

An international interfaith meeting

At international interfaith meeting, religious leaders pledge global cooperation and lash out at ills they say are afflicting their faiths. GREATER spiritual freedom for women and a renewed dedication to world peace were the messages preached Thursday at a mixed-faith Buddhism and Hindu forum at Svay Pope pagoda in Phnom Penh.



Photo by: **HENG CHIVOAN**

Participants at the three-day conference “Giving Global Voice to Eastern Wisdom”, which began on Thursday in Phnom Penh.

In a pledge at the three-day conference, titled “Giving Global Voice to Eastern Wisdom”, nearly 100 Hindu and Buddhist leaders from India, Sri Lanka, Japan and Cambodia vowed to cooperate to promote international peace in a world of “greed and self-ignorance” and where Eastern ideals were seen to be “marginalised” by the West.

The first day’s speakers also addressed more specific problems they said were plaguing their religions, including “aggressive” conversion practices by evangelical Christian groups and the marginalisation of women in the way the faiths are practiced.

“In our religion, women are not given a voice,” Jetunama Tenzin Palmo, an ordained Buddhist nun of British origin who has spent

the last 25 years in India, told the audience. “Women comprise half of the one billion Buddhists and Hindus in the world, but we have a very inferior place compared to men.”

“We have a long way to go before women are respected in the spiritual world,” she told the Post.

Dena Merrian, founder of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, said that although women are crucial according to the scripture of Eastern religions, in reality they are given a secondary role in the way the faiths are practised.

Omalpe Sobhita Thero, a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka, lashed out at Christian missionaries who, he said, “come in and take our land and ruin our traditions and religions”.

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“Together, Buddhism and Hinduism must collaborate and stand against Western Christianity,” he added,

While Cambodia is 95 percent Buddhist, organisers said Cambodia was the chosen location for its historical mix of Buddhism and Hinduism, which was the dominant religion in the Khmer empire until the 13th century.

“Buddhism is the national religion of Cambodia, but Hinduism is the traditional culture of Cambodian,” said Bour Kry, the Supreme Patriarch of the Dharma Yuttikanikaya Order, one of the two biggest sects in Cambodia.

Phon Phalla, a secretary of state for the Ministry of Cults and Religions, said the conference was important to stop religious discrimination in the countries represented.

“I hope this event will reinforce the friendship between the Hindu and Buddhist faiths and therefore reduce religious conflict in the world,” he said