

 Christian Conference of Asia

cca news



Life in dignity

Volume 45 • Number 4 • December 2010

Life in dignity



**"I came that they may have life,
and have it abundantly."
(John 10:10)**

The Christmas season is a time to celebrate God's gift of life - life in dignity.

Many people in Asia and around the world experience life's darkness. Poverty, social and economic injustices, violence, disintegration of families, the unbearable impact of ecological destruction people are crying, "how long, O God...!" The Year 2010 has seen enormous challenges that have caused havoc and uncertainty in the lives of people in many parts of the world. Pakistan was inundated for several months. Merapi volcano in Indonesia had erupted and caused damage on the land and its people. Victims of villages and churches burned in the Khandamal violence continue to suffer from homelessness with no place to worship. Typhoon Megi visited the Philippines causing families to flee their homes in search for safety and security. Forty three health workers continue to languish in detention without any hope of freedom. North Korea struck the Island of Yeonpyeong and threatened the very fragile peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula.

During the Advent season we as churches come before God to express our longing for love, joy, peace and justice to reign in our lives and in all of creation. It is also the time to confess as individuals and as churches, our wrongdoings in the past that hinder many to experience fullness of life that is the gift of God to all. Now is the moment to turn around and renew our commitment to do our share in bringing about the time when "Steadfast love and

faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Psalms 85:10, NRSV).

As I have been travelling recently to some Asian countries, I was encouraged by the commitment of people to uphold and promote life. Churches and various civil society groups around Asia spontaneously respond to emergency situations caused by Megi typhoon in the Philippines; floods in Wasior, Papua, Indonesia; tsunami in Mentawai, western Indonesia, eruption of Mt. Merapi in Central Java, Indonesia. Several movements and initiatives brought together millions of people across religious, ethnic, geographical boundaries to work for justice, peace and life for all.

It was heartening to be part of the Asia meeting of the Global Christian Forum where representatives of different denominations in Asia gathered in Seoul on November 12-16, 2010. The meeting aimed to know and understand each other better and to once again commit themselves to work for Christian unity in witness to the love of Christ for all people and the whole creation especially in Asia.

As we pray and work for Christian unity, let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us as churches to change our hearts, to welcome others and be willing to work together in common witness so that all may taste the goodness of God - life in dignity and in its fullness.

The peace of Christ, abundant blessings and good health be yours this Christmas season and in the years to come.

Henriette Hutabarat Lebang

Official publication of the
Christian Conference of Asia

P.O. Box 183, Chiang Mai
Muang, Chiang Mai 50000
Thailand
Tel.: + 66 53 243906-7
Fax: + 66 53 247303
Email: cca@cca.org.hk
Website: www.cca.org.hk

Editor-in-Chief:
Henriette Hutabarat Lebang

Editorial Committee:
Moumita Biswas
Liza Lamis
Charlie Ocampo
Sung Kook Park



Cover Art:
Love, by Erland Sibuea

Disclaimer:

Opinions expressed in the articles
of this publication do not necessarily
reflect the policies or positions of CCA.

In this issue

Editorial	2
Theological Reflections	
Emmanuel - God with us	4
In focus	
The CCA Emergency Fund and 2011 Asia Sunday	6
Twice bent over. Who cares?	7



Life-changing experience	10
Responding to disarmament	12
Empowering clergy women	14
Mainstreaming gender justice	16
Caste and Christ	18
The pathos of climate refugees	20
Kandhamal	22



Reflections	
Taking human life seriously	24
News in brief	
Women weaving peace	26
Book Promotion	27
CCA Pastoral Letter	28
NCKK Statement	30

Emmanuel - God with us

In the last few years and months we read in the papers and saw on television stories of people on the move because of floods, eruption of volcanoes, landslides, draught, civil, ethnic and tribal wars. This list can go on to show how people today are uprooted from their homes, ancestral properties

These are carried out by humans to satisfy their greed for profit and desire to accumulate more and more. This is the ugly side of human nature and one can say this is the outcome when human beings become slaves to forces of Mammon. Jesus warned us about it when he said "One cannot serve God



*Table fellowship
at the dumps.
Burmese people
living in the
garbage dumps
in Mae Sod,
Thailand, sharing
food.
Photo: © John
Hulme*

and places they and their ancestors have lived for generations. These are painful stories to hear, read and see.

We are also being made aware, thanks to the advancement of science and technology, that the root causes for most of nature's eruptions are not the will of God but nature's reaction to human actions such as deforestation, offshore drillings, testing and detonation of nuclear bombs underground, excess carbon emissions, building of dams and exploitation of non-renewable resources.

and Mammon" (Mt.7:24; Lk16:13).

It is almost impossible to think of Christmas divorced from the painful realities described above. Christmas is a time in the Church's calendar set apart to celebrate the birth of Jesus. According to the Gospel of Matthew Jesus is called "Emmanuel" which means "God with us" (Mt. 1:23), who through his ministry became God among us, God for us and God for others. The most pertinent question is: who is this Jesus we celebrate during Christmas season?

Does this Jesus reflect and reveal God's character?

The birth of Jesus took place in a context like today where the empires or the principalities and powers of the day were enslaving people and treating them as non-humans. This is God's way of speaking to groaning and suffering humanity and God's heart is spoken out by Jesus when he said, "...and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt. 28: 20).

It is absolutely clear that the story of Christmas is a reminder to all of us that God has not abandoned this world but God in Jesus reveals to the world that the God of the Bible is a God who feels the pain, the agony and the abandonment of God's people created in God's image. The story of Christmas is not a story of a triumphant God but a suffering God. God of the Bible is not a God of the Empire but God in Jesus Christ who questioned the authority and the legitimacy of the Empire.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, sang a revolutionary song (Lk. 1.46-55) when she was carrying Jesus in her womb. Those words of Mary revealed the character of God with us whom we celebrate during the season of Christmas. Herod the Great trembled in fear when he heard about the birth of Jesus and slaughtered hundreds of children thinking that through that act of violence he can eliminate the threat to his life. We also know that the poor and the vulnerable, like the shepherds, rejoiced at the birth of Jesus when the angels announced to them about the Prince of Peace (Lk. 2:14f). In that sense, Jesus, God with us, is good news to the vulnerable, lowly and the meek. Jesus the gentle one is also the righteous one who called the Herod "fox" (Lk.13: 32), and turned the tables of the money changers at the Temple Court (Mk.11:15). On the one hand, at the birth of Jesus evil and inhuman powers trembled, and on the other, the weak and the meek sang for joy songs of liberation and hope.

Therefore, the message of Christmas is not about Santa Claus, merry making and grand celebrations with food and drinks in a world where more than 2/3 of humanity

suffer from hunger, malnutrition, lack of drinking water, security and opportunities to be human and live in dignity. In such a world the message of Christmas should be that another world is possible because Jesus stood for another world and he demonstrated it through his teachings about the reign of God. Christmas, therefore, is a time to repent and rediscover the authentic Jesus as recorded in the Gospels - God with us - who suffers with those who suffer, mourn with those who mourn and die with those who die.

The story of the birth of Jesus devoid of the cross is like talking about the crucifixion without the resurrection or resurrection

Would Santa also visit children of the dumps in Mae Sod Thailand? Photo: © John Hulme



without the cross. Therefore, the story of Christmas is a story of joy and pain, the story of a savior of the world who also becomes a refugee, one who was hunted to be killed and one who is denied, betrayed, tortured and finally killed by the collaborative act of the agents of the institutional religion and the Empire. In spite of it God raised him from the dead and sent him back to the world to be God with us and in and through us. Hence, the Church which claims to be the Body of Christ must reflect in and through all its actions the mind of Christ and become God's channel of Emmanuel. This is a sacred task and that is the reason we are called to be the Body of Christ. And we are the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27).

Rienzie Perera

The CCA Emergency Fund

In contexts where churches, councils and communities at-large in Asia become victims due to recurring earthquakes, volcanic eruption, floods, tsunami, etc., CCA deems it important to build an Emergency Fund, keep it on reserve and use it at the right time.

As mandated by the 13th CCA Assembly in April 2010 in Kuala Lumpur, the CCA Emergency Fund was created to enable CCA to:

- Organize immediate visits to see firsthand the damages caused and find out how to assist churches and councils in responding to the emergency situation. The initial visit provides CCA with information to inform the CCA family about the situation so that they can be in solidarity with the affected people and the churches in the countries where the tragedy has taken place.
- Facilitate visits of accompaniment, at times by a small team consisting of members from the CCA family. The

visits aim to assist churches to work out their own relief and rehabilitation work in collaboration with Action by Churches Together (ACT) International or other major donors.

CCA's role is purely accompaniment where it equips and empowers the local churches to be in mission and to respond effectively to the need of the times. The implementors are the local churches and the national councils.

We thus appeal to you to contribute to the CCA Emergency Fund, by sending your contributions to:

Account name: Christian Conference of Asia

Bank: Hang Seng Bank

Branch: Hankow Road (4 Hankow Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR, China)

Account No.: 295 - 4 - 7095

The 2011 Asia Sunday

Every year since 1974, Asia Sunday has been celebrated in Asia and among ecumenical organizations around the world on the Sunday before Pentecost. The observance is to commemorate the founding of the East Asia Christian Conference, renamed in 1973 as the Christian Conference of Asia.

This year Asia Sunday falls on 5 June 2011. The theme of Asia Sunday 2011 is

“Make Us Healers, O God.”

This is drawn from the CCA 13th General Assembly theme which will run for five years (2011-15), “Called to Prophesy, Reconcile and Heal.” The theme is a prayer for us to become healers even as we also pray to be healed of our brokenness and division in our personal and communal life, and in relation to the whole creation.

Please mark 5 June 2011 on your church calendar as Asia Sunday, or designate any Sunday you may prefer. Liturgical resources are being prepared by a staff team at CCA and will be made available electronically.

Twice bent over. Who cares?

'Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said "Woman, you are set free from your ailment". When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. (Luke 13:10-13)



Self-help group members in Phnom Penh neighborhood of Sen Rikreay. Shum Lorn, 65, center, listen raptly as a Buddhist monk addresses the group. Many people in this community are infected or affected by HIV and AIDS. Buddhist monks and other religious meet with them regularly to mediate and discuss their challenges. Photo: Paul Jeffrey, EAA

In my meetings with the Kampuchean Christian Council (KCC), I learned from Ms. Van Arun Rasmey, one of the Presidents of CCA, that there are 45,000 sex workers in Cambodia every night. Mr. Samnang Douk also said that massage parlors and karaoke bars are used for clandestine sex. At Svay Pak there are Vietnamese children who are sold for sex work. And in some of the KCC churches there are people living with HIV+.

Being bent over starts from childhood. Children who are supposed to go to school grow up in the streets and sell sex. Some are sold by their parents and grandparents. Many are raped and beaten. Young women

who are forced into prostitution suffer for years. The stories resonate from what I have heard in many Asian countries - girl children and young women who moved from farming communities to work in city restaurants and end up selling sex, and women who are raped by policemen and have no one to turn to for help. It is hard to go back home since the victim is blamed rather than the rapist. Without any education that could provide a better life, victims go into sex work. Some commit suicide. There are lots of emotional scars left and these scars leaves them bent over even more. Some fortunately escape but many have no options. Who can they turn to? Who cares?



A woman and her child in the neighborhood of Sen Rikreay, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Photo: Paul Jeffrey, EAA

Poverty and hunger characterize the life of many girl children and women. Women are laid off from factories and now have to sell sex because they have no other means of livelihood. Some of them are lured to work in the borders of Thailand. Dr. Tia Phalla of the National AIDS Program said that around 200,000 men and women are undocumented workers in the Cambodia-Thailand border. Many are at risk of getting HIV infection as is usually the case in border areas with Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

Grandma and grandchildren in Sen Rikreay, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Photo: Paul Jeffrey, EAA



Dr. Phalla said that HIV infection is driven mostly by heterosexual transmission. There are 342,000 men having multiple sexual partners and 202,000 of them are married. Their wives could potentially be infected by HIV and some could be transmitted to their babies. "Twenty thousand men are buying sex daily, which could generate around USD500,000.00," revealed by Dr. Phalla. There are also 144,000 men who have sex with men (MSM), who are also having sex with women. There are 34,200 who are injecting drugs and who are having sex with women. It took a bold teacher who got infected by her husband to approach the governor, the vice governor and the police authorities to make the government realize that there is a need for a policy of 100% condom use to cut down on HIV infection.

"The Law Against Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation in Cambodia, passed in February 2008 is undermining the efforts for 100% condom use," according to Dr. Phalla. Brothels were closed down; sex workers are all over the streets and karaoke bars are selling sex clandestinely. Mere possession of condom makes a woman liable to be charged with engaging in sex work and are arrested, detained, and abused by police authorities who are supposed to protect them. Statistics show that 1% are recruited by human traffickers who are elusive from being detected or arrested, 0.79% are sold to prostitution, 0.59% are raped, 40.16% face family

problems, 0.21% live by others, and 0.73% volunteer to sell sex in order to survive.

The stories are big challenges for NGOs focused on reducing HIV infections like the Salvation Centre Cambodia (SCC), the Cambodian HIV/AIDS Education and Care (CHEC), Living with Dignity (Lutheran World Federation Program in Cambodia), Centre d'Etude et de Developpement Agricole Cambodgien/Cambodian Center for the Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC), Sprouts and Bridges of Hope (Maryknoll), Tean Thor Association are involved in addressing the problem of HIV in Northwestern Cambodia for the past decade. The presence of Cambodia Positive Network Plus (CPN+) in the Workshop on Sustainability of HIV

There are stories of hope - of a few bold women who escaped from the brothels and are now rising above societies' norms and with their head held high and bodies straightened-up for the long haul of rescuing and rehabilitating more women and re-integrating them in society. They also meet opposition for being tough. One success story is a woman who created recovery shelters and sanctuaries in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Women who were rescued from being sex slaves are hoping that other people will not look down on them but will enable them to live in dignity. They are hoping that the words of Jesus, "Woman you are set free from infirmity," will be a reality.



On the opening day of the 15th International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2003, Thai sex workers demonstrated in the exhibit area. Photo: Paul Jeffrey, EAA

Program showed that there is now greater involvement of People Living with HIV but more needs to be done especially in focusing on human rights and human dignity alongside meeting the challenge of HIV.

There is a need for a rights based focus in programming. For example, sex workers who are bent over since childhood should be prioritized in HIV prevention. They also need to be organized to get better leverage in society and to recover their dignity that was snatched from them from childhood.

The KCC is taking these stories of bent overness to build HIV Competent Churches. Like Jesus, they are encouraged to give visibility to the bent overness of women and girl children and to help restore their God-given image and dignity. The story of Cambodia is a common story in Asia and like Jesus we need to give visibility to their stories, touch them, listen to them, learn from their pains and bent overness and help set them free from long term infirmity and brokenness.

Erlinda N. Senturias

Life-changing experience

Our task was not to achieve great goals but to take one small step forward with great love and passion. During this 15-day intensive course, all participants were encouraged to step out of their comfort zone in order to expose themselves to new things. The fact is that there is no easy way of doing this or making it through unscathed. We challenged ourselves to give it all we got with the help from one another and also from the organizers and resource persons. What made us strong and flexible to keep our ecumenical journey going was having this wonderful relationship with new sisters and brothers of Asia.

"We are each other's keeper," Rev. Revelation Velunta, AEC/BEC Dean, said. I do not see the national borders anymore. Before participating in AEC/BEC, to be honest, I did not perceive the problems in the Philippines as relevant to myself. I had been regarding them as a fire on the other side of the river. Now that I have many Filipino sisters and brothers, what breaks their hearts also breaks mine. AEC/BEC opened my eyes to see Asia as the one big household of God. - Kanan Kitani, Japan

Kanan Kitani was one of the two Japanese among the seven international participants of the Basic Ecumenical Course held at the Ecumenical Center of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) on 15-29 October in Quezon City. A graduate theology student at Doshisha University, she is a member of CCA-FMU program area committee and comes from the United Church of Christ in Japan.

Other international participants came from Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia. The 22 Filipino participants came from different parts of the Philippines and various denominations represented in the NCCP.

BEC follows similar module as the region-wide Asian Ecumenical Course, which consists of the four areas of Asian reality, ecumenical vision, community building, and leadership training. In the BEC, the carefully planned module marks a building up from ecumenical memory to ecumenical agenda, ecumenical theology, deepening through immersion and encounter, and concrete actions for solidarity and advocacy.

AEC/BEC has been a journey with my fellow pilgrims. It gave me an opportunity

for real engagement with the issues in my country and to actively immerse myself in ecumenical work. The experience stirs compassion among participants and a sense of solidarity with each other at the regional level. Inspired by the undeniable contributions of ecumenical pioneers fighting for a just and equal society, I learned that the church must be the conscience of society and a prophet against any form of injustice. Immersion in different communities allowed us to experience the Philippine reality. I realized that I need to be part of this struggle by reclaiming my roots as a marginalized one.

Utilizing Dr. Hope S. Antone's theological spiral - naming the oppression, identifying reinforcing agents and their dominant theology, doing feminist critique, and commitment to action together - we reflected on the core issues of injustices brought by the market-driven/capitalist society and borne by the land, women, indigenous people, and of human rights violations, forced migration, militarisation, etc. AEC/BEC is like being on a path with various pilgrims: some are just beginning; others are midway; still others, on their last stretch. The path is not free of adversity. Still whatever phase we are in, the invitation remains: to continue to see, discern, and to act. - Hadje C. Sadjé, Philippines

Hadje C. Sadje comes from a predominantly Muslim community in Mindanao and is now involved in ecumenical work in Manila.

Resource persons came from various denominations in the Philippines, thereby giving the participants a taste of the various ecumenical perspectives on issues.

At the end of the course, participants were asked to articulate their definition of being ecumenical:

To be ecumenical means being ready to work in harmony towards life together. Unfortunately these days it is very difficult to actualize this life together in our community. It is much easier to live individualistically and egoistically. To actualize life together, we must take specific steps and actions towards the marginalized in the community, e.g. the victims of structural poverty, oppression, etc. - Irene Ludji, pastor of Timor Reformed Church in Indonesia and faculty member of Satya Wacana Christian University in Salatiga, Indonesia.

I believe that to be ecumenical is to embrace all Christians as brothers and sisters, no matter what denomination, and even the people of other faiths, and to accept the true meaning of the Gospel and engage ourselves in actions to realize

justice and peace in a broken world. - Park Jongdeok, Presbyterian Church of Korea, graduate student of Busan Presbyterian University.

To be ecumenical is to help and serve all people and all creatures in this world, and to love and help each other as a family. - Kim Sok-song, Presbyterian Church of Korea, graduate student of Busan Presbyterian University.

This batch of BEC participants consisted of pastors, youth leaders, church workers, and theology students. Many of them were very critical of how the church has become captive to capitalism - e.g. when the church works only for the rich and seeks to be rich, preaching that God wants people to be rich so that if we obey God's word we will be rich. "This is not the truth. God wants the church to be on the side of the poor, oppressed and marginalized," one Korean participant wrote.

Holding a national level AEC with a CCA member allows more participants from the host country to attend a given program. It also fosters closer relationship with CCA members and more ownership by them of CCA life and work.

Hope S. Antone



A small group working on their biblico-theological reflection.

Responding to disarmament

Church leaders meet in a global solidarity conference

What does “Gothenburg” have to do with “Chiang Mai”? What does arms trade have to do with the Church? What is the relevance of disarmament for Christians in Asia?

The Gothenburg Process as it is known today originated from an initiative in 2001 by three Swedish ecumenical institutions, namely: the Christian Council of Sweden, the Swedish Mission Council. The Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation, now known as the Life and Peace Institute joined them. The primary focus was to highlight the growing transfers of military equipment, especially in the global South.

From an Asian perspective in a declaration adopted at the Gothenburg consultation for Asia in Chiang Mai in 2008, the participants moved, “to organize a Chiang Mai process inspired by the Gothenburg process” to begin albeit in small steps to address “the complex issues of conventional and small arms proliferation in Asia.”

From a Declaration issued by the Chiang Mai 2008 Consultation the participants declared - “We share a common concern that the proliferation of arms is becoming a daily threat to the sanctity of human life. More than 1300 persons die each day, only out of shots from small arms and light weapons. The poorly regulated and illicit transfers and misuse of conventional arms fuel conflict, cause death and serious human rights violations and grave breaches of international humanitarian law, destabilizing countries and regions and undermining sustainable development.

“Sustainable futures for the peoples of the world are threatened if we continue to spend annually about 1035 billion dollars on military expenditure! With only 10% of this amount it would be possible to halve

the number of people that suffer from hunger and reduce the infant mortality by two thirds.”

At the Conference on 28-31st October Gothenburg IV in London, even with a coalition of like-minded and committed NGOs and faith communities, the problem appears to be too large and complicated for any one or two groups to solve. Furthermore, especially for us in Asia, we might only see the uphill challenge with regards to the violent madness resulting from irresponsible arms trading.

And yet, faith-based advocacy brings a mustard seed-like faith which we believe can even move the ‘mountains’ of an issue like arms trade. The different actors in the arms trade are named, and thus helps clarify our roles and our points of engagement. They are the producers (the arms industry), the users (mainly the armed forces in the recipient countries), the controllers (mainly the control authorities on the national and regional levels) and the ‘critical civil society’ (in the Gothenburg process this comprises, in a simplified sense, mainly churches, ecumenical and interfaith institutions.

The Gothenburg IV conference became a safe space for representatives of the different actors cited above to be in mutual consultation and even critique each other. It was heartening to see a variety of Christian representatives across traditions - Protestant, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox giving theological, ethical and practical contributions. It was also significant to see those in the industry such as Rolls Royce, and those in government brought to be in the same space with faith-based NGOs as well as secular NGOs. Religions for Peace brought an interfaith collaborative dimension into the consultation.

A particular highlight for me was to listen to the inspiring presentation from Fr. Nithiya of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and Sr. Mariola from the National Commission for Justice, Peace and Development, India. They shared stories on how women and the poor are empowered to confront the issue of arms trade with their "Right to Food" Campaign. It was for many an enlightening moment to see the practical connection between the issue of arms trade and poverty. Even with the frustrations that come as part of

prophesying, healing and reconciliation. The declaration in 2008 was just a first step in relation to a specific issue as conventional and small arms proliferation in Asia.

Where do we go from here, then? How can we as CCA and in our respective faith communities join forces with other like-minded groups in Asia such as Pax Christi and the FABC? In what ways can we collaborate with our partners in the Global North from the original "Gothenburg Process" towards long term



Artist Pedro Reyes collected 1,527 guns from the citizens of Culiacán, Mexico by offering coupons for appliances and electronics in exchange. He used the weapons for a project called Palas por Pistolas, in which Reyes had the guns melted down and recast into 1,527 shovel heads to be used to plant 1,527 trees all over the community. Culiacán, which has a high rate of gunshot deaths, also has a botanical garden that commissions artists for community enrichment projects. (source: <http://www.mentalfloss.com/blogs/archives/73351>)

our work, we must not forget to celebrate every small victory. They are signs of the greater good we could achieve in the future.

Gothenburg IV did not sidestep the hard truths of confronting corruption at all levels. Dealing with those in power with specific political and self interests was high on the agenda. Christian communities are continually challenged to provide further theological input to enable churches to respond in whatever situation they are in relation to arms trade.

The Chiang Mai process was our attempt to wrestle with what kind of theology and initiatives we advocate in the Asian context in relation to our ministry of

solutions?

Not doing anything at all is too high a price to pay, not just for today, but also for tomorrow.

CCA was represented in the Gothenburg IV Conference by the Rev. Sivin Kit of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Mr. Cesar Villanueva of Pax Christi Philippines.

Sivin Kit

An ordained minister of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore, the Rev. Sivin Kit will be pursuing a Ph.D. in Religion, Ethics and Society from 2011 onwards. He blogs at <http://sivinkit.net/>

Empowering clergy women

“Life of a clergywoman, especially a married woman with children, is like walking on a tightrope. One has to make a balance between church and family.”

“Although there is more acceptance and appreciation now of clergywomen, the regard that male pastors are better is still there and women still need to disprove it.”

These were part of the sharing by 22 clergywomen and theology students who gathered at Southern Christian College (SCC) in Midsayap, Cotabato, Philippines for a seminar cum Ecumenical Lecture on “Discerning the Role of Clergywomen in These Critical Times” on 19-20 October 2010.

A number of the older women recalled how they had to follow a dress code which men did not have; or that they tended to be assigned to remote places while clergymen were readily assigned to churches in the cities; or that clergymen were given higher salary for the same job; or that clergywomen were not given responsibilities or positions in the conferences.

Yet, these clergywomen could easily speak of the inner joys they experienced in serving the church despite the pain and struggle.

“If you serve a bigger church there is lot of food. But there is also less laughter. If you serve a smaller church, there is less food, but there is also more laughter,” a younger clergywoman compared her experiences. “The small church may not give a regular honorarium but their gifts in kind are sources of joy,” another added.

“When God calls us, we cannot say ‘No’. We just do the best we can and God will do the rest,” Delia, who later served as a conference minister, pointed out.

The women came mostly from the Cotabato Annual Conference and Southern Mindanao District Conference of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. They included pastors of local churches, theology faculty, and theology students. Among them was a Manobo, an Indigenous woman, who has served as a lay pastor and is now studying theology at SCC.

As the main resource person for that seminar, I led the group in a participatory reflection on their chosen theme. We dissected the meaning of “these critical times”, the “role of clergywomen”, and how “discerning” is done together. We looked at the various realities women face resulting from the socio-economic, political and ecological issues of our day. We analyzed the multiple burden that clergywomen bear - especially when they are wives and mothers with stereotyped roles expected by their families and society. And we looked into discerning as a way of listening to the Holy Spirit and at the same time at listening to what the world is also clamoring for us to hear.

Following that participatory reflection, I facilitated a workshop on theologizing using the Asian feminist theological spiral - (a) naming the oppression, (b) identifying reinforcing agents, (c) identifying dominant theology/ideology, (d) making a feminist critique by providing alternative theology and re-reading of scripture, and (e) commitment to action. The participants then worked in small groups using this spiral of theologizing.

It was in these small groups that cases of violence against women and children, sexual abuse and domestic violence were shared, a number of them having been committed by church leaders themselves. The clergywomen bemoaned the lack of action done to perpetrators of violence and abuse, and the lack of women’s united action in support of the victims. They vowed to make a difference from now on.

Realizing the need for more solidarity among women, one of them said, “When we are nominated for a certain position, we should not refuse saying we cannot do it.” “When we hear statements that women are not capable or women are weak, we should challenge it right then and there,” another one said.

“We should question and challenge the stereotyping of roles - why are Christian education and the Vacation Church School always assigned to women? Why can’t men also be in children’s ministry?” another one asked.

Some of the single clergywomen shared their experiences of being subjected to jokes or pitiful remarks. "Women should stand up and educate others that today marriage is no longer the norm since women can stand up on their own professionally and economically," I pointed out. "In terms of leadership, clergywomen need to be assertive without being aggressive," I added.

The sharing from the Indigenous woman further opened the group's eyes to the multiple burden that Indigenous women face - especially in relation to their husband and the older wives (if he has several wives). She shared that a wife who feels tired serving her husband and the earlier wives can ask

CCA-FMU staff with the Southern Christian College led by the Rev. Dr. Teresita de la Cruz, dean of the theology faculty to provide a venue for clergywomen to deepen their understanding of their role not only in church but also in the wider society and to lay the groundwork for the establishment of a clergy women's organization.

They expressed their desire to continue meeting for their own education and update. They also expressed hope that a seminar like this can be open to clergywomen from the other denominations. For their next topic, they want to focus on feminist hermeneutics in relation to violence against women.



"When God calls us, we cannot say 'No.'" The women clergy participants.

her husband to get another wife to relieve her of her burden. And so the cycle of oppression begins for the latest wife. The group felt that more Indigenous women should be helped to go through theological training so they themselves can empower other Indigenous women.

The clergywomen's seminar was co-organized by

They also hoped that later similar activities can be done for the husbands of clergywomen, for the Church Workers Association, which includes men and women, and for the Christian Women's Association and United Church Men of the church.

Hope S. Antone

Gender mainstreaming

Towards women-men partnership

Meeting with the women of IPTL in July 2010, in Dili, Timor Leste.



Equipping church leaders to work for gender justice and to overcome gender-based violence is one of the major goals of CCA. CCA through the Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) has been

justice. It involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.

To do gender mainstreaming CCA emphasizes on the need to assist church leaders in understanding and studying gender and gender justice concepts from biblical and theological perspectives. CCA engages in enlightening Asian church leaders to understand that gender justice is a crosscutting issue for all activities.

engaged in training church and lay leaders in advocating for gender mainstreaming.

Gender Mainstreaming

'Gender mainstreaming' as defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1997 is a "strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated." Furthermore, it is an approach and means to achieve the goal of gender equality and gender

Promoting gender sensitivity among churches and addressing gender-based violence is not only necessary in political, economic sphere and social areas but also in religious institutions. It is a basic imperative for building communities of peace. Through its Men and Women Partnership and gender justice workshops/trainings like the Asian School of Ecumenical Formation for Gender Justice, CCA tries to break the common and wrong understanding prevalent among many Asian church leaders that gender justice is an agenda only for and by women.

CCA promotes the understanding that gender-based violence have adverse impact not only on women and children but on the entire community. Hence there is a need to raise the gender consciousness not only of women but

also of men. There is also a need to initiate men and women dialogue, to explore a biblical understanding that both men and women are created in the image of God, and create partnership activities meant to eradicate gender-based violence in family and society.

The Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) held a Gender Mainstreaming Workshop on 27 - 30 September 2010, which was supported by CCA. It was a local follow-up initiative and an outcome of the Asian School of Ecumenical Formation for Gender Justice organized by CCA in 2009 where church leaders of the Mekong region and East Timor were trained. One outcome is the creation of the Committee of Gender Equality Technical Support Group comprising of eminent leaders from churches and organizations promoting gender equality. This support group will engage in advocacy for gender

mainstreaming in the churches. Another is a draft policy on preventing sexual harassment which will be implemented once approved by their Central Committee.

To multiply the impact of the workshops in local communities, CCA supports country initiatives in collaboration with member churches and councils in 2010. Follow up trainings were also organized in Cambodia and Timor Leste.

In 2011 CCA will organize the Asia School of Ecumenical Formation for Gender Justice for South Asian men and women church leaders. The major focus of this training will be ecumenical formation for church leaders for promoting gender justice and children's rights, and on the need for advocacy to promote and implement a child protection policy in churches and ecumenical organizations.



A small group discussion on masculinities during the Ecumenical School for Gender Justice for church leaders of the Mekong region

Caste and Christ

They cannot co-exist.

*To be a woman,
old, Dalit and
poor. Murkunoom
is a Dalit from
Kandhamal,
Orissa.*



This is an affirmation that the seventy-five theologians, women, academics, members of the Indian clergy, social activists and representatives from churches and ecumenical agencies overseas issued during the National Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits held at the Church of North India Headquarters in New Delhi on 22-24th October 2010.

The struggles of the Dalits to be fully human and an equal participant in society have been exposed, debated and unraveled in the light of the gospel and the example shown by Jesus Christ.

In his theological presentation, Metropolitan Dr. Geevarghese Mor Coorilos of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church expounded the call to be in solidarity with the Dalits. In his view, Jesus threw out the vendors in the temple not only because they turned it into a marketplace, but because they also encroached on gentile space in the temple structure.

The Faith Affirmation issued by participants in a fitting finale to the Conference, collectively confessed -

“Caste violence has broken the body and bruised the soul. Dalit children are shunned, stunted and have their childhood shattered. Dalit women are beaten, raped, and murdered. Dalit men are dispossessed, locked up, and lynched. The evil confluence of caste, class and patriarchy has distorted human dignity and destroyed human bodies. We are ashamed that we as Christians have remained silent while our brothers and sisters have been violated and killed.”

After presenting a carefully documented history of Dalit Christian struggle over many years, Mr. Frank Caesar Thomas issued a plea before the Dalit Conference participants, “No Indian Christian shall be deemed to be a member of a scheduled caste”.

In his reflections on missiology,

Professor James Massey, Director of the Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies and Community Contextual Communication Centre in New Delhi, drew insights from the Nazareth Manifesto and the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos. He said that Jesus through his Manifesto made his agenda public by announcing publicly that he was going to begin the work with four groups of people - the poor (deen), the captives (bandi), the blind (andhey), and the oppressed (dalit). Jesus must have come face to face with these four segments of society living in Galilee, which was considered a socio-culturally backward region, and within its fold lay an even lesser known village called Nazareth, from where “nothing good was ever supposed to have emerged.”

The Conference Faith Affirmation invites the churches and Christians in India to make a commitment to the cause of the Dalit people -

- To be faithful to Jesus Christ and to realize that being born again means to be born against caste.
- To put our energies and resources to work to end caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence in our churches and society.
- To make our churches courageous and concrete witnesses to the body of Christ free of caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence.
- To our churches serving as zero tolerance zones for casteism and caste based discrimination and our churches developing policies on social inclusion. That also involves that our institutions become sites that practice preferential option for Dalits in admission, employment and in perspective.
- To designating Lent 2011 as a time of purging caste from our churches. This will be an occasion for developing resources, both theological and liturgical, for use in Sunday Schools, Youth Groups, Women’s and Men’s fellowships and pastors and bishops retreats

with the specific mandate to root out casteism in our mindset and caste discrimination in our way of life..

- To do all that is humanly possible with God as our Helper to save Dalits under attack from the regimes of casteism let loose in our nation. As living members of the body of Christ we will “watch and pray” to prevent Dalit attacks, rapes and murders. Each local congregation and institution will join in God’s mission to be defenders of the Dalit right to live in security without fear and be prompters of the Dalit right to live in freedom with justice in our caste violence prone society.

Bishop Taranath Sagar, NCCI President, launching the latest Dalit book at the Conference.



The 13th CCA Assembly in Kuala Lumpur passed an action supporting the struggles of the Dalit people and giving priority to inviting Dalit leaders to participate in CCA programs on peace and human rights advocacy, in ecumenical and theological formation, and in youth and gender justice. CCA co-organized with the WCC an International Ecumenical Conference on Solidarity with Dalits held in Bangkok in March 2009. CCA supported with funds this Dalit National Conference in New Delhi hosted by the National Council of Churches in India.

Charlie Ocampo

The pathos of climate refugees

The following are excerpts of the statement issued by the participants coming from Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Korea, New Zealand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand, who attended the consultation on "The Pathos of Climate Refugees" on 5 - 9 October 2010, in Bangalore, India, organized by CCA in partnership with the National Council of Churches in India (NCC India):

Environmental degradation around the world is creating a new category of people known as climate refugees. There are reportedly some 25 million climate refugees in the world today, mostly in Asia and Africa. Their number seems to be increasing by the day. According to predictions by informed groups, there will be 150-200 million climate refugees in the world by 2050, and Asia is likely to be home to a large number of them.

Climate refugees are people who have to leave their habitats, immediately or in the near future, because of climate change and related environmental disasters. These disasters result in increased droughts, water scarcity, desertification, sea level rise and the more frequent occurrence of extreme weather events such as hurricanes, cyclones, mass flooding and tornadoes.

Climate refugees are the victims of unjust geopolitical, social and economic systems, and patriarchy. They experience daily poverty, destitution, homelessness, violence, sexual abuse, state brutality, human trafficking, among others, which are their pathos.

The most vulnerable groups to climate change are the poor, elderly, children, women and indigenous people.

The consultation participants acknowledged the following:

- Increased natural disasters, such as drought, flood and cyclone
- Shortage of food and water, faced especially by the poor and the marginalized
- Threat to public health due to increasing

pollution, water related diseases, and death due to natural disasters

- Change in ecosystems in terms of biodiversity and living conditions
- Melting of glaciers and snow, and
- Rise in sea level.

Climate change is not just a problem limited to the rise in temperature but the consequences of carbon civilization caused by industrialization, capitalism, and neo-liberal globalization.

The dominant worldview to seek profit without limits, to separate human beings from nature, to impose a logic of domination upon nature and transform everything like water, earth, traditional cultures, biodiversity, justice, ethics, the rights of peoples and life itself turn into commodities that further destroy the harmony of creation, and force millions to become climate refugees.



The tragedy of the floods. Victims still waiting for help in Pakistan.
Photo: Hira S. Malik

Climate change is adversely affecting not only human beings but the whole creation. The definition of climate refugees thus is broadened to include all displaced and endangered members of the earth community.

The subaltern communities such as women, indigenous communities, children, dalits and the like are disproportionately forced to bear the brunt of the consequences of climate change in spite of the fact that their carbon emission is almost negligible.

God is a climate refugee in the slums of Dhaka struggling for survival. God is encountered in Maldives, Kiribati, Tuvalu and other low lying small islands, lamenting with island communities over the impending disaster. God is in the movements of the climate refugees as a resilient presence putting a stop to the onslaught of death, and creating alternatives.

The memory of Jesus is celebrated, one who experienced the pains and pathos of being a refugee in Egypt. Egypt the 'house of slavery' could be transformed into the 'house of refuge' for Jesus'



family which inspires countries and churches to be 'homes of refugees'.

Churches, individual Christians and civil society movements are thus urged:

- To enable faith communities to understand climate change as climate injustice and the colonization of the wider community
- To create awareness in children and young people through incorporating climate justice concerns into the Sunday school curriculum
- To establish eco-justice commissions with full time coordinators in all churches/dioceses and ecumenical organizations
- To initiate carbon auditing of all churches and Christian organizations, and make alternative energy policies and practices
- To enable faith communities to understand climate injustice as sin through developing new worship resources and sermon resources
- To engage in inter-faith initiatives in solidarity with climate justice movements,
- To create awareness on the impact of tourism on nature and subaltern communities, and encourage just tourism
- To demand our countries and international bodies to be proactive and accountable in addressing climate change
- To lobby among law makers to initiate changes in the environment-related policies by the government for reducing the causes of climate change
- To convince the governments to open their borders to climate refugees without having to go through a stringent visa regime
- To create a new culture of ecological living, and
- To introduce eco-theology as a required subject in the theological curriculum, and to accompany the process through workshops for faculty, and publication of text books.

For the complete text of the statement, visit: www.cca.org.hk

Kandhamal

Violence and death on silent nights

Eager to tell their stories. Dalit Christians in Kandhamal sharing thier lot to the delegation.



The road to G'udaigiri is long and winding all the way from Bhubaneswar. We passed by lush vegetation and rich pasture for cattle. The scene changed drastically as we entered G'udaigiri, the other name for Kandhamal. Towards Christmas of 2007 and 2008, the quiet villages were suddenly rocked by church buildings and houses being torched to the ground. The violence came as a surprise to communities preparing to celebrate the birth of the Messiah. The rest is history.

CCA was invited to send a delegation of church leaders in December 2008, but the visit was not to be, mainly as visas were not given to the members of the delegation. At the CCA pre-Assembly

People's Forum and on the Assembly floor in Kuala Lumpur in April 2010, the invitation for an ecumenical visit was reiterated, this time by the entire delegation from India. The leadership of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) then started organizing another low-key visit before the Dalit Ecumenical Conference in New Delhi.

Early in the morning of 18th October, the team of Christopher Rajkumar from the Justice, Peace and Creation team of NCCI, Angelou Michael, the youthful NCCI Vice President, and Charlie Ocampo, CCA Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service (JID) took the flight from Kolkata to Bhubaneswar.

Bishop Bijay Kumar Nayak, head vicar of the Diocese of Phulbani offered to host the team in the Diocesan Compound, where members of the diocesan clergy and leaders of the community were gathered to welcome us and to share their stories of faith and survival during the long dark nights almost two years ago in Kandhamal.

More than 103 churches were razed to the ground, 10,000 left homeless with their houses charred during the onslaught of the violence. People have no access to basic needs and no means of livelihood to support them in rebuilding their lives. The victims bemoan the many groups visiting from outside who have listened to their stories and documented their suffering yet very little has been done to ameliorate their broken lives. Only a little more than 4,000 houses have been reconstructed but mostly lacking provision for toilets and other sanitary facilities.

When asked what their urgent priority was, the victim families, some of whom are still living in tents and other makeshift structures responded that they would like to see their houses of worship rebuilt from the ruins. Their houses and other necessities will follow once they have a place of worship.



Narango, the Dalit woman who wished to have the church constructed first before her own house. Photo: Christopher Rajkumar

Bishop Nayak and leaders of the Phulbani diocese have expressed the need for training in livelihood skills, the repairs on two children's hostels, tailoring, and trauma counseling. A section of the diocesan building has also been offered where training in computer skills can be conducted. Making provisions for some scholarships in theological education by Serampore, United Theological College in Bangalore, and other theological institutions was also identified as a pressing need.



Church in ruins.

On Pakistan's Blasphemy Law

Taking human life seriously

CCA and the churches in Asia have expressed concerns about the life-threatening impact of the Blasphemy Law on the Pakistani people. In August 2009, CCA again had expressed support for the Churches and Christians in Pakistan as they continue to raise their voices against the Blasphemy Law.

The following is a reflection by Naeem Shakir, a human rights activist, member of the Church of Pakistan and advocate in the Supreme Court in Pakistan.

The death sentence passed under the blasphemy law on November 8, 2010, against a Christian woman of thirty-two years, Aasia Bibi, mother of two daughters and a daily wage earner on a farm house, has reignited the debate over some laws instituted under the Zia regime. Such occurrences raise serious questions about the place of non-Muslims in the state of Pakistan. Islam is the state religion of Pakistan where Islamic punishments under Sharia's Hudood Laws have been imposed on non-Muslims as well. The blasphemy law became a tool of religious persecution, also used to settle personal score, grab property or eliminate a professional rival.

The blasphemy law was introduced by the military dictator General Zia through his handpicked Shoora (parliament) in 1982 and 1986 without any debate. And the Federal Shariah Court went further to declare capital punishment as the only punishment under Shariah law. The cases for blasphemy were never heard of earlier in Pakistani society. But after these amendments in the penal code, there were cases registered under these provisions. The religious extremists started taking in their own hands the punishment of an alleged blasphemer. They have killed sixteen Christians, fifteen Muslims, two Ahmedis and one

Hindu without trial or due process of law. A victim is neither safe in police custody nor in jail and not in court. There have been 1058 cases under blasphemy law out of which 456 were Ahmedies, 449 Muslims, 132 Christians and twenty-one Hindus.

As invariably happens, in Aasia's case the complainant was a local clergy named Mohammad Salam, who was not even present at the alleged occurrence and did not personally hear the blasphemous words allegedly uttered by her. Yet Aasia was meted a death sentence. The courts are subject to intense pressure from religious zealots who throng the courtroom, display banners and play cards demanding death to the accused. The verdicts are made in an environment that is hardly conducive to any judicious dispensation. Although many of the accused have been acquitted by the superior court, records show that after release they were obliged to leave the country for fear of being killed.

The Pakistan society is under immense pressure of religious militants inspired by Talibans, and is made hostage to a 'moral' police that invokes a divine mandate. They have become the sole arbiters of truth who do not listen to reason or logic. They just issue the religious decree. The state is adopting a policy of appeasement as the religious bogey forms part of the electorate of the ruling political elite. The process of polemics has ceased as there is no room left for dialogue. Socio-religious intolerance has grown beyond proportions.

Like Aasia Bibi there are many who are living under dehumanized and vulnerable conditions. Some are facing socio-religious oppression like Dalits but some are facing hunger, disease, HIV, the dangers to life as refugees and



© Jamal Ashiqain

*As God's people,
we all share a
common humanity.
We can live side
by side in peace
and harmony.
Photo: Jamal
Ashiqain*

as migrant workers. The poor and the marginalized are also the most likely to be victims of religious persecution and discriminatory laws.

As both inheritors of the Abrahamic faith, Christians and Muslims are called alike to heed the words of Yahweh God: *“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow”* (Isaiah 1:15c-17, NRSV).

Jesus Christ the great Prophet has

assured God's people: *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”* (John 10:10, NRSV). We are challenged to take life seriously and order our lives according to God's will and strive to enjoy fullness of life. This is only possible through our struggle to bring an end to unjust social orders that foist suffering to humankind, especially to the least and the marginalized.

The reign of God founded on justice has to be built right on this earth that is full of life.

Naeem Shakir

Women weaving peace

Ecumenical networking to strengthen Asian women's ecumenical movement is one of the major foci of CCA Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Ecumenical Formation (EGY) work. CCA as midwife of peace links member churches with Asian ecumenical organizations to nurture women's peace initiatives which may not be always recognized by society. Ecumenical networking is accompanying one another, sharing human and other resources to promote women's leadership development and advocate for women and children's rights. CCA works with the Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC) in weaving peace by nurturing church women's peace initiatives.

women in Cambodia through the Women's Ecumenical Accompaniment for Empowerment or WEAVE Project in partnership with the Kampuchea Council of Churches (KCC).

CCA facilitated the collaborative work between the women of Igreja Protestante Iha Timor Leste (IPTL) and ACWC as Timor Leste is still not a member of ACWC. CCA supported two IPTL women leaders to attend the ACWC assembly where IPTL applied to become a member. In a churchwomen leaders training organized in Timor Leste on 10-11 July 2010, ACWC's vision, mission and its 2010 assembly were discussed, including the need for ecumenical networking among Asian church women.



From left: Krise Anki Gosal, Lee Moon Sook, Shu Wen Chang (outgoing ACWC Executive Secretary), Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, Nareeboon Rachkeeree (past ACWC President), Moumita Biswas.

The 14th Quadrennial Assembly of ACWC held on 15-20 October 2010 in Bogor, Indonesia provided CCA the opportunity to yet again promote Asian Church women's prophetic ministry of healing and reconciliation. The assembly with the theme, 'Asian Women Moving Forward - Non Violent World - New Earth, Life in its Fullness,' gathered fifty-nine (59) delegates, 185 observers and guests from twenty-six countries. Donna Bryan from Australia was elected as President, Devika Ukwatte from Sri Lanka as Vice President, and Lee Moon Sook from Korea, as Executive Secretary.

Rev. Dr. Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, CCA General Secretary and Moumita Biswas, Executive Secretary of EGY attended the assembly.

CCA and ACWC have journeyed together in accompanying

CCA also convened a meeting of women leaders from the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) and IPTL together with Rev. Lee, Moon Sook, newly elected ACWC Executive Secretary, Dr Hutabarat Lebang and Ms. Corazon Tabing-Reyes, Executive Secretary of the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC). The women discussed how churches in Timor Leste and Indonesia could work together in supporting and accompanying one another in women's leadership development, and to engage in a prophetic ministry of healing and reconciliation. Ms Krise Anki Gosal, PGI Women and Children Concerns Executive Secretary suggested that PGI can involve IPTL women in its programs on overcoming domestic violence against women and on human trafficking. Further collaboration work on gender justice, peace and reconciliation with other ecumenical organizations will also be explored.

Is your Church HIV competent?

A test on HIV Competency is featured in the new CCA book, *“Building HIV Competent Churches: Called to Prophesy, Reconcile and Heal”* edited by Dr. Erlinda N. Senturias and Dr. Liza B. Lamis. The book is funded by the Hong Kong Christian Council, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Church in Hong Kong), the Regional Offices of Joint United Nations HIV/AIDS Program and the United Nations Population Fund in Bangkok.

The voices of people living with HIV (PLHIV+), the witness of the churches, the pastoral, spiritual and biblico-theological reflections, and the context of HIV in Asia presented during the Pre-Assembly Forum of PLHIV+ and General Assembly (April 2010) and the Writeshop on CCA HIV Policy (August 2009) are featured in the book that will be used by CCA in the program to build HIV Competent Churches from 2011 to 2013.

To help build HIV competent Churches in Asia, you may avail of the book (email Liza - liza@cca.org.hk), and contribute to the CCA's HIV and AIDS Ministry by



sending your donations to:
Account name: **Christian Conference of Asia**
Bank: **Hang Seng Bank**
Branch: **Hankow Road (4 Hankow Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR, China)**
Account No.: **295 - 4 - 7095**
Designated for: **CCA HIV and AIDS Ministry**

Christ and art in Asia

For over thirty years the Asian Christian Art Association (ACAA) has been bringing together artists from across Asia, engaging a contextual theology through the visual cultures of the region, and bringing to wider audiences the wonderful creative responses of artists to seeing Christ in the Asian context.

In response to changing circumstances and emerging patterns of church and art the ACAA is actively looking for assistance in contacting artists and theologians interested in this dialogue. Events are planned for 2011 - 2012 that will enhance these conversations. The ACAA is ably led by its President, Filipino artist Emmanuel Garibay based in Manila, and its Secretary, Rev. Dr. Rod Pattenden from Sydney, Australia.

Please contact Rod Pattenden (pattenden@bigpond.com) for any information or if you would like to contribute to this network.

We would also commend to Seminaries, Colleges, libraries and researchers the regular ACAA publication, IMAGE. This publication provides a wonderful pictorial introduction to the arts in Asia. The ACAA has also

published a number of books but it is through IMAGE that much of the richness of the arts in Asia has been explored. Back issues are also available. IMAGE subscriptions can be made online through PayPal at the website www.asianchristianart.org, or by post in Australian dollars (\$35 Europe and North America, \$25 Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and Japan, \$15 the rest of Asia), to P.O. Box 225, Epping 1710 NSW, Australia.

The artwork on this issue's cover is entitled '*Love*' by Bali-based Indonesian artist, Erland Sibuea who is a member of ACAA. The artwork tells about the work of Jesus Christ unifying all people in God's ultimate love. People of different cultures, places, languages and races are embraced by Christ's hands, and are enjoined to enjoy God's love, and also to love one another.

Erland is currently secretary of Bali Christian Art Association (BCAA), the members of which are also members of ACAA. Ketut Lasia, adviser of BCAA is a co-founder of ACAA in 1978.

CCA joins Korean Churches in a signature campaign calling for a Peace Treaty to replace the present Armistice Agreement in the Korean Peninsula

03 December 2010

Dear Member Churches, National Councils in Asia and Ecumenical Partners:

On this Advent Season, we write to you with utmost urgency and prayers to support the current Signature Campaign calling for a Peace Treaty to replace the current Armistice Agreement in the Korean Peninsula.

The exchange of fire on Yeonpyeong on 23 November has led to the deaths of two civilians and two marine soldiers. Eighteen more people were injured and a number of homes were destroyed in and on this small island that lies only seven miles from the North Korean border and fifty miles from the densely populated Southern port city of Incheon. The fighting and the mass exodus of residents from the island that is home to a fishing community and military bases is all too reminiscent of the Korean War that inflicted pain on the Korean people that none can forget. This transpired only months after the sinking of a South Korean warship, Choenan; the fragile peace along the dividing line between the two Koreas has been broken.

The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) mourns with the surviving victims and the families of those whose lives were so senselessly taken. It deplores the North Korean military for using powerful weapons against the civilian community in the most serious incident since the signing of the Armistice in 1953.

The Christian Conference of Asia is an active witness and supports the position taken by the Korean churches on the precarious and uncertain situation faced by both North and South Koreans on the peninsula.

The Tsuen Wan Declaration*

The Tsuen Wan Communique, is a declaration passed by 137 church leaders from Korea and the rest of the world present in the Tsuen Wan International Consultation held in Tsuen Wan, Kowloon, Hong Kong that marked the 25th anniversary of the Tozanso ecumenical process on 22-24 October 2009.

The Tsuen Wan Declaration reiterated support for the governments of North and South Korea for the full implementation of the June 15th 2000 and October 4th 2007 Declarations, spelling out further steps towards reunification on the peninsula.

Tsuen Wan also affirmed that the Koreans are one people, one culture, one nation, yet remain divided. Justice demands that they be reunited in peace and in common commitment to one another.

The participants in the Conference also affirmed that the gospel of Jesus Christ commits Christians to work against evil, injustice and suffering in all its forms, and to pray and work for God's justice, peace and unity in the world.

CCA Public Issues Committee Statement, Kuala Lumpur**

Based on the Report of the Public Issues Committee before the CCA Assembly, the following actions were passed -

1. calls for the parties to the Korean War to bring an end to the Armistice that is in place and to replace it with a peace treaty; and
2. calls on member churches and Councils to provide whatever humanitarian aid they can in support of the suffering people of North Korea.

Proposals from the NCKK and the Korean churches***

The current unstable and precarious situation on the Korean peninsula in the aftermath of the recent violence in Yeonpyeong Island brought about an escalation of tensions between North and South Korea. Among proposals put forward by the Korean Churches, through the National Council of Churches in Korea include -

1. not to abuse resentments of the victims as a pretext of revenge, to restore humanitarian support to North Korea instead of engaging in hard line policies and sanctions and to resume dialogue and mutual exchanges, such as the Six-Party Talks and the North-South Red Cross Conference;
2. to establish the "Special Peace and Cooperation Zone in the West Sea" initiated by North and South Korea Declaration of October 4, 2007, and to stop the military drill in that area rather than continue to collide because of the controversial Northern Limit Lane;
3. to repeal the 1953 Armistice Agreement and replace it with a Peace Treaty, de-escalating the threats of imminent conflict between North and South Korea and ensuring peace and security, not only in Northeast Asia but the whole world.

A signature campaign is being launched by the Korean churches to gather support for the making of a Peace Treaty.

The peace, security and reunification on the Korean peninsula is a significant and continuing ecumenical commitment and CCA has supported and accompanied the churches and Christians in North and South Korea in their journey towards this goal. The Tozanso ecumenical peace process has been in the CCA agenda since Tozanso's inception in 1984. The 2009 Conference to celebrate 25 years of the Tozanso process, the action passed by the Kuala Lumpur Assembly in April 2010, and the pastoral letters issued to the member churches in Korea and the NCKK underscore CCA's role and commitment to reunification. Support for this signature campaign towards a Peace Treaty is one concrete ecumenical action endorsed and supported by CCA through its member churches and Councils in Asia.

Attached are the pertinent documents to guide you in your reflections and response to the Campaign.

CCA enjoins its member churches and Councils to actively support the campaign, which it deems a timely response to the suffering of both North and South Koreans at this Season of Advent.

Yours faithfully,

(signed)
Henriette Hutabarat Lebang
General Secretary

cc.: Members of the CCA General Committee
CCA Staff and Consultants

Attachments:
NCKK Letter on Yeonpyeong Island Incident
PROK Letter to ecumenical partners
Call for Signatures

*CCA and WCC jointly organized the Tsuen Wan Conference marking the 25th anniversary of the Tozanso ecumenical peace initiative, held in Hong Kong on 22-24 October 2009.

**Recommendations from the Public Issues Committee were passed by the CCA Assembly in Kuala Lumpur held on April 15-20, 2010)

***Proposals presented in a letter, "NCKK Call to Prayer over the Yeonpyeong Island incident.



STATEMENT

The National Council of Churches of Korea A Call to Prayer over the Yeonpyeong Island Incident

Yet again, only months after the sinking of a South Korean warship, Choenan, the fragile peace along the dividing line between the two Koreas has been broken. The exchange of fire on Yeonpyeong on 23 November has led to the deaths of two civilians and two marines. Eighteen more people were injured and a number of homes were destroyed in and on this small island that lies only seven miles from the North Korean border and fifty miles from the densely populated Southern port city of Incheon. The fighting and the mass exodus of residents from the island that is home to a fishing community and military bases is all too reminiscent of the Korean War that inflicted pain on the Korean people that none can forget. The National Council of Churches in Korea mourns with the surviving victims and the families of those whose lives were so senselessly taken. It deplores the North Korean military for using powerful weapons against the civilian community in the most serious incident since the signing of the Armistice in 1953.

Yet again the Peninsula and its people are gripped by the fear of an escalation of ideologically-inspired violence. In its 1988 Incheon Consultation Statement on Peace and Justice, as the NCCCK we said to the nation that our country sits at the apex of hegemonic competition and diplomatic and military brinkmanship. Yet again, we in the South are reminded of the fragility of our nation's booming prosperity and of the starkly contradictory widespread poverty of the North. And once more this border clash comes in the context of joint US and South Korean naval exercises off the coast and "war games" on the Peninsula. NCCCK challenges the governments of South Korea, USA and Japan to refrain from upgrading these joint military exercises under an umbrella of the USA's respective "security alliances" because they appear to have provoked North Korea and led to its strong reaction.

As we have so often repeated in the past, these exercises of political and military brinkmanship serve no purpose other than to escalate tensions in Korea and to threaten the peace in the whole Northeast Asian region. The presence of a great number of nuclear weapons on land and on the surrounding seas makes Korea a tinderbox that threatens the peace of the whole world.

We therefore call on the ecumenical family to pray for peace in our land and to urge all governments to exercise caution, to refrain from further inflaming the political atmosphere and to exercise the maximum restraint so that reason and diplomacy can prevail over narrow self-serving military, strategic or political interests. The fundamental interests of the people must prevail: mutual respect and peace with justice for all.

We also appeal to all nations to reject any attempt to cheapen life by treating Korea as a pawn in diplomatic gamesmanship, while ignoring the welfare of the people.

For nearly three decades, the NCCCK and the global ecumenical fellowship have worked together to these ends. We have slowly built bridges and established regular, productive contact with the Korean Christians Federation in the North and we have shared our common prayers for peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula with the global fellowship of Christian churches through the World Council of Churches. We have sought to provide a model that governments, politicians

and diplomats might follow, and we have therefore rejoiced at the successes of the two Inter-Korean summits of June 13-15, 2000 between President Kim Dae-jung and Chairman Kim Jong Il and of October 2-4, 2007 between President Roh Moon-hyun and Chairman Kim Jong Il. We are convinced that they provide a good basis and framework for the two sides to work together towards a shared future.

On 15 August this year, the NCCK, the KCF and churches in other parts of the world simultaneously prayed for peace and the reunification of Korea, using in part the following words: "We pray that mistrust and confrontation between the North and the South should die down, mutual trust should be built up through reconciliation, cooperation and exchanges. The June 15 unification mood that we have all enjoyed should be revived in full blossom, and therefore the warm atmosphere of unification should blow its way through all this peninsula."

Given the current tensions, the NCCK further notes these important commitments in the October 2007 summit peace declaration:

1. South and North Korea committed themselves to work for mutual respect and trust in order to overcome differences in ideology, and system.
2. South and North Korea committed themselves to ease military tensions, hold ministerial defense talks in November in Pyongyang to discuss this and inter-Korean economic cooperation.
3. The two sides agreed on the need to end the current armistice and establish permanent peace.
4. The two sides agreed to create a special peace zone around Haeju in North Korea and nearby areas.
5. South and North Korea committed themselves to promote humanitarian cooperation and expansion of the reunions of separated families.

The tragic events in recent days underscore the importance of pursuing this course. We urge the parties to the stalled Six-Party Talks to follow this same path, to cease exploiting the divisions and differences and to put the welfare of the people at the center of their concern. The situation must not be allowed to deteriorate further and all military actions or retaliation must be avoided we urge all our partners to pray for peace on the Korean Peninsula. We would welcome our partner councils and ecumenical organizations to support us also by urging all governments to work together to help resolve the dangerous crisis through diplomacy and peaceful means.

The World Council of Churches has repeatedly asserted that the future of the Korean Peninsula is ultimately to be determined by the Korean people. We shall fulfill this calling despite the challenges and obstacles because we believe that God is faithful and will perform mighty acts on our land. We are immensely grateful for the solidarity, prayers and support of the churches around the world. We give thanks to God for you.

Seoul, 27 November 2010

(signed)

Kim Young Ju(Rev)

The Newly elected General Secretary

The National Council of Churches in Korea



GOD is with us

Advent reminds us that God would not abandon the people in their time of distress and hopelessness. God gives us time by entering history with the Word and God's work of salvation. Advent is always an opportune time for healing and reconciliation. Who needs our help? Who would we make peace with? Who have experienced brokenness and are in need of healing in our communities? What changes would we make in our personal and community life?

God continues to speak to us with a word of hope even in the midst of darkness and despair. The mystery of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the supreme and timely word of good news in a world beset by war, famine, disease and economic turmoil. At a time when all we hear is bad news, God's promise to us needs to be heard afresh.

"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6, NRSV).

As the Season of Advent dawns on us, we can tell the world, "Wait, there is something more powerful than the darkness we see and experience in the world for God is with us - in our lives and in our world."

The Staff
Christian Conference of Asia
December 2010

The dumps yield food for the hungry. Children sharing bread from scavenging in Mae Sod, Thailand. Photo: © John Hulme