

Reverend Junsei Terasawa
A biographical profile
(updated 2 September 2003)

Junsei Terasawa, aged 53, Buddhist monk of Order Nipponzan Myohoji, consultant of the International Peace Bureau in Geneva, was born in Hakui, Ishikawa pref. of Japan. At 17 he encountered Ven. Nichidatsu Fujii and was inspired by his life example. In 1970 during the peak of anti-Vietnam war movement he became his disciple as a Buddhist monk at the age of 19.

Influenced by the spiritual pacifism of Leo Tolstoy and the active non-violent resistance of Mahatma Gandhi, Rev. Terasawa joined an unique peace activism of Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Order, led by Ven. Nichidatsu Fujii. He spent 6 years in India until 1975 for intensively studying and practising Buddhism and associated himself with the Gandhian movement and also the social reform movement to remove communal and caste division conflicts.

In 1975, at 25, he moved to England. Eventually his peace drum and prayer led every huge anti-nuclear peace march and demonstration throughout Europe during the 1980s (Copenhagen-Paris Peace March 81; Berlin-Vienna Peace March 82; two East and West peace marches to Berlin Wall from Warsaw and from Brussels 83), calling for a Nuclear Free Europe and for the end of the Cold War. He established two Peace Pagodas in England, at Milton Keynes in 1980 and at London's Battersea Park in 1985. Both became not only the symbol of peace movement, but also provided the venue for inter-religious pledges for the renunciation of wars and for oneness and harmony of humanity.

In 1986 he initiated in India the Rajgir Symposium on the Victory of Law over the nuclear menace, prior to the New Delhi summit of Rajiv Gandhi and Mikhail Gorbachev, which produced the visionary "New Delhi Declaration to build a Nuclear-free Non-violent World".

In 1988 Rev. Terasawa acted as a peace emissary to the 3rd UN Special Session on Disarmament in New York, carrying the sacred relics of the Buddha from Toshodaiji Temple in Japan. On the way he presented the sacred relics to President Gorbachev at Kremlin during the Reagan-Gorbachev Moscow summit.

In 1991 he initiated the Peace Camp on the Iraq-Saudi border in a bid to avert the Gulf War, warning that the military solution may jeopardise the post-Cold War future. He witnessed the 1991 August non-violent revolution in Moscow and joined the barricade of the White House against the attempted coup d'etat. This event led him to decide to live in the post-Soviet regions, including Caucasus and Central Asia. He views this difficult transition process, not only as a crisis of the socio-political structure, but also more profoundly as one that has to be dealt in its cultural, spiritual and civilisational dimensions.

Rev. Terasawa publicly opposed the Chechen conflict from the very beginning and organized the "Mothers' March for Peace and Compassion" to Grozny in 1995, which became the only international non-violent civilian intervention during this war. The March was joined by thousands of soldiers' mothers of Russia and welcomed by the whole civilian population in the Chechen villages.

From 1998 to 1999 his whole Buddhist community from Russia and Ukraine undertook the Eurasian-wide Peace Pilgrimage "Towards a War-free Non-violent New Millennium", starting from Yasnaya Polyana, home of Leo Tolstoy, traveling through all the conflict zones of the Caucasus and Central Asia, following on foot the Path where the Buddha himself walked in India. This unprecedented Eurasian-wide Peace Pilgrimage, which ended at Lumbini, birthplace of the Buddha, was dedicated to the Hague Appeal for Peace' 99 civil society conference, which aimed to abolish war in the 21st century. The Pilgrimage received on its way messages of support from: Mikhail Gorbachev; Aslan Maskhadov, President of Chechen Republic Ichkeria; Ruslan Aushev, President of Republic Ingushetia; Arkadiy Gukasyan, President of Nagorniy-Karabakh; Parliaments of Georgia and Abkhazia; the Assemblies of the Peoples of Kazakhstan; the advisor to the President of Azerbaijan; and from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan. Members of the Pilgrimage presented a special Peace Appeal for the de-nuclearization of South Asia to Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of India, at Boddh Gaya, place of the Buddha's Enlightenment.

Most recently he initiated the Pakistan-India Prayer March for Peace – 2002, beginning from Taxila in Pakistan on 6 August, the anniversary of the first atomic bombing in history on Hiroshima, and ended at Sanchi, the ancient Buddhist site of King Ashoka in India. This 3 month long Prayer March across Pakistan and India, consisting of 10 Buddhist monks and individuals of 6 nationalities, was the only international civic peace initiative undertaken during the period of highest alert in the military stand-off; a stand-off which even now could possibly have nuclear consequences. The initiative received the support of both governments, a warm reception from the public of both countries, and considerable mass media interest. Within a week after the completion of the March, India announced the withdrawal of its troops from the border.

For last 3 years, Rev. Terasawa had taken part in annual Sessions of the UN Human Rights Commission at Geneva as a representative of the International Peace Bureau. Most lately, he initiated the Inter-Faith Peace Mission to Chechnya with support of HRH Prince El Hassan of Jordan and Mikhail Gorbachev. As a similar effort, he entered Bethlehem under the curfew during the siege of the Church of Nativity in May 2002, and held a Prayer Vigil for the non-military solution of the crisis in the Holy Land.

Only few months ago in February-April of this year 2003 during peak of Iraq crisis Rev. Terasawa initiated the International Inter-Religious Peace Mission to Iraq and led the Buddhist Delegation to Baghdad with their Appeal to President Saddam Hussein, President George W. Bush and world leaders. The Appeal asked Iraqi leader, in order to spare his nation and people, peacefully and honourably to step down as an ultimate gesture to avert the war, installing interim Iraqi administration, incorporated with the UN led protectorate in Iraq. In the end this Appeal was finally rejected, though delegates struggled until the last moment to persuade any Iraqi leaders to put forward it to President; they stayed in Baghdad till remaining 24 hours before expiry of Bush's ultimatum. During their 20 days stay in Iraq, monks waged Sit-in in front of the Baghdad UN Office observing the Day of Fast and Prayer called for by Pope John Paul II. The delegation also issued the Urgent call from Baghdad for Worldwide Solidarity Marches for Iraqi Children's Future. Rev. Terasawa led from Samarra to Baghdad (140 km) a week-long Peace March in Solidarity with Iraqi children, who faced imminent threat of war. It culminated by the Candle Lights Peace Ceremony at Sinak bridge at sunset and full moon time, just 3 days before bombardment started. There were spontaneous Candlelights Prayer Vigils for peace in Iraq all over the world same evening.
