

Buddhist Statement on Wildlife Conservation  
– The Sanghas of Mongolia and Bhutan

*"For humans to find peace, they must have a proper relationship with nature. For many centuries Mongolians have been developing a rich tradition and practical experience of the necessary harmony between the material and spiritual worlds in our daily lives. During the 20th century, when many misunderstood social development as only meaning material development, Mongolia was one of the few countries to preserve the integrity of its natural environment, as a direct consequence of the influence of Buddhism."*

Venerable Khamba Lama Choijamts, Abbot of the  
Buddhist Gandan Tegchenlin monastery

*"Buddhism has a long tradition of environmental protection. Buddha taught the concepts of interdependence, of cause and effect, of karma, and of dharma values (Prat tyasamutp da). Most dharma practitioners want to contribute positively to preserving the environment, but unless we all work together, no solution will be found. Moreover, although we have begun to learn lessons from what has already taken place, good wishes alone are not enough to bring about change. We have to assume active responsibility."*

His Holiness the 17<sup>th</sup> Gyalwang Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje

Buddhism is a religion with deep connections to the Earth and environmental protection. The Lord Buddha was born in the Lumbini Garden, carried out religious practices in the forest, attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and gave the first teaching at Deer Park. The monasteries where Buddha offered his teachings were all gardens or forests, such as the Amravana Garden, Bamboo Grove and Jeta Grove. Lord Buddha passed on to Nirvana between two Sal trees near Kusinagara. Many events and stories in Buddhism embrace an environmental component.

There are various Buddhist deities and stories associated with animals, and with the cat family in particular. Think of the great saint Padmasambhava who rides a flying tigress; Vaishravana, the Buddha of wealth who rides a lion; and Princess Mandarava, the consort of Padmasambhava who manifested as a cat-faced dakini in Bengal. The snow leopard has profound religious, cultural and ecological significance in Bhutan, associated with a miracle of Milarepa, the greatest of the teachers of Buddhism in Tibet and Bhutan. There are stories of Buddhist lamas traveling to Tibet in the form of snow leopards in search of rare medicinal herbs.

Environmentalism arises from the philosophy of Sarvodaya (uplift of all), which includes kindness, compassion and altruistic joy. His Holiness the Dalai Lama reiterates this by saying: *"The decision to save the environment must come from the human heart. The key point is a call for a genuine sense of*

*universal responsibility that is based on love, compassion and clear awareness.*" Buddhists practice this universal responsibility in order to maintain a well-balanced ecosystem.

Buddhism teaches the importance of extending compassion to all sentient beings, as they each have a Buddha nature or essence. The Lotus Sutra describes the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara 'looking with the eyes of compassion and listening deeply to the cries of the world', and we must follow this example.

We call upon all Buddhists to respect the tradition of treating other sentient beings in the natural world with compassion, and to protect the big cats, as well as other species that are threatened by illegal hunting, trade and consumption.