

Statement on abuse in Buddhist communities

In a spiritual context, as in any other, various kinds of inappropriate behaviour may occur, including sexual abuse. This has been true throughout history, in many countries and in many religious and spiritual traditions. Sadly it is still true today.

Buddhist communities are no exception. Recently several new cases of abuse within Buddhist communities have come to light, all involving abuse of power, including sexual abuse.

We acknowledge with great sorrow the suffering of victims of harm inflicted by Buddhist teachers and leaders.

It is clear that in many cases serious breaches of integrity, and in some cases even criminal offences, have taken place. A strong sense of hierarchy, close community, shared belief systems and heartfelt commitment may all contribute to a healthy spiritual environment, but they may also conduce to unhealthy relations and serious harm to adults and children.

In the teaching relationship, the teacher is in a position of greater power and responsibility than the student. We recommend that sexual relationships between teachers and students are either subject to clearly defined and effectively applied measures to reduce risk of abuse of power, or prohibited entirely.

The first principle of Buddhist ethics is to avoid causing harm. This has been emphasized throughout the history of Buddhism.

We call on all Buddhist organisations to address honestly and effectively allegations of serious breaches of ethical precepts and law by their teachers and leaders, and to listen to those who feel harmed and unheard, with compassion for all concerned.

In recent years many Buddhist organizations have developed ethical guidelines, and complaints procedures, and support systems for victims of sexual abuse. We call upon all Buddhist organizations in Europe to follow their example, to ensure that all are able to meet the Buddha's teachings in a respectful, safe and caring environment.

European Buddhist Union

Annual General Meeting

Adhithana Buddhist Centre, Herefordshire, UK

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