

Friday, 19 June 2009

Waldbroel. Germany



Dear Beloved Sangha,

In September 2008, more than 20 brothers and sisters were sent to Germany from Plum Village to set up the European Institute of Applied Buddhism (EIAB). This has been a dream of Thay's since he was a young novice. His wish is to bring the teaching of the Buddha into every aspect of our lives. Buddhism should not only be theoretical, but it should be practical and we should be able to apply it in transforming the suffering of individuals, families and society. This is also a dream of every member of Plum Village's international community. At the EIAB, we will have courses for new couples who are getting married, for parents and children who wish to reconcile, for police officers, for psychotherapists, teachers, businesspeople and so on (please consult the catalogue of courses offered at the EIAB at www.eiab.eu).

The building of the EIAB is 150m long, and about 12 to 16m wide, and the total floor area is 12,000m² (this includes the floor area of all 5 floors and the basement). We have the capacity of hosting 400-500 people in this building. We have spent 500,000 € in order to purchase this building and begin simple, preliminary renovations. We knew that we would have to invest a significant amount of money for the entire renovation project, but as we have started the construction work, completely unforeseeable things have arisen which have raised the costs of renovation considerably, and also drastically shortened our timeline for raising funds.

The military operated the building from 1967-2006 and they have their own set of fire safety regulations. As the EIAB, the building is considered to be in civilian use, and the authorities have a very different set of fire safety regulations for this purpose. In addition, many water pipes (put into place in the 1930s) are now old and rusty, and together with our now out-of-date kitchen, they no longer meet the public health standards. We also need to repair our old heating system due to the many leakages it has, and more importantly, to redesign it in order to make it more energy efficient and ecologically friendly. To house the intended number of people in this building, we would also need to build many more public toilets and showers.

In the last nine months, a team of experts that includes architects, engineers and technicians have sat together and looked carefully into this matter, and we now know that we would have to spend at least 3 million Euros for half of the building to be functional and open to the public (this includes installing the fire-safety equipment for the whole building like the outdoor fire-escape stairways, the central fire alarm system etc., and the repairs for half of the building, as well as the kitchen). The EIAB is not allowed to be opened to the public under current conditions, and the brothers and sisters are only given the temporary permission to stay in a small restricted area of this building until January 2010. This means that we have to raise money as soon as possible in order to proceed with the construction work and have it completed by the end of 2009.

We have sent out newsletters to call for help and we have also prepared to ask for a loan from some banks, but the chances of getting a loan from a bank for such a big amount are very low. Last night, I was thinking about how we can raise this big amount of money in such a short time. My practice as a monk for 18 years is to take refuge in my beloved Sangha. Whenever I have problems or difficulties, my practice is to communicate it to my beloved Sangha, and it has been my experience that I always receive help and support. Lately, I visited my family and I shared the problems of the EIAB with my parents. My father is 91 years old and my mother is 81 years old. They are both supported by the social security system in the U.S. Three of my brothers

and sisters are without work. On the day I left to return to Germany, my family offered me 500 USD for the construction of the EIAB. Since I could not sleep for the whole of last night, I evoked the name of the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion to ask for her help, and for the whole night, I thought about my international beloved community – brothers and sisters and friends that I have come to know in my 18 years as a monk. I thought that if each of our friends, families, or local Sanghas everywhere in the world would give a contribution of 500 Euros either as a donation, a loan without interest, or as a retreat voucher (to be redeemed for future courses or retreats at the EIAB), or a combination of the three, then with 6,000 such contributions, we would meet our urgent need of raising the necessary funds by the end of this year. I am writing this letter to our friends all over the world who have read Thay's books, attended retreats, lectures or Days of Mindfulness led by Thay or the Plum Village Sangha so that you know about our situation here at the EIAB. I have a deep trust in our beloved community. I know that if I communicate our difficulties to you, we will receive your help.

The EIAB is a vision not only for the European community but also for the international community. If we succeed as a community, we can inspire the practice of Buddhism all over the world. With the realization of the EIAB, we hope that the wheel of the Dharma can continue to turn in the West. This vision has been presented in a paper to the World Buddhist Forum in China in 2006 (please refer to our website for this article). The practice of contribution is a form of commitment to the practice. Thanks to your contribution, a relationship between you and the EIAB will be created. Please make good use of the EIAB for the nourishment and the cultivation of your practice.

In 2005 and in 2007, when I organized Thay's trips to Vietnam, the situation seemed very difficult as well. In 2007 especially, when we organized the three great requiem ceremonies for the victims of the Vietnam War, there were times I had the feeling that the difficulties were insurmountable, but thanks to the practice of our beloved community, we were able to overcome the difficulties. I remember very clearly the great requiem ceremony in the north of Vietnam. The difficulties were so huge and we were so isolated (the news of the ceremony was not allowed to reach the population) that we thought that we would have to cancel the ceremony, but in the end, more than 20,000 people showed up! Among them were elderly people who had walked for 10 or 20 kilometers who had only enough money to pay for the food on their journey, and the other half of their money they donated for the cause of the ceremony. The energy of the ceremony was so powerful that the night before the opening ceremony, there was a big landslide at the mountain right behind the temple. The great requiem ceremonies were not organized for individuals but for the whole country of Vietnam. So too is the EIAB – we are building it for the collective consciousness of the European community as well as a source of inspiration for the international community of practice.

I am including a contribution form with this letter. We sincerely ask for your practice of generosity to help to make the EIAB a reality for the cultivation of love and understanding for all of us, and our children. We also ask you to help circulate this letter as widely as possible to all your friends and family. *Please also help us to reach out to companies and foundations that have grants and charity programs which support **non-profit** educational and community service work such as ours.*

Thầy Pháp Ân

(On behalf of the brothers and sisters of the EIAB:

Sr. Chân Đức, Sr. Hương Châu, Sr. Bi Nghiêm, Sr. Châu Nghiêm, Sr. Huệ Tri, Sr. Huệ Hiền, Sr. Hiền Hạnh, Sr. Hiền Hòa, Sr. Song Nghiêm, Sr. Phổ Nghiêm, Sr. Thịnh Nghiêm, Sr. Luật Nghiêm, Sr. Khôi Nghiêm, Br. Pháp Trạch, Br. Pháp Lượng, Br. Pháp Chương, Br. Pháp Hy, Br. Pháp Thiên, Br. Pháp Nhật, Br. Pháp Tri, Br. Pháp Chu)