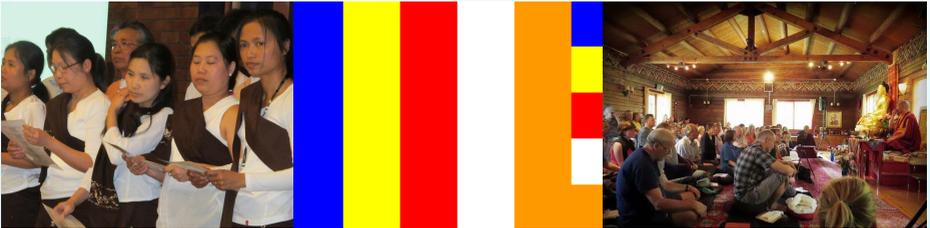


**BUDDHIST FEDERATION
OF NORWAY**

HOW MANY BUDDHISTS IN NORWAY?

The majority of Buddhists in Norway have their origin in the Buddhist countries in Asia. A conservative estimate based on official statistics of immigrants and their descendants in Norway suggests that there are presently more than 31.000 Buddhists in this category. There are also several thousand Buddhists with a Western background among whom more than 1700 are members of the Buddhist Federation of Norway.

The total number of Buddhists can be estimated to be at least 33.000. This constitute 0,66 % of the population of Norway which presently stands at 5 million.



BUDDHIST FEDERATION OF NORWAY

The Buddhist Federation of Norway was founded in 1979. It is a registered faith community based on the Act relating to Religious Communities, passed by the Norwegian parliament in 1969, which provides for regular government funding of registered religious communities of all faiths.

Through the Buddhist Federation of Norway its member organizations cooperate for their own benefit as well as for the larger purpose of promoting Buddhism nationally and internationally. Presently 14 Buddhist organisations with a total number of 13.828 members have joined the Buddhist Federation of Norway. The major traditions of Buddhism are all represented in the Buddhist Federation of Norway which represents the Buddhists in relation to the government as well as in relation to other religions in the country.



THE MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE BUDDHIST FEDERATION OF NORWAY

The organisations of the Buddhist Federation of Norway represent both Buddhists of Asian backgrounds as well as “new Buddhists» of Western background. There are also “nondenominational” Buddhists who are directly affiliated with the Buddhist Federation of Norway. These two categories can be further described as follows:

Traditional Buddhists

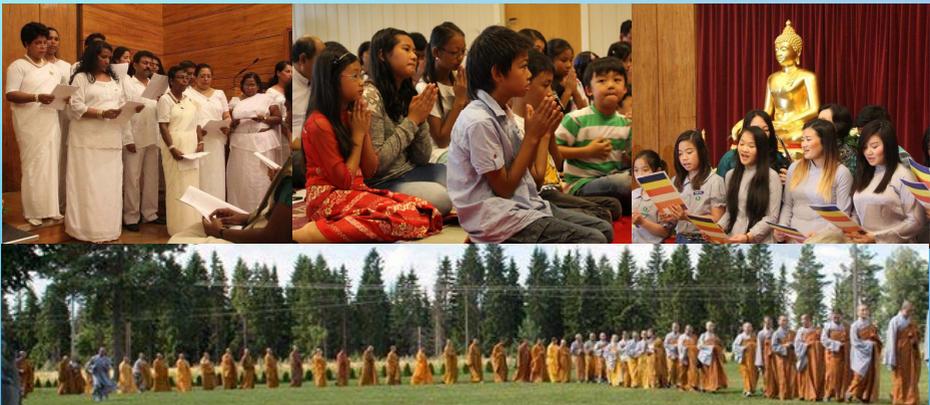
These Buddhists represent the traditional Buddhism of their countries of origin.

The Vietnamese Buddhists (formally established in 1981) have five temples (two purpose built) situated in the major cities of Norway with altogether around twenty monks and nuns. The Thai Buddhists (formally established in 1991) built a temple in 2007 at the outskirts of the capital of Norway (Oslo) with more than five resident monks. There are also a number of smaller Thai temples with resident Thai monks in other parts of Norway. The Burmese Theravada Buddhist Association, The Khmer Buddhist Association as well as Tisarana Sri Lankan Buddhist Association also have their own temples with resident monks.

These temples serve both as religious centres as well as cultural and social gathering points for their respective expatriate communities where cultural traditions are maintained along with the practice of the Buddhadharma.

New Buddhists

This category of organisations represent Western Buddhists who have mostly chose Buddhism individually as adults. Tibetan Buddhism followed by Zen Buddhism has attracted the largest following. Here the focus is more on the practice of meditation as part of an individual spiritual search. The activities conducted by these organisations are therefore mostly courses for learning and practicing meditation.



THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BUDDHIST FEDERATION OF NORWAY

The Buddhist religious activities mostly take place in the member organisations of the Buddhist Federation of Norway. However, administrative tasks such as registering members, applying for grants from the government, allocating funds to the member organisations, managing book-keeping and auditing as well as producing financial reports are all done by the federation. The member organisations are therefore relieved from handling some of the administrative responsibilities that follows from being a registered faith community with funding from the state.

Membership

According to established legislation Norwegian citizens may ask for their «church tax» to be allocated to their own faith community on a regular basis. A system set up to fund the established church of Norway has therefore come to benefit the other religions equally as they are supported on the same per capita basis (since 1969). Any individual is free to join the Buddhist Federation of Norway through accepting its credo which states its commitment to the welfare of all beings on the basis of faith in the Three Jewels, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

Celebration of Buddhist festivals

The Buddhist Federation of Norway aims to establish a sense of community of all Buddhists. An important activity of the federation is therefore celebrating the most important festivals, such as Vesak, as common public events.

Publishing activities

Information about Buddhism through various media such as books and the internet is also an important activity of the Buddhist Federation of Norway.

Educational activities

The public school system in Norway provides general knowledge about religion. Buddhism is therefore included in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. The Buddhist Federation of Norway contributes to the improvement of the education given on Buddhism through providing lecturers as well as facilitating access to temples.



Dialogue with other religions

The Buddhist Federation of Norway put much emphasis on dialogue with other religions. In 1996 the federation joined the other religions in Norway in establishing a national inter-religious council. The federation has also been instrumental in the development of an international institution to promote freedom of religion or belief: The Oslo Coalition (established 1998).

Humanitarian assistance

The Buddhist Federation of Norway is also involved in international humanitarian assistance in connection with natural disasters in countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.

International Buddhist cooperation

The Buddhist Federation of Norway is a member of international Buddhist organisations such as World Fellowship of Buddhists (Bangkok), International Council of Day of Vesak (Bangkok) and European Buddhist Union (London).

A NEW PROJECT: “RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN BUDDHIST MAJORITY STATES”

This project addresses the question of freedom of religion in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Our approach is Dhamma-based and seeks to relate the principles of the Universal Declarations of Human Rights to the values of freedom of religion embedded in the Buddhist tradition while contextualising them in countries in South Asia.

Tensions between religious groups characterise some of these countries. Aggressive Christian proselytism, Islamic fundamentalism, Buddhist radicalism as well as allegations of violations of human rights by Buddhist majorities characterise some of these countries.

The Buddhist Federation of Norway seeks to approach these challenges through intra-Buddhist dialogue organising workshops in each of the countries involved as well as facilitating expression of Buddhist viewpoints through a book and a website devoted to this issue.

The aim of the project is to facilitate discussions among Buddhists about these challenges, increase awareness about the principles of Dhamma and Human Rights relating to freedom of religion, as well as promoting good practices among Buddhists regarding relations to other religions.



THE ORGANISATION OF THE BUDDHIST FEDERATION OF NORWAY

The Buddhist Federation of Norway is governed by a board with members appointed by the Buddhist organizations that have joined the federation. A president with a council of three vice presidents leads the federation. An office handles the day to day affairs led by a coordinator. Committees set up for the purpose handle areas such as finances, publishing, and celebration of festivals and so on.



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