

**Statement by Mr. Kul Chandra Gautam, Chairman,  
Gautam Buddha International Peace Award Selection and Management Committee**

**17 May 2011, Lumbini, Nepal**

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**Mr. Chairman**

**Right Honourable President**

**Right Honourable Vice President**

**Venerable Monks and Nuns**

**Distinguished Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

**Today is a very special - a dream-come-true - day for all of us who have been involved with the Gautam Buddha International Peace Award, and for millions around the world who are inspired by the teachings of Lord Gautam Buddha on peace, non-violence, compassion and human solidarity.**

**Shakyamuni Siddhartha Gautama was born, attained enlightenment, and died, or rather achieved *nirvana*, on the same full-moon day of Vesakha purnima - which is now celebrated universally as Buddha Jayanti.**

**There is some discussion among historians about the exact year of his birth. Here in Nepal we celebrate today as Buddha's 2555<sup>th</sup> birthday, whereas some consider it as the anniversary of his *mahaparinirvana*. In Sri Lanka and elsewhere where Theravada tradition is followed, this year's Buddha Jayanti is celebrated as 2600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Buddha's attainment of enlightenment.**

**Despite some uncertainty about the exact dates, there is total unanimity about Buddha's most eloquent teachings which have inspired millions, and cumulatively, even billions of people in the world to follow the path of peace and harmony in both precept and practice. His central message to us all is to extend loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.**

**Until today, there was no dedicated international peace award in the name of this greatest messenger of peace on earth in human history. We are so proud that today we are conferring the very first Gautam Buddha International Peace Award in this sacred birth**

**place of the Buddha from the hands of the very first President of the Republic of Nepal to two great advocates of peace – the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan.**

**The credit for this historic initiative goes to the First World Buddhist Summit held in these sacred gardens of Lumbini in 1998 which recommended the establishment of this Award. It was followed up by the Government of Nepal which took the initiative to establish the Award and to fund it for the foreseeable future as an international award every 5 years.**

**An endowment has been established to perpetuate the award, and it is our hope that in future years we will receive contributions from interested donors around the world – big and small - to further enhance the prestige, the frequency and the amount of the Gautam Buddha International Peace Award as a major international peace prize.**

**Those of us who were asked to serve in the Selection and Management Committee of the Award feel immensely honoured to have had the privilege to help define and determine the purpose and objectives of the Award, its selection criteria and nomination guidelines.**

**We invited, screened and recommended the Award winners through an independent, confidential but very rigorous process of short-listing and selection following international norms and best practices.**

**We are delighted that the joint winners of this very first Award are the most deserving champions of peace, former Mayor Dr. Tadatoshi Akiba of Hiroshima and current Mayor Tomihisa Taue of Nagasaki, Japan, who are here with us today.**

**I wish to take the occasion to inform this distinguished audience that as we were processing the nominees for the Award, our Committee was mindful of the very special role played by former Secretary-General of the United Nations, the late Mr. U Thant for the development of Lumbini, as a major global pilgrimage site.**

**In recognition of U Thant's great contribution not only for the development of Lumbini, but for disseminating Buddha's message of peace, non-violence and human solidarity which is at the heart of the United Nations, our Committee has recommended and the Government of Nepal has decided to honour Madame Daw Aye Aye Thant, beloved daughter of U Thant and Founder and President of the U Thant Institute with a special letter of appreciation.**

**As Madame Thant was unable to join us this year, this special recognition will be conferred on her at Buddha Jayanti next year.**

**I take the opportunity to thank all members of the Selection and Management Committee for the Gautam Buddha International Peace Award for their hard work; the small but very helpful Secretariat of the Committee at the Ministry of Culture led by the distinguished**

**Secretary of Culture and his colleagues; the Government of Nepal as a whole for entrusting us with this major responsibility, and the Right Honourable President and Vice President of Nepal for gracing us with their presence on this auspicious occasion.**

**Above all I take the opportunity to warmly congratulate Mayors Akiba and Taue for being the worthy recipients of the first Gautam Buddha International Peace Award. Your work and contribution is a great source of inspiration for us.**

**Finally, I note with deep respect the presence here with us of two survivors of the atomic bomb attack that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki 66 years ago.**

**The heart-rending experience that these *hibakusha* represent, the message of hope for a peaceful world without any nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction that they convey to us is a very timely reminder for all of us in Nepal as we are trying to conclude our own peace process and build a bright future for the people of Nepal, and contribute to peace around the world.**

**Thank you.**