

**1ST THAI AND CAMBODIAN JOINT CONFERENCE HELD
FLORIDA NATURE AND CULTURE CENTER EVENT
BY JOE FIROVED AND JOSEPH GRONER**

The first Thai–Cambodian language conference was held at the Florida Nature and Culture Center on May 13–16, after nearly two years of preparation. Overcoming many difficulties, holding many chanting sessions and preparation meetings, 114 Thai and Cambodian members gathered for this historic conference from all across the United States. Two leaders from SGI-Thailand, Mrs. Siriporn Aphiratkasem, SGI-Thailand vice women’s leader, and Mrs. Somsri Kraisakdawat, region vice women’s leader, also attended and worked tirelessly giving encouragement until late at night.

One unique aspect of the conference was that the Thai members did not speak Cambodian, nor did the Cambodian members speak Thai. However, simultaneous translations in Thai and Cambodian made every session a total success. Following a lecture on “Happiness in this World” and presentations on such subjects as propagation, human revolution and the temple issue, intense dialogue sessions were conducted. On Saturday, following sightseeing and tours, a Thai–Cambodian friendship exchange was held. From the colorful Thai drummers to the beautiful and graceful Cambodian dancers, each act was alive and joyful.

Rising above many centuries of conflict between their countries, every member burned with the desire to return to their respective communities refreshed and committed to kosen-rufu.

SGI PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE ENJOY LIVING, FEAR NOTHING

My dear Thai and Cambodian Group members, I offer my heartfelt congratulations on your first conference in the splendid environment of the Florida Nature and Culture Center.

You have come from Southeast Asia, across the Pacific Ocean, and gathered here in order to study Nichiren Dai-shonin’s Buddhism, which radiates like the sun. Your noble efforts are symbolic of the arrival of a new era, of the start of the great voyage of the people. You have surmounted the struggles of living in the United States and brightly and cheerfully come together. You are proof of the great victory of faith.

The Daishonin states that “there is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 161). For what purpose were we born? To enjoy living, Buddhism explains.

Reality is full of suffering and constant change, but those of us who embrace the Mystic Law need fear nothing. From chanting daimoku, we gain the fundamental power to live; this is the source of our strength to change our karma and solve our problems.

Please continue to chant daimoku while encouraging one another in your daily SGI-USA activities. Please lead supremely happy lives as practitioners of the Lotus Sutra who “enjoy themselves at ease” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 230).

Every day, I am earnestly praying for the good health, success and prosperity of you and your families, whom I dearly love. Please give my sincerest regards to those who were unable to be here today.

*May 13, 1999
Daisaku Ikeda*