Message from Ms Pennie White
Member, Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd.
for the Audience of the ICT for All Symposium 2012 on "ICT and Buddhism"

November 24th, 2555 B.E., 12:30-17:30 hrs.

at Panyapiwat Technological College, Nonthaburi Province, Kingdom of Thailand
organized by the Information and Communication Technology for All Club (ICT for All Club)
in Cooperation with the Assembly of Buddhist Organizations of Thailand Association,
the Thai Consumers Development Association, the Association for Constitutional Democracy, The Thai
Council of Civic Political Development, and the Science Technology and Innovation Association of Thailand (STIA)

To all the Dignitaries, VIPs, speakers, participants and guests of this symposium,

We congratulate you on coming together for this important ICT for All Symposium on "ICT and Buddhism". We also congratulate the conveners, ICT for All Club, on their efforts to reduce the Digital Divide and thank them for the opportunity to contribute to this worthy symposium.

For Buddhist communities in the Digital Age, embracing technology is the obvious next step. The Internet and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) developments have had a significant impact on the networked learning organisations aiming at immediate communications between people in different countries.

There is now a need for people to adapt to use these technologies in ways similar to other segments of society. It is a natural progression to use the technologies in the tradition of preserving and disseminating the sacred texts. The future Buddhists are the generation.com and they are looking for the teachings in their online 'always on' world. We must embrace the technologies of the Digital Age to reach the goal of being truly globally networked Buddhists.

This message is brought to you on behalf of the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd. in Australia, a regional centre of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and an Associated Institute of the World Buddhist University. Our Abbot, Anita Carter sends her blessing to you all on this occasion and to all of you for the virtuous work you do in your daily life.

Our late founder, John D. Hughes taught thousands of people Buddha Dhamma who came to our Centre in person. However, it was our founder John, who had the vision back in the eighties to see that ICT would be an important part of preserving and disseminating the teachings of the Buddha Dhamma. At this time he developed a 20 year conceptual solution for our Centre in using ICT to support the work of our key objectives to:

- To introduce a philosophy of life based on Buddha Dhamma
- To encourage the study, practice and realisation of Buddha Dhamma
- To provide beings with Buddha Dhamma training
- To preserve the Buddha Dhamma at this Temple for at least 500 years.

As a student of Buddha Dhamma from 1999 with John D. Hughes as my teacher I have been fortunate to be able to research a Masters thesis on the topic of "The use of ICT by the World Buddhist University". John D. Hughes introduced me to the worldwide network of Buddha Dhamma institutions and scholars; making available textual resources; encouraged this research to be done at the outset and supported me throughout the research process.

The World Buddhist University faculty and students expressed their commitment to putting into practice objectives to provide facility for research, learning and communication through its network. The World Buddhist University is a new kind of network, free from the traditional structure of education consisting of teachers, students and a body of knowledge to be learnt.

The faculty and students of the World Buddhist University acknowledge both the limitations of ICT in achieving their objectives and their personal limitations in using ICT. In acknowledging this, many saw the need to change and adapt in order to make the best use of ICT.

The website was seen as fundamental to the operation of the WBU because as a virtual university the website is the face of the university. The WBU website contains a webboard. This webboard needs to be moderated by a World Buddhist University Staff Member to ensure that the content is appropriate (ethical and relevant). As a globally networked organisation the WBUs participants speak different native languages and this poses a challenge. To overcome this the WBU has a policy of working globally and using English as the language for communication as most of the online world is dominated by English.

The World Buddhist University network is being developed in two ways; electronically and personally. Both elements were found to be important to the WBU. Participants acknowledged the benefits of using technology for networking but found that, at this stage, trust and rapport was easier to develop using face-to-face communication.

Buddhism as an academic pursuit can be aided by the use of ICT but it is questionable whether Buddhism as a practice can be transmitted online because it is so subtle and has been passed from teacher to student for centuries as recommended by the texts. Buddhism is usually practiced in communities. The WBU must be wary of people thinking they can achieve this through the technology alone. ICT could be a threat to the traditional forms of Buddhist instruction and care needs to be taken not to undermine the fundamental teachings.

The use of ICT is not contrary to the Buddhist teachings however there are some caveats on this. Lay Buddhists who live a family life and keep five precepts (a code of morality to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicants that cloud the mind) may use ICT for any legal purpose not contrary to

these precepts. There were concerns by Senior Monks about Buddhist Monks using ICT for some purposes because many Monks adhere to 227 precepts including the abstinence from entertainments (such as listening to music or theatrical plays or dancing). Another issue for Monks using ICT or learning about worldly subjects is that it must not interfere with their learning of the Pali language or study of Buddhist texts. The main areas of study and development in Buddhism are morality, concentration and wisdom as the means of reaching enlightenment.

On the topic of the the digital divide, participants explained that the WBU is located in Thailand where ICT have only become available in the city areas in the last few years and are not yet available in most of the villages. This was an issue for the WBU because many of the staff and students had little exposure to the technologies. Participants who resided in Australia have had better access to technology and have had so for a longer time.

This research found that the World Buddhist University found their own strategy for closing the gap around the generation divide. The senior WBU staff did not feel as skilled as younger staff in using ICT. To work around this, senior and junior staff to work collaboratively on the website displayed using a digital projector.

Buddhist online learning environment need to embrace a new pedagogy capable of supporting Buddhist methods of learning.

As in the vision of John D. Hughes, there will come a time that in future, with more advanced video and holographic technology, where a student may sit before a virtual teacher using the Internet to provide a traditional teacher student face-to-face relationship suitable for learning Buddhist teachings.

It is because of the fact that technology does not in itself bring equality or equal access to education that the work you are doing today at this symposium is all the more necessary and pertinent.

Thank you for this opportunity to share some thoughts with you at your symposium on behalf of the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd.

May the symposium strengthen the networks of those who are bringing the Buddha Dhamma to all in the Digital Age.

Thank you,

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