

### **3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Gross National Happiness**

## **TOWARDS GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION ~ WORLD VIEWS MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

**22 – 28 November 2007, Nongkhai / Bangkok, Thailand**

#### ***Background information***

##### **i. Alternatives to Consumerism**

In November this year it will be exactly 10 years ago that Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, with his students around him, organized the international gathering 'Alternatives to Consumerism'. Social activists and practitioners especially from Asia exchanged their critical views and above all, their efforts to realize concrete alternatives to the mainstream development paradigm: in agriculture, in politics, in medicine, education, religion and even in business. Since 1997 the cluster of independent groups in Thailand associated under the legal umbrella of the Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF) has grown steadily and gained stability, creativity and strength. In addition to the local work, which has first priority, the groups cultivate exchanges and cooperation with likeminded groups in the region, in Asia and globally.

The year 2007, overshadowed by a new political vacuum and growing conflict in Thailand, poses a challenge to reinforce human-scale cooperation and exchanges towards non-violent transformation, alternative development and Peace building.

##### **ii. Cultural Integrity versus Structural Violence**

Ajarn Sulak's message to the world can be briefly characterized as the demonstration of exemplary 'cultural integrity'. Facing growing 'structural violence' the authentic revitalization of local culture, engaged spirituality, social transformation, critical global awareness as well as friendship may be seen as powerful antidotes. 'Structural violence' addresses in its analysis of the 'state of the world' the root causes of conflict, rather than the symptoms. Ajarn Sulak has been a pioneer of inter-religious dialogue, however his approach is not an academic exercise but an existential dialogue to reveal that 'world views make a difference' and full critical appreciation of diversity is the healthy starting point for cooperation towards non-violent transformation.

##### **iii. Contemporary Asian impulses for transformation**

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Gross National Happiness the organizers aim to bring together contemporary Asian impulses for social innovation together. Critical support and partnership with global movements of engaged spirituality is essential. Apart from 'neo-Gandhi-ism' as exemplified by Vandana Shiva, we intend to bring to the light the challenges implied in *Sufficiency Economy*, *Human Security* while *Gross National Happiness*, the cool but passionate message from Bhutan, is expected to provide the holistic framework to bring diverse world views together in a workable framework for the future.

##### **iv. Economic and Cultural Integration of the Mekong Region**

In the previous years the groups inspired by Ajarn Sulak and their partners have carefully start building grassroot-based networks in the Mekong Region. The economic integration in the region demands strong efforts to build deep-rooted understanding and cooperation including the

cultural dimension. Apart from business and technical infra-structure, migration of farmers-labourers and vulnerable citizens is growing, often in a problematic framework. This asks for exchanges, networking and new patterns of cooperation in the region and a critical assessment of 'development'.

*Gross National Happiness* is seen as a catalyst for tri-sector cooperation: 1) civil society/ NGO's should be empowered and supported in their dialogue with the 2) business and 3) government sectors. The implicit spirituality in 'GNH' has, in the preparatory years, been very helpful in bringing people together in a creative, action-oriented context and it has provided fresh inspiration for common efforts towards inner, local and global transformation.

## 1. Explanation of the Project

### 1.1. Introduction and Organization

During the 'Action Plan'-session of the conference ***New Paradigms in Development. Gross National Happiness in the Greater Mekong Sub-region*** in Ashram Wongsanit, August 2006 (the major sponsor was The Japan Foundation), the group of Bhutanese participants, our colleagues from the **Center for Bhutan Studies (CBS)** led by Karma Ura, confirmed an earlier idea that they would appreciate to see the 3<sup>rd</sup> *International Conference on Gross National Happiness* to be organized in Thailand by the **Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF)**. A report of the conference in August 2006 has been published in the English section of *Business & Society*.

The plan to organize the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Gross National Happiness in Thailand in the year 2007 was later re-confirmed in a consultation between **Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley**, President of CBS and **Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa**, Founder and President of SNF; Thimphu, Bhutan, 23 August 2006.

It was agreed that the 3d International Conference on Gross National Happiness will be co-organised by SNF in close cooperation with the group of Thai organizations (the 'Wellbeing Index Network') on visit to Bhutan, 28 August 2006 under the leadership of **Mr. Paiboon Wattanasiritham**. **Mr. Paiboon is Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Social Development and Human Security of the Royal Government of Thailand.**

The pre-conference academic dialogue initiated during the Seminar ***Gross National Happiness and Sufficiency Economy*** at the Public Policy Development Office (PPDO), Government House, August 2006, will be an important element of the 3d International Conference on GNH.

### 1.2. Previous International Conferences

- The first International Conference on Gross National Happiness (GNH) ***Operationalizing Gross National Happiness*** was organized in Thimphu, Bhutan, Februari 2004. The organizing body was the Center for Bhutan Studies [www.bhutanstudies.org.bt](http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt)

[In September 2004 SNF organized the International Seminar 'Gross National Happiness: the Message from Bhutan' in the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT). A report of the conference in English is available and was published at the AIT website.]

- The second International Conference on GNH ***Rethinking Development. Local Pathways to Global Well-being*** was held in Nova Scotia, Canada, June 2005. This conference was organized by GPI Atlantic (Genuine Progress Index [www.gpiatlantic.org](http://www.gpiatlantic.org)). Participants came from all continents of the world.

### 1.3. Aims

Inspired by the example of efforts being made in Bhutan to guide national development by Gross National Happiness; the guidance of H.M. the King of Thailand towards Sufficiency Economy; and initiatives all over the world exploring similar pathways; the aims of the conference will be:

- To provide a creative platform for inspirational exchanges on **'transformation'**, revitalization of ancient culture and simplicity in the context of modernity. And for cross-cultural communication on transformational **world views** through story-telling
- To facilitate exchanges, interaction, scientific debate and networking on research being done on **Gross National Happiness** and related issues including **Sufficiency Economy**; to prepare for ongoing research frameworks
- To strengthen and innovate effective approaches and supporting networks inducing tangible results towards the *improvement of people's* **happiness, well-being, peace and Human Security involving all stakeholders**
  - \* **NGO's, civil society**
  - \* **governments and intergovernmental bodies**
  - \* **corporate sector, business networks and social entrepreneurs**
  - \* **academics and students**

While recognizing *genuine happiness* as the (spiritual) force able to confront and alleviate suffering, as well as being the result of these efforts.

#### **1.4. Rationale Towards Global Transformation. World Views Make a Difference**

Urgently needed global transformation starts taking shape. People around the world are striving to work together to become one family in service to future generations. People are answering the challenge of the present age to recreate the world and themselves as a global community that sustains nature and sets humanity on the course of cooperation. To give direction to transformation we turn to ancient sources, induce new 'vision' and re-define our world views.

World views are the way we look at reality, the way we understand and perceive the challenges humanity faces. World views, influenced by culture, science and economic patterns, are diverse and we often are not fully aware of our and others' world views. Clarification of world views can be sought not only by scientific and political debate – though important – but as much through story telling, art and development of whole relations.

World views make a difference towards effective poverty reduction on the ground, environmental rehabilitation and liberation from injustice.

This urges the organizers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Gross National Happiness to invite all parties to make further steps beyond inspiration towards operationalization.

The first International Conference on Gross National Happiness in Thimphu, Bhutan (February 2004) initiated exchanges between scholars, NGO representatives, business leaders, policy makers and independent creative thinkers globally, around the question: how can Bhutan, as a small country and considered to be poor, mold globalization and modernity towards the preservation of the integrity of its ancient culture.

Can cultural integrity grow under the pressure of boosting GDP?

H.R.H. Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Wangchuk, the present King of Bhutan since December 2006, addressed the participants of the 1<sup>st</sup> conference in Thimphu:

**"I feel that there must be some convergence among nations on the idea of what the primary objective of development and progress should be – something Gross National Happiness seeks to bring about."**

Since the first International Conference on Gross National Happiness in Thimphu, 'GNH' has been understood worldwide as a unique, creative response to globalization and 'GDP fundamentalism'. GNH

offers inspiration to re-thinking development in all its dimensions. Therefore *'Re-thinking Development'* has been the theme of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Gross National Happiness in Canada, June 2005.

From interaction during the follow up to the first GNH conferences, two other pre-dominantly Asian concepts presented themselves as important additional impulses towards transformation. These two concepts are **Sufficiency Economy** (H.M. King Bhumipol, Thailand) and **Human Security** (Madame Sadaka Ogata, Japan / Prof. Amartya Sen, India).

Sufficiency Economy, understood beyond its national Thai interpretation, promotes a shift towards fulfillment of the moderate needs of all citizens (or even: all sentient beings), away from undue priority adhered to benefits of those in power based on the promotion of over-consumption. H.E. Anand Panyarachun, the former Prime Minister of Thailand, described the relevance of the Sufficiency Economy philosophy for global transformation in a thought-provoking article for English newspapers in Thailand the Bangkok Post and The Nation. Later the article was published in Thai and in English in the journal for Corporate Social Responsibility *Business & Society*.

Human Security marks a paradigm shift in world governance from 'the external right to interference' (and its drawbacks) to 'the shared responsibility to protect'. In its broadest sense Human Security is a renewed effort to respond to 'structural violence' in a comprehensive way.

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Gross National Happiness to be held in Thailand in the year 2007 offers an opportunity to articulate Asian world views towards transformation in a 'message to the world'. And to exchange views with visionary thinkers and activists from all over the world.**

### **1.5. The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) and its 'universalization'**

Gross National Happiness is evolving as an inspiring set of principles for policy development. The core elements ~ without promoting them as a dogma ~ have been identified as the 'Four Pillars' of GNH:

1. Cultural promotion
2. Equitable economic development
3. Good governance
4. Environmental conservation

Groups and individuals from all over the world have been encouraged to mirror their own authentic efforts with GNH development in Bhutan and where possible contribute to the 'universalization' of GNH so that it becomes an internationally comparable and applicable – sensitive to cultural diversity – public policy concept and possibly a new 'standard for development'.

The four pillars provide a flexible structure for workshops and networking during the conference, while cross-fertilization between the four areas will be encouraged (See: Methodology).

### **1.6. Conclusion**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on **Gross National Happiness** will promote efforts to compare, converge and synthesize GNH with the concepts **Sufficiency Economy** and **Human Security**.

**It will be a global conference, while emphasis will be adhered to the presentation of Asian world views, local differences they make on the ground, and their role in global transformation.**

**The result will be growth, both in depth and in volume, of an emerging 'global transformation' network inspired by Gross National Happiness, Sufficiency Economy and Human Security.**

## 1.7. Summary of expected results

- Increased awareness of the importance of ‘happiness’ and ‘well-being’ for policy development; understanding of happiness as the source of attributing meaning to life; and the frequent discords between ‘economic growth’ in its narrow sense and growth of happiness.
- Empowerment of social movements that are inspired by happiness as a leading principle, and fostering commitment towards transformation, by setting up
  - support mechanisms and cooperative networks
  - content development; capacity building
  - advocacy and advice
- Process development towards a global standard supporting the above, based on diversity of local, national, culturally specific standards; and a synthesis towards what they have in common

## 2. Methodology

The subject of the conference is complex and innovative and it designed to be a human-scale creative exercise in order to be effective. Therefore we propose to approach the conference as a one-year long collective process with a variety of activities to be organized by various groups at a diversity of times and places.

Separate related meetings could be: ‘PPDO conference’; National Health Assembly; German-Thai Sufficiency Economy Seminar; Inter-government and Research Consultation on Happiness and Well-being Indexes as Policy Development Instruments; UNESCAP Green Growth conference; Eco-villages conference and training course; Social Venture Network Asia conference etc.

A core group of Thai NGO’s and NGO-representatives from some of the Mekong countries (Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam) met for two days in Wongsanit Ashram, Nakorn Nayok. A series of GHN-related activities has been identified, and are now being realized.

The NGO core group is committed to fully share responsibility for the conference organization. A sequence of 3 preparatory meetings in Thailand, and 3 preparatory meetings in the Mekong region (Laos 23-25 March 2007 hosted by PADETC, Cambodia Youth for Peace, Vietnam VietDHRRA) has been agreed upon.

### 2.1. Synthesis

The *culmination* of common efforts at all scale and local, national and international parallel activities will be the **3d International Conference on Gross National Happiness**. The conference 22 – 28 November 2007 will bring communications together to attain a productive level of synthesis. We selected the days around full moon of November 2007, in Thailand the **Loy Krathong Festival**, as the ultimate momentum for this gathering. The gathering will start in a rural, spiritual based, setting (Wat Hin Mak Peng, a Buddhist monastery near Nonghkai, North of Thailand near Vientiane, Laos) and will be preceded by an optional excursion to Laos, 20 – 21 November (and other optional pre-conference activities).

The second part of the conference in Bangkok will consist of plenary sessions (keynotes and panel discussions), a great diversity of workshops (26 – 28 November) and three parallel action-oriented seminars at a university campus in Bangkok (*Chulalongkorn University campus: to be confirmed*). In this way the intention to bring local wisdom and cultural integrity as well as global awareness and modern communication together will be exemplified in a shared effort to challenge current dominating development paradigms and initiate, strengthen, pathways to holistic development, benefiting all sentient beings.

Some examples of workshops in Bangkok, ordered by GNH pillar, are:

- **Cultural integrity** – transformative world views – community culture – interfaith dialogue – alternative education and education reform – moral and values education – story telling – sacred music – socially engaged spirituality – gender interaction – holistic health care – eco-villages, organic architecture and landscaping
- **Sufficiency Economy** and its underlying philosophy – micro-finance – multi-stakeholder dialogue – Corporate Social Responsibility – social entrepreneurship – Green Growth – socially responsible and sustainable investment – the Spirit of Volunteerism – ‘Your Money or Your Life’
- **Good Governance** – community leadership – national well-being policies – Human Security – responsibility to protect – poverty reduction – Happiness Indexes – media freedom and interaction – participatory world governance – indigenous peoples’ rights and citizenship
- **Environmental Care** – biodiversity and local seed propagation – global warming and sustainable development – forestry conservation and community rights – water catchment area management – organic agriculture – healthy food and water – green consumers movement

## 2.2. Research

The intention to effectively operationalize GNH has led to the exploration of research instruments for feed-back on GNH- oriented policy development and implementation. A possible *GNH Index* is meant to challenge *GNP* (Gross National Product)- or *GD(Domestic)P*- driven development policies.

Research efforts include investigation on happiness at individual and collective levels (community, micro-regions, nations, and international scales); and happiness/wellbeing philosophies and policies in the various social sectors: governments, business/private sector and civil society. This includes dialogue, scientific debate and inter-cultural communication on definitions ~ *and underlying world views* ~ of happiness, well-being; compassion, love; Human Security and Peace; and related public policy development. Analysis of needs and trends towards global transformation and tangible differences at ground level.

Recent research undertaken in Bhutan by the Center for Bhutan Studies (CBS) distinguishes 9 domains as possible composites of a GNH Index:

- Psychological wellbeing
- Health
- Time Use and Balance
- Education
- Cultural Diversity and Resilience
- Good Governance
- Community Vitality
- Ecological Diversity and Resilience
- Living Standards

The intensive survey of CBS in Bhutan will be synthesized into a shorter version for further research including possible comparative research in other countries.

A ‘**Call for Papers**’ will be launched and selected papers related to the nine research domains, as well as ‘out of the box’ subjects, will be presented in a special academic session.

### 2.3. Speakers

The Organizers propose that the Opening Ceremony of the Conference in Bangkok will be presided by Prime Minister Khun Surayud Chulanont and the Prime Minister of Bhutan, with a possibility that the Royal Families from both sides will be represented.

Key-note international speakers addressing aspects of the aims are proposed as follows (tentative):

- **Mohammad Yunus – Nobel Peace Prize Recipient 2006, Grameen Bank (Bangla Desh) (to be confirmed)**
- **Madame Sadaka Ogata – Chairperson UN Human Security Advisory group (Japan) (to be confirmed)**
- **Lord Richard Layard – author of *Happiness. Lessons from a New Science*. Professor emeritus, London School of Economics (to be confirmed)**
- **Vandana Shiva – feminist biodiversity activist (India) (confirmed)**
- **John Ralston Saul – author on globalization; speaker on Good Governance (Canada) (confirmed)**
- **Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley – President Center for Bhutan Studies (Bhutan) (confirmed)**

The international speakers will be matched with Thai keynote speakers, moderators and resource persons in workshops.

### 3. Applying Institution, Participants, and Collaborating Organizations

The Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation, in close cooperation with the Center for Bhutan Studies and local organizations in Thailand, has prepared partnerships with a diversity of organizations. In the first place these partnerships are intended to be formed with organizations and individuals who played an active role in the first two International GNH conferences.

#### 3.1. Organizational arrangement

The conference will be convened by:

- **Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa – President Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation**
- **H.E. Paiboon Wattanasiritham – Deputy Prime Minister; Minister for Social Development and Human Security**

Thai and International Advisors will be asked to form an Advisory Group.

#### 3.2. Partner-organizations and Coordinators in Thailand and the Mekong region are:

**Representative Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation and Project Director – Wallapa van Willenswaard - Kuntiranont**

**Coordinator Minister of Social Development and Human Security – Ms. Kanda Vajrabhaya, Deputy Secretary-General**

**Coordinator Network of Thai Government Organizations ('Well-being Index Network'): Moral Center, NESDB, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, NHC, MSDHS, CODI, TRF, ABAC – Doctor Ugrid Milintangkul (National Health Center, NHC)**

**Coordinators Network of Thai NGO's:** SEM, TVS, RRAFFA, Social Management College (SMC) – Chatchawarn Thongdeert, SMC and Somboon Chungprampree (**Spirit in Education Movement**)

**Youth Coordinator – Somkid Mahissaya, TVS**

**International Coordinator** including development of partnerships with: New Economics Foundation; Bija Vidyapeeth; The World Future Council; Right Livelihood Award recipients' network; Quakers; Social Venture Network; GPI Atlantic; Fair Trade International; UNESCO/DESD; Asia-Europe Foundation etc (*to be confirmed*). – **Hans van Willenswaard** and **Francesco Volpini** (Suan Nguen Mee Ma publishers, Bangkok)

**Coordinator Greater Mekong Sub-region network** NGO's in Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Vietnam, China (Yunnan Province and Tibet) – **Sombath Somphone (PADETC, Laos), Magsaysay Award recipient**

**Research and Academic Coordinators – Prof. Anuchart Puangsamlee, Mahidol University, Bangkok; Ass. Prof. Surichai Wung'aeo, Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University; and Prof. Takayoshi Kusago (Japan) (Advisor).**

**Call for Papers – Dr. Michita Champathes Rodsutti**

**Conference Coordinator – Asama Mungkorntai**

**Coordinator Cultural Activities – vacancy**

**Coordinator Communication/website designer, webmaster – vacancy**

Fund-raising will be undertaken in a spirit of partnership. The Japan Foundation, Bangkok Office, has approved to be the priority sponsor, as The Japan Foundation supported two previous GNH conferences in Thailand. The Royal Government of Thailand is committed to provide the conference with appropriate financial and organizational support. Circa half of the funding has been requested from the Royal Government of Thailand; one quarter from the Thai Health Foundation; and one quarter will be solicited from international funding, including The Japan Foundation.

### **3.3. Special characteristics of the host country Thailand; and the Mekong Sub-region**

In Thailand policy development regarding Sufficiency Economy inspired by H.M. the King has become increasingly central in government policies, while the business sector and civil society play their own role in debating and initiating transformation.

**Several countries in the Mekong Sub-region share Least Developed Country (LDC) status with Bhutan and therefore have special interest in the example of inspiring innovative policy development initiated from Bhutan.**

**The conference will offer a unique opportunity to further shape South-South development cooperation.**

## **4. Dissemination**

### **4.1. Cultural Festival and Media-supported Networking**

Special attention will be given to the artistic dimensions of the process and media-communication: video; audio-recording of story-telling; photo's; newspaper and magazine articles including in the Journal on Corporate Social Responsibility 'Business & Society'. The multi-media products will help to mold the diversity of activities together.



#### **4.2. A Youth programme will run parallel and integrated with all activities.**

#### **4.3. Media**

Networking will be supported with a website, preparatory and follow up meetings and resource materials to be made available to the groups as well as publications in English and in Thai. (the cultural and media-programme will be detailed in the next stage of preparations).

#### **4.4. Target groups**

The target groups include: policy makers, politicians, public policy advisors and researchers, academics, NGO's, PO's, civil society, community leaders, Youth, students, consumers associations, business leaders and social entrepreneurs; and through the media: the public in general.

### **5. Evaluation of the Project**

An important element of growth of the 'global transformation network' is the evaluation at various stages of the process.

Progress can be measured by a survey to be conducted during the conference; the database with all organizations and persons involved; the intensity and quality of communication and frequency of activities organized in connection with the conference (before and after); coverage in the media; and ultimately change in policies that benefit the quality of life in local communities; national and global degrees of Human Security; and genuine happiness experienced at various levels.

An independent Evaluation Committee will be appointed by the Joint Organizing Committee; the management of the funding will be scrutinized by a registered auditor or Auditing Committee to be approved by the donors.

### **6. Draft Programme**

#### **Pre-conference options:**

- Excursion to Laos, Vientiane and region, 20-21 November 2007 (PADETC)
- Boat-trip on Mekong River, Luang Prabang to Nongkhai (Eco-villages programme)
- Youth programme
- Meditation retreat in Wat Hin Mak Peng
- others

#### **Nongkhai (North-East of Thailand, near border with Laos and 'Friendship Bridge' crossing Mekong River)**

#### **Thursday 22 November**

Wat Hin Mak Peng (Buddhist monastery in the forest tradition, 40 km from Nongkhai)

Opening: Interfaith Gathering, including Buddhist monks from a.o. Bhutan, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and practitioners from other beliefs

Workshops on 'Philosophy of Happiness'

Free evening in Nongkhai

**Friday 23 November**

Community Leaders' and Villagers' Forum

Story telling 'Happiness in traditional and intentional Communities'

Workshops

Free evening in Nongkhai

**Saturday 24 November**

Plenary meeting in Nongkhai town center

Open-air Cultural Festival

Evening: Loy Krathong celebration (traditional Thai festival with floating candles in the Mekong river)

**Sunday 25 November**

Transport to Bangkok

**Monday 26 November**

Optional programme:

Academic session in Chulalongkorn University

Film premiere: 'Economy of Happiness' – Helena Norberg-Hodge + film festival

Cultural Festival – Organic Fair

Registration & Reception at Chulalongkorn University

Welcome Dinner

**Tuesday 27 November**

Invocation

Formal Opening

Prime Ministers of Bhutan and Thailand

Keynote speech '*World Views make a Difference*'

Panel discussion

Lunch

Workshop session I (20 workshops related to the Four Pillars of GNH)

Workshop session II (20 workshops related to the Four Pillars of GNH)

Buffet Dinner

Free evening

### **Wednesday 28 November**

Keynote speech

*“Well-being Indexes: towards a Global Standard?”*

Panel discussion

Presentations (Community leaders; rapporteurs Academic Session; Youth group)

Lunch

Three action-oriented Seminars on the Intended Conference Results:

- \* Building Awareness of Gross National Happiness
- \* Networking and Advocacy towards New Paradigms in Development
- \* a Global Well-being Standard versus Cultural Diversity?

Keynote speech

*“Transformation: individual and collective challenges”*

Panel discussion

Closure

Farewell Dinner and Cultural Programme

### **Post-conference options**

- **Thursday 29 November: Bhutan exchanges**
  
- **Eco-villages conference and training**