

VIETNAM BUDDHIST SANGHA- 30 YEARS OF BUILDING, DEVELOPMENT AND TRAVELING WITH THE NATION

Editorial staff

1- The process of establishment and development

In history, Vietnam Buddhism has many names but its cause has propagated Dharma. Before 1975 Vietnam Buddhism organized many campaigns to unite Buddhist organizations in our country but not any campaigns won victory because of subjective and objective reasons. Therefore, Buddhist organizations had not enough elements to unite and promote patriotic tradition of monks, nuns and Buddhist followers in Vietnam.

After April 30th, 1975, our country has made united. In this condition Buddhist sects, monks, nuns and followers have been determined to unite all Buddhist sects into one common organization. After some years for preparing, the Conference of Representative for Buddhist Unification was organized in Quán Sứ pagoda, Hanoi in November, 1981 with representative members from nine different Buddhist denominations:

- 1- The Vietnamese United Buddhist Sangha.
- 2- The United Vietnamese Buddhist Association
- 3- The Vietnamese Traditional Buddhist Sangha.
- 4- The Hồ Chí Minh City Buddhist Liaison Committee
- 5- The Vietnamese Original Buddhist Sangha
- 6- The T'ien –t'ai School Sangha
- 7- The Vietnamese Mendicant Monks Buddhist Sangha
- 8- The Southern Patriotic Clergy Solidarity Association
- 9- The Vietnamese Buddhist Study Association

The Conference unanimously agreed to establish the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha. This has been unique Buddhist organization of Vietnamese Buddhist followers, monks and nuns inside and outside of our country. The Conference adopted Charter and action plan with orientation “The Dharma-The Nation – Socialism”. From 1981 up to now, Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha has organized 6 national congresses.

The first National Congress was held in November 1981 in Quán Sứ pagoda, Hanoi with 165 representatives of 9 sects. The congress elected Buddhist Sangha Patronage Council with 50 superior Buddhist monks, and the Dharma Executive Council with 50 monks, nuns and lay people, 28 the Management Boards in provinces and cities and 6 departments of the Dharma Executive Council. Most venerable Thích Đức Nhuận was elected the leader of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Most venerable Thích Trí Thủ was elected the president of Central Dharma Executive Council of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

The second National Congress was held in October, 1987 in Viet- Xo Cultural Palace, Hanoi with 200 representatives. The congress elected Sangha Patronage Council with 60 members, the Dharma Executive Council with 60 members. In this congress 33 the Management boards of provinces and cities were established. 8 departments of the Central Dharma Executive Council were established in this congress. Most venerable Thích Đức Nhuận was elected the leader of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Most venerable Thích Trí Thủ was elected the president of Central Dharma Executive Council of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. The congress also adopted the list of ordaining 60 the most venerable monks, 22 superior monks, 21 monks and 28 nuns.

The 3rd congress was held in November, 1992 in Viet-Xo Cultural Palace with 227 representatives. The congress elected Sangha Patronage Council with 75 members, the Dharma Executive Council with 70 members. In this congress 41 the Management boards of provinces and cities were established. 10 departments of the Central Dharma Executive Council were established in this congress. Most venerable Thích Đức Nhuận was elected the leader of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Most venerable Thích Trí Thủ was elected the president of Central Dharma Executive Council of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. The congress also adopted the list of ordaining 72 the most venerable monks, 130 superior monks, 32 monks and 103 nuns.

The 4th congress was held in November, 1997 in Viet- Xo Cultural Palace with 320 representatives. The congress elected Sangha Patronage Council with 65 members, the Dharma Executive Council with 95 members. Most venerable Thích Tâm Tịch was elected the leader of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Most venerable Thích Trí Tịch was elected the president of Central Dharma Executive Council of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. The congress also adopted the list of ordaining 106 the most venerable monks, 374 superior monks, 91 monks and 278 nuns.

The 5th congress was held in December 2002 in Viet-Xo Cultural Palace, Hanoi with 527 representatives. The congress elected Sangha Patronage Council with 85 members, the Dharma Executive Council with 95 official members and 24 alternative members. In this congress 52 the Management boards of provinces and cities were established. In this congress, most venerable Thich Tâm Tịch was elected the leader of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Most venerable Thich Tri Tich was elected the president of Central Dharma Executive Council of Vietnam Buddhist

Sangha. The congress also adopted the list of ordaining 137 the most venerable monks, 419 superior monks, 75 monks and 315 nuns.

The 6th congress was held in December 2007 in Viet- Xô Cultural Palace, Hanoi with 1500 representatives. Among them, there were 895 official representatives and 26 international guests of Laos, France, America, Thailand, and India... The congress elected Sangha Patronage Council with 97 members, the Dharma Executive Council with 147 official members and 48 alternative members. In this congress, 58 the Management boards of provinces and cities were established. In this congress, most venerable Thich Phổ Tuệ was elected the leader of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Most venerable Thich Trí Tịch was elected the president of Central Dharma Executive Council of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. The Congress adopted 6 organizations of Vietnamese Buddhists in Europe as Russia, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, and Hungary. The Congress adopted charter with 12 chapters and 52 articles. The congress defined the orientation of Vietnam Buddhism: “the Dharma- The Nation –Socialism”

2- On some achievements

2.1 On activities

In 2011 Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has established organizational system in 58/65 cities and provinces. The local Buddhist organizations have operated stably and achieved many great results. The members of local management boards, which have represented Buddhist sects, have good virtuous characters and abilities to manage affairs of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

After 30 years of building and developing, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has 46.495 monks and nuns, 14778 places of worship (Buddhist pagodas, Buddhist monasteries...). The provincial/city management boards held 258

ceremonies and preached 37.040 believer; Every year about 36.000 monks and nuns carry out summer retreat. The Central Committee of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha granted 11.864 summer retreat certificates for monks and nuns.

The Central Committee of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha organized two cultivatable courses of administrative work for nuns and monks. The Provincial/ City management boards organized 70 cultivatable courses of Buddhist knowledge for 19.701 monks and nuns who were members of provincial/city management boards and preventative boards.

The provincial/city management boards appointed about 10.000 monks and nuns to manage pagodas and adopted places of worship to take part in Sangha. The Central Committee of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and provincial/city management boards have guide Buddhist followers to lead religious life in pagodas

After the 6th National Buddhist Congress, the department, which was responsible for nuns, was established in November 2008. This department belonged of the Vietnam Central Buddhist Sangha. Now many departments, which are responsible for nuns, are established. In Vietnam Buddhist Sangha there are 20.571 nuns and 8101 places of worship are managed by nuns. Nuns are active to take part in Buddhist affairs of Sangha. They teach in Buddhist colleges, take part in the courses of summer retreat and carry out well charitable work.

2.2 On training of monks and nuns

The training of monks and nuns is one of many important affairs of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. After establishment, the leader of Sangha has always taken interest in training of monks and nuns so the training of monks and nuns has expanded and developed.

Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has held well many meeting with subject “Buddhist education”. 4 Vietnam Buddhist Institutes have united educational program and compiled textbooks in levels. Vietnam Buddhist Sangha asks permission of State for opening training scheme after university .

On Buddhist educational foundation. In whole country there are 4 Buddhist institutes. They are in Hà nội, in Huế, in Hồ Chí Minh city and Theravada Khmer Buddhist Institute in Cần Thơ city . These institutes have trained 4826 monks and nuns; 8 Buddhist colleges have trained 2196 monks and nuns; 30 Buddhist intermediate schools have trained 9926 nuns and monks and 1500 monks and nuns are learning in Buddhist primary classes.

58 monks of the first term are graduated from Theravada Khmer Buddhist Institute in Cần Thơ city. At present, students of the second term are learning in Theravada Khmer Buddhist Institute in Cần Thơ city. The Theravada Khmer Buddhist intermediate school has 19 classes with 1534 students ; 26 monks and nuns are graduated from Pali continuation school; 36 primary schools have 2777 nuns and monks; 785 Pali, Khmer primary classes have educated 25.155 monks and nuns. . Thanks to the help of Vietnam government and the leaders of provincial/ city authorities, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha have sent 376 monks and nuns to learn in India, Japan, China, France, America...100 monks and nuns depended PhD theses and MA theses on Buddhism, philosophy, sociology, psychology. Now they are teaching in Buddhist Institutes, in Buddhist junior colleges

2.3 On propagation of faith

Thanks to the help of the Standing Committee of the Dharma Executive Council and related branches, the Central/ provincial Council of

propagation of faith organized successfully 4 meetings on propagation of faith in the second office of the Central Buddhist Sangha; 3 meetings on propagation of faith were held in Đà Nẵng, Kiên Giang, Bình Dương; 5 meetings on propagation of faith were held in Northern provinces; 1 meetings on propagation of faith was held in the Central part and in the Central Highlands.

Vietnam Buddhist Sangha organized successfully 4 high and intermediate courses for 681 monks and nuns. 140 monks and nuns of high level and 40 monks and nuns of intermediate level will be graduated from the 5th course (2009 -2012).

The members of the Central/ provincial Council of propagation of faith actively take part in the program of Dharma preaching and religious practice of 100 services such as Pháp Hoa, Dược Sư, tu Bát Quan Trai, Tu Thiền, Niệm Phật.... They would like to propagate Dharma to Buddhist followers, especially ethnic minority people in remote regions. In the service there are 200 to 1000 Buddhists. The Council of propagation of faith organized many exams on dogma for Buddhists in the Central Buddhist Sangha and in some regions as Hồ Chí Minh city, the Western South, The Central part, the Central Highlands, and the North. Thousands of Buddhists take part in the exam on dogma.

The achievements of propagation of faith have contributed in Dharma propagation. It has helped Buddhists to stabilize their lives.

2.4 On publishing of Buddhist prayer books and Buddhist books

Vietnam Buddhist Sangha attaches special importance to publishing of Buddhist prayer books and Buddhist books because Buddhist prayer books and Buddhist books are vehicles in propagation of Dharma. From the establishment of the Religious Publishing House (1999) to now , Vietnam

Buddhist Sangha has printed 1000 book titles with more than 6 million copies. In 2005- 2008 the Theravada Khmer Buddhism and Vietnam Buddhist Sangha have printed 29 book titles

Vietnam Buddhist studies Institutes in Hồ Chí Minh city and in Hanoi have translated and issued 100 books titles including pray- books and books on Vietnamese Buddhist history and Buddhist history in the world.

In the future, Vietnam Buddhist studies Institutes in Hồ Chí Minh city and in Hanoi will translate and compile many Buddhist books such as Chinese Buddhism, Korean Buddhism, Kampuchea Buddhism...

Vietnam Buddhist studies Institutes are also interested in training scheme of translation for monks and nuns.

Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has published 4 magazines, 1 monthly magazine and 1 weekly newspaper. They are Buddhist Studies Magazine, Buddhist Culture magazine, Khuong Viet magazine, Original Buddhist magazine, Enlightenment magazine and Enlightenment newspaper.

The website of the Vietnamese Central Buddhist Sangha, Giác Ngộ, Bình Dương, Kiên Giang, Bạc Liêu, Phú Yên, the Central Committee for propagation of faith, Vietnam Buddhist Institute have operated stably their contents are plentiful.

The Buddhist internal magazines in provinces and cities such as Hoa Từ (Ninh Thuận), Hương Sen (Bình Dương), Hương Từ Bi (Đắk Nông) Vô Ưu (Đắk Lắk) Quảng Đức (Khánh Hòa) Đuốc Sen (Hồ Chí Minh) are issued on great Buddhist Holidays as the Buddha's birthday, Buddhist holiday which was held annually on 15th of the 7th month of the Lunar calendar

2.5 On charitable social work

Charitable social work is one of many notable actions of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. On treatment, Sangha has Tuệ Tĩnh clinic with 655 consulting rooms. This clinic has cared for thousands of patients free.

Vietnam Buddhist Sangha also build kindergartens and schools for poor children and orphans

Many consultative offices for patients with HIV/AIDS are built in Hanoi, Huế and Hồ Chí Minh city by Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

Vietnam Buddhist Sangha also takes part in international relief work. It sent letters of sympathy to Asian people who were in Tsunami in 2005 and Japanese people who met earthquake in 2011...

Vietnam Buddhist Sangha also takes part in other charitable social works such as to build bridges and roads, to donate blood, to help many poor family overcome poverty...

Total number of expense for charitable works of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is about 200.000.000 Vietnamese *dongs*

2.6 On international relations

At present, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has established and exchanged with Buddhist organizations in other countries and territories, including Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, India, Japan, France, China... and some countries in Europe and America. Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has met and exchanged with the International Buddhist delegations in the office of the Central Buddhist Sangha. Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has visited many countries in Southeast Asia, Asia and Europe. Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has held many international seminars on Buddhist culture, Buddhist ethics and Buddhist education.

In 2008 Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and IOC (International Organizational Committee) organized successfully the Great Buddha's

Birthday in Vietnam. In the late 2009 and early 2010, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha organized successfully the 11th Congress of International Buddhist Nuns.

In recent years, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has carried out propagation of faith to Vietnamese Buddhists in Russia, Poland Ukraine... Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is prepared to take part in the International Buddhist Union in India in November 2011 and celebrate 2600 years *Phat Thanh dao* **in India**.

Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has compiled the book “ summing up Administrative Structure and actions of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha” in English to introduce all actions of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

In general, the international Buddhist affairs of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha have many achievements. In these affairs, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha gradually has overcome difficulties and carried out well propagation of faith to Buddhists in accordance with cultural policy of our State and Party.

2.7 On building and defending our country

Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has always promoted the spirit of "severing religion and loving country" and preserved the spirit of the national independence.

As the member of the great national unity, the social activities of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha have always associated with nation accordance with orientation of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha “ the Dharma- the Nation and Socialism”. The provincial/ city management boards have often encouraged monks, nuns and Buddhists to carry out well the movement of environmental protection and building of cultural life in resident areas.

Many monks and nuns are commended and rewarded by State. The late superior Buddhist monks Thích Đức Nhuận, Thích Thiện Hòa, Thích Thanh Tứ are presented Hồ Chí Minh medals. Superior Buddhist monks Thích Thuận Đức, Thích Thiện Siêu, Thích Trí Tịnh, Thích Phổ Tuệ, Thích Minh Châu, Thích Hiền Pháp are presented the second and the third Independent Medals. The late superior Buddhist monks Thích Định Quang is presented the third Resistance War Medal. Enlightenment Newspaper, Kỳ Quang II pagoda, Ngọc Phương monastery are presented the third labor Medals....

In the 30th anniversary of foundation, the Vietnam Central Buddhist Sangha proposes State to present many medals and certificates of merit to monks and nuns and give name Vietnamese monks to streets.

At present, monks, nuns and Buddhists believe in the role of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is more and more integrating into the international Buddhist community to contribute in building happy life for people.

3- Conclusion

Spending 30 years of building and developing, Vietnamese Buddhists, monks and nuns have carried out principle, which was proposed in Charter of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. Because of unity of monks, nuns and Buddhists, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has notable achievements. The leadership of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is perfect.

The achievements of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha are contributions in stabilizing society and developing economy. These achievements affirm the faith of Vietnamese Buddhists in socialism. This faith has been taken shape by true monks who have gone through many hardships of our country.

Under the lucid leadership of the Central committee of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and the helps of Vietnamese Buddhists inside and outside of our country, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha continues to promote its achievements and realize well the ideal : the Dharma and the Nation to welcome the 7th National Congress of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha