



Congrégation Bouddhique Zen

Village des Pruniers

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INSTITUT DES HAUTES ETUDES BOUDDHIQUES

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Dear President U Htin Kyaw and Her Excellency State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi,

My Name is Sister True Emptiness Chan Khong, **eldest spiritual daughter of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh.**

It is with deep humility and sensitivity that I touch upon issues relating to the people and authorities of Myanmar. **I do not dare to condemn anyone**, nor to demand this or that, or exhort anyone to do anything. My only hope is to offer a very simple yet profound teaching given by Shakyamuni Buddha, whose wisdom has been revered for over 2,600 years.

The Buddha taught that whenever we see something, and whenever we hear something, we have the impression that we can see the object of our perceptions truly and accurately; we are sure that our perceptions are 100% correct. But, according to the teachings of the Buddha, **human perceptions are, in fact, only partially correct. Perceptions may be correct in some respects, yet incomplete or incorrect in other respects.**

The **perceptions** that the police, or the Government of Myanmar may be holding in relation to the two journalists, **Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo**, are only **perceptions**. It is not the fully reality. Why dare I, a humble old Buddhist nun say this?! Because I and my friends have had an occasion to learn, from various sources, the background of these two men **Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo**, who come from humble farmer families, and yet are brilliant, astute and compassionate. We have heard the way **Wa Lone lives**: despite many responsibilities, he still made time to write a book for countryside poor children and play with them and read for them. We have heard the way the poet Kyaw Soe Oo enjoyed writing poetry before he decided to embark on a career as a journalist, proves that he more interested in poetic beauty than in condemning or judging others as a journalist.

Over the last 2,600 years, many disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha have affirmed the fact that our perceptions are always partial. One analogy given is that of blind people touching an elephant. The person who touches the elephant's tusks, thinks the elephant is something sharp and hard that could be very dangerous. The person who touches the tail thinks the elephant must be like a broom. And the person who touches the legs thinks that the elephant is like a set of pillars. None of them can perceive the elephant in its entirety. The same is true with us and our perceptions - our perception of the situation is partial and incomplete.

Another analogy the Buddha gave is of a curl of rope lying on the ground. We catch sight of the rope and we react immediately, sure that is an enormous snake. Our intention is to kill the snake as quick as possible. Only later do we realize that it was only a rope.

During the war in Vietnam in May 1966, two of my friends in the School of Youth for Social Service were killed by a dozen grenades thrown by masked men. At the funeral of our two friends I read a short speech saying that we are not against you, the killers of my two friends; our only wish is to remove the wrong perception you have about us. We wanted to tell them that, in fact, we are just good-hearted young people, who volunteered to be trained by our Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh to go to the poorest villages in the countryside, villages without a school for the children, without medical care for the sick. We wanted to let them know that we did not hate them, but we only wanted to remove the wrong perceptions they had about us. We knew that what they had done seemed cruel, but we know that they did it because they thought we were poisonous snakes and they wanted to kill the snakes in us, to free the world of dangerous people like us. And yet in fact, we were simply their humble young brothers and sisters, who dearly loved the children in the countryside who had no school or medical care and who needed help.

Dear Bodhisattva Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, dear Honorable President of Myanmar U Htin Kyaw. I beg you to reconsider your **perceptions** of Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo. I do not seek to judge or condemn you. As a humble nun, spiritual daughter of Thich Nhat Hanh, I invite you to return to your breathing, touching the **serenity** that is there as you breathe in, and **the clarity** that is there as you breathe out. As you focus only on your breath, there is **peace**, as you breathe in, there is **compassion** as you breathe out. Please offer you that gift of one day without nervousity and anger. Please do not misperceive me; I am not condemning you or your decisions. Perhaps in one or two days you will be glad that you did not misjudge such beloved beautiful sons of Myanmar as Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo. We know that you love all the peoples of Myanmar, but that the complex situation prevents you from acting **as the Buddha in you might wish**. I write this letter not to judge you but to touch the Peaceful Buddha, the Great Compassionate Bodhisattva in you, so that **loving kindness** can blossom in you and you can overcome the obstacles that have been blocking you.

Namo Shakya Muni Buddhaya

Namo all Buddhayas of Myanmar

We know that compassion, loving kindness exist in your heart.
With deep gratitude,

Bhiksuni **True Emptiness Chan Khong**

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