

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

in the Quest for Peace



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THE ROLE of UNIVERSITIES in the QUEST for PEACE

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P r e f a c e

This paper was prepared at the invitation of the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL) for presentation as a public lecture at the ASAIHL General Conference and Seminar held on 24-27 November 2004 at the Makati Shangri-La Hotel, Manila, the Philippines. Due to unforeseen circumstances, I was not able to deliver the lecture in person but the text was made available to the conference.

As any discerning reader will see, the issues raised in the lecture are of lasting importance for serious discussion and reflection by the university, academia, students, policy makers, and the general public. The lecture's central concern goes beyond reflections on the normal functioning of the university whose role is to teach, undertake research and publication, as well as to provide services. It suggests going back to the idea of what *higher* education is all about — the emancipation of the mind, and the self-empowering of the individual. Very importantly, it is about the university playing its civilisational role of 'cultural enlargement' that helps shape human beings with a particular attitude of the mind and habit of the heart that uphold a culture of peace, and respect for difference and creativity. As argued in the lecture, the "values of peace, freedom, pluralist acceptance of the other, transcendence, and so on form the cornerstone of human civilisation. Without these values, civilisation loses its humanity, and we will sink into the dark abyss of modern-day savagery."