

o Peace Prize

(Publicity)

Servant of the people wins award

Niwano Peace Prize honors Buddhist leader whose activism helps promote social awareness

The Niwano Peace Foundation will award the 28th Niwano Peace Prize to Sulak Sivaraksa of Thailand, a remarkable and multifaceted Buddhist leader whose work for peace is exemplified by courage, determination, imagination and the constant inspiration of the core principles of his Buddhist faith.

Sulak has helped to change the views of political leaders, scholars and young people in Thailand, across Asia and the world, encouraging a new understanding of peace, democracy and development. He challenges accepted approaches that fail to give priority to poor citizens, men and women alike. Over a lifetime of dedicated service and unflagging commitment, he has given new life to ancient Buddhist teachings about nonviolence, peace and justice.

On the selection of Sulak, the Niwano Peace Prize Committee said: "He is a courageous Buddhist activist. Also he is intellectual enough to persuade people to promote the importance of social awareness among Buddhists all over the world. He is the founder of many organizations, including the Asian Cultural Forum on Development and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). His work and achievements certainly qualify him for the prize."

Niwano also states as another reason to honor Sulak is his intelligent advocacy for the environment. Sulak speaks forcefully against environmental destruction, promoting environmental preservation and environmental justice. Sulak's Seykhiyadhamma (Students of the



Sulak Sivaraksa.

Dhamma), a network of Buddhist monks, works in their communities to preserve local environments, principally forests that are so essential to village economies. Characteristic of Sulak's approach, the work combines education, teaching villagers better ways to conserve natural resources, and political action to protect local social, cultural and natural environ-

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ments from the encroachment of commercial, industrial and urban development. Sulak's environmental ethic is grounded in a holistic understanding of the Buddhist principle of interdependence and a deep respect for nature. Knowledge of interbecoming (a term he borrows from Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh) is achieved by developing mindful awareness. In contrast to more reflective and contemplative styles, he aggressively fights in

the trenches for the cause of human and environmental justice.

The Niwano Peace Prize presentation ceremony will take place in Kyoto on July 23. In addition to an award certificate, Sulak will receive a medal and ¥20 million.

Sulak Sivaraksa was born in 1933 in Bangkok to a family of Chinese ancestry. Educated in Thailand, England and Wales in law and other disciplines, he returned to Bangkok in 1961. Sulak's long career has seen him using his intellectual gifts to propel the concept and movement of Engaged Buddhism. Sulak has worked as a teacher, scholar, publisher, activist and founder of many organizations. He has authored more than a hundred books and monographs in Thai and English.

"I accept the Niwano Peace Prize for 2011 with gratitude and humility," Sulak said in a

uplift and moral courage for all its members, who have contributed so much to the social welfare of others."

Sulak has worked in organizations such as the INEB, Spirit in Education Movement and Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation. Sulak has always been an activist and never hesitates to speak truth to those in power. To serve society truly, Sulak contends, one must stay in touch with poor people and the grassroots. Working to bring about change has embroiled him in many controversial issues. He approaches advocacy with a combination of knowledge, courage and absolute commitment to nonviolence. He is widely credited with having mobilized Thai civil society, creating many social welfare and development organizations. All embody two central themes of his work: rejection of consumerist development and pursuit of development rooted in indigenous culture and socially-engaged religious traditions and beliefs. His organizations reflect an indigenous, sustainable and spiritual model for change. Today, these organizations are active far beyond Thailand.

Sulak added: "Today, it has become a flourishing grassroots Buddhist network across Asia, and also into the West, where we are bringing across multinational Buddhist communities, in order to bring the Buddha's teachings into practice — not only privately but publicly — to make a more just and peaceful world. We challenge social structures which are unjust and violent, and we try to offer alternative models of development in the globalizing world, which is dominated by neo-imperialism and transnational corporations."

Sulak combines his insights into politics and spirituality, well aware of the importance of politics for Buddhism, but never straying from the central role of spirituality. Through his activities, he has been in jail many times, due to his critical approach to numerous political and social issues and protests. He appreciates that political and institutional change are needed to achieve peace and justice.

Sulak remarked that "the three most recent charges against me over the last four years were dropped toward the end of 2010, when I heard the most welcome news that I was selected as a recipient of the 28th Niwano Peace Prize. This will encourage me to struggle more meaningfully and nonviolently for freedom, for social justice and for truth — all which are the essence of peace. The prize in financial terms will be very helpful indeed for my various activities."



Courageous activist: A ceremony organized by the poor helps mark Sulak Sivaraksa's freedom after the public prosecutors in Thailand dropped the charge of lese-majeste against him.