

## **Basic Information on the German Buddhist Union (DBU)**

In 1955 the majority of the existing Buddhist groups in Germany formed an umbrella organisation, which, three years later, was named “Deutsche Buddhistische Union” (DBU), German Buddhist Union.

In 1975 the DBU became a founding member of the “Buddhist Union of Europe” (EBU) and in 1961 became a Regional Centre of the “World Fellowship of Buddhists” (WFB).

The German Buddhist Union was and is a platform where Buddhists from all traditions and schools can meet and develop understanding and appreciation of the variety and diversity of Buddhist theory and practice.

At present in Germany about 100,000 Germans and 120 00 Asians (mostly Vietnamese refugees, but some also from Thailand, Cambodia, Korea, and Japan) consider themselves followers of Buddhist teachings. For the last two decades communities of all large Asian schools have been represented.

Currently, there are 61 member groups of the DBU, some of them with many branches all over Germany and elsewhere in Europe, such as Rigpa, Shambala, Karma Kagyu, Sakya, Gelugpa. Contacts with other Buddhist groups in the country exist on a friendly level and each year 3-4 new groups decide to join the DBU. Through the “Buddhistische Gemeinschaft in der DBU” (BG), a Buddhist community within the DBU, it has become possible for individuals to become members. Currently there are around 3,500 individual members. People who want to support Buddhism in Germany generally, can become personally associated members.

The DBU is a democratic organization under German law. Every three years an eleven member Council is elected at a General meeting of members. The Council elects the three-member Executive Board from its ranks. These are the President, the Vice-President and the Treasurer. The DBU has no spiritual head.

Under the umbrella of DBU something new was created in Germany in 1984 that has been unique in spreading the Dharma in the West - The Buddhist Declaration, which is accepted by all the schools and constitutes the foundation for integration of Buddhism in the West. Groups who wish to become members of the DBU have to accept this declaration (see enclosure).

The DBU has had a National office in Munich since 1986. This office is the central contact for Buddhism in Germany. It functions as a neutral platform for provision of information and as a centre for seekers as well as for the press and the public. It helps to organise and co-ordinate local and national events together with the different Buddhist centres and groups. It supports the work of the Council and the Board of the German Buddhist Union.

Ever since 1955 the DBU has been holding an Annual General Meeting in the spring, and since 1985 it has been holding a Buddhist Convention with participants from all over Germany, open to the general public. DBU Council members, delegates of the

member societies, Buddhist teachers and friends from all traditions meet for speeches, guided meditations and inspiring discussions on the teaching and practice of Buddhism in a Western country.

The location and the main subject are different every year. In 2009, with two other member communities, the DBU organised a big four day event in Frankfurt.a.M, with the presence of the Dalai Lama and more than 50,000 visitors.

In addition, DBU member communities occasionally join together to hold regional events and organise talks and artistic presentations. Amongst these, the Vesakh celebrations in big towns such as Munich, Hamburg, and Frankfurt a.M. are of special importance. There are presentations, group meditation sessions, workshops, information stalls and cultural events. In this way the different traditions create an impression of the variety of Buddhist activities in Germany.

Working groups for the different traditions have been formed within the DBU, which networks the activities of each tradition and sometimes holds meetings and conferences, issues publications and runs projects.

A two-year study programme on all Buddhist traditions began in March 2004. The Training Course is open to anyone interested in Buddhism, particular Buddhist teachers as well as teachers of ethics and religious studies. It covers a wide range of topics and gives a good overview of fields of ethics, meditation, and wisdom. (see enclosure)

The DBU Website ([www.buddhismus-deutschland.de](http://www.buddhismus-deutschland.de)) provides information about the activities of the DBU and about Buddhism in general, a list of Buddhist groups all over Germany, a calendar of events and much more. Several other websites give information about DBU activities.

Comprehensive information about social issues can be found under

[www.buddhismus-soziales.de](http://www.buddhismus-soziales.de)

The magazine "Buddhismus aktuell" (Buddhist News) is published quarterly. It provides information in a appealing style on all traditions and ways of practice. Each issue focuses on a single subject. A special section of Buddhismus aktuell reports regional, national, and international news ; it includes book reviews as well as a calendar of events and gives information about important activities of the member communities. It has some 2500 subscribers and sells altogether around 5000 copies of each issue. It is also available in news stands at railway stations of major German cities.

In Germany DBU or other Buddhist communities are not yet approved as Religious Communities, as Christians or Jewish communities are. Otherwise the German Basic Law (the Constitution) guarantees freedom of religion. So the DBU and all the German Buddhist communities can continue their work without problems but they are not eligible for state grants.

In conclusion, the DBU is the non-sectarian umbrella organisation of Buddhist communities in Germany. The most essential objectives and activities can be subsumed under six points:

1. To support the development of an authentic form of Buddhism in the West and to communicate its principles in a contemporary manner.
2. To create a common context for Buddhists of different traditions in Germany for joint activities, meetings, and exchanges.
3. To represent Buddhism in Germany by means of public relations, publications, events, seminars, courses, and information materials.
4. To put into practice the Buddhist principles of compassion and interconnectedness of all living beings by commitment to social projects.
5. To be a partner for interdisciplinary and interreligious dialogue in modern society
6. To provide a neutral platform for sharing information about Buddhism.