



Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa

Recipient of the International Award for Promoting Gandhian Values Outside India – 2014

Born: March 27, 1933

Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa is one of the founders of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), which was established in 1989 with leading Buddhists. Besides, he is the initiator of a number of social, humanitarian, ecological and spiritual movements.

Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa was educated in Bangkok at the University of Wales, Lampeter, where he is now an honorary fellow in Buddhism. Soon after his return to Thailand, he directed his energies towards the development of sustainable models for a rapidly changing economic and social environment. In 1963, Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa founded and edited the Social Science Review – a journal that became the most influential intellectual outlet in the country. It was instrumental in awakening student awareness that eventually led to the overthrow of the military regime in 1973.

Mr. Sivaraksa's commitment to peace was strengthened during the military coup in 1976 when he was forced into exile for two years. Since then he has been championing non-violence in war-torn and repressed countries. His devotion to peace and non-violence is demonstrated by his leadership and membership in international peace organization like Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Peace Brigade International and Gandhi Peace Foundation. He is councillor of the World Future Council.

An important aspect of Mr. Sivaraksa's work as an engaged Buddhist is his focus on and commitment to inter-religious dialogue. Spending some of his early years in Great Britain enabled him to present Buddhism in a way that is congruent with Western logic. In 1976, his concern for social change as a religious matter moved him to establish the Co-ordinating Group for Religion and Society (CGRS) which included people of all community and religion.

Mr. Sivaraksa promotes religion and politics as two inter-related spheres. He proposes that each of the world's religions consists of two main aspects, i.e. universal love, which is altruistic and selfless on the one hand; and a tribal, institutionalized or egocentric factor on the other. One has to work towards peaceful co-existence and cooperation. He is convinced that defining a strategy to bring long-term peace to the world is peace making, peace keeping and peace building. Similarly to fight terrorism, he believes that one has to overcome fear to attribute to a peaceful, non-violent action.

Mr. Sivaraksa has also combined intellectual work with continual grass-roots organizing. He has founded rural development projects as well as many non-governmental organizations dedicated to exploring alternative models of sustainable, traditionally rooted, and ethically and spiritually based development. He visited rural villages, temples, and the terraced rice fields to understand the actual conditions of the people - the farmers and workers.

In 1986, Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa founded the Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute (SPD), a non-government organization with an objective to achieve genuine participatory democracy, social justice and to promote non-violent social actions for change. SPD organized many activities locally, nationally and internationally fulfilling its objectives to work towards raising awareness of civil rights and democracy and to provide empowerment training programs on non violent social actions for democratization. Target groups were student activists, grassroots people's organizations and NGO workers. In 1992, SPD joined the anti-military government campaign and demonstrations. Beside the activities at home, SPD also supported grassroots organizations in neighboring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, Burma and Sri Lanka.

Since 1990, SPD is also handling the work of the Assembly of the Poor (AOP) which is a network of Thai grassroots and farmers' organizations including small scale farmers, fisher folks, workers, ethnic minorities and the urban poor. It was formed into sub-networks around the problems faced by the poor and facilitated reforms in the government policies on economic development and people's participation in natural resource management. AOP's three networks i.e. Network of Land, Network of Forests, Network of Water empowers the poor to engage in social actions for social, economic and political justices as well as to seek alternatives to mainstream development.

Mr. Sivaraksa launched many foundations, charities, non-governmental organizations and activist groups, throughout the 1970-80s, which formed the basis upon which Thailand's robust network of non-governmental organizations currently exists. He generated tangible results through his work on rural and urban community development, provided political voice to the poor and the displaced, and he effectively challenged environmentally destructive pipelines and dams in northern Thailand.

Series of panel discussions, seminars, training programs on women's rights, political rights, civil rights and community rights awareness, non-violence social actions, social and political analysis and skills for social activism; developing materials in Thai, English and Burmese languages for training programs on alternatives to consumerism, sustainable village economics and appropriate technology, are some of the major activities of SPD.

They also aim to bring forth and fortify the women's wisdom and leadership to help participate in the natural resources management at all levels. In the areas of capacity building and eradication of poverty, SPD aims to use action research technique to enable the villagers to understand the problems, to systematize and organize the local wisdom on natural resource management and to seek ecologically and culturally appropriate alternative economic activities based on the community natural resources for poverty eradication. They are also empowering the Thai small scale farmers to implement the constitutional rights for food sovereignty.

Mr. Sivaraksa also opened the first alternative bookstore in Thailand called Suksit Siam (suksit means intellectual). Suksit Siam became a hub for cultural, Buddhist, and educational activities in Bangkok that promoted social reform and democracy.

He was awarded the Swedish Right Livelihood Award-1995; the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization) Award-1998, and the Indian 'Millennium Gandhi Award-2001'. Mr. Sivaraksa was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the American Friends Service Committee in 1994.

For the last 35 years, Mr. Sivaraksa has travelled all over the world lecturing, writing, mentoring, participating in inter-religious dialogues. He has published his own and others' books and articles, with more than hundred books written by him in Thai and English languages. Some of Mr. Sivaraksa's seminal works include his autobiography –'Loyalty Demands Dissent', as well as 'Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society', and 'Conflict, Culture, Change - Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing World'.

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