



ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE REPORT

To this we commit in spirit, thought and action." The palpable silence that descended over the crowd hung in the air as the speaker finished. She descended from the podium, cognizant of the cameras and gazes that followed her. As the words sunk in, I tried to imagine the world that had just been described to me. I had the feeling that this had the potential of creating true progress, or could end like many other such initiatives-in big, empty words.

The rally of hundreds of youth from across the Asia Pacific region who shared a common commitment to a better future was under way. In Bangkok, from February 24 to 28, 200 delegates gathered under the banner of the World Youth Peace summit. Present at this summit were those who are leaders in their respective fields: government, business, religion/spirituality, science and technology, law, media, medicine and health, arts, culture and sports, and environment and agriculture.

The conference was co-hosted by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and Sathira Dhammasathan, a meditation and harmony centre. The Venerable Mae-Chee Sansanee Sthirasuta offered her tranquil gardens for a pre-conference event on 25 February. Delegates, religious leaders and Sathira Dhammasathan members (minority

groups and juvenile offenders), practised the philosophy of "peace within, peace with each other and peace with nature". Together, they created environmentally friendly pieces of art symbolising peace. As night fell, the gardens were alight with candles, initiated by the religious leaders and passed onto the delegates and other members. Within minutes, the gardens were glowing with blossoms of light, lit in unity for the cause of peace.

One day of ceremony and introductory discussion along with three days of thematic information sessions, workshops and late nights made up the core of this summit. Organizers hoped that the delegates would come together to form a common vision of the future, and make a commitment to a plan of action that would enable it. The process was designed to foster a high level of participation.

The first day of the conference, 25 February, was held amidst the grand halls and serene gardens of Buddhamonthon, Thailand's religious conference centre. Delegates and participants exchanged ideas on peace with attending religious leaders; HE Kamel Al-Sharif, HE Mahmoud Araghi, Rev.Dr. Joan Campbell, Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, HH Swarmi Dayananda Saraswati, HE Ms. Leticia Ramos Shahani, Most Venerable Master Sheng Yen, Sister Joan Chittister, His Grace Rev. Riah Abu Al-Assal, representing Dadi Janki - Sister Maureen Goodman, representing His Beatitude Irineos I, Father Martinianos, and Mr. Irfan Khan. The day commenced with opening speeches by the chairman, Mr. Bawa Jain, the co-chairperson, Mr. Shinichiro Okuyama and co-hosts. WYPS was

officially opened by H.R.H. Princess Ubol Ratana of Thailand. Subsequently, a Thai actress, Patravarin Timkul, opened the discussion highlighting the challenges to peace.

The forum covered many issues on a variety of levels. Delegates discussed certain issues, which challenge peace such as sexual exploitation, HIV/AIDS, and discriminating against disabled persons. Theoretical issues relating to peace were also covered, such as young people acting as agents of change, the role of youth in social welfare, and academic expertise versus experimental expertise. Other methods promoting peace were also discussed.

Following the day's ceremonies, speeches and group photographs, delegates and participants were ushered outside and seated in front of a 200 metre tall standing Buddha highlighted from behind by the red setting sun. The scene was set for a magnificent dinner and cultural show that highlighted Thailand's diverse traditions, geographical resources and history by means of spectacularly colourful performances and a documentary played by LCD on a projected watercourse.

26 February United Nations Conference Centre

The conference began with opening speeches by the Most Venerable Phra Thepsophon, Mr. Bawa Jain, the WYPS chairman, Dr. Kim Hak-Su, the Executive Secretary of UN-ESCAP and Mr. Shinichiro Okuyama, the WYPS Asia Pacific co-chairperson.

At 10:00, thematic working sessions began, which including civil and Global Conflict, Human Respect, Governance, Sustaining Human and Environmental

Resources, Equality of and through Technology, Culture and Globalization and Economic Disparities and Inequalities. The format of the sessions began with a five-to-ten minute presentation by expert speakers from the United Nations, Thai universities and established associations. The discussion was then handed over to the youth to exchange their national and personal experiences of the current issues in each theme.

After lunch, the delegates began the process of establishing a unified vision and action for peace based on the factual and thought-provoking discussions. To achieve a consolidated vision from 120 delegates, they were divided into five groups. The initial task was to summarise information learnt from the thematic session, and then to individually write a vision of the world they would like to live in. Individuals were then grouped into four, where a group vision was agreed upon. This process was repeated from a group of four, to 8, then 20 and finally the whole group combined their thoughts into a team vision. Apart from the five teams following this format, there was another session in the plenary hall that explored the issue of religion and spirituality as a tool for world peace, inviting religious leaders to stimulate critical thinking. This session was primarily for observers, however, delegates were also invited and they too developed a united vision which they combined into the united vision.

At 1700, the delegates returned to the Imperial Queen Park's Hotel for the official welcoming dinner, which was interspersed by impressive talent shows from the delegates, ranging from the dramatic Haka Maori tribal dance to a graceful Korean folksong.

After dinner, the elected representatives of each group met together to formulate the WYPS Asia

Pacific shared vision. The process through which this was achieved was solely created by the delegates who worked through until the early morning hours to present their shared vision. The shared vision runs as follows: "We, the youth of the Asia and Pacific regions, believe that world peace can be achieved through the sustained development of respect, equality, natural resources, basic needs, education, governance, global cooperation and communication".

The next morning began with a keynote speech by the Former Deputy Prime Minister, Korn Thapparangsi. The delegates then presented their shared vision to the attendees and commenced a feedback session for further improvements and suggestions. After lunch and the group photograph, the delegates again were divided into their five teams to devise a unified action plan, in the same process as the shared vision. At 1700, the groups chose three or four different representatives to encapsulate each team's ideas in one plan. Back at the hotel, during dinner, Mr. Mechai Viravaidya, Chairman of Population & Community Development Association gave a speech on the spread of HIV/AIDS and the role of youth in raising awareness of the disease, family planning, and female empowerment. Towards the end of the dinner, a young Indian magician, Kruti Parekh, performed a magic show where all her tricks symbolised and taught the basic concept of peace. Later, the chosen representatives from each team got to work on formulating the unified version of the action plan. The main actions agreed upon included raising awareness and promoting the WYPS vision and action, enhancing youth participation, building and maintaining networks, using existing resources, educating, using different mediums to promote peace and raise funds, committing to individual action, and following up (See www.wyps.org link for full action plan).

Quote from Patrick Draper

Volunteer - Canada

"The summit was filled with highly diverse participants counting some 44 countries in the area. With different religions, cultures and beliefs, they all sat under one roof working towards a higher purpose. Their diversity might well prove to be one of their greatest assets, as the ability to overcome and utilize these differences will be a hallmark of the possibilities to come. During a vision-building workshop, two delegates, from India and the Maldives, approached me saying they couldn't agree on any common vision. By the end of the process, not only had the two delegates come to a consensus, but the rest of the 200 had as well.

Having spoken at length with many motivated young leaders, I realized the potential inherent in energizing youth to a common goal. There was a dedicated core group that gave up most of its nights to produce the vision and action it felt would embody its world. Many were already highly involved individuals who were working towards change. Using this experience as a foundation, the summit built a network of dedicated youth...."

28 February, United Nations Conference

Centre

During the last day of the conference, the majority of the morning was devoted to those who wanted to present their experiences and personal perspectives on peace. After the inspirational and heart-warming stories, delegates and participants broke for lunch. The conference resumed with the delegates presenting their action plan and allowing time for feedback and improvement. Once there was concordance between the delegates, representatives from each country dedicated themselves to carrying out the WYPS vision and action plan by signing the WYPS charter. Once the charter had been signed, the closing ceremony began with a keynote speech by Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Wissanu Krea-ngam and Thailand's Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan . Concluding remarks and a vote of thanks was given by the Most Venerable Professor Phra Thepsophon, Mr. Bawa Jain and Mr. Shinichiro Okuyama.

The final ceremony WYPS had prepared for the delegates and participants was a farewell dinner held at the sumptuous Royal Thai Navy Conference Hall. Until 2100, the delegates, religious leaders and participants enjoyed a colourful show of traditional Asian dances.

All the programmes and activities during the conference were organised to inform, inspire and unify the delegates into a community based on the values and commitments of global peace. The combined effort to formulate a vision and action plan and the initial common interests in peace created a unique network of dynamic and inspirational young leaders. The strength and growth of this network is a testimony to the success of the WYPS Asia Pacific conference.

"It was a gathering of energy and experience, gathering of sects, casts, religions, races and colours with one objective...wow"

Pervaiz Tufail, Delegate – Pakistan

"The important lesson was for me that my nation is not alone fighting for PEACE, there are nations in the world who are fighting to bring PEACE for our global village."

Younas Changazi, Delegate – Afghanistan

"This conference gave me a great experience and make me encouragement. Currently, Myanmar's situation is critical and now I will try to form a "Myanmar Youth Association."

Thit Lwin Oo, Delegate – Myanmar

"Now I'm more encouraging, forth coming and participatory and more importantly more conscious of peace at all levels."

Anwar Naeem, Delegate – Pakistan

"Here in India, there was never such scope for me to speak my mind. Now, I am all the more aware about the world and of course all the more willing to contribute for WORLD PEACE."

Laila. R. Hirani, India

"The measure of whether or not the words will ring true is still undetermined, as the network mobilizes to tangible action. But given the individuals in attendance, with their impressive track records and dedication, I think this summit might just bring some sunlight into a world that is becoming increasingly dark."

Patrick Draper, Volunteer - Canada