



Address of the Venerable Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Chan Khong



Sister Chan Khong is the first fully-ordained monastic disciple of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, and the director of his humanitarian projects since the 1960s. In 1959 she helped him set up the School of Youth for Social Service, training young social workers to bring aid to war-devasted villages. She organised the Buddhist Peace Delegation at the Paris Peace Talks in 1969, and led emergency efforts to rescue Vietnamese Boat People. She helped Thich Nhat Hanh establish Plum Village Monastery in France, and is the Elder nun of the International Plum Village Sangha of 800+ monastics. The deep mindfulness practices she has pioneered have brought reconciliation and healing to hundreds of thousands of individuals, couples and families worldwide.

CEREMONY FOR THE SIGNING OF THE JOINT DECLARATION OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AGAINST SLAVERY

Casina Pio IV, Tuesday, 2 December 2014

Your Holinesses, Your Excellencies, Your Eminencies, dear Most Venerables, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. Please allow me to read the words that our Beloved Teacher, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, wished to deliver here today.

In our age of global material and economic growth, there also needs to be a growth in our spiritual life. Even with the greatest good will, if we are swept away by our daily concerns for material needs or emotional comforts, we will be too busy to realise our common aspiration.

Contemplation must go together with action. Without a spiritual practice we will abandon our dream very soon.

Each of us, according to the teaching of our own tradition, must practice to be deeply in touch with the wonders of Nature, with the wonders of life in each of us, the Kingdom of God in each of us, the Pure Land, Nirvana in each of us, so that we can get the healing, the nourishment, the joy and the happiness born from the insight that the Kingdom of God is already available in the here and now. The feeling of love and admiration for nature that we all share, has the power to nourish us, and unite us, and remove all separation and discrimination.

By being in touch with everything that is refreshing and healing, we will be able to free ourselves from our daily concerns for material comforts and we will have a lot of time to realise our ideal of bringing freedom and compassion to all human beings. As it says in the Gospel, *“Do not worry about what you will eat or drink or wear. Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be given to you. Don’t worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow will care of itself.”*

In our work of service, we must have time to come back to ourselves, and generate peace in our body and mind. When we can recognise and embrace our own suffering, the energy of compassion will be born in our hearts, and we will know what to do and what not to do to relieve the suffering of our beloved ones, and of the world. We need to be able to embrace our own anger, fear, discrimination and despair; and we need to look deeply in order to generate the clarity, courage and compassion we need. When we have peace in ourselves, and clarity in our mind, we will be able to have compassion even for the traffickers themselves. We will be able to help wake them up, and touch the seed of compassion in their hearts. Our compassion can help them abandon their exploitation, and transform them into our friends and allies of our cause. But when we can take care ourselves in the present moment, our actions of service will have spiritual depth.

Without a spiritual practice we will abandon our dream very soon. And without a spiritual community we will not be able to succeed in our work of compassion. We should not go as *cavaliers seuls*, as *lone warriors*. We need to learn the art of building a thriving community, where there is brotherhood and sisterhood, love and understanding.

If we can cultivate a spiritual dimension to our life and work today, tomorrow will take care of itself. With a spiritual community to support us, we will be able to realise our dream.

Venerable Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Chan Khong, his eldest monastic student