

## **UBCV Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do issues Vesak Message**

PARIS, May 2, 2012 (IBIB) – On the occasion of the 2556th Vesak, or anniversary of Buddha’s Birth, the Most Venerable **Thich Quang Do**, Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) has issued a Message to Vietnamese Buddhists urging them to keep up the spirit of freedom inherent in Vietnamese Buddhism, and pursue its tradition of engagement to protect the Vietnamese people and nation. The UBCV Patriarch, 84, sent the message from the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Saigon where he is under *de facto* house arrest. This year’s Vesak Day, which is celebrated in Vietnam on the 15th day of the 5th month of the Lunar calendar, falls on May 5, 2012.

In the Message, Thich Quang Do stressed that the essence of Vietnamese Buddhism, which has been practiced in Vietnam for the past 2,000 years, is the implementation of the triple ethics of Compassion, Wisdom and Fearlessness, which have laid the foundations of Vietnamese civilization. Engagement in society to save others is the key, he wrote: *“We do not focus on the individual, or the ego. Our vision is all-embracing, and our goal is to achieve the enlightenment and liberation of the community, the whole society and every sentient being. When oppressed by tyrannical dynasties or regimes that denigrate Buddhism, when faced with aggressors who violate our sovereignty or trample on the people’s freedom of opinion, we Buddhists are always on the front line of the movement to eradicate these threats”.*

Throughout history, he wrote, Vietnamese Buddhism has been *“inspired with a spirit of equality and freedom that has safeguarded our country from the domination of oppressive powers. We can truly say that Buddhism has laid the foundations of an integrated society in which the spiritual, cultural, economic and political domains evolve hand-in-hand for the development of the individual and the nation”.*

Thich Quang Do recalled that 22 monks, nuns and lay-followers had self-immolated in Vietnam to pray for religious freedom since the Communist Party took power in 1975. Whilst he did not encourage these tragic acts, he called on Buddhists in Vietnam and in the 3 million-strong Diaspora around the world to remember their sacrifice, and cultivate compassion, wisdom and fearlessness in order to pursue the UBCV’s engagement for freedom and social justice. *(See full text below)*

VESAK MESSAGE

**by the Most Venerable THICH QUANG DO**

## Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam

“On behalf of the Bicameral Council of Institutes of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, I am happy to extend my warmest greetings to all respected dignitaries, monks, nuns and Buddhists at home and abroad on this Day of the Vesak, where we celebrate the birth of Tathāgata, the Enlightened One.

“The Vesak is a blissful occasion for the whole world, for it was from this day on that humanity discovered the way to dissipate ignorance, the source of all suffering, and embark upon the path towards enlightenment and emancipation.

“This is the 2,000th time Vietnamese Buddhists have celebrated the Vesak since Buddhism came to our country. Two thousand times over, we have reaffirmed the mutually-reinforcing virtues of Compassion, Wisdom and Fearlessness that lay the foundations of Vietnamese civilization. Thanks to the noble, Compassionate heart, we are not discouraged by the suffering of birth and death, and we never turn our back on fellow beings in need. On the contrary, we feel responsible for the welfare of others, and we strive to pay and repay the Four Great Debts – to our parents, to our teachers and friends, to society and the nation and to the Three Jewels. Thanks to Wisdom (Prajna), we know how to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong and walk forward on Lord Buddha’s path. Thanks to Fearlessness, we do not shrink back from danger; we are not afraid to be alone, and we bring our personal karma and force of enlightenment to overthrow the collective karma of craving, suffering and badness that afflicts humankind.

“The history of Buddhism in Vietnam reflects the continuous endeavours of Vietnamese Buddhists to realize the triple ethics of compassion, wisdom and fearlessness. We do not focus on the individual, or the ego. Our vision is all-embracing, and our goal is to achieve the enlightenment and liberation of the community, the whole society and every sentient being. When oppressed by tyrannical dynasties or regimes that denigrate Buddhism, when faced with aggressors who violate our sovereignty or trample on the people’s freedom of opinion, we Buddhists are always on the front line of the movement to eradicate these threats.

“Although Buddhism came to Vietnam from the outside, it has harmoniously adapted to our peoples’ lifestyle, traditions and spiritual heritage. It has become a Vietnamese religion, inspired with a spirit of equality and freedom that has safeguarded our country from the domination of oppressive powers. We can truly say that Buddhism has laid the foundations of an integrated society in which the spiritual, cultural, economic and political domains evolve hand-in-hand for the development of the individual and the nation.

“Buddhists will never sever the bonds that tie them to the destiny of their country, of the world or of the Dharma. For if the Dharma is destroyed, our world will continue to subject its limited resources to serve the infinite ambitions of powers whose goal is the destruction of virtue and the extermination of human dignity. Over the past thirty seven years, if we rely on the figures available in our closed society where all information is controlled by the state, twenty-two monks, nuns and lay-Buddhists have self-immolated in the sole aim of protecting the Dharma. I mention this tragic image today [not because I am asking you for emulation], but because I want to remind you all that these are true Bodhisattvas, who have undertaken great vows, even the ultimate sacrifice for the benefit of humankind. But at the same time, I want to hold up before Lord Buddha the noble spirit and purpose of these Buddhists of Vietnam on this sacred Vesak day. Through their example, in the coming days and months, I hope that all Buddhists will realize what they must do to help to spread Buddhism as if it was their own families’ affair, and work for the welfare of others as if it was their own profession. Only then can we hope to save those people who have mindlessly let their bodies become the lackeys of political powers, and their minds become slaves to fanaticism.

“Vietnamese Buddhism has a life-span of 2,000 years. This 2,000-year heritage is an inexhaustible source of salvation and deliverance. On the day of Vesak, we should look back upon this long life-span and evaluate our spiritual heritage. What is Vietnamese Buddhism’s contribution? Only those who have realized in their lives the achievements that Buddhism has achieved over the past 2556 years can fully answer this question.

“It is in this spirit that Buddhists may reaffirm their faith in the Dharma, and realize the sacred mission of each one of us to save humankind in this era of conflict, darkness and violence in which we live.

“I call upon all members of the Sangha and Buddhist followers at home and abroad to welcome Lord Buddha into your hearts and solemnly celebrate this sacred day”.