegations. Law enforcement authorities intensified patrols and closely monitored key areas, ensuring rapid response capabilities for any arising incidents.

♦ **Success Through Close Coordination**

The meticulous preparation and security efforts for Vesak 2008 exemplified the coordinated commitment of government agencies, security forces, and the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Until the conclusion of the event, security forces maintained the highest level of vigilance, executing protection plans at the National Convention Center My Dinh and other relevant venues to prevent any disruptions, thereby contributing to the overall success of Vesak 2008.

Thanks to stringent security measures and effective coordination among stakeholders, the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 was conducted safely and successfully, leaving a profound impression on the international community and reinforcing Vietnam’s credibility on the global stage.

The scene of the Opening Ceremony of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



Opening Ceremony of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



VESAK 2008: AN INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST FESTIVAL IN VIETNAM

HỘI QUỐC 2008
XÂY DỰNG
CHỦ, VĂN MINH
VESAK CELEBRATIONS 2008
2008
Hanoi, Vietnam
TO BUILDING
VILIZED SOCIETY
lic of Vietnam
thist Sangha and National Coordinating Committee

S DAY OF VESAK

The 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak, co-hosted by the Government of Vietnam, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN), and the International Organizing Committee (IOC), took place in Hanoi from May 13 to May 17, 2008.

With the theme “The Contribution of Buddhism to the Building of a Just, Democratic, and Civilized Society,” the event attracted 1,500 international participants, including Buddhist leaders, scholars, and officials from 95 countries around the world.

For Vietnamese Buddhism, this marked a monumental moment in its 2,000-year history since the arrival of Buddhism in the country. For the first time, Vietnam played host to the United Nations Day of Vesak, a significant event in the annals of Vietnamese Buddhism. In this context, *Phap Luat* magazine held interviews with several prominent Buddhist leaders and members of the Vesak Organizing Committee to gather insights and reflections on this historic occasion.

♦ **Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang, Vice President of the Executive Council of GHPGVN, Head of the International Buddhist Affairs Department:**



“In the past, the Vesak Festival, also known as the Triple Gem Festival, was primarily celebrated in Theravada Buddhist countries, beginning with Sri Lanka and spreading to Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Meanwhile, Mahayana Buddhist countries such as China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan

would often hold separate observances for the Birth, Enlightenment, and Nirvana of the Buddha on different dates throughout the year.

However, the full moon day of the fourth lunar month was recognized as the most important Buddhist holiday during the 6th International Buddhist Conference in 1961. On December 15, 1999, the UN General Assembly officially recognized the Vesak Festival as an international cultural and religious event to be observed at UN Headquarters and regional UN offices.

The first UN Vesak celebration took place in 2000 at the UN Headquarters in New York. From 2004 onwards, the celebrations have been successfully held in Bangkok, Thailand. On May 29, 2007, during the closing ceremony of the 2007 UN Vesak Festival, after reviewing a petition from GHPGVN and an application from Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the IOC officially announced to over 500 delegations from 62 countries that Vietnam would host the 2008 UN Vesak celebration and the 5th International Buddhist Conference.

In preparation for the 2008 UN Vesak, GHPGVN has issued formal instructions to Buddhist provinces and cities across Vietnam to organize activities in response to the Vesak celebration and to hold Buddhist observances in line with Vietnamese traditions.

The 2008 UN Vesak is not merely an international cultural and religious event. It is also a historic moment for Vietnamese Buddhism. This occasion brings together representatives of Buddhism from around the world to Vietnam, highlighting the values and role of Vietnamese Buddhism in promoting harmony, unity, and friendship, and in building a better life for all.”

♦ **Mr. Nguyen The Doanh, Head of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs:**

“The 2008 UN Vesak, co-hosted by the Vietnamese Government, GHPGVN, and the IOC, will also include the 5th International Buddhist Conference to commemorate the Buddha’s Birth, Enlightenment, and Nirvana.

To ensure the success of this grand event—recognized by the UN as a major international cultural and religious gathering—the Vietnamese Government has established a National Coordinating Committee to work closely with GHPGVN and the IOC in organizing the celebration.

The Government Committee for Religious Affairs has sent official documents to the People’s Committees and Religious Affairs Committees of



provinces and centrally governed cities, urging them to coordinate with local Buddhist authorities to organize the 2008 Vesak Festival in accordance with GHPGVN's instructions.

The 2008 UN Vesak in Vietnam is a large-scale international event, and while we may lack experience and face material limitations, the strong leadership of the Prime Minister, the proactive efforts of GHPGVN, the IOC, and other key sectors, combined with the unified determination of the International Organizing Committee and related participants, will ensure that the event proceeds smoothly.

Every Vietnamese citizen should not only take pride in hosting the 2008 UN Vesak but also feel a responsibility to contribute to its success through mindful, heartfelt participation."

♦ **Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, Secretary General of the IOC:**

"The United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) is officially known as the 'United Nations Vesak Festival' in Vietnam. Its purpose is to honor the ethical, cultural, and peaceful values of the Buddha's teachings, while fostering mutual respect and understanding among nations and peoples worldwide.

The International Organizing Committee (IOC) was established in May 2004, based on UN General Assembly Resolution A/Res/54/115, adopted during its 54th session on December 15, 1999.

The IOC is a global Buddhist organization comprising representatives from various Buddhist traditions and countries, with the goal of organizing the annual UN Vesak celebration. It also serves as a platform for global Buddhist cooperation in addressing personal, familial, societal, national, and international issues based on the Buddha's teachings.

During the closing ceremony of the 2007 UN Vesak in Thailand, the IOC officially handed over the responsibility of hosting the 2008 Vesak to Vietnam and nominated Professor Dr. Le Manh That as the IOC Chairman, in accordance with the organization's Charter.

The Vietnamese Government has approved the establishment of an IOC office in Ho Chi Minh City and has directed the formation of seven subcommittees to oversee the various aspects of organizing the 2008 UN Vesak, which will be held at the National Convention Center and the Vietnam-Soviet Friendship Cultural Palace in Hanoi from May 13 to 17, 2008. Preparations are well underway across all subcommittees and are



nearing completion. As of now, 1,500 delegates from 600 organizations across 95 countries and territories have registered to attend the festival.

For the 5th International Buddhist Conference, the organizing committee has received approximately 20 papers from Buddhist scholars and researchers both within and outside of Vietnam. These contributions represent diverse perspectives, all centered around the main theme: the role of Vietnamese Buddhism in building the nation both now and in the future.

Most of the presentations focus on the theme of the conference: 'The Contribution of Buddhism to Building a Just, Democratic, and Civilized Society.' The content highlights how Vietnamese Buddhism is not merely a cultural relic of the past but a living force in the present and a continued companion of the nation in the future."

♦ **Venerable Thich Ton That, Permanent Member of the Executive Council of GHPGVN, Head of the Chinese Vietnamese Buddhist Sect:**

"The 2008 UN Vesak in Vietnam is an opportunity to honor the traditional cultural values of Vietnamese Buddhism, showcase the government's respect for religious freedom, and

present Vietnam's image as a peaceful, friendly, and cooperative nation.

With the engaged spirit of Vietnamese Buddhism in this era of integration, we believe that the 2008 UN Vesak in Vietnam will be a unique international Buddhist festival and the largest spiritual and cultural event ever held in the country.

The Chinese Vietnamese Buddhist Sect is a member of GHPGVN. As the Head of the sect, I am honored to be entrusted with organizing the candlelight vigil for peace to celebrate the success of the 2008 Vesak. The vigil is scheduled for 6:00 PM on May 16 at the National Convention Center. It will be one of the key activities in celebrating the success of Vesak and in spreading the Buddha's message of compassion, peace, harmony, and progress to all of humanity."

♦ **Venerable Thich Thien Bao, Head of the Cultural Department of the Ho Chi Minh City Buddhist Sangha:**

"According to the plan for the Vesak Week organized by the Ho Chi Minh City Buddhist Sangha, we are in charge of the cultural performances, exhibitions, floral lantern parades, and the cultural-culinary fair.





Chanting the Buddha's name during the Opening Ceremony of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008.
Photo: Vo Van Tuong

These activities are already in progress. The largest event will be the Buddhist Cultural Performance Competition, running from March 29 to May 5 at the Hoa Binh Theater. Concurrently, we are producing a Buddhist music video clip that will be broadcast on Ho Chi Minh City Television (HTV) on May 12 and May 18.

In terms of the exhibition, we are organizing a 'Buddhist Art: Past and Present' exhibition in collaboration with the Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts Association and local artifact collectors. The exhibition is scheduled from May 18 to May 25 at the

Ho Chi Minh City Museum of Fine Arts, and we plan to make this an annual cultural event during Vesak."

The 2008 UN Vesak in Hanoi, attended by Buddhist leaders and international delegates, is a significant opportunity to showcase Vietnam's integration into the world, its traditional cultural practices, and its religious beliefs. Through such activities, we will greatly enhance the beauty of the city, affirm our commitment to building a civilized, prosperous, and modern nation, and elevate the stature of the beloved city named after President Ho Chi Minh in the hearts of international friends.

BANQUET HONORING BUSINESS LEADERS TO WELCOME THE 2008 UNITED NATIONS VESAK

♦ A Cultural and Spiritual Gala

On the evening of May 10, 2008, as part of the celebrations for the 2008 United Nations Vesak in Vietnam, the Standing Committee of the Executive Council of the Central Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN) in collaboration with the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) hosted a prestigious banquet at the International Conference Center in Hanoi. This event was designed not only to honor the contributions of business leaders to the Vesak celebrations but also to foster meaningful connections between the religious and business communities both domestically and internationally.

♦ Distinguished Guests and Key Figures in Attendance

The banquet was graced by the presence of esteemed religious leaders and dignitaries, including Venerable Thich Thanh Tu, Vice President of the Executive Council of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN); Venerable Thich Giac Toan, Vice President of the Executive Council of the GHPGVN; Venerable Thich Bao Nghiem, Vice President and Head of the Propagation Department of the Central Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN); Professor Dr. Le Manh That, Chairman of the International Organizing Committee for Vesak (IOC); Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, Secretary-General of the IOC—who played a key role in advocating for the United Nations Vesak to be hosted in Vietnam; and Venerable Thich Duc Thien, Deputy Secretary-General of the IOC. Additionally, the event welcomed Dr. Vu Tien Loc, Chairman of the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), along with nearly 1,000 business leaders from both Vietnam and abroad, all of whom played a significant part in the success of the event.

♦ Opening Remarks: Emphasizing the Importance of Collaboration

In his opening speech, Venerable Thich Thanh Tu highlighted the immense significance and profound meaning of hosting the United Nations Vesak for the first time in Vietnam. He underscored the essential role that business leaders play, both materially and spiritually, in ensuring the success of such a grand event. Venerable Thich Thanh Tu affirmed that the presence and contributions of businesspeople had left a lasting impression of a peaceful, hospitable, and amiable Vietnam among international friends.

Following him, Dr. Vu Tien Loc expressed his delight at the collaboration between the Buddhist Sangha and the business community. He praised the enthusiasm and support from both domestic and international business leaders, noting that the high

attendance surpassed expectations and demonstrated the widespread influence and reach of the Vesak celebrations within the business sector.

♦ Auction of Rare Items: Supporting the Final Stages of Vesak

As part of the banquet, the organizing committee conducted an auction featuring three exquisite and rare items to raise funds for the final preparations of the Vesak celebrations. The items up for auction included:

1. **A Gandhara-Style Jataka Statue:** Crafted from glass jade, this 8-meter tall statue represents the birth of Buddha and is the first of its kind in Vietnam, donated by Chien Thang Co., Ltd. (Ho Chi Minh City)..
2. **A 10-CD Set “Flying of Happy Mankind”:** Composed by musician Nguyen Cuong, this collection is signed by Venerable Thich Thanh Tu, Professor Dr. Le Manh That, and Mr. Nguyen Huu Oanh, Vice Chairman of the National Coordination Committee for Vesak 2008.
3. **The Largest Peace Calligraphy in Vietnam:** Measuring 1.8 meters by 38 meters, this masterpiece was initiated by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and completed by 14 renowned calligraphers, including Minh Duc, Trieu Tam Anh, Thanh Son, and Ho Cong Khanh.

All proceeds from the auction were directed towards the final organizational stages of the Vesak 2008 celebrations, ensuring their successful completion.

♦ A Night of Cultural Performances

Following the auction, guests and business leaders were treated to a series of vibrant and colorful cultural performances. These performances showcased traditional Vietnamese arts and served as a heartfelt tribute to the business community's support. The performances not only highlighted Vietnam's rich cultural heritage but also symbolized gratitude towards the business leaders who played a pivotal role in the success of the Vesak celebrations.

Conclusion: Bridging Religion and Business for a Harmonious Future

The banquet served as more than just a formal event; it was a meaningful gathering that reinforced the strong ties between the religious and business communities. By bringing together business leaders and religious dignitaries, the event highlighted the collaborative spirit essential for fostering a harmonious and prosperous society. Through this initiative, Vietnam's image as a dynamic, compassionate, and harmonious nation was effectively portrayed, enhancing the country's stature and reputation among international friends and partners.

LUNCHEON RECEPTION FOR DELEGATES ATTENDING THE 2008 UN VESAK IN HANOI



The Banquet hosted by the Chairman of the National Assembly during United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

On May 15th, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha hosted an official luncheon reception for the heads of Buddhist delegations and international guests participating in the 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak (Vesak 2008) at the National Convention Center in Hanoi. The event saw the presence of high-ranking officials from the Vietnamese government, representatives from the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, and Buddhist delegates from 74 countries and territories.

Attendees: On the Vietnamese side, the luncheon was attended by Most Venerable Thich Thanh Tu, Vice Chairman of the Executive Council of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha; Professor Le Manh That, Chairman of the International Organizing Committee (IOC) for UN Vesak; Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, Secretary-General of IOC, who played a key role in bringing the UN Vesak event to Vietnam; Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Pham Gia Khiem; and representatives from the Government Committee for Religious Affairs. On the international side, the luncheon welcomed Most Venerable Phra Dharmakosajarn, Rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (Thailand), along with Buddhist leaders from countries such as Sri Lanka, India, Bhutan, and Cambodia.

Speech by Most Venerable Thich Thanh Tu: In his address, Most Venerable Thich Thanh Tu, on behalf of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, extended a warm welcome, expressing solidarity and good wishes for health to all the

distinguished guests. He emphasized that the 2008 UN Vesak in Vietnam was a momentous “auspicious occasion,” taking place in Hanoi, a city recognized by the international community as a “City of Peace.” Quoting the Buddha’s teaching that “a single day of meeting is a karmic bond spanning lifetimes,” Most Venerable Thich Thanh Tu underscored the invaluable contributions of the international delegates, whose presence enriched the event with vibrant and diverse perspectives. He highlighted that the occasion fostered harmony and collaboration in spreading the Buddha’s teachings, which serve as a source of inspiration for all peace-loving people around the world. For the Vietnamese Buddhist community, he remarked that this event marked a significant milestone in the 2,000-year history of Buddhism’s companionship with the Vietnamese nation.

Speech by Most Venerable Phra Dharmakosajarn:

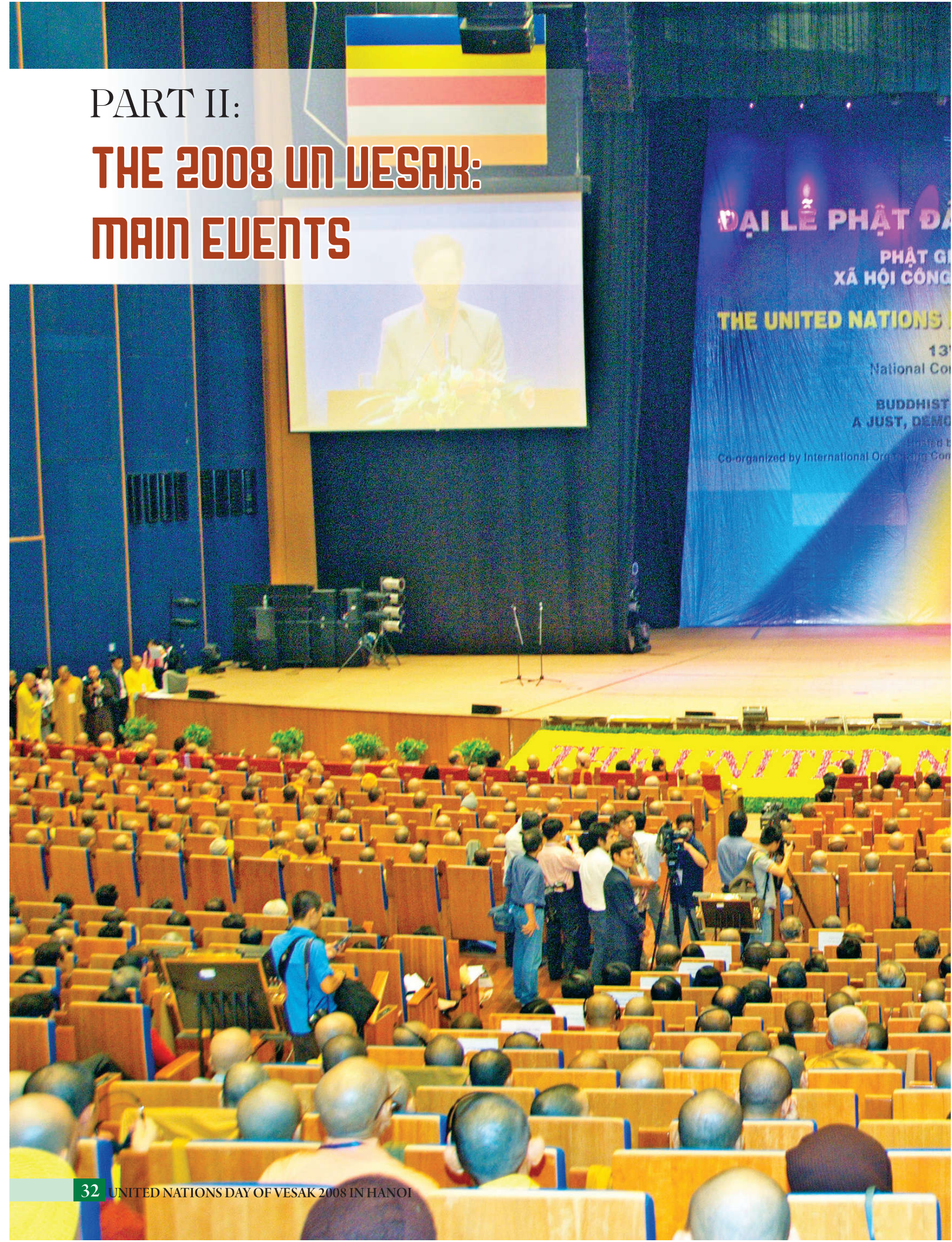
Representing the international Buddhist delegations, Most Venerable Phra Dharmakosajarn expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Government of Vietnam and the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha for providing the ideal conditions for a successful and harmonious Vesak. He stressed that the contributions made by the delegates during the Vesak celebration would create a collective strength, fostering a unique opportunity for the global Buddhist community to connect and take concerted action for peace and the well-being of all sentient beings.

The Role of Professor Le Manh That and Venerable Thich Nhat Tu:

Both Professor Le Manh That, Chairman of the IOC, and Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, Secretary-General of the IOC, were recognized for their significant roles in the successful organization of Vesak 2008. Particularly, Venerable Thich Nhat Tu’s strong advocacy played a crucial role in bringing the UN Vesak celebration to Vietnam, enhancing the country’s stature in hosting major international religious events. At the luncheon, both were commended by international and Vietnamese delegates alike for their tireless efforts throughout the planning and execution of the event.

The luncheon reception took place in a formal yet warm atmosphere, embodying the spirit of international solidarity and celebrating the humanistic and peaceful values that Buddhism brings to all of humanity.

PART II: THE 2008 UN VESAK: MAIN EVENTS





Prof. Lê Mạnh Thát, Chairman of the IOC, delivering the Opening Speech at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008.
Photo: Vo Van Tuong

PROGRAM OF THE 2008 UN VESAK FESTIVAL IN HANOI, VIETNAM

May 13, 2008	All day	Welcoming and registration of delegates.
May 14, 2008	7:30	Transportation for delegates from hotels to the National Convention Center
	8:10	Auditorium seating arrangement
	8:30	Reception of international guests, Ambassadors, and Heads of State
	8:35	Welcoming Buddhist dignitaries, international guests, Ambassadors, and Heads of State into the auditorium
	8:45	Triple Gem ceremony, Lục Cúng dance, and Vesak chanting
	9:00	Opening speech by the President of the IOC
	9:10	Welcome speech by the Supreme Patriarch of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) and Chairman of the VBS Administrative Council
	9:20	Opening remarks by the President of Vietnam
	9:50	Message from the UN Secretary-General
	10:00	Messages from Heads of State and Ambassadors
	10:30	Break
	10:50	Messages from leaders of world Buddhist organizations
	11:30	Lunch
	13:00	Messages from leaders of world Buddhist organizations
	13:50	Keynote Speech 1: <i>Buddhism's Contribution to Social Justice and Democracy</i>
	15:00	Break
	15:30	Meditation music performance
	15:40	Keynote Speech 2: <i>A Buddhist Solution to War and Conflict</i>
	16:50	Group photo session
	17:30	Break
	18:00	Dinner
	19:30	Cultural performance and traditional Vietnamese dances, coordinated by Deputy Minister Lê Tiến Thọ (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism)
	21:00	Return to the hotel

May 15, 2008	7:30	Transportation for delegates from hotels to the National Convention Center
	8:10	Auditorium seating arrangement
	8:30	Vesak chanting and prayer ceremony by Buddhist delegations
	9:00	Group discussions 1) <i>War and Conflict: A Buddhist Perspective</i> 2) <i>The Buddhist Contribution to Social Justice</i> 3) <i>Engaged Buddhism and Development</i> 4) <i>Care for the Environment: Buddhist Response to Climate Change</i> 5) <i>Family Problems and Buddhist Response</i> 6) <i>Symposium on Buddhist Education: Continuity and Progress</i> 7) <i>Symposium on Buddhism in the Digital Age</i>
	10:00	Break – Continuation of group discussions
	11:30	Lunch
	13:00	Continuation of group discussions
	15:00	Break
	17:00	Conclusion of group discussions
	19:00	Buddhist cải lương play “The Life of the Buddha,” written by Tuệ Quang, coordinated by Deputy Minister Lê Tiến Thọ, directed by Meritorious Artist Hoa Hạ, and overseen by Dr. Thích Nhất Tu
	20:00	The international secretariat drafts the conference report and the Hanoi Declaration
May 16, 2008	7:30	Transportation for delegates from hotels to the National Convention Center
	8:10	Auditorium seating arrangement
	8:20	Vesak chanting and prayer ceremony by Buddhist delegations
	9:00	Special symposium: <i>Buddhism in the Digital Age</i>
	9:45	Break
	10:00	Open discussion session
	11:30	Banquet hosted by the Prime Minister of Vietnam
	13:00	Special presentation on <i>Buddhist Economics and Welfare Development: A Buddhist Contribution</i>
	14:00	Speeches by leaders of international Buddhist delegations
	15:00	Break
	15:30	Presentation of the Vesak Declaration in Hanoi
	15:45	Closing ceremony chaired by the Chairman of the VBS Administrative Council
	15:50	Closing remarks by the Prime Minister of Vietnam

	16:30	Symphony and traditional dance performance coordinated by Deputy Minister Lê Tiến Thọ, composed by Musician Nguyễn Thiện Đạo, overseen by Dr. Thích Đức Thiện
	19:30	Candlelight vigil for world peace and national prosperity
	20:30	End of the Vesak Festival. Return to the hotel
May 17, 2008	All day	One-day spiritual and cultural tour: 1. Trúc Lâm Yên Tử Monastery, Quảng Ninh 2. Bai Dinh Buddhist Cultural Park, Ninh Bình 3. UNESCO World Heritage Site: Hạ Long Bay, Quảng Ninh



The exterior view of the National Convention Center, the Venue for United Nations Day of Vesak 2008.
Photo: Vo Van Tuong

OPENING OF THE 2008 VESAK: A SYMBOL OF PEACE AND UNITY

♦ A Major Event at the National Convention Center

On the morning of May 14, 2008, the United Nations Day of Vesak officially opened at the National Convention Center in Hanoi. This was the first time such a significant cultural and religious event was held in Vietnam, drawing over 3,500 delegates, including 2,000 international representatives from 60 countries and territories. This event not only honored the Buddha but also affirmed Buddhism's crucial role in fostering a world of peace and unity.

♦ Vietnamese Leaders and International Delegates in Attendance

In attendance were President Nguyễn Minh Triết, Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng, National Assembly Chairman Nguyễn Phú Trọng, and former leaders including former General Secretary Đỗ Mười, former President Trần Đức Lương, former Prime Minister Võ Văn Kiệt, and former National Assembly Chairman Nguyễn Văn An. From the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha were the His Holiness Thich Pho Tue, Patriarch of the Vietnam Buddhist



A scenic view of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

Sangha, and Most Venerable Thich Tri Tinh, Chairman of the Executive Council of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. The event also saw the participation of Professor Lê Mạnh Thát, Chairman of the International Organizing Committee for Vesak 2008, as well as thousands of monks, nuns, and lay Buddhists from across Vietnam.

♦ Opening Ceremony and the Vesak Spirit

Prior to the opening ceremony, delegates attended the flag-raising ceremony for both the national and Buddhist flags, followed by a Tam Bảo (Three Jewels) offering ceremony. The traditional Vietnamese Buddhist dance “Bài ca Vesak thiêng liêng” officially opened the event. This was followed by other cultural performances, including the choral piece “Tình ca Phật giáo,” the dance performance



Vietnamese President Nguyễn Minh Triết delivering the Opening Address at the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 Celebration in Hanoi. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

“Hào quang Vesak,” and the song “Bình yên Việt Nam,” all of which set a solemn and sacred tone for the day. In his keynote address, Professor Lê Mạnh



Delegates attending the UN Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



From left to right: Chairman of the National Assembly Nguyễn Văn An, Most Ven. Brahmapundit, His Holiness Thích Trí Tịnh, Former General Secretary Đỗ Mười, His Holiness Thích Phổ Tuệ, President Nguyễn Minh Triết, Prof. Lê Mạnh Thát, and Former President Trần Đức Lương at the Opening Ceremony of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008.

Thát emphasized the importance of Buddhism in today's world and highlighted the spirit of unity and peace that Vesak embodies.

♦ Significant Speeches

The Most Venerable Thich Tu Nhon, Vice Chairman of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha's Executive Council, delivered the welcome address on behalf of the Most Venerable Thich Tri Tinh. His speech underscored the harmony and solidarity of the global Buddhist community. President Nguyễn Minh Triết, in his address, affirmed that the hosting of Vesak 2008 in Vietnam was a testament to the government's respect and support for the moral values of all religions, particularly Buddhism. He expressed his hope that the event would contribute to building a peaceful, cooperative, and developing world.

♦ Messages from Buddhist and International Leaders

Alongside speeches from Vietnamese leaders, Vesak also received messages from the United Nations Secretary-General, global Buddhist leaders, and foreign ambassadors. These messages collectively emphasized the role of Buddhism in

addressing global challenges such as war, social injustice, and environmental concerns, and called on the Buddhist community to contribute to building a just and civilized society.

♦ Key Presentations and Cultural Programs

In the afternoon, delegates listened to two keynote presentations by Most Venerable Dharmakosajaran and Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. Their talks focused on the role of Buddhism in preventing war and addressing social issues, two of the seven presentations to be delivered during the Vesak celebration. Other key topics included sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and the role of Buddhism in the digital age.

♦ Unity and Sustainable Development

Vesak 2008 was not only a cultural and religious celebration but also a forum for the global Buddhist community to discuss and seek solutions to pressing global issues. With the theme "Buddhist Contributions to Building a Just, Democratic, and Civilized Society," the event underscored Buddhism's alignment with human values and peace, contributing to the sustainable development of society.

♦ **Closing Ceremony and Visits to Historical Sites**

The event will conclude on the afternoon of May 16. Afterward, delegates will embark on visits to cultural and historical sites such as Bái Đính (Ninh Bình), Yên Tử (Quảng Ninh), and Hạ Long Bay (Quảng Ninh). These excursions offer international delegates an opportunity to gain deeper insight into Vietnamese culture and people, further promoting friendship and international cooperation.

♦ **Vesak 2008: A Mark of Vietnam's Role in Global Buddhism**

With the success of Vesak 2008, Vietnam affirmed its active role in promoting Buddhist values and contributing to the development of the global Buddhist community. The event was not only a source of pride for Vietnamese Buddhism but also a bridge that enhanced understanding and harmony between nations and religions worldwide.



CONFERENCE ON “BUDDHISM AND A JUST, DEMOCRATIC, AND CIVILIZED SOCIETY”



A thematic session at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

On May 15, the second day of activities at the 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak (Vesak 2008), after the chanting and prayer session by various Buddhist delegations, participants divided into seven discussion groups: “The Role of Buddhism in Conflict Resolution and War Prevention,” “The Buddhist Contribution to Social Justice,” “Engaged Buddhism and Development,” “Buddhist Solutions to Climate Change,” “Family Issues and Buddhist Responses,” “Symposium on Buddhist Education: Continuity and Progress,” and “Buddhism in the Digital Age.” These discussions aimed to address the overarching theme of “Buddhism and a Just, Democratic, and Civilized Society.”

Discussions within these groups focused primarily on the theme of “Buddhism’s Contribution to Social Justice.” Drawing from the principles of compassion, non-attachment, and equality in relationships, the Buddha taught methods of equitable resource distribution based on the spirit of mutual benefit. This method emphasizes sharing out of love and empathy, where

those with capabilities assist those less fortunate, enabling them to uplift themselves through their own efforts. With compassion for fellow beings, both the giver and receiver transcend greed and anger, replacing them with personal and communal karmic transformation. The capable individuals support the less fortunate in confidently pursuing happiness, while those less fortunate contribute to society, improve themselves, and develop stronger community bonds. This collective effort helps eliminate social inequalities, paving the way for a prosperous, just, and peaceful society without oppression or exploitation

1. The Role of Buddhism in Conflict Resolution and War Prevention

This sub-theme focuses on how Buddhist principles, such as compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and mindfulness (*sati*), can be applied to resolve conflicts and prevent wars. The discussion highlights that war and conflict arise from human ignorance, greed, and hatred, which can be transformed through self-awareness



A thematic session at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



A thematic session at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

and ethical behavior as taught by the Buddha. Delegates, including Buddhist scholars, monks, and international leaders, explored how Buddhist teachings offer practical solutions for mediation,

reconciliation, and fostering peace at both personal and societal levels.

2. The Buddhist Contribution to Social Justice

This session emphasizes the Buddhist approach to social justice, rooted in equality, non-discrimination, and generosity (*dāna*). Participants discussed how Buddhism advocates for the fair distribution of resources and the eradication of social disparities, promoting a just society. Key insights included the role of compassion and wisdom (*prajñā*) in creating systems where marginalized communities receive support. Buddhist leaders, academics, and human rights activists participated, sharing examples of engaged Buddhism addressing inequality and social injustice across various countries.

3. Engaged Buddhism and Development

This sub-theme explores how Buddhism can actively contribute to socio-economic development. Engaged Buddhism encourages individuals to apply Buddhist ethics in addressing real-world issues like poverty, education, and healthcare. The discussion focused on how Buddhist values, such as right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) and interdependence, can foster sustainable development. Delegates included monks, development experts, and policy makers, who shared successful Buddhist-led initiatives in community development, economic empowerment, and social welfare.

4. Buddhist Solutions to Climate Change

Participants in this session examined how Buddhist teachings on non-harming (*ahimsā*), mindfulness of consumption, and respect for nature can contribute to addressing environmental challenges, especially climate change. The discussion underscored the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of living in harmony with the Earth. Delegates, including environmentalists



and Buddhist practitioners, shared strategies for promoting sustainable living and reducing ecological footprints, drawing on traditional Buddhist ecological practices.

5. Family Problems and Buddhist Responses

This sub-theme delved into how Buddhism addresses contemporary family issues such as divorce, domestic violence, and the generational gap. Buddhist teachings on love, patience (*kṣānti*), and ethical conduct (*śīla*) were presented as frameworks for resolving family conflicts and fostering harmonious relationships. Participants, including family therapists, educators, and monastics, explored how Buddhist wisdom can help families cultivate deeper connections, understanding, and emotional resilience, particularly in times of crisis.

6. Symposium on Buddhist Education: Continuity and Progress

This symposium focused on the evolution of Buddhist education, addressing how traditional Buddhist teachings can adapt to modern educational needs. Topics included the integration of Buddhist philosophy into school curricula and the role of monastic education in preserving Buddhist heritage. Educators, monastics, and scholars discussed ways to ensure that Buddhist teachings remain relevant and accessible to future generations, while also engaging with contemporary educational challenges such as technology and globalization.

7. Buddhism in the Digital Age

In this session, participants explored the impact of digital technology on the dissemination of Buddhist teachings and practices. Discussions centered on how the internet, social media, and digital tools are transforming the way Buddhists practice and learn the Dharma. Delegates, including tech-savvy monks, scholars, and digital content creators, examined both the opportunities and challenges of promoting mindfulness, meditation, and Buddhist ethics in the digital era, emphasizing the potential for technology to foster global spiritual communities.





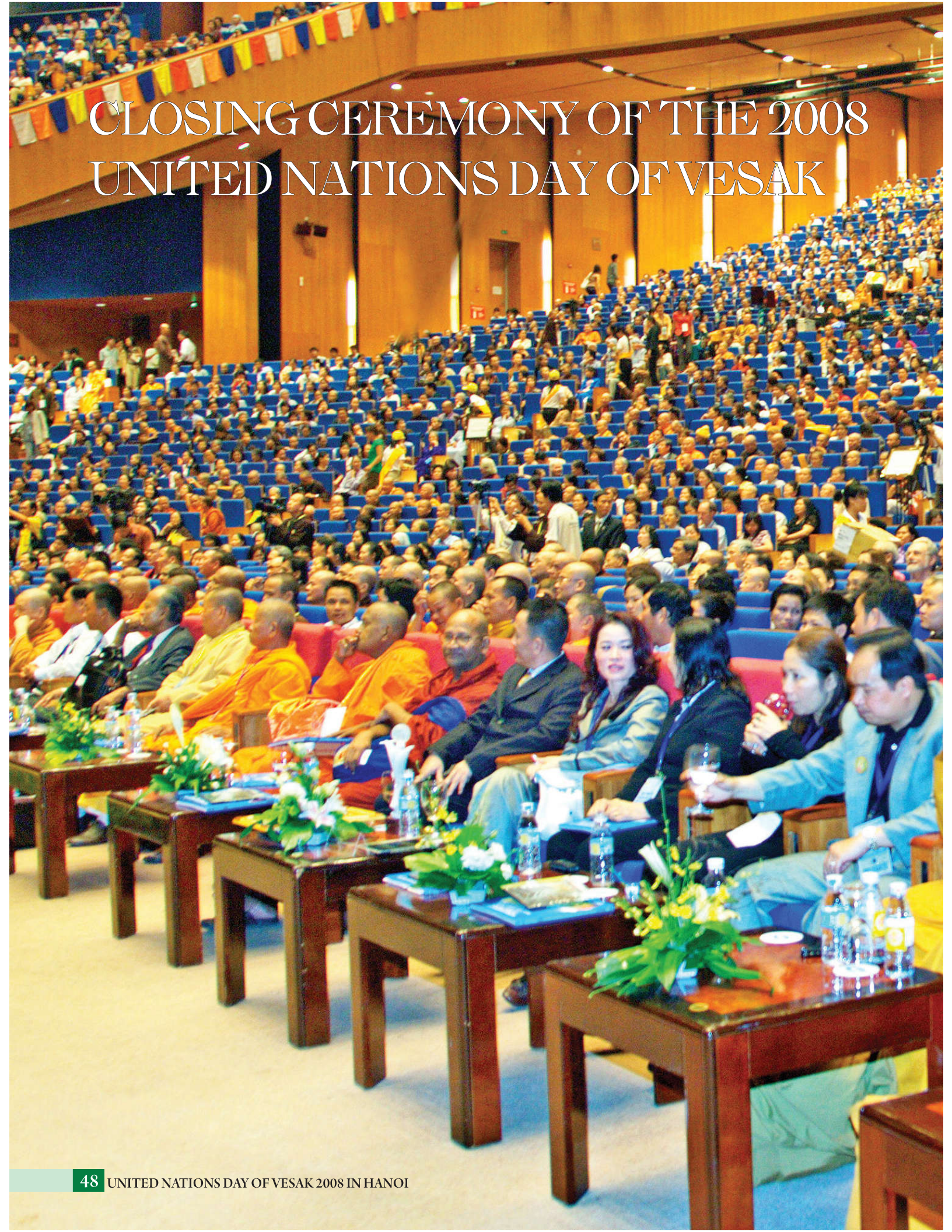
A thematic session at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



A panoramic view of the thematic forum sessions at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong





A large audience is seated in a hall with blue seats, facing a stage. The audience is diverse, with many people wearing orange robes, likely Buddhist monks. The hall has a high ceiling and is decorated with colorful flags along the top. The text "CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE 2008 UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK" is overlaid on the top half of the image.

CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE 2008 UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK



On the afternoon of May 16, 2008, after three days of solemn Buddhist ceremonies and key discussion sessions, the 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak (Vesak 2008) officially concluded at the National Convention Center in Hanoi. This event attracted the participation of numerous heads of state, leaders of both Vietnamese and global Buddhist communities, United Nations representatives, and over 600 Buddhist delegations from 74 countries and territories.

1. Remarks by Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang

In his closing speech, Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang, Vice President of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, emphasized the essential role of Buddhism in building a just, peaceful, and civilized society. He reiterated the Buddha's teachings on compassion and wisdom, asserting that these values form the foundation for creating a world free from conflict, oppression, and injustice. Venerable Thich Tri Quang also expressed pride in Vietnam's selection as the host country for the 2008 UN Vesak, highlighting the harmony between national culture and Buddhist spirituality in fostering a peaceful and progressive nation.

2. Remarks by the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and the International Organizing Committee (IOC)

In his closing address, Professor Le Manh That, President of the IOC, expressed deep gratitude to the United Nations, the international Buddhist community, and especially to the leaders of the Vietnamese Party and State. He emphasized that Vesak 2008 had surpassed expectations, reinforcing Vietnam's position in hosting international religious and cultural events while spreading the spiritual values of Buddhism, particularly peace, wisdom, and sustainable development.

3. Summary Report by Most Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, Secretary-General of the IOC

In his summary report, Most Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, Secretary-General of the IOC, stressed the significance of Vesak 2008 and the meticulous preparations by Vietnam. He shared the outcomes of the discussions on Buddhism and a just, democratic, and civilized society. Topics of discussion included conflict resolution, environmental protection, and the Buddhist contribution to social justice.

4. Remarks by Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem

In his speech, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Pham Gia Khiem affirmed the noble vision of Vesak 2008—building a just, democratic, and civilized society. He emphasized that the Vesak celebration was not only a religious event but also an opportunity for the global community to better

understand Vietnamese Buddhism, culture, and the country's policies on religious freedom and national unity. Deputy Prime Minister Khiem expressed his gratitude to the monks, nuns, and Buddhists, both in Vietnam and abroad, for their contributions to the success of the event.

5. Remarks by the United Nations Representative

The United Nations representative congratulated the success of Vesak 2008 and highlighted the pivotal role of Buddhism in promoting peace, justice, and sustainable development globally. The representative also called for continued international



cooperation in addressing contemporary challenges through the values embodied in Buddhism.

6. Adoption of the Hanoi Declaration

Professor Le Manh That officially adopted the Hanoi Declaration, consisting of 16 commitments related to the issues discussed during Vesak, including Buddhism's role in conflict resolution, environmental protection, and social justice. The Declaration also encouraged support for future international Buddhist events, such as the Buddhist Summit in Japan and the World Buddhist Forum in China.

7. Performance of the Symphony "Khai Giac"

The closing ceremony concluded with a performance of the symphony Khai Giac (Enlightenment), a special musical piece composed by Vietnamese-French musician Nguyen Thien Dao, honoring the life of Buddha Shakyamuni. This marked the first time a symphony was performed at the United Nations Vesak, and it became a significant cultural highlight in Vietnamese Buddhist history.

The ceremony concluded in a solemn and dignified atmosphere, marking the success of Vesak 2008 with prayers for world peace and the sustainable development of humanity.



The Closing Ceremony of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



International delegates at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 posing for a group photo at the National Convention Center, Hanoi. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



THE UNDV DECLARATION – HANOI – VIETNAM 2008

After three days of activities (from May 14 to May 16, 2008) featuring various Buddhist ceremonies and discussions on numerous issues closely related to modern social life, the 2008 United Nations Vesak Celebration concluded this afternoon (May 16) in Hanoi. Delegates from countries and territories participating in the 2008 United Nations Vesak Celebration in Vietnam issued the Hanoi Declaration.

The declaration runs as follows:

"We, the participants from seventy four countries and territorial regions of the International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak at the National Convention Center, Hanoi, Vietnam, from May 13-17, 2008 (B.E. 2552), gratefully acknowledging that the Conference on Buddhist Contribution to Building a Just, Democratic and Civilised Society has been generously supported by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, have unanimously resolved the following:

1. To urge international communities to strengthen their efforts towards sustainable world peace in promoting dialogue, mutual trust, respect, and human dignity among different religions and nations, through the

light of Buddhist wisdom and compassion.

2. To promote prevention of conflict and war, especially by means of disarmament including prohibition of tests of nuclear weapons, production of chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons and the prevention of the pollution of oceans and inland waters.

3. To enhance economic, social, environmental and spiritual development throughout the world, in order to achieve a higher quality of life for all the people.

4. To advocate for social justice, democracy and good governance in all sectors of society, in order to bring peace and security within and among nations.

5. To acknowledge that social and economic development cannot be secured in a sustainable way in the absence of peace and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

6. To contribute towards legal and administrative measures for the protection and improvement of the environment, at both national and international levels, in order to commit to a healthy and productive life in harmony with the environment.

7. To affirm that climate change and other forms of environmental damages are already harming human well-being and that urgent action is required to minimise these changes.

8. To stress on pursuing active measures to halt the misuse of our natural resources, a modern-life trend which has resulted in ecological imbalances, which increase the threat of climate change and endanger all life on the planet.

9. To recognise and respond to the moral and spiritual needs of individuals, families and the communities at large.

10. To recognise the need for solutions to global social problems, especially poverty, unemployment and social injustice.

11. To acknowledge the continuing need for



modernisation of education for monastics and laypeople, to enable them to meet challenges of local and global issues and crisis.

12. To provide basic education and improve the quality of education, especially for girls, women and deprived groups, in order to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation in social life.

13. To strengthen family bonds by emphasising the Buddhist principles of harmony, understanding and compassion for stable marriages and individual happiness.

14. To stress on the growing importance of information technology and provide guidance for the

wise use of technology to serve social interests.

15. To develop materials for the internet that can be easily accessed by users to bridge the gap between those in developed regions and those in under-developed societies with limited resources.

16. To support major international Buddhist events including the Second World Buddhist Forum in China in November 2008, the Fifth World Buddhist Summit in Japan in 2008, the First Conference of International Association of Buddhist Universities, Bangkok, Thailand, in September 2008, as well as the activities of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) and Inner Trip Reiyukai International (ITRI)."

Panoramic view of the Closing Ceremony of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



REPORT ON UNDV 2008 HANOI, VIETNAM

First of all we would like to extend our warmest greetings to all the Venerables and distinguished guests, while giving thanks to The Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, the International Organizing Committee and the National Coordinating Committee and hundreds of monks, nuns and devoted Buddhists who worked tirelessly to make this first-ever biggest Buddhist international event in Vietnam a great success. We would also like to take this opportunity to seek understanding and empathy of the foreign and local delegates for the inconveniences they faced due to some organizational hiccups for certain unavoidable factors, which are generally inherent in any event of such a large scale.

We all must be aware that the United Nations in a resolution in 15 December 1999 decided to celebrate the thrice-sacred day of Vesak in the month of May. The thrice-sacred Holy Vesak celebrates the Birth, Enlightenment and Passing Away of the Gautama Buddha. The first UNDV celebrations were held in the year 2000 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Subsequently, these celebrations were successfully held in Bangkok, Thailand since 2004. It is the first time that the UNDV celebrations are being organized in Vietnam.

Over the years, the United Nations Day of Vesak has become a significant cultural celebration worldwide that venerates the Buddha as a great cultural figure and sage of the mankind. The objective of the celebration is to commemorate the moral and cultural values, the thoughts of peace, equality and non-violence of the Buddha, and to create mutual respect and understanding among countries and peoples throughout the world.

♦ UNDV in Vietnam-Celebrations Opening

Vietnam hosted this grand event of international level with great enthusiasm. Over 600 Buddhist delegations consisting of about 5,000 representatives from 74 countries came to find, in the spirit of compassion and wisdom, the solutions to the pressing world issues that every Buddhist and humanity is concerned about.

The celebrations were set in motion well before the three-day UN Vesak celebrations opened on May 14 amid impressive religious festivity. One of the main activities organized was the retreats by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh in which more than 400 delegates from 41 countries participated. These delegates also organized an early morning walk around the famous

Hoan Kiem Lake in Hanoi to spiritually support the Vesak celebrations with their mindfulness.

UNDV celebrations in Vietnam strongly manifest the four significant aspects; the religious, cultural, educational and tourism.

♦ Cultural Aspect

UNDV is an international religious and cultural day that promotes interaction and exchange of Buddhist cultural values from diverse countries. Simultaneously, during the celebrations a call was made for the conservation and development of world cultural heritage including Buddhist cultural heritage, both at the national and international levels.

Cultural activities were organized not only in the capital Hanoi but also throughout other districts, towns and provinces. Buddhist culture and arts exhibition, food fair, special processions of lights decorated floats were some of the major cultural highlights of the celebrations. Lanterns were released on rivers and into the air. Balloons were released in the air and specially designed postcards to commemorate the UNDV festivities were distributed. Cultural performances were well done. A Buddhist symphony will be organized after the closing ceremony. Today evening a candlelight vigil praying for the World Peace will also be held in which about 20,000 people will participate. Thirteen cultural activities of UNDV 2008 are being organized which have created some new records including the following:

1. Biggest Buddhist Workshops having 5,000 participants from 600 international delegations from over 80 countries
2. Largest vegetarian group of 5,000 persons
3. The world biggest air balloon on Buddha Birthday anniversary
4. Buddhist flag with largest number of signatures
5. Largest number of Bodhi tree planting ceremony
6. Globe balloon having largest number of international flags
7. Theatrical piece about the Buddha's life with the largest number of free DVD distribution
8. The Vietnam largest candle light ceremony praying for World Peace with 20,000 participants from over 80 countries
9. Biggest symphony concert in Vietnam with 500 musicians.

♦ Conferences Overview

This year's UNDV celebrations in Hanoi marked an apparent shift from the previous celebrations in Bangkok, particularly in the choice of conferences'

themes and approach which were relevant to Vietnam's current social, political, economic and religious conditions. The Main theme of this year's UNDV conference was 'Buddhist Contribution to Building a Just, Democratic and Civil Society', with sub themes where Buddhism could make a difference were: climate change, family conflicts, war and healing, social change, Buddhist education, engaged Buddhism and Buddhism in the digital age. More than hundred scholars from all over the world read papers or gave presentations of their works regarding these themes.

♦ **War, Conflict and Healing: A Buddhist Perspective**

The international gathering investigated the causes of war, conflict and disharmony among different cultures, nations and religions, and tried through the light of Buddhist doctrines to find solutions. Even though after the I and II World War, the United Nations had been created to stop war and to establish sustainable peace in the planet, but unfortunately this cherishing hopes have not been realized until today. Therefore, the development of sustainable world peace was given a prominent focus at the conference.

♦ **Buddhist Contribution to Social Justice**

Fourteen scholars presented papers in this workshop, treating the theme of Buddhist Contribution to Social Justice, approaching the subject from a wide variety of angles. They conclusively demonstrated that Buddhist teaching is extremely relevant to healing the wounds in our society and increasing the health and happiness of our world.

♦ **Engaged Buddhism and Development**

Ten scholars spoke this conference and reiterated the idea that development must not only be defined as economic growth and material prosperity but also as the growth of happiness and peace in society. Many societies that were so called 'developed' had high rates of crime, depression, suicide, family breakdown and deep unhappiness, brought about precisely by the materialism and drive to consume that was the mark of our current definition of 'developed' societies, they noted. They summed up saying Engaged Buddhism has much to offer in this exploration of true development.

♦ **Care for Our Environment: Buddhist Response to Climate Change**

The threat of human-induced climate and environmental change were the two great threats to the future well-being of humanity which were thoroughly discussed along with their impact on immensely important issues of non-human species and ecosystems. The panel recommended that the Buddhist world prepared itself for climate change and promote more education about the issue. It also asked both lay people and monastics to set an example and that earth day be recognised and honoured in the world. World Buddhist community was called to exhibit leadership in this regard.

♦ **Family Problems and the Buddhist Response**

Scholars in the family panel discussed the breaking down of family institution globally, focusing mainly on the family relationships in a fast changing world pressured by the advances in technology and developing economies. The psychological aspects in family relationships also came for a thorough discussion with regard to parent-children relationships, husband-wife bonds, marriage, divorce, single parents, education, child abuse and drug addiction. The scholars gave answers to these problems from a Buddhist perspective of compassion and leading a simple life, which can help in healing and transforming family problems at their root.

♦ **Symposium on Buddhist Education: Continuity and Progress**

Buddhist universities have served as stabilizing pillars for sharing the wisdom which penetrated deeply into the internal and external structure of our mind as well as the collective consciousness, this was the observation of 13 scholars who presented papers in this workshop. The continued growth and maintenance of these centers of teaching is critical to the well-being of people within these societies as well as in relationships with other nations. There was a growing interest in the Western countries to integrate Buddhist teachings into the very foundation of education in schools from primarily level to university programs, they noted.

♦ **Symposium on Buddhism in the Digital Age**

The workshop panels on Buddhism and Technology explored the impact of new ways of communicating. Seventeen researchers, in the use of information technology gave presentations with focus on the cultural heritage issues including the use of Virtual Reality software as a method for recovering and presenting information on sites that are only partially remaining. The organizing group for the workshop was the Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative (ECAI).

♦ **Hanoi Declaration**

The Hanoi declaration is ready to be released. Besides reiterating commitment to the issues of Conference themes, the declaration will seek to support the major international Buddhist events including the Fifth World Buddhist Summit in Japan in November 2008, General Conference of the international Association of Buddhist Universities, Bangkok, Thailand, 2008, the activities of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) and Inner Trip Reiyukai International (ITRI), the 2nd World Buddhist Forum in August 2008 as well as the Fifth World Buddhist Summit in November 2008 in Kobe, Japan and the Sixth World Buddhist Summit in Vietnam in 2010.

♦ **Conclusion**

For the successful organization of UNDV 2008 celebrations, we would like to express our delight and record our deep sense of gratitude to those who worked diligently and made this event a memorable one.

PART III:

CULTURAL ASPESTS



ĐẠI LỄ PHẬT ĐẢN LIÊN HỢP QUỐC
-VESAK LẦN THỨ II
-Ngày 7-11 tháng 5 năm 2014
Chùa Bái Đính, Ninh Bình, Việt Nam





OPENING OF THE CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC EXHIBITION CELEBRATING THE 2008 UN VESAK FESTIVAL: A DISPLAY OF BUDDHIST ARTISTIC HERITAGE



♦ **Vietnamese Buddhist Cultural and Artistic Exhibition: Rich and Diverse**

On the afternoon of May 13, the Vietnamese Buddhist cultural and artistic exhibition officially opened at the National Convention Center in Hanoi, marking a significant event within the series of activities celebrating the 2008 United Nations Vesak Festival. The exhibition was divided into four thematic categories: Buddhist antiquities, Buddhist records, Buddhist fine arts, and artistic photography of Buddhism.

♦ **“Early Summer Lotus”: Buddhist Fine Arts and Reverence**

A highlight of the exhibition was the Buddhist fine arts display under the theme “Early Summer Lotus.” This collection showcased 54 fine art and sculptural pieces by 12 Buddhist artists from across the country, using various mediums such as lacquer, silk, oil

painting, and glass. Each piece not only embodied Buddhist philosophical thought but also conveyed the artists’ deep reverence for the Buddha, creating a space infused with spirituality and intellect.

♦ **Vietnamese Buddhist Antiquities: A Journey Through History**

In addition to fine arts, the exhibition garnered special attention with its theme of “Vietnamese Buddhist Antiquities,” displaying around 300 rare artifacts made of ceramics, porcelain, stone, and bronze. These artifacts, representing Buddhist cultural heritage, held immense historical and artistic value. Among the notable pieces were antiquities from the Ly and Tran dynasties, including the “Ceramic Stupa,” “Gandha Bird,” and “Stone Column Base from Phat Tich Pagoda,” which impressed both experts and enthusiasts alike.

Buddhist Photography: A Chronicle of 20 Centuries

NGÔI CHÙA VIỆT NAM: 20 THẾ KỶ HÌNH THÀNH VÀ PHÁT TRIỂN
VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST TEMPLES: 20 CENTURIES OF FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT



Vietnamese Buddhist Art Exhibition. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

The Buddhist photography exhibition featured over 800 images of Vietnamese temples and pagodas, chronicling the formation and development of Buddhism in Vietnam over the past 20 centuries. The photographs also captured Buddhist activities across provinces and cities, as well as notable Buddhist records, offering viewers a deeper understanding of the richness and diversity of Buddhism in everyday life.

♦ **Buddhist Cultural Fair: A Hub for Knowledge Sharing and Connection**

Alongside the art exhibitions, the Buddhist Cultural Fair opened with more than 40 booths, showcasing nearly 1,000 titles on Buddhism, alongside hundreds of other stalls displaying Buddhist ritual instruments, Buddhist magazines, clothing, worship items, and vegetarian cuisine. This was not only a space for displaying products but also a venue for the Buddhist community and

those interested in Buddhism to engage, share, and deepen their understanding of Buddhist teachings.

♦ **Opening of the UN Vesak 2008 Media Center: Spreading the Message of Peace**

On the same day, Deputy Minister of Information and Communications Do Quy Doan, Venerable Thich Thanh Tu, and Professor Le Manh That inaugurated the UN Vesak 2008 Media Center. The center was equipped with modern facilities, including 50 computers connected to the internet, ready to serve about 300 domestic and international journalists, ensuring swift and efficient coverage of the Vesak celebration.

The media center operated from May 13 until the conclusion of the festival on May 17, ensuring timely and accurate dissemination of information, contributing to the promotion of Vietnam's Buddhist heritage and the global message of peace.



Opening Ceremony of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 Exhibition. Photo: Vo Van Tuong





VESAK 2008 GRAND MUSIC FESTIVAL



ĐẠI LỄ PHẬT ĐẢN L

**PHẬT GIÁO VÀ
XÃ HỘI CÔNG BẰNG**

THE UNITED NATIONS DAY OF

**13th to 17th
National Convention**

**BUDDHIST CONTRIB
A JUST, DEMOCRATIC**

Hosted by the Social
Co-organized by International Organizing Committee, Viet



THE UNITED NATIONS

The Symphony concert "Khai Giác" (Awakening) at the Closing Ceremony of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008.
Photo: Vò Van Tuong

TIỀN HỢP QUỐC 2008

VIỆC XÂY DỰNG
DÂN CHỦ, VĂN MINH

OF VESAK CELEBRATIONS 2008

th May 2008

Center, Hanoi, Vietnam

CONTRIBUTION TO BUILDING
A CIVILIZED SOCIETY

1st Republic of Vietnam
nam Buddhist Sangha and National Coordinating Committee



IONS DAY OF VESAK



A Scene from the Cai Luong Opera "The Life of the Buddha" at UN Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

Renowned singer My Linh will perform at the Vesak 2008 Grand Music Festival, which is scheduled for the evening of May 14, 2008, at the National Convention Center in Hanoi. This is the first cultural performance in a series of activities to welcome and serve international delegates attending the United Nations Vesak Celebration in Hanoi.

♦ **Stage Design and Lighting:**

The stage is primarily designed with large screens and two stylized lotus flower models, created by artist Đinh Công Đạt. The lotus, a symbol of purity and enlightenment in Buddhism, is artistically represented through Buddhist-inspired paintings. Golden lighting will serve as the primary color scheme of the event, creating a solemn and sacred atmosphere.

♦ **Musical Arrangements:**

Musician Anh Quan, the program's music director, has chosen a world music arrangement,

blending traditional Vietnamese instruments to create a fusion of traditional and contemporary elements. A special composition titled *Celebrating Vesak* (Buddhist calendar year 2552), written specifically for this occasion, will be performed as a duet by Mỹ Linh and Trọng Tấn.

In addition, the dance *Hoa Khai Kiến Phật*, choreographed by Tan Loc and based on an idea by Venerable Thích Minh Hien, will depict the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death that all beings experience in life.

♦ **Highlight Performances:**

My Linh, Trọng Tấn, and Khanh Linh will also perform well-known songs such as *Chắp Tay Hoa* (by Phạm Duy, based on the poetry of Phạm Thiên Thu), *Lạy Phật Con Vê* (by Lê Mạnh Cường), and *Nam Mô Bản Sư Thích Ca Mâu Ni Phật* (by Thẩm Oánh). Additionally, 108 Buddhist monks and nuns will participate in the performances, creating

a deep spiritual and cultural experience.

A key highlight of the evening will be a traditional Vietnamese drum performance by the Xuan Son Drum Group (SonX), a *hát văn* performance titled *Hương Sơn Phong Cảnh Ca* (based on the poetry of Chu Mạnh Trinh), sung by National Artist Thanh Hoài, and the Lục Cúng Hoa Đăng dance, a traditional Buddhist offering ritual.

♦ **Production Team:**

The program is directed by a talented and dedicated team, with Venerable Thich Minh Hien serving as the executive producer, Việt Tú as the general director, and other renowned figures such as musician Anh Quan (music director), choreographer Tấn Lộc, and arrangers Huy Tuan, Đức Tri, and Xuan Son. The stage was designed by artist Đinh Công Đạt, with visual art direction by Đàm Quang Tuan. All members contributed voluntarily, with a spirit of devotion to ensuring the success of the event.

♦ **Cải Lương Performance: "The Life of the Buddha":**

In addition to the grand music festival, on May 15, 2008, there will be a cải lương (traditional Vietnamese opera) performance titled *The Life of the Buddha*, directed by Venerable Thich Nhat Tu. The performance will feature veteran cải lương artists from Ho Chi Minh City and is considered a major highlight of the Vesak 2008 celebrations. This unique stage production portrays the life and teachings of Buddha Śākyamuni through the traditional art form of cải lương, drawing significant interest from both local and international audiences.

The cải lương performance will be attended by representatives from the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism; the Government Committee for Religious Affairs; the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN); and over 4,000 Buddhist delegates from Vietnam and abroad. This performance not only enriched the cultural and religious program of Vesak 2008 but also highlighted the beauty of Vietnam's traditional arts on the international stage.



A view of the symphony concert "Awakening" at the Closing Ceremony of UN Vesak 2008.
Photo: Vo Van Tuong

NGUYEN THIEN DAO AND THE SYMPHONY “KHAI GIAC”: THE FUSION OF VIETNAMESE MUSIC AND BUDDHISM

♦ A Talented Musician And His Mission

Nguyen Thien Dao, born in 1940 in Hanoi, is a prominent figure in contemporary Vietnamese music. At the age of 13, he was sent to study in France, and by 1963, he had already made a name for himself by winning a composition prize at the prestigious Paris National Conservatory. Though he spent over 50 years in Paris and held French citizenship, his deep love for his homeland remained steadfast. Dao's compositions frequently celebrate Vietnam and its cultural and historical values.

At the 2008 United Nations Vesak Day in Hanoi, Nguyen Thien Dao introduced *Khai Giac*, a symphonic and choral masterpiece. This composition not only demonstrated the scale of his ambition but also embodied profound Buddhist philosophy.

♦ Khai Giac – A musical journey of enlightenment

Khai Giac is a large-scale symphonic work involving 500 artists, including Buddhist monks and nuns. Lasting 40 minutes, the piece is divided into seven movements, inspired by the teachings of the Buddha and his seven weeks of meditation leading to enlightenment. Each movement, from meditation, life, and death to nirvana, traces the Buddha's path to ultimate liberation.

What sets *Khai Giac* apart is its blending of modern music with traditional religious elements. Dao chose to use the *Heart Sutra* (*Bát Nhã Ba La Mật*) in Sanskrit without translation, creating a bridge between seemingly opposing musical styles. The choir of 50 monks and nuns, combined with solo chanting, was seamlessly integrated with modern orchestration, resulting in a sound that was both timeless and contemporary.

♦ Bringing Buddhist music to an international audience

Vesak Day was an ideal platform to introduce Vietnamese culture and music to an international audience. Through *Khai Giac*, Nguyen Thien Dao not only expressed his love for Buddhist music but also demonstrated his ability to convey spiritual values to the world. Dao

emphasized that Buddhist sutras represent the collective wisdom of humanity, and *Khai Giac* was a “building block” in the ongoing effort to preserve and expand that wisdom.

♦ Music as a journey of dedication and creativity

Throughout his career, Nguyen Thien Dao believed that music was a never-ending journey of dedication. Despite living modestly in France, he took pride in the works he created from the heart. Each symphony or choral piece he composed was driven by a desire to serve both Vietnamese and global music. With *Khai Giac*,



Dao contributed not only to the world of music but also to the elevation of Buddhist teachings, spreading the Buddha's message of compassion and wisdom.

♦ **Nguyen Thien Dao – A patriot and an international figure**

With nearly 90 major compositions, many of which have been performed at contemporary music centers worldwide, Nguyen Thien Dao's legacy is vast. His name is featured in more than 70 books that highlight global figures, and he remains one of the few overseas Vietnamese recognized with dual citizenship. His career is not just a story of personal success but a testament to his unwavering love for his homeland and his relentless pursuit of creativity and service to global culture and humanity.



Composer Nguyễn Thiện Đạo conducting the symphony “Awakening.” Photo: Vo Van Tuong



VESAK 2008 CULTURAL PERFORMANCE: THE INTERTWINING OF FAITH AND CULTURE

Photo: Vo Van Tuong



♦ **A Special Event in Huong Thuy**

On the evening of May 14, 2008 (the 10th day of the 4th lunar month, Year of the Rat), a spectacular cultural performance celebrating the United Nations Day of Vesak 2552 was held at the Huong Thuy Cultural Center. This event was part of a series of public activities dedicated to honoring and commemorating the birth of *Śākyamuni Buddha*, attracting significant interest from the local community and Buddhist followers alike.

♦ **Presence of the Sangha and Government Officials**

The performance was graced by the presence of senior monastics from the *Vietnam Buddhist Sangha* (GHPGVN) of Thua Thien Hue Province. Among them were Most Venerable Thich Thanh Lien, Member of the Executive Council of GHPGVN and

Head of the Ritual Committee of GHPGVN Thua Thien Hue; Venerable Thich Giac Dao, Deputy Secretary and Chief of the Office of the Provincial Executive Committee; and other distinguished monastics such as Venerables Thich Giac Man, Thich Tinh Quang, and Thich Hanh Tri, representing the Buddhist communities of Huong Thuy, Huong Tra, and Phu Loc districts.

Additionally, local government officials were also in attendance, including Mr. Le Van Chung, Vice Chairman of the Huong Thuy District People's Committee; Mr. Le Viet Soan, Vice Chairman of the District *Vietnam Fatherland Front*; along with representatives from local law enforcement, the Department of Culture, and Information.

♦ **Illuminating Aspirations Despite the Weather**

Despite unfavorable weather conditions, the event attracted a large and enthusiastic audience. The performances, ranging from songs celebrating Buddha's Birthday to traditional dances depicting the enlightenment of the Buddha, created a solemn and sacred atmosphere. The event not only served as an expression of deep reverence for the Buddha but also provided an opportunity for Buddhist families and local cultural groups to showcase their talents and devotion to the Dharma.

♦ **Profound Impressions from Vesak Performances**

The performances left a lasting impression on the audience. Through emotionally charged songs and sacred dances, the event successfully conveyed Buddhism's message of compassion, wisdom, and peace to all sectors of society. It also provided an opportunity for local Buddhist families to affirm their roles and actively contribute to cultural and religious activities within their communities.

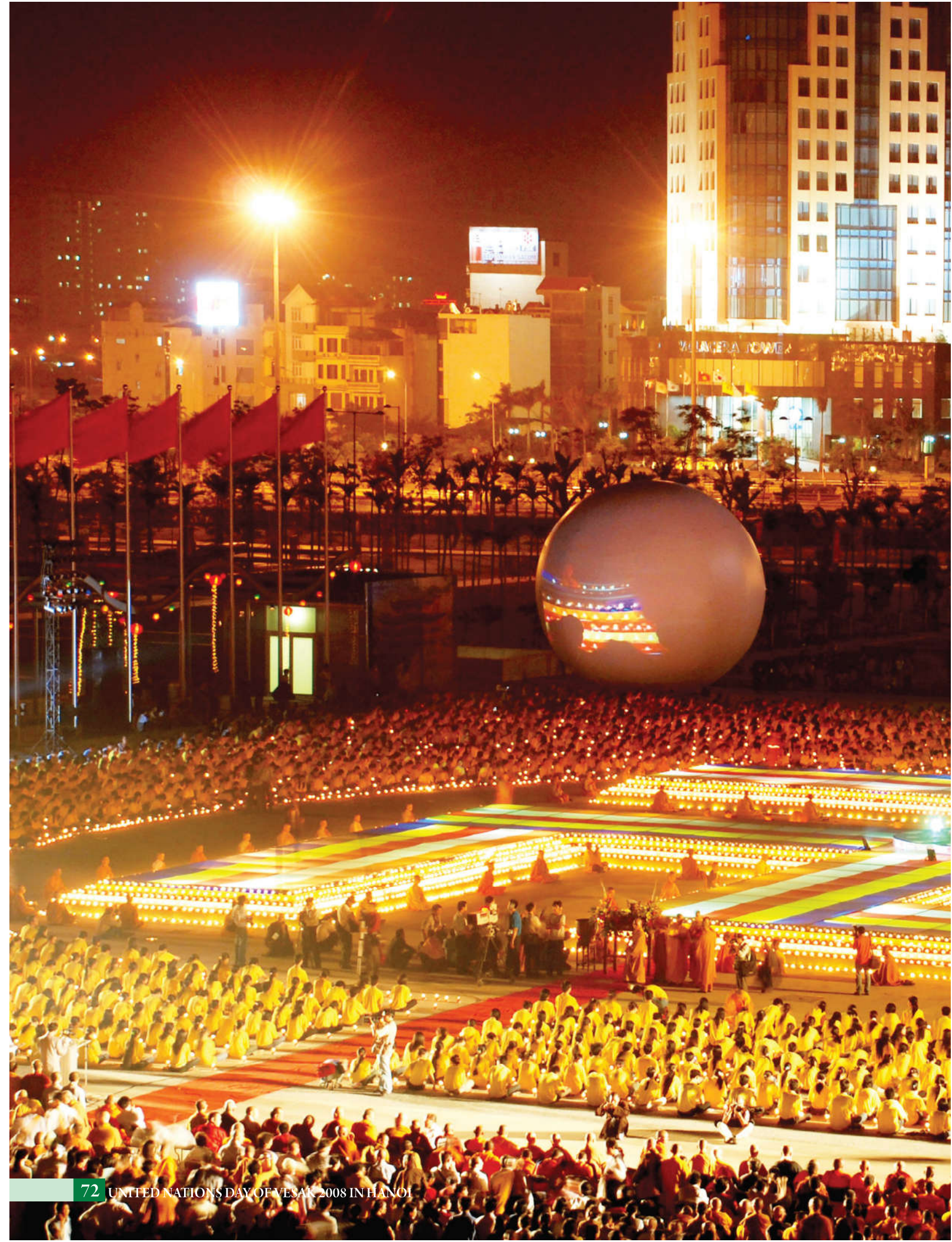
♦ **Other Vesak Cultural Programs in the Region**

Prior to this event, several other Vesak cultural performances had taken place at Thuong Bac Park and Huong Tra Stadium. These Buddhist-themed performances significantly contributed to fostering unity within the Buddhist community and the local populace, spreading joy and serenity—the essence of the Vesak season. These events became notable cultural highlights in Thua Thien Hue during this sacred Buddhist festival.

♦ **Honoring Spiritual and Cultural Values During Vesak**

This year's public Vesak cultural program was not merely a cultural event but a vibrant expression of religious faith. Through such initiatives, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and local authorities reaffirmed their commitment to fostering Buddhist cultural development within the community. The event also contributed to strengthening solidarity, mutual understanding, and cooperation between religious organizations and governmental bodies, thereby supporting the construction of a civilized, harmonious, and meaningful society during this significant Buddhist celebration.





UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK 2008: 10,000 CANDLES FOR PEACE AND HUMANITARIAN VALUES



♦ **Vesak 2008: A Unique International Religious and Cultural Event**

Vesak, the United Nations Day of Vesak, also known as the *Threefold Commemoration*, marks the three most significant events in the life of *Sākyamuni Buddha*: His birth, enlightenment, and *Parinirvāṇa*. Held annually in mid-May, this international event embodies profound cultural and humanitarian values, focusing on two major global concerns: religion and culture. More than a religious celebration, *Vesak* serves as an occasion for nations to express their hopes in the Buddha's teachings, aspiring to foster peace and eradicate suffering, war, and division.

♦ **Thousands of Delegates from 81 Countries Gather for Vesak 2008**

Vesak 2008 in Hanoi welcomed over 4,000 guests and 500 international Buddhist delegations from 81 countries and territories. According to Venerable Thich Duc Thien, Deputy Head of the Vesak 2008 Propaganda Subcommittee, this event represented an opportunity for engaged Buddhism to address pressing social issues such as conflicts, justice, environmental crises, and global challenges. This socially engaged Buddhist spirit extended beyond religious rituals to encompass discussions and forums tackling urgent global issues.

♦ **Engaged Buddhism in the Modern World**

With a focus on "Buddhism and Social Justice, Peace," Vesak 2008 emphasized Buddhism's role in resolving conflicts and preventing wars. The event revolved around seven key themes: Buddhism and peace, social justice, environmental concerns, education, and development in the digital era. More than a ceremonial occasion, Vesak was an essential platform for discussing Buddhist solutions to contemporary social issues such as climate change and family life.

♦ **A Global Vision and 10,000 Candles for Peace**

One of the most remarkable highlights of Vesak 2008 was the lighting of 10,000 candles, arranged in the shape of the *swastika* (卐), at the National Convention Center My Dinh. This symbol represented unity and a collective prayer for global peace, with the participation of thousands of monastics and lay Buddhists. Peace prayers were also held at Yen Tu, Ninh Binh—recognized as Vietnam's sacred Buddhist land—and at the Bai Dinh Buddhist Cultural Park.

♦ **Vesak 2008: A Bridge Between Culture and Religion**

Beyond religious rituals, Vesak 2008

served as an opportunity to showcase Vietnam's rich cultural heritage to international visitors. Spiritual tourism programs were organized, guiding international Buddhist delegations to renowned Buddhist sites such as Yen Tu, Ha Long Bay, and Hoa Lu. According to Venerable Thich Duc Thien, integrating religion and culture through these visits exemplified Vietnam's commitment to engaged Buddhism, promoting harmony between spiritual traditions and social life.

♦ **Unforgettable Impressions of Vesak 2008**

The United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 in Vietnam was not only a successful religious event but also left a lasting impression on the international community. With the participation of senior Vietnamese leaders, Vesak 2008 reaffirmed the strong support of the Vietnamese government for Buddhism and underscored Vietnam's significant role in the global Buddhist community. Even at Vesak 2009 in Thailand, the success of Vesak 2008 was frequently cited as a testament to the enduring cultural and religious cooperation between Vietnam and the world.

♦ **Conclusion with the Hanoi Declaration**

At the closing ceremony of Vesak 2008, Professor Le Manh That, Chairman of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 International Committee, delivered the Hanoi Declaration, which comprised 16 articles affirming support for international Buddhist activities and a vision for the sustainable development of Buddhism in the modern era. This marked a significant step in integrating Vietnamese Buddhism into the global Buddhist movement, laying a strong foundation for peace-building and sustainable development worldwide.



Buddhist youth praying for world peace at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



12 VIETNAM BUDDHIST RECORDS CELEBRATING THE 2008 UN VESAK: HISTORIC MILESTONES

♦ The Largest International Buddhist Event in Vietnam

The 2008 United Nations Vesak, held for the first time in Vietnam, became the largest Buddhist event in the country's 2,000-year history. From May 13 to May 17, 2008, the celebration in Hanoi and Ninh Binh brought together nearly 3,500 official delegates from 75 countries and territories. This significant occasion not only honored the Buddha but also affirmed Vietnam's role in promoting and preserving Buddhist values on the global stage.

♦ Vietnam's Buddhist Records

In honor of this monumental event, the Vietnam Book of Records - VIETKINGS announced 12 Vietnam Buddhist records, leaving lasting impressions on both the public and Buddhist practitioners.

1. The Largest Buddha's Birthday Celebration in Vietnam: With nearly 3,500 official delegates from 75 countries, the 2008 UN Vesak was recognized as the largest Buddhist festival ever held in Vietnam.

2. The Largest International Buddhist Conference: Attended by 5,000 people from 75 countries and 600 delegations, this conference

marked the largest international Buddhist gathering in Vietnam.

3. The Largest Vegetarian Gathering: With 5,000 attendees, this event not only honored Buddhist vegetarian traditions but also highlighted the growing influence of healthy, compassionate living.

♦ Cultural Highlights

1. The Largest and Widest Distributed Theatrical Production on the Life of the Buddha: The cải lương (a traditional form of Vietnamese opera) production *The Life of the Buddha* was released in 30,000 DVDs, becoming the largest religious stage production about the Buddha in Vietnam.

2. The Largest Pair of Lanterns: Standing 12 meters tall and weighing 10 tons each, the two lanterns at Hoang Phap Pagoda, Ho Chi Minh City, set a national record for their grandeur, adding solemnity to the sacred festival.

3. The Largest Buddhist Flag: Measuring 26.32 meters in length and 60 kilograms in weight, this enormous Buddhist flag, lifted by a cluster of balloons, symbolized the connection and unity of Buddhists worldwide.

♦ **Exhibitions and Performances**

1. The Largest Buddhist Photo Exhibition: Displaying 1,000 photos of Vietnamese pagodas, Buddhist relics, and various Buddhist activities, the exhibition provided a comprehensive view of Vietnam's Buddhist heritage.

2. The Largest Buddhist Symphony Performance: With the participation of 500 musicians, this symphonic performance created a deeply spiritual and impactful artistic experience for the audience.

3. The Largest Candlelight Prayer for Peace: With 20,000 participants and 20,000 candles, this candlelight vigil became a symbol of hope and peace, touching hearts around the world.

♦ **Religious Activities and Sacred Symbols**

1. The Largest Bodhi Tree Planting Ceremony: 100 Bodhi trees, originating from the sacred tree in India, were planted at Bai Dinh Pagoda, Ninh Binh, creating a sacred space and preserving a valuable

Buddhist heritage.

2. The Pagoda with the Most Lanterns Released: Thanh Pagoda in Lang Son organized a ceremony where 10,000 lanterns were released on the Ky Cung River, creating a mesmerizing and solemn atmosphere during the festival.

3. The Largest Lantern Release Ceremony in Vietnam: 10,000 lanterns were released by monks and Buddhists, symbolizing the light of wisdom and compassion spreading across humanity.

♦ **UN Vesak 2008: A Historic Moment for Vietnamese Buddhism**

The 2008 UN Vesak was not only a cultural and religious event but also an invaluable opportunity for Vietnamese Buddhism to demonstrate its proactive role on the international stage. These established records reflected the creativity, enthusiasm, and community spirit of Vietnamese Buddhism, contributing to the global promotion of its image and generating profound cultural and spiritual values.



Vietnam record-setting ceremony at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

PART IV:

VESAK CELEBRATIONS IN VARIOUS PROVINCES



Floral car parade celebrating United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 in Vietnam. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

LANG MAI MEDITATION RETREATS DURING VESAK: SOWING SEEDS OF LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING



Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Plum Village Sangha at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008.
Photo: Vo Van Tuong

♦ A Special Event at the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008

Amid the solemn and sacred atmosphere of the United Nations Vesak 2008, several meaningful meditation retreats were organized by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village Sangha. These retreats were not only offerings to the Buddhas, but also opportunities for young people, business leaders, and the international community to learn, practice mindfulness, and nurture compassion in modern life.

♦ Youth Retreat: Listening to Understand, Looking Back to Love

From April 24 to 27, 2008, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village International Buddhist Delegation hosted the first retreat at Bat Nha Monastery in Bao Loc, Lam Dong. This retreat brought together nearly 400 participants from 41 countries, under the theme “Buddhism for Youth: Listening to Understand, Looking Back to Love.” It provided a unique space for young Buddhists and laypeople to practice mindfulness, deep listening, and cultivate loving-kindness through moments of awareness.

♦ A Journey of Compassionate Planting in Hanoi

Following the success of the first retreat, another retreat titled “Buddhism for Youth: Sowing Seeds of Compassion, Protecting Mother Earth” was held from April 30 to May 3 at Bang Pagoda, Hanoi. This retreat addressed contemporary social issues, encouraging young participants to take responsibility for environmental protection and maintain harmony between humanity and nature. Through teachings and mindfulness practices, participants were inspired to become seeds of compassion, spreading love and understanding in their daily lives.

♦ International Retreat: Engaged Buddhism for the 21st Century

From May 5 to May 11, a special seven-day retreat was organized for Western practitioners at Kim Lien Hotel, Hanoi. The theme, “Engaged Buddhism for the 21st Century,” aimed to meet the needs of international participants by applying Buddhist teachings to daily life. This retreat emphasized the importance of mindfulness practice in quietude while also offering tools to confront modern challenges such as violence, family conflicts, and climate change.

♦ Special Day of Mindfulness: Nurturing Love and Understanding

On May 13, just before the official start of Vesak, a special day of mindfulness on the theme “Nurturing Love and Understanding to Transform Violence in Families, Schools, and Society” was held at Tay Ho Hotel, Hanoi. This retreat attracted a large number of teachers, education professionals, and individuals interested in building peace and happiness in their families and communities.

♦ Thich Nhat Hanh’s Business Retreat in Hoi An

Following his participation and keynote presentation at the Vesak celebration in Hanoi, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh traveled to Hoi An to conduct a one-day retreat for business leaders on May 24 and 25. According to Venerable Thich Phap Kham, coordinator of the Plum Village delegation in Vietnam, this retreat was specifically designed for entrepreneurs, helping them manage stress, balance work and life, and work ethically with an awareness of environmental impact.

Results and Significance of the Retreats

Though the retreats were relatively brief, their impact was profound. Participants, especially the youth, felt deeply moved by the love and understanding they were taught. Many chose to take





Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Plum Village Sangha in Hanoi during the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 mindfulness retreat. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

refuge in the Three Jewels and observe the Five Precepts, a result that Venerable Phap Kham described as invaluable. He emphasized, "We do not expect immediate results. Our mission is to plant seeds of love and understanding. When the time is right, those seeds will blossom."

A Meaningful Offering to the Buddhas of the Ten Directions

The retreats organized by the Plum Village Sangha during Vesak 2008 were not only opportunities for Buddhist practice but also heartfelt offerings to the Buddhas of the ten directions during this sacred occasion. The spread of compassion, wisdom, and ethics fostered by these retreats are lasting values that contribute to building a world of peace, happiness, and harmony.





Buddhajayanti Celebration 2008 at Military Zone 7 Stadium, Ho Chi Minh City.

THE 2008 VESAK CELEBRATION IN HO CHI MINH CITY: THE EVENT HONORS PEACE AND SOLIDARITY

♦ Large-scale event in Ho Chi Minh City

On the morning of May 19, 2008, more than 20,000 monks and Buddhists gathered at the Central Sports Stadium of Military Zone 7 in Tan Binh District, Ho Chi Minh City, to attend the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. This significant event, organized by the Executive Board of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) in Ho Chi Minh City, was held to honor the birth of Buddha and to send a message of peace, harmony, and compassion to the world.

♦ Presence of Senior Clergy and Government Officials

The event was graced by the attendance of senior monastics from the Vietnam Buddhist

Sangha, including Most Venerable Thich Hien Phap, Vice President of the VBS; Most Venerable Thich Tu Nhon, Standing Vice Chairman of the Executive Council; and His Eminence Thich Tri Quang, Vice Chairman of the Executive Council and Head of the Executive Board of VBS in Ho Chi Minh City, along with other distinguished monks from 24 districts of the city.

International Buddhist delegations from Thailand, Cambodia, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and India also participated in the event, along with consulates of these countries. Government representatives included Mr. Le Hoang Quan, Chairman of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee; Mr. Nguyễn Thành Tài, Permanent Vice



World Buddhist Leaders and HCM City Council Leaders.



Representatives of various religions at the 2008 Buddhajayanti Celebration.

Chairman of the City's People's Committee; and Mr. Tran Thanh Long, Chairman of the Ho Chi Minh City Fatherland Front Committee, among other senior leaders from various city departments.

♦ Solemn and Sacred Ceremonies

The ceremony commenced with three strikes of the Bát Nhã bell and drum, symbolizing awakening and unity, marking the start of the Buddha's birth celebration. The attendees participated in a solemn meditation session filled with compassion and mindfulness. The gathering then listened to a message from the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008, read by Most Venerable Thich Tu Nhon, emphasizing Buddhism's role in promoting peace, love, and harmony for all humanity. The message also reaffirmed Vietnam's commitment to preserving and promoting Buddha's teachings of

compassion and wisdom.

♦ Opening Address and Remarks from City Leadership

In his opening address, His Eminence Thich Tri Quang, Head of the Organizing Committee, highlighted the profound significance of this event in Buddhist history, celebrating the birth and life of Buddha, who delivered a message of peace and liberation to humanity over 45 years of teaching.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mr. Le Hoang Quan, Chairman of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, expressed his joy at the success of the Vesak 2008 event in Vietnam. He praised the contributions of Buddhism throughout Vietnam's history and its vital role in building a just, democratic, and civilized society. He affirmed his belief that Vietnamese Buddhism would continue



Most Ven. Thích Từ Nhơn reading the Buddhajayanti message from the Supreme Patriarch of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.



Most Ven. Thích Trí Quảng delivering the Opening Address on behalf of the President of the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam.



H.E. Lê Hoàng Quân, Chairman of Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, addressing the 2008 Buddhajayanti Celebration.

to play a crucial role in fostering love, unity, and happiness for all.

♦ **Balloon Release for Peace and the Flower Float Parade**

In a joyful celebration of Buddha's birth, the monastics and distinguished guests released balloons into the sky, symbolizing prayers for peace, happiness, and well-being for all beings.

This act beautifully reflected the Buddhist spirit of compassion and wisdom, spreading from the hearts of followers to all layers of society.

Additionally, a procession of 60 flower floats, each adorned with cultural symbols of different Buddhist sects from various city districts, became a visual highlight of the event. Each float was a work of art, symbolizing the reverence and harmony of Buddhism in modern life.

♦ **Vesak 2008: A Milestone in Vietnamese Buddhism's Growth**

The United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 in Ho Chi Minh City was not only an occasion for the Buddhist community to honor Buddha's birth but also an opportunity for Vietnamese Buddhism to showcase its active role in spreading the message of peace and love to the world. With the participation of monastics, government officials, and Buddhists from across the country and abroad, this event reaffirmed the stature of Vietnamese Buddhism on the global stage and opened new hopes for a world filled with peace, happiness, and boundless compassion.



Floral car parade celebrating Buddhajayanti 2008 at Military Zone 7 Stadium.



The Buddha procession ceremony during the 2008 Buddhajayanti Celebration in Huế.

THUA THIEN HUE: OVER 10,000 PARTICIPANTS IN THE VESAK BUDDHA PROCESSION — A MAJESTIC AND SACRED SPIRITUAL EVENT

♦ The Grandest Buddha Procession in Vesak 2008 in Huế

On the evening of May 18, 2008 (14th day of the 4th lunar month, Year of the Rat), the city of Huế witnessed a majestic and sacred religious event: the Buddha procession from Diệu Đế Pagoda to Từ Đàm Pagoda. This event, one of the key activities during the 2008 United Nations Vesak celebrations in Huế, was organized to pray for peace, prosperity for the nation, and well-being for all humankind. With the participation of over 10,000 monks, nuns, and lay Buddhists, along with numerous locals and

pilgrims, the procession became a highlight of this year's Vesak festival in the ancient capital.

♦ A Spiritual Atmosphere and Silent Prayers

The Buddha procession officially began at 6 p.m., following solemn rituals at Diệu Đế Pagoda starting at 4:30 p.m. The participants, dressed in formal attire and holding lighted lanterns, walked in silent reverence along a 4-kilometer route from Diệu Đế Pagoda to Từ Đàm Pagoda. The flickering lights from thousands of lanterns created an enchanting, mystical scene, symbolizing enlightenment and devotion to the Buddha.

By the time the front of the procession reached the courtyard of Từ Đàm Pagoda, the end of the procession was still near the base of Trường Tiền Bridge, showcasing the immense scale of the event. Along the route, many pagodas and private homes had set up altars, burned incense, and rang bells to welcome and honor the Buddha, creating an atmosphere of deep reverence.

♦ The Wide Participation of Clergy and Intellectuals

This year's Buddha procession saw the participation not only of monks, nuns, and lay Buddhists, but also a large number of scholars, elders, students, and youth members from Buddhist groups. Together, they formed a united procession, demonstrating a collective spirit of devotion and respect for the Dharma.

The end of the procession at Từ Đàm Pagoda, where thousands of locals and pilgrims had gathered, turned the streets of Điện Biên Phủ, Sư Liễu Quán, and Phan Bội Châu into a sea of people. The lively yet solemn atmosphere left a lasting impression, marking one of the largest spiritual gatherings in Huế's history.

♦ A Cultural and Religious Flow Deeply Rooted in Huế

The Buddha procession in Huế has become a distinctive cultural and religious event, not only for Buddhism but also for the spiritual life of the city's residents. This event clearly demonstrated the long-standing connection between Buddhism and Huế's cultural identity. Within the international scope of the United Nations Vesak celebration, the Buddha procession in Huế honored traditional and spiritual values while spreading the Buddha's message of peace and compassion to the world.

♦ Conclusion: Huế – The Spiritual Heart in Vesak 2008

With over 10,000 participants, the Buddha procession from Diệu Đế Pagoda to Từ Đàm Pagoda was not just a religious event, but also a significant cultural celebration for the

people of Huế. From the meticulous preparations to the broad participation of people from all walks of life, the procession became a powerful symbol of faith and devotion to Buddhism, creating a sacred and majestic spiritual atmosphere in the heart of the ancient capital.



The Buddha procession ceremony during the 2008 Buddhajayanti Celebration in Huế

PART V:

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2008 UN VESAK



Bái Đính pagoda welcoming United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

VESAK 2008 IN VIETNAM: MANY PROMINENT ACTIVITIES

♦ A Historic Event for Vietnamese Buddhism

The 2008 UN Vesak Vietnam was not only a celebration of Buddhist spiritual values but also an exceptional opportunity for Vietnam to connect with the global Buddhist community. During the opening ceremony, Venerable Thich Thanh Tu, Vice Chairman of the Executive Council of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, extended a heartfelt welcome on behalf of all Vietnamese monks, nuns, and lay Buddhists to distinguished guests and international delegates. He emphasized that this event was a “great karmic connection,” fostering an atmosphere of unity and mutual respect. The discussions at the Vesak would contribute invaluable knowledge, transforming the teachings of the Buddha into a source of inspiration for all those who cherish peace worldwide.

Venerable Phra Oharmakoshjarn from Thailand expressed gratitude to the Vietnamese government and the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha for facilitating such a successful event, fostering a deep sense of unity among nations and the global Buddhist community.

♦ A Cultural Night Honoring Buddhism and Vietnamese Heritage

On the evening of May 14, a special cultural performance was held at the National Convention Center in Hanoi,

featuring 108 monks and nuns alongside 100 artists. This artistic event was a key highlight of the UN Vesak celebration, showcasing twelve performances that brought the richness of Vietnamese Buddhist culture to life. The lotus flower, a powerful symbol of Buddhism, took center stage, as the harmonious blend of music, visuals, and Buddhist philosophy provided international delegates with a profound insight into the diversity and depth of

Vietnamese Buddhism.

♦ International Conference: Buddhism and Global Challenges

In addition to cultural activities, delegates participated in a symposium titled “Buddhism and a Just, Democratic, and Civilized Society.” Essential global issues were discussed, ranging from Buddhism’s role in preventing war and building peace to its contributions to social justice and sustainable development. The symposium also explored Buddhist solutions to climate change, family conflict, and education in the



Most Ven. Thích Thanh Tứ, Standing Vice President of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

Photo: Vo Van Tuong



Buddhist Art Performance at United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong

digital age. Delegates provided valuable insights, helping to shape a new direction for Buddhism in addressing global challenges.

♦ **Art Exhibition: Buddhism and Vietnamese Spirituality**

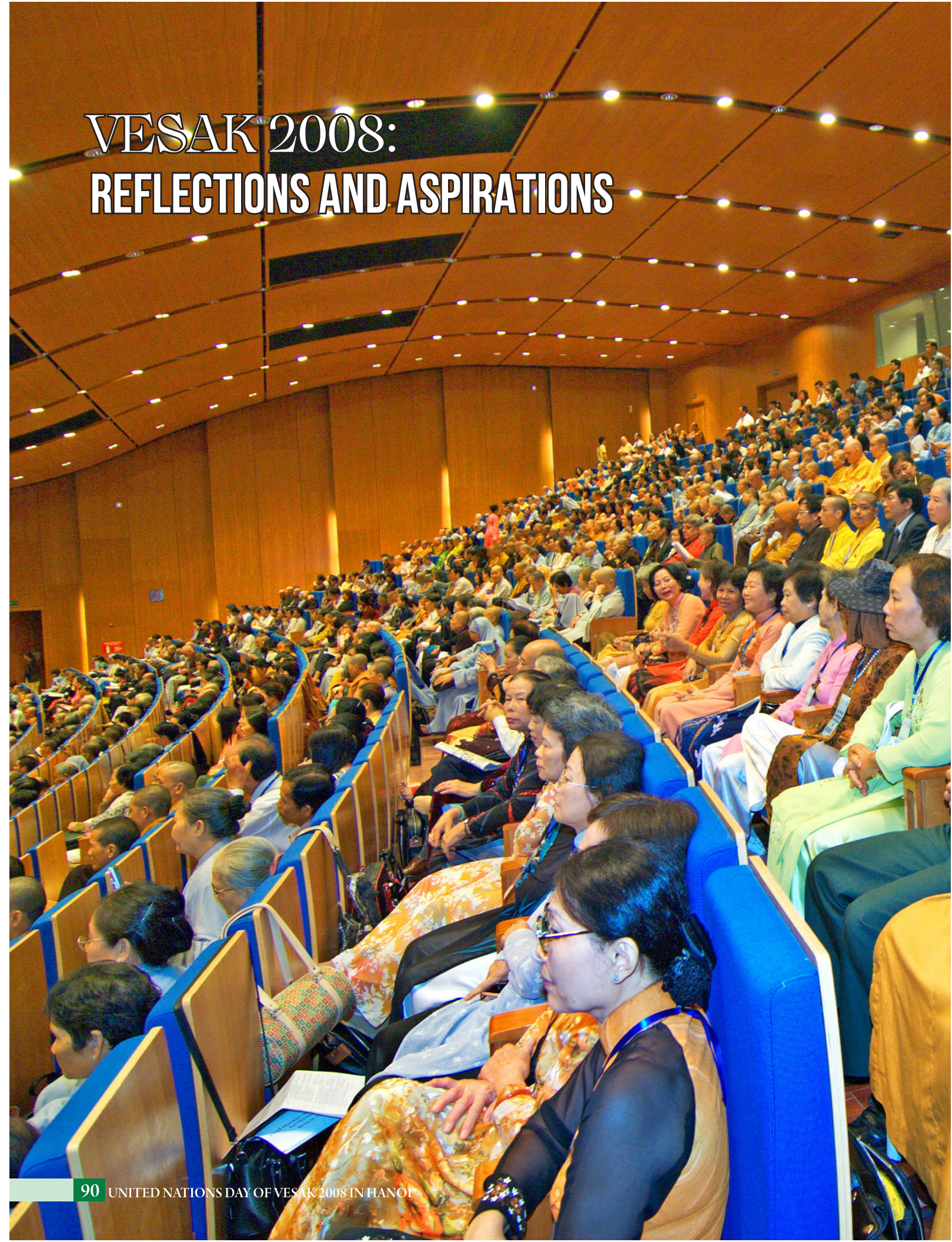
On May 15, the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, in collaboration with UNESCO Vietnam, opened an art exhibition titled “Buddhism and Vietnamese Spirituality” by artist Trinh Yen. The exhibition showcased over 30 large-scale works, blending the expressive style of East Asian art with the refinement of Western techniques. This event marked a celebratory moment for Vesak 2008 and was part of the lead-up to the 1000th anniversary of Thang Long-Hanoi. Open to the public from June

20 to 30 at the Museum of Ethnology and Hanoi’s Information and Exhibition Center, the exhibition contributed to the capital city’s rich cultural agenda.

♦ **Bridging Vietnamese Buddhism and Culture with the World**

The 2008 UN Vesak celebration in Vietnam was not only a major religious event but also a golden opportunity for Vietnam to promote its image as a peaceful, hospitable nation. It provided a platform to share the unique cultural and spiritual values of Vietnamese Buddhism with the world. Through its diverse activities, Vesak 2008 conveyed a powerful message of peace, unity, and sustainable development, reinforcing Vietnam’s place on the global Buddhist map.

VESAK 2008: REFLECTIONS AND ASPIRATIONS





Opening Ceremony of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008.

♦ Vesak 2008: A Significant Milestone and Insights

The United Nations Day of Vesak 2008, celebrated in Hue and other major cities across Vietnam, stands as one of the most remarkable Buddhist events in over 40 years. With widespread participation from monks, nuns, lay Buddhists, and the general public, Buddhist flags adorned the skies, and vibrant celebrations unfolded nationwide. Yet, alongside these remarkable successes, there remain key areas for reflection and improvement to ensure future Vesak celebrations reach even greater heights.

♦ Buddhist Flags: A Flourishing Symbol

Never before, in over three decades, have Buddhist flags flown so prolifically as they did during Vesak 2008. From Hue and Saigon to Hanoi, the streets were awash in vibrant Buddhist colors, creating a stunning visual backdrop to the celebrations. Especially noteworthy was the presence of Buddhist flags at the National Convention Center in Hanoi, where the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 was held, and their prominence on national television. This spectacle instilled immense pride in all Buddhists, reinforcing the cultural and spiritual unity of the global Buddhist community.

However, not every location displayed flags uniformly. While some pagodas hoisted them along several kilometers of streets, others had only a few. This inconsistency in festive spirit underscores the need for greater participation, particularly among lay Buddhists, in future events to enhance the grandeur of this sacred occasion.

♦ Welcoming Gates: A Symbol of Unity

Buddhist gateways—traditionally erected along streets leading to pagodas since the 1960s—are an integral part of Vesak celebrations. Yet in 2008, they appeared sporadically, mostly in front of larger pagodas. This suggests that Vesak celebrations have yet to permeate all Buddhist-populated neighborhoods. Such gateways not only serve as decorations but also represent the collective spirit of the Buddhist community. Expanding their use will help transform Vesak into a more inclusive festival, bringing peace and joy to the wider society.

♦ Media: Opportunities and Challenges

The rise of mass media has significantly boosted the visibility of Buddhism. Posters featuring the Buddha's teachings and tributes to him were displayed along major streets, brightening the cityscapes. However, the full potential of media remains underutilized. In-depth articles about Buddhism remain scarce compared to the abundance of images and news coverage.

Encouragingly, Vietnam's national television broadcasted the opening ceremony of Vesak 2008 and the candlelight vigil for peace live. This was a major opportunity to introduce the broader public to the essence of Vesak. To maximize future impact, Buddhist festivals need to be more dynamic and engaging, ensuring lasting impressions on viewers.

♦ Banners: Short and Impactful

Banners celebrating Vesak 2008 were a common sight on major streets and intersections, contributing significantly to the festive atmosphere. However, many of these banners were text-heavy, making them difficult to read from passing vehicles. Simplifying their content to feature key phrases like "Happy Vesak" would be more visually impactful and cost-effective, allowing them to be reused in subsequent years.

♦ Ceremonies in Stadiums: Enhancing the Experience

Hosting Vesak ceremonies in stadiums marked a significant milestone, drawing much larger crowds than those previously held at pagoda courtyards. Flags, banners, and vehicles adorned with Buddhist symbols filled the stands and parking lots, creating an atmosphere of joy. However, the event remained somewhat subdued, likely because it was the first time held in such a setting. Incorporating more lively activities, such as processions, collective performances, or interactive shows, would make future ceremonies more engaging, especially for live television audiences.



♦ **New Decorations: Digital Lightboxes**

One of the most innovative and striking elements of the Vesak 2008 decorations was the use of Hiflex lightboxes featuring Buddhist imagery. These high-resolution digital prints, from depictions of Lumbini Garden to images of the newborn Buddha, added a modern and visually captivating dimension to the festivities. Lightboxes are not only aesthetically pleasing but also durable and cost-effective. Expanding their use in future Vesak celebrations will bring new life to the event.

♦ **Conclusion: Towards More Comprehensive Vesak Celebrations**

Looking back at the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008, it is clear that the event marked a major step forward in organizing nationwide Buddhist celebrations. While there are areas for improvement, the accomplishments thus far provide a strong foundation for future growth. With the continued dedication of the Buddhist community and support from the media, Vesak can evolve into a festival not only for Buddhists but for all of society, celebrating peace, unity, and compassion.

Panoramic view of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



THE 2008 UN VESAK DAY: A LANDMARK FOR BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM



ĐẠI LỄ PHẬT ĐẢN L

**PHẬT GIÁO VÀ
XÃ HỘI CÔNG BẰNG,**

THE UNITED NATIONS DAY OF

**13th to 17th
National Convention**

**BUDDHIST COUNTRY
A JUST DEMOCRATIC**

Co-organized by International Organization of Buddhist Countries



Art performance at the Opening Ceremony of United Nations Day of Vesak 2008. Photo: Vo Van Tuong



♦ A Significant Religious and Cultural Event

The 2008 United Nations Vesak Day in Vietnam was not only a religious festival but also a momentous cultural and political event. Professor Cao Huy Thuan, a Buddhist scholar from Hue and professor of political science at the University of Picardie (France), emphasized that this occasion showcased not only the global strength of Buddhism but also marked Vietnam's maturation on the international stage. With Hanoi as the global Buddhist capital during the three-day celebration, Vietnam sent a powerful message of religious unity and cultural pride to the world.

♦ Buddhism and Its Global Message

According to Professor Cao Huy Thuan, Buddhism is not confined to any single nation or territory but is a universal faith for all humanity. The Buddha's teachings offer solutions to every facet of life, from war and poverty to the loneliness and insecurity that pervade modern society. His messages of compassion and peace are more relevant than ever, especially in a world grappling with violence, hatred, and environmental destruction. These values, recognized by the United Nations, provide a solid foundation for building a better world.

♦ Vietnam: A Rising Star on the International Map

The 2008 UN Vesak Day was not just a religious event; it solidified Vietnam's standing on the global stage. As the first country without a UN headquarters to host this event, Vietnam demonstrated its credibility and rich cultural heritage. This was an opportunity for the country to present itself as a peaceful, culturally refined nation deeply integrated into the international community. It also highlighted the role of Buddhism in shaping the nation's moral and cultural identity.

♦ Buddhist Values in Modern Society

Professor Cao Huy Thuan underscored that Buddhism's true strength lies not in its physical structures or the number of temples but in the way its values permeate the everyday lives of the Vietnamese people. Buddhism has been instrumental in shaping Vietnam's culture and societal values, fostering peace and happiness within the community. Vietnamese Buddhism does not simply focus on religious practice but also serves as a guardian of the country's moral and spiritual integrity.

♦ Buddhism: A Path of Justice and Democracy

Buddhism advocates not only for justice but also for democracy. Professor Cao Huy Thuan cited many examples from the life and teachings of the Buddha, illustrating that Buddhism has always emphasized equality and fairness. The Buddhist concept of justice extends beyond material sharing to spiritual equality, enlightenment, and moral virtue.

♦ Conclusion: The 2008 Vesak Day – A Lasting Legacy

Reflecting on the 2008 UN Vesak Day, it is evident that this was not merely a religious milestone but an opportunity for Vietnamese Buddhism to assert its role and value in the global context. With its principles of compassion, peace, and justice, Vietnamese Buddhism remains a vital foundation for the country's growth while contributing to the creation of a more harmonious and joyful world.



THE IMPRESSIVE VESAK 2008 SHINES AT THE 2009 UN VESAK CELEBRATION



Panoramic view of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 Closing Conference.

♦ **Success of Vesak 2008 Recognized at Vesak 2009 in Thailand**

During the 2009 United Nations Day of Vesak, held from May 4 to May 6 in Bangkok, Thailand, the event once again recalled Vietnam's remarkable success in organizing Vesak 2008 in Hanoi. The 2009 celebration attracted over 1,250 international delegates, including many renowned Buddhist scholars and leaders from around the world. The Vietnamese delegation, led by Venerable Thich Tri Quang, Vice President of the Executive Council of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN), left a profound mark on the event.

♦ **Significant Contributions of Vietnamese Buddhism at Vesak 2009**

The Vietnamese Buddhist delegation did not merely attend as observers but played an active role in various discussions. Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, Vice Rector of the Vietnam Buddhist University, HCM City and a member of the International Council for the United Nations Day of Vesak, remarked, "During the three-day event, the Vietnamese delegation delivered three key presentations on pressing topics, such as 'Political Crises during the Buddha's Time and in the Modern Era,' 'The Global Financial Crisis,' and 'The Formation and Publication of a Common Canon for Buddhist Schools'."

Vietnam was among the few delegations that contributed multiple presentations, demonstrating a strong and influential voice in international Buddhist affairs. Notably, Venerable Thich Nhat Tu was entrusted as the coordinator for the message presentations and seminars of nine nations during the official program on the first day, affirming Vietnam's prominent position in the global Buddhist community.

♦ **Vietnamese Cultural Impressions through the Presence of Buddhist Devotees**

In addition to its scholarly contributions, the Vietnamese delegation brought a rich cultural flavor to Vesak 2009. Around 100 Buddhist devotees from various provinces across Vietnam

attended the event, wearing traditional áo dài, which garnered significant attention from both Thai and international media. The áo dài not only symbolized Vietnamese cultural identity but also became a representation of solidarity and cultural exchange at such a major international event.

♦ **Vesak 2008 – Vietnam's Pride on the International Stage**

According to Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, the success of Vesak 2008 in Vietnam left a lasting impression on the international community. Many delegates who had participated in Vesak 2008 praised the event's organization, from the program content to cultural activities and the offerings. Notably, the presence of senior Vietnamese leaders at Vesak 2008 was recognized as a highlight. Never before in the history of international Buddhist forums had so many national leaders attended, underscoring the Vietnamese government's strong support for Buddhism during its integration period.

♦ **The Joint Declaration Acknowledging Vietnam's Role**

For the first time in the history of Vesak, the 2009 Joint Declaration honored the success of Vesak 2008 in Vietnam, a significant milestone. This was the first time a host country's achievements were acknowledged in the Joint Declaration, reflecting the international community's deep appreciation for Vietnam. Vesak 2008 left an indelible mark on the hearts of international friends, opening new opportunities and greater potential for Vietnamese Buddhism on the global stage.

♦ **Conclusion: Vietnam in the Eyes of International Friends through Vesak**

Vesak 2008 was not only a major international religious event but also an opportunity for Vietnam to assert its position and important role in the global Buddhist community. The recognition of Vesak 2008's success at Vesak 2009 is clear evidence of Vietnam's growing influence, both religiously and culturally, in the eyes of the international community.

SUMMARY CONFERENCE OF THE 2008 UN VESAK CELEBRATION: SUCCESS AND KEY CONTRIBUTIONS



Panoramic view of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 Closing Conference.

On the morning of January 12, 2009, in Hanoi, a conference was held to summarize the organization of the 2008 United Nations Vesak Day. The conference saw the participation of senior monks from the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS), representatives of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, along with various government agencies, individuals, and organizations who contributed to the event. Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem, who directly oversaw the organization of the celebration, was present and delivered remarks at the conference. Attendees also included prominent figures such as Venerable Thich Tri Quang, Vice President of the VBS's Council for Religious Affairs, and Venerable Thich Thanh Nhieu, Executive Vice President of the VBS.

♦ A Religious and Cultural Event of International Scope

The 2008 United Nations Vesak Celebration, held for the first time in Vietnam from May 14 to

17 at the National Convention Center in Hanoi, attracted 4,000 official delegates from 74 countries and territories. Participants included international Buddhist leaders, scholars, UN representatives, UNESCO officials, and other international organizations. The event was honored to host leaders from the Vietnamese Communist Party, the Government, and the National Assembly, as well as senior monks, nuns, and notable Buddhists from all over Vietnam.

♦ Meticulous and Comprehensive Preparations

To ensure the success of this major event, the Prime Minister assigned Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem to oversee the organizational efforts. A National Coordinating Committee was established with representatives from central and local authorities such as Hanoi, Ninh Binh, Quang Ninh, and Ho Chi Minh City, alongside the VBS and Vietnamese members of the International Organizing Committee (IOC).

The Coordinating Committee managed eight subcommittees responsible for protocol, content, decor, ceremonies, sponsorship, security, logistics, and media coordination.

♦ A Variety of Activities

Throughout the Vesak celebration, participants took part in the opening and closing ceremonies, peace prayers, and several academic forums discussing Buddhism's contribution to creating a just, democratic, and civilized society. Cultural activities, including Buddhist exhibitions and visits to sacred sites like Bai Dinh (Ninh Binh), Yen Tu (Quang Ninh), and Ha Long Bay, left lasting impressions on attendees.

♦ A Resounding Success and Positive Impact

Thanks to the support of government agencies, the active participation of the VBS, IOC members, sponsors, and the public, the 2008 UN Vesak Celebration was a resounding success. The event not only elevated the prestige of Vietnamese Buddhism internationally but also strengthened Vietnam's standing in the global community, particularly within the United Nations. Additionally, it inspired a spirit of unity among the country's monks, nuns, and Buddhists, reinforcing their positive role in national development.

♦ Recognition of Outstanding Contributions

In his speech at the conference, Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem commended the efforts of the organizations and individuals involved in organizing the Vesak celebration. He emphasized the significant positive impact the event had on



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Pham Gia Khiem, at the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 Closing Conference.

both the Buddhist community and Vietnamese society. On this occasion, the Prime Minister awarded commendations to 19 organizations and 33 individuals for their outstanding contributions. Among those honored were many VBS leaders, including Venerable Thich Tri Quang and Venerable Thich Thanh Nieu, as well as Vietnamese IOC members. The National Coordinating Committee also recognized 42 organizations and 266 individuals for their important contributions to the success of the event.

♦ Conclusion: Contributions to Both Religion and Society

The 2008 United Nations Vesak Celebration was a significant event, with profound religious, cultural, and political implications. Its success affirmed the close relationship between Vietnamese Buddhists and the global Buddhist community while demonstrating the unity and solidarity of the Vietnamese people. With this spirit of collaboration for both religious and societal progress, the celebration remains a milestone in the history of Vietnamese Buddhism and national development.



Certificate presentation ceremony at the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008 Closing Conference.