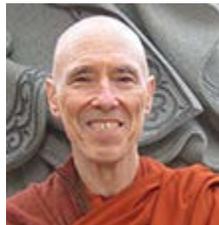




## Buddhist Gathering at the White House

*By Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi*



On May 14th, I was privileged to be part of a group of Buddhist monastics, teachers, and other leaders who converged on Washington DC for a conference on the role of Buddhism in the public square. The idea to convene such a conference originated with Bill Aiken, Public Affairs Officer for Soka Gakkai International–USA, who began to lay plans for the gathering as far back as December 2014. Preparation gained momentum with the formation of a steering committee, which eventually came to consist of Danny Hall, Professor Duncan Williams, Professor Sallie King, Matt Regan, Rev. T.K. Nakagaki, and myself. The list of invitees, originally set at 80, gradually increased until it amounted to approximately 125, the maximum that could comfortably be accommodated. Representatives included monks, nuns, ministers, academics, yogis, lay Dharma teachers, and Buddhist activists from all traditions. There was also a balanced blend of Asian immigrant Buddhists and convert American Buddhists.

As preparations unfolded, two points of focus emerged. One was climate change, which poses an ever-escalating threat to the security of human life on earth. The other, accentuated by recent reports on police killings of unarmed black people, is the need for this country to achieve full racial justice in all spheres of our common life.

The conference was divided into two segments. In the forenoon, we met in a spacious hall in George Washington University to hear presentations on climate change, racism in America, and efforts to express Buddhist values in the public sphere. After the opening preliminaries, Mary Evelyn Tucker of Yale University gave a short pre-recorded video

message on faith as a catalyst for action to protect the planet. Thereafter I gave a presentation on climate change. I used the four noble truths as a template to trace the causes behind climate change and to highlight the need to make the transition to a new economy powered by clean sources of energy. An effective approach also requires an effort to combat consumerism and embody an ethic guided by wisdom, compassion, and concern for the earth. Rev. angel Kyodo williams next gave an incisive talk on the interconnection between



racism and the degradation of the planet. She pointed out that the way we treat the planet is symptomatic of the mentality with which we treat other people, particularly people of color; both are governed by a dehumanizing attitude of objectification and exploitation. Thus, she said, to dig up the roots of climate devastation requires that we also cut

the roots of racism. Professor Duncan Williams spoke about the experience of Japanese Buddhists in America, emphasizing how deep biases simultaneously devalued their religion and subjected them to constant suspicion, particularly during World War II. But this same mistreatment also inspired Japanese Buddhists to seek to enter the public sphere to secure their place as respected American citizens. The main presentations were followed by a series of short talks about Buddhist groups working for social transformation. In this period BGR's fundraising chair, Sylvie Sun, spoke about the work of Buddhist Global Relief.

In the afternoon we all gathered in the Executive Offices Building of the White House to hear from Administration officials on the issues at the center of the morning's gathering. After a welcome from the White House Office of Public Engagement, Rev. T.K. Nakagaki led a group of monastics and Dharma leaders in a short Vesak ceremony, the first ever held in the White House. This was followed by presentations, including question and answer sessions, from representatives of the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs, the Council on Environmental Quality, and the U.S. Institute for Peace. At the end of the proceedings we submitted two statements to government officials, one calling for action to stem climate change, the other expressing the need to address racism.



The day's events concluded with a short talk by Jack Kornfield, who gave voice to the shared recognition that this day marked a significant step forward for Buddhism on American soil. Jack pointed out that in coming together to articulate our concern to see Buddhist values taken as guideposts for public policy, Buddhists were not breaking new ground but were continuing a tradition that goes back to the Buddha himself, who traveled through northeast India advising kings, princes, governors, and citizens how to establish a rule that conforms to the Dharma, the timeless law of goodness, truth, and justice.

This year's gathering marked the first of what is likely to become an annual event. Bill Aiken suggested that next year's conference might culminate in a visit with legislators on Capitol Hill. My personal feeling is that a one-day conference is not enough to fulfill the potentials an encounter like this offers. While meeting on the single day gave us the chance to make new contacts and express our shared concerns, for such a gathering to bear effective fruit, I feel the conference would have to extend over two days. The extra time would allow for additional full-length sessions in which we would be able to explore the points made in the presentations and decide on ways to exert group pressure on specific public policy issues.

I also believe that, given the small number of Buddhists in the US relative to the general population, it would be delusional for us to imagine that we can exercise a significant influence on our own. Buddhism has a role to play, for it does offer a set of values that can guide public policy without demanding an exclusive faith commitment. Our purpose would not be to support a particular party or political position, but to see that government policies are guided by moral intent, that they conform to the decrees of compassion, social equity, peace, and environmental responsibility, values that are at the heart of Buddhism and the world's other great faith



traditions. To pursue this aim, I feel, our best prospects would be to form alliances with those of other religious traditions that share our values. We could thereby present a collective front, rooted in our respective faiths, advocating for greater social justice, ecological responsibility, and an end to militarism. Such a convergence of faiths has already emerged in the environmental movement through such organizations as Green Faith, Interfaith Moral Action on Climate, and OurVoices.

As a result of the wave of secularization beginning in the late 19th century, the faith perspective has been sidelined in the formation of public policy, except perhaps for the Christian fundamentalist groups that have focused on “family values” as a way of defending old ways of thinking challenged by transformations in social consciousness. But this narrow, often intolerant, and sometimes belligerent approach is not the only way religions can respond to policy issues. Collaboration between faiths that share more progressive moral values could serve to articulate a new paradigm and promote a sustainable alternative to free-market corporate capitalism, which in its pursuit of endless economic growth has been pushing us to depths of economic inequality, destructive military engagements, and the decimation of the natural environment. What is needed to guide public policy, as an alternative to both pragmatic secularism and regressive religious lobbying, is a faith-rooted orientation that centers around shared perceptions of human unity, the intrinsic dignity of the person, and the interdependence of all life forms with each other and the natural world. One of the challenges Buddhism faces today, if it is to fulfill its global role, is to take this ethical commitment as a spur to action in the public sphere.

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## 2015 Concert to Feed the Hungry

*By Carla Prater*



**Drummer Winard Harper**

BGR's Fourth Concert to Feed the Hungry was a memorable occasion. The concert was held at the Interchurch Center in New York City on April 30, International Jazz Day. It capped a whole day of jazz-themed events by our concert partners, Jazzmobile and The New Heritage Theatre Group, at the Interchurch Center. Produced by jazz saxophonist *Dan Blake*, the concert brought together an all-star lineup of leading jazz artists with a global mission to assist impoverished communities around the world: bassist *Larry Grenadier*, singer and songwriter *Rebecca Martin*, jazz and blues vocalist *Sandra Reaves-Phillips*, drummer *Winard Harper*, organist *Akiko Tsuruga*, the *Leni Stern Group* featuring a West African drum team, and pianist *Mijiwa Miyagima*.

All who attended agreed that the music was exceptional, and were united in their appreciation for the talented jazz musicians who donated their time to the cause of hunger relief. Our sincere thanks go out to Dan Blake and all the others who worked so hard to make the evening a success, to those who

attended and those who made donations. If you were unable to attend, we hope you can come next year for a moving and delightful evening of music and caring.



Vocalist Sandra Reaves-Phillips



Bassist Larry Grenadier



Dan Blake Playing



Drums!

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## BGR Projects Approved for Fiscal Year 2015-2016

*By BGR Staff*



Over the first weekend of May, BGR team members held their annual general meeting on Saturday, May 2, followed the next day by a board meeting to select projects for our next fiscal year (July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016). Both meetings took place in the Woo Ju Memorial Library of Chuang Yen Monastery in Carmel, New York. Team members came from across the US, including Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington State while others from California and Florida joined via the internet.

At the board meeting on May 3, the board approved twenty-six projects for partnership grants in the next fiscal year, at a total cost of \$375,000. Several projects are renewals of repeated annual projects, while others are new. In addition to our long-term partners, we also established several new partnerships. Projects approved include several multi-year programs, which allow for the pursuit of bolder goals than is possible with one-year projects.

In addition to the regular projects, the board also agreed to provide two further emergency donations for relief work in Nepal: \$2,000 to Karuna Shechen and \$2,000 to the Tzuchi Foundation. Both are Buddhist-inspired relief organizations working to provide care to victims of the April 26 earthquake. These donations are in addition to the \$10,000 emergency relief BGR provided immediately after the earthquake, which was divided evenly among five organizations: UNICEF, CARE, Direct Relief, Oxfam America, and the International Medical Corps.



A five-part series of posts giving brief summaries of the BGR projects approved at the meeting is available on the [BGR Blog](#). Projects are arranged alphabetically by country. International projects precede the U.S. projects described in the final post. Thanks are due to Kim Behan, BGR Executive Director; Patti Price, Chair of the Projects Committee; and Jessie Benjamin, Charles Elliott, Carla Prater, and Jennifer Russ, who helped prepare the material presented here.

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## BGR It's Cool to Go Back to School in Rural China

By Jennifer Russ



Do the words “back to school” conjure images of young children standing at bus stops, their hands on the straps of neon backpacks and polyester pouches full of pencils and erasers? Or perhaps you think of the colorful newspaper inserts sprouting like flowers from the center of the Sunday edition of your local paper, reminding you that department stores will soon be flooded with families clutching fistfuls of coupons.

The words “back to school” might fill a nine-year-old with dread as she realizes her sun-drenched days by the pool will soon be exchanged for flickering fluorescent lights and a cold, graphite-smearred desktop.

This dread is foreign to five-year-old Yangling Lhamo of China's Qinghai Province. When a social worker from Shambala visited her home to provide her with back-to-school supplies funded by a BGR grant, Lhamo couldn't contain her excitement. She picked up a flat rock to use as a chalkboard and played teacher to the social worker, demonstrating the Tibetan letters she'd learned at school.

Lhamo is one of many children in rural China who are grateful for the opportunity to attend school. Although education in the Qinghai Province of China is supposed to be compulsory, between 25 and 40 percent of students who enroll in school drop out before their ninth year. The extraneous school costs – food, uniforms, and supplies – can be prohibitive for poor families, especially if students make it to academic or vocational high schools, where costs per student can run between 2000-3000 RMB or \$323-484 per year. Girls are at higher risk of dropping out as nomadic and agricultural families prefer girls stay home to help with household chores, but children of either gender who grow up in single parent or no-parents homes are at the highest risk.





Lhamo is one of these children. As a girl from a poor, single-parent household in the Gaxiu Village, where dangerous roads make it hard to get to school, she is among the most likely to drop out. To make matters worse, many people in Lhamo's family – including her mother – have learning disabilities. Luckily, the Shambala Foundation keeps a close eye on Lhamo, including counseling her family on the importance of sending her and her brother to school. They will continue to follow Lhamo and her brother until they graduate primary school, high school, and perhaps even college, and then will help Lhamo and her brother secure their first jobs.

The Shambala Foundation seeks a long-term solution to poverty in rural China with their Orphanages Without Walls program, which the website describes as a “close coordination between a foster family, an orphan, the local school and the responsible NGO.” In 2014, they wrote to BGR requesting a grant to supply 60 orphans and high-risk children from the Qinghai Province with a new set of clothes, shoes, school supplies, and books. They money supplied actually allowed the foundation to deliver 100 sets of back-to-school supplies.

These supplies are changing lives. With them, painfully shy Sonam Jya may attend school and continue learning to write, one of his newfound joys and only attempts to communicate. At school, Tsering Samdrup, who loves class but struggles with the content, is well-liked for his kindness and responsibility. He was recently appointed the position of class monitor.

The words “back to school” may fill families like the Yanglings with worry, but thanks to BGR and Shambala, the Yanglings can focus on Lhamo, who gave the Shambala volunteer's camera a big, genuine grin before the volunteer traveled to the next home. The foundation reports that Lhamo's attitude “brings laughter and hope to her family.” Going “back to school” is the best guarantee of a brighter future to a child, a family, and a community, and these school supplies ensure that kids like Lhamo can continue looking forward to an education year after year.



*Jennifer Russ is a volunteer and staff writer for Buddhist Global Relief.*

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## BGR holds Annual Meeting

*By BGR Staff*

BGR held its Annual Meeting and Spring Board Meeting at Chuang Yen Monastery in Carmel New York on May 3rd and 4th. The Annual Meeting was well attended and very inspirational. At the Board Meeting, a record number of projects was funded - twenty-six in all! We take this opportunity to share photos of the occasion with all of you.





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## BGR Accepted into 2015 Combined Federal Campaign

By BGR Staff



We are pleased to announce that Buddhist Global Relief has been accepted for participation in the 2015 Combined Federal Campaign, under CFC # 74375.

BGR has also joined the [Charities Without Borders Federation](#), an umbrella organization that will help us handle the increased workload from partnership in the CFC and will also provide us with support services such as training, reporting, and marketing through [Maguire/Maguire Inc.](#) With the help of these groups, we think we will be able to tap into many CFC events around the country without overworking our able volunteers and Board members. We look forward to an especially fruitful fundraising campaign this fall.



We want to thank Sylvie Sun for her incredible effort last fall when she attended many CFC events in the New York area, raising our profile among federal employees in the area. In addition, we want to thank BGR Treasurer Tom Spies for his attention to the detailed and difficult work of keeping our financial records and making sure we have appropriate financial audits in place so we can participate in this and other non-profit support agencies.

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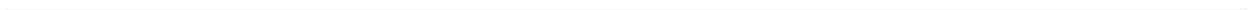
## Upcoming BGR 2015 Walk Events

By BGR Staff



BGR's fundraising in 2015 has gotten off to a great start with the Concert to Feed the Hungry (see below) and the Walk in Surrey, UK on May 30th (see our [Facebook page](#)) hosted by the [New Buddha Way](#) group. More walks are planned for the fall in the US, including the Michigan Walk (September 27th), Seattle Walk (October 17th), the San Francisco Walk (October 24th) and New York City Walk (October 31st) and others.

If you live near any of the walks, we hope you will join the dedicated volunteers and donors to celebrate our community and renew our dedication to the virtue of generosity. Watch the [BGR website](#) for updates and more information later in the summer!



## Responding to Earthquakes in Nepal

By BGR Staff



On April 26th, a massive earthquake struck Nepal with devastating force close to the capital, Kathmandu, followed closely by another earthquake. The death toll from the two earthquakes is estimated at 8,600 people, with many more suffering serious injuries. Tens of thousands have been rendered homeless, without food and water, and close to a million children in affected areas have been in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. While Buddhist Global Relief is not a disaster relief organization, the BGR Board approved an emergency donation of \$14,000 to support the relief

efforts. The donation has been evenly distributed among seven relief organizations: UNICEF, CARE, Direct Relief, Oxfam America, the International Medical Corps, Karuna Shechen, and the Tzuchi Foundation. The latter two are Buddhist-based organizations.

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## Responding to Refugee Crisis in Southeast Asia

By BGR Staff



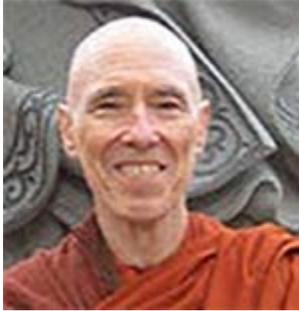
Thousands of Rohingyas, a Muslim minority from the Rakhine State in far western Myanmar, have been fleeing persecution at home, where they have been lodged in displaced persons camps and forced to endure harsh living conditions. Many Rohingyas, as well as refugees from Bangladesh, set out on the sea in search of asylum elsewhere, only to find themselves drifting on rickety boats without food. Recently Malaysia has granted temporary asylum to a number of refugees, both from Myanmar and Bangladesh, while

others continue to drift. In response to the crisis, a "Buddhist Emergency Fund for the Rohingya" was established under the auspices of United Against Genocide. BGR offered a donation of \$5,000 to the fund in order to provide immediate food, water, and medicine to refugees on the boats and in the camps.

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## Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi at Harvard Divinity School

By BGR Staff



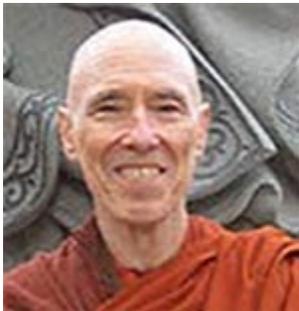
From April 23rd to April 25th, BGR Chair Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi participated in the first symposium on education and training for Buddhist ministry at Harvard Divinity School. The purpose of the symposium was “to bring together representatives of select institutions and programs educating students to become chaplains and caregivers, leaders in Buddhist communities and organizations, and participants and leaders in organizations and movements working to apply the insights of Buddhist practice and thought to address suffering in the world.”

Over the three days, participants shared challenges, insights, and questions in panel discussions, breakout sessions, and informal meetings. Representing BGR, Ven. Bodhi spoke on the afternoon panel of April 24th on “How the International Aspect of Buddhist Ministry Should Inform Our Work.” He briefly described the work of BGR and stressed the need for Buddhists to see their work in the world not merely as a means of helping people deal with their personal suffering, but also of addressing the comprehensive social, economic, and political roots of collective suffering.

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## Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi Interviews

By BGR Staff



Recently Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi was interviewed on two occasions. Both were recorded and are now available on the internet. On April 14th he was interviewed by Adam Bucko, cofounder of The Reciprocity Foundation (a BGR project partner), for the Unity Online Radio program “Radical Spirituality and Sacred Activism.” In the interview, titled “Buddha’s Great Compassion,” Ven. Bodhi analyzes the present spiritual milieu and proposes “a Buddhism and spirituality that can not only help us to work on ourselves, but ultimately work for a world that addresses structural injustices so we can start building a world that manifests the Buddha’s great compassion.” You can listen to [the interview here](#).

Two weeks later, Ven. Bodhi was interviewed again, this time by Rev. angel Kyodo williams, as part of the Shambala Mountain Center’s series titled “Beyond Mindfulness.” In the video interview, [which can be viewed here](#), Ven. Bodhi referred to Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek’s criticism of Western Buddhism as a means for inducing people to accept corporate capitalism. When williams asked how Buddhism can avoid this pitfall, Ven. Bodhi responded that the usual Buddhist emphasis on equanimity and acceptance must be balanced with “conscientious compassion,” a sense of responsibility to stand up against injustice and “promote a social and economic order and political system that are respectful of every human being and which enables every person to unfold their full potential and capacities.” The interview concludes with Ven. Bodhi leading a meditation on connecting with victims of the Nepal earthquake and members of the Baltimore community affected by police violence.

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## Carla Prater as Oxfam's Sister of the Planet Ambassador

By BGR Staff



BGR now has two Oxfam Sisters on the Planet, Kim Behan and Carla Prater. Carla joined the program in May, and has already participated in several events sponsored by Oxfam. Sisters participate in events like briefings on disasters or policy issues, lobbying elected officials on issues like the budget priorities for foreign aid, and networking with like-minded people in the area. This is an opportunity for Buddhist Global Relief to extend its outreach, and Carla is very excited to join this group of amazing women!

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## Board Members Visit NYC Partners

By BGR Staff



On June 9th, BGR Chair Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi and Fundraising Chair Sylvie Sun visited two of BGR's project partners in New York City to present them with the grants allocated at the Board meeting in early May. They first visited Helen Keller International, where they met with Vice President of Development and Communications Nancy Haitch; Dan Fiedler, Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations; and Liz Gilbert, Officer of Corporate and Foundation Relations. At the meeting, the HKI leaders presented Ven. Bodhi and Sylvie with a beautiful plaque with an inscription that reads: "With heartfelt appreciation to Buddhist Global Relief for your longstanding partnership with Helen Keller International and for your deep commitment to combating chronic hunger and malnutrition among the world's most vulnerable communities."

Their next stop was the Reciprocity Foundation, where Bhante and Sylvie met with our old friend Adam Bucko, cofounder of Reciprocity, and team members Rich Overton and two women staff members both named Chelsea. At the meeting Adam and Rich spoke of their new project, starting a community vegetable garden in upper Manhattan to be cultivated by homeless youth to provide healthy food for poor neighborhoods.



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## How You Can Help

Opportunities are available now to assist with Walks to Feed the Hungry in many locations this fall, and to do outreach for the 2014 Combined Federal Campaign. If you are interested in helping out with these or other efforts, check out the list of [Volunteer Opportunities](#) on our website. Some volunteers need to be located in a particular place, but most can work from home, wherever that may be. Please contact us at [info@buddhistglobalrelief.org](mailto:info@buddhistglobalrelief.org) for further information.

As always, donations to BGR are welcome. You can donate by PayPal or credit card on the [website](#), on Facebook, or by check to:

**Buddhist Global Relief**  
**PO Box 1611**  
**Sparta, New Jersey 07871 USA**

Thank you for your help!

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