

ENC General Secretary Dr. Lian Hmung Sakhong awarded the 2007 Martin Luther King Prize in Sweden

By Salai Za Ceu Lian
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Dr. Lian Hmung Sakhong, the current General Secretary of Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC), the largest ethnic based political coalition consistently advocating for the emergence of Tripartite Dialogue as a mean to solve the existing political impasse of the Union of Burma, is honored with the Martin Luther King Prize for 2007 in Sweden.

This Award, Martin Luther King Prize, is established in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for his historic calling and contribution for peace and harmony among human race regardless of race by the Swedish based global peace groups including the Baptist Union of Sweden, Christian Initiative for Peace (Peace Initiative), Christian Association for Combat to Racism, and Afro-Swedish Association in 2003. The prize giving ceremony is scheduled to be held in the Swedish parliament on coming January 15, which is the birthday of Martin Luther King.

The value of the prize is US \$ 25,000 and a certificate of Honour made by the committee. As a recipient, Dr. Sakhong will give a peace lecture entitled "A STRUGGLE TO BE AN AUTHENTIC HUMAN BEING AGAIN" in the official ceremony. According to the Awards giving committee, Dr. Sakhong is the third recipient of this Martin Luther King-Prize ever since the first King Prize was handed out on 15th January 2005 in the Swedish Parliament. Notably, the fact that the prize giving ceremony takes place at the Swedish Parliament is an indication of the full recognition of the prize by the Swedish government.

In the official website of the Awards committee, it reads, "Martin Luther King's strong conviction was that peace, freedom and justice is possible for all. Not only for the oppressed black in the USA, but for all people in all countries in the world. Segregation, poverty and war are humanity's greatest problems according to King. It was true in the 1960s and it is still true today. With inspiration and knowledge from the life of Martin Luther King and his work, we can see that even the most difficult situations and problems can be solved. If we do it together, if we do one piece at a time and if we have a vision...then the dream can turn into reality."

This Martin Luther King-Prize , as quoted above, was set up with a global vision to relentlessly strive for peace around the world by encouraging and acknowledging the noble works of those frontline actors like Dr. Sakhong who are unwaveringly working for peace, national reconciliation, and democratization internationally.

Because of his active involvements in the pro-democracy movement following the students led uprising in 1988, Martin Luther King Prize laureate Dr. Lian Sakhong was arrested, interrogated and even tortured by the military junta on three separate occasions between 1988 and 1990. Knowing that the Burmese Regime has made numerous attempts to re-arrest him, he fled from his country in 1990 and resettled in Sweden since 1991.

During his stay in Burma, Dr. Lian Sakhong was a General secretary of United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD), a coalition of political parties formed by the Ethnic nationalities of Burma that legitimately formed, together with its ally Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), a parliamentary bloc of 67 elected representatives of the peoples, and also served as a General Secretary of Chin National League for Democracy (CNLD), a party winning three parliamentary seats in the 1990 election.

For Dr. Lian Sakhong, his passion for a federal system based democratic reforms and national reconciliation in the Union of Burma never wanes even in his exile political life since 1991. Besides his ongoing political leadership as a General Secretary of Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC, www.encburma.org), he also serves as a General Secretary of United Nationalities League for Democracy liberated Area (UNLD-LA), and also as General Secretary of Chin National League for Democracy (CNLD-exile).

Fully understanding the need for every constituent State to have their own State Constitution in anticipation of the future Federal Union of Burma, he, along with the late Dr. Chao Tzang Yawngwe started the initiative of State Constitution Drafting Process in the year 2001. Currently, he is working as a General Secretary of Federal Constitution Drafting Committee in which he is one of the main drafters of the State Constitution, which was first published in April 2006. In addition, with aims of bringing about the national reconciliation and peaceful coexistence among the diverse nationalities of the Union of Burma, Dr. Lian Sakhong, along with the two ethnic Shan political leaders, the late Dr. Chao Tzang Yawngwe and Harn Yawngwe, current Euro-Burma Office director, founded the National Reconciliation Program (NRP), in which he was serving as the Research Director till 2004, and now sits as a Senior Advisor of the National Reconciliation Program.

With a full conviction of the needs to have basic principles on which the historic initiative of drafting the state Constitution should be based upon, Dr. Lian Sakhong wrote a concept paper enumerating the Basic Principles for Future Federal Union, which was adopted by 104 delegates at the historic gathering in the jungle of Thai-Burma border in 2005, representing 64 political parties and various political organizations.

Fully convinced that the restoration of a mere democracy will not solve the political conflicts confronting a country as ethnically diverse as Burma for decades, Martin Luther King Prize laureate Dr. Lian Sakhong has been vehemently calling for the establishment of a genuine Federal Union based on the principles of the Panglong Agreement, which was signed on February 12, 1947, by General Aung San, Chief Minister of the Interim Government of Burma (British colony); and the leaders of the Federated Shan States and the Frontier Areas - the Chin and Kachin Hills.

Besides his political activisms, he is also internationally acclaimed author. He has published numerous articles on Chin history, traditions and politics in Burma, including his Ph.D. dissertation: Religion and Politics among the Chin People in Burma (Uppsala University, 2000) and his book, In Search of Chin Identity: A Study in Religion, Politics and Ethnic Identity in Burma (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2003). He also edited a series of ten books under the title of Peaceful-coexistence: Towards Federal Union of Burma (Chiang Mai: UNLD Press, between 1999 and 2006).

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