PRESS RELEASE

Regional Workshop for Reviving Buddhist Arts

Bangkok, 15 November 2007 – UNESCO and Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) will be organizing a regional workshop to evaluate the results of the UNESCO project "Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha" from 21-24 November 2007 at the MCU Wang Noi campus.

The event will be officially opened by His Holiness Somdet Phra Phutthachan, President of the Executive Committee for His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand. Mr. Kriengkrai Sampatchalit, Director General of the Fine Arts Department, and Mr. Nopparat Benjavatnanun, Deputy Director of the National Buddhism Office will also take part as honoured guests in the opening ceremony. The Most Ven. Prof. Phra Dharmakosajarn, Rector of MCU; Dr Richard Engelhardt, UNESCO Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific; and Ms. Gunnhild Eriksen of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will deliver welcome remarks.

UNESCO has been implementing the Norway-funded regional project since 2004 in the following countries around the region: Cambodia, China, India, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The project responds to the urgent need to protect building crafts and decorative traditions associated with Buddhist temples, and improve skills in preventative conservation, especially by monks.

As a result of the project, vulnerable Buddhist arts and rituals throughout Asia have been safeguarded. This includes notable achievements such as the revival of casting bronze Buddha images in Lao PDR; the transmission of Buddhist chanting in Mustang, Nepal; the protection of palm leaf manuscripts in Sri Lanka; and the renewal of ritualistic temple arts in Sikkim, India. The project has produced valuable documentation of Buddhist arts and rituals on the brink of extinction, for use by scholars, monks and artisans. Through project activities, an active network of monks, Buddhist institutions, and concerned government agencies and NGOs who cooperate in safeguarding activities has been developed.

The workshop will bring together monk and lay representatives from 19 project sites from the participating countries. A total of approximately 85 site representatives are expected to take part, along with 100 observers from the MCU faculty and relevant Thai authorities.
The objectives of this workshop will be to:

(i) Report accomplishments by each site in reviving traditional Buddhist arts
(ii) Share experiences with other project sites
(iii) Identify strengths and weaknesses in project implementation
(iv) Collaborate on measures for sustaining project results in the future

An exhibit of project activities and craft outputs will be arranged on-site to showcase the project accomplishments. Experts in Buddhist art and conservation and senior monks from around the region will discuss how to cooperate to save Buddhist arts.

In Thailand, the project has been implemented in Nan province, in Nakhon Si Thammarat province and in cooperation with MCU. In cooperation with MCU, a curriculum on Buddhist Arts has been developed, which will raise awareness and capacity in protecting Buddhist temples and artistic traditions. In Nan, the project has successfully strengthened skills in local Lanna building crafts and preventative conservation of temples, with the support of the Fine Arts Department, the Non-Formal Education Centre, Chiang Mai University and the Kanchanpisek Centre (Non-Formal Education Department). In Nakhon Si Thammarat, the project has focused on preventative conservation training for temple communities, with support from the Rajabhat University Nakhon Si Thammarat, the Fine Arts Department and Silpakorn University.

The workshop will take place at the Mahachulabannakarn Building and the IT Building, MCU Wang Noi.

For more information about the UNESCO “Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha” project, please refer to the attached Information Sheet.

More details can be found at:
http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=479

For details in Thai:

For further information, please contact:

Ms Montira Horayangura Unakul
Programme Specialist
Office of the Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO Bangkok
Tel: +66 (0)2391 0577 ext 509, 503; Fax: +66-2-391-0866
Email: h.montira@unescobkk.org or monksproject@unescobkk.org

Mr Rik Ponne
Programme Specialist
Office of the Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO Bangkok
Tel: +66 (0)2391 0577 ext 509, 502; Fax: +66-2-391-0866
Email: r.ponne@unescobkk.org or monksproject@unescobkk.org