

# cca news



**Asian Contribution to the Ninth Assembly  
of the World Council of Churches**

# God, in Your Grace, Transform the World

In the ten days of the WCC assembly there were momentous events in virtually every nook and cranny. The assembly theme, 'God, in your grace, transform the world', might be seen as an appeal to the creator to intervene in a corrupt world, corrupted especially by those who have acquired power and privilege.

But one thing is clear—which an inspiring reflection at the opening worship brought home quite clearly—God is not going to show up suddenly and take control of the world and rule it directly. To expect that miracle from above is to dream the impossible, to desire more than we deserve. This is a world torn apart by human indifference to what God wants for us—to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Having erred and moved away from God's will for the earth and all within it, we are now called to join God at work in the world and to be part of the transformation. This is not just about simple decisions and resolutions. We are asked to avoid the temptation of 'being conformed' to the world and, instead, seek a transformation that will lead to a world where things are good and perfect.

I think of Asia as I write these words in my hotel room in Porto Alegre, with the words of inspiring speakers from the stage, in ecumenical conversations and *mutirão* echoing within me. I wonder what the messages mean for churches in Asia. How can we in our Asian churches find the grace to be involved in God's transformative work in the world? No longer can we think of Asia in monolithic terms. Ours is a region punctuated by extreme poverty, caste oppression, racism and the subjugation of ethnic minorities, the violation of women and children, exploitation of workers, religious conflict, environmental



How can we in our Asian churches find the grace to be involved in God's transformative work in the world?

degradation and a large number of other related issues. This is not the Asia that God wants for us.

It is tempting and easy to release our guilt in failing to address these problems by announcing grand new plans and mouthing radical slogans. As I said above, change is not going to happen so easily. Change calls for much sacrifice, tireless commitment and active cooperation with those who seek to truly transform the world in which we live.

So, how do we go from Port Alegre back to Asia seeking transformation? I want to suggest three main steps. These are not in any hierarchical order but are intertwined ideas. Transformation requires each of us to be en-

gaged in self-examination, so our first prayer must therefore be this: 'God transform this world, beginning with me!' This demands looking at ourselves, confessing our own selfishness and our apathy to the suffering of the vast majority of our people. Secondly, we must ask God to transform our institutions. Our churches and the various agencies associated with them are not ones that the people of Asia can always look to as sources of their liberation and redemption. Our institutions tend to be slow to act, overcautious at times when they are called to dare risks, self-preserved when they should really be willing to be torn apart and remade so they can fulfill new functions, and scale new frontiers of mission. Thirdly, we must open ourselves to our peoples and recognise their enormous and inherent strength to change their own situations. People count when it comes to mission in Asia. It is for the people that we as a church exist, no matter who they are, what their religious affiliations are, or what their social status is.

Time and again, the people of Asia have shown they are resilient even in the face of acute crises. The church in Asia must humble itself, seeking God's grace to be an instrument of societal transformation. This will require that we are willing to submit ourselves completely and truly to the requirements of such transformation. We will have to confess our failures and repent, and only then will come our self-transformation as a church and, with that, our capacity to influence change.

We have prayed together with our sisters and brothers from around the globe, 'God in your grace, transform the world.' It is now time to make a covenant with God and work to make this prayer a reality.

—Prawate Khid-arn



# Asia in Porto Alegre

A special issue on the contribution of Asian churches and people to the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil



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**Editor-in-Chief**  
Prawate Khid-arn

**Editor**  
Geoff Alves

Official publication of the Christian Conference of Asia

**Editorial Committee**

Hope Antone  
Corazon Tabing-Reyes  
Tony Waworuntu

96, 2nd District, Pak Tin Village  
Mei Tin Road, Sha Tin, NT  
Hong Kong SAR, China  
Telephone + 852 2691 1068  
Fax + 852 2692 4378  
email [cca@cca.org.hk](mailto:cca@cca.org.hk)  
[www.cca.org.hk](http://www.cca.org.hk)

# Asia in Porto Alegre

Considerable Asian contribution to the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches

**A**sia made a substantial contribution to the World Council of Churches ninth assembly, according to the WCC Asia Secretary, Mathews George. In terms of statistics 19 per cent of the voting delegates came from the Asia region, and over 10 per cent of all participants came from the area. These percentages are higher than at the last assembly in Harare. All countries in the region, except two, but including others that are not members of CCA, were represented, and twenty-seven people (18 per cent, exceeded only by Europe and, slightly, by Africa) were elected to the central committee. In terms of gender balance Asia can be proud that more than half of these people are women. The number of youth is only three, but this is more than before. The Asian central committee members are able, experienced and committed, will make an important contribution to the WCC in the next seven years, and give an important Asian input.



Asian members of the Nominations Committee, Ery Hutabarat-Lebang (Indonesia), Kim Kyung In (Korea) and S.M. Chowdhury (Bangladesh)

People from the Asia region took part in every activity from the opening worship onwards. They served the plenary sessions as facilitators and speakers. They were particularly prominent in interfaith contributions to the assembly. There were Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim participants from the region. The address of Dr Achmad Hasyim Muzadi, who represents 40 million Muslims in Indonesia, to the WCC delegates, was a highlight of the



Mathews George, Asia Secretary, World Council of Churches



Sri Lankan street theatre



CCA treasurer Thomas Soo Yee Po

assembly. People from the Asia region provided leadership in Bible studies, *mutirão*, workshops and ecumenical conversations.

The *mutirão* offered the opportunity for a huge range of issues to be raised, and Asia took a prominent role in these. There were also cultural presentations, Asian organisations in the exhibition hall, demonstrations regarding Dalits in India, street theatre from Sri Lanka and a communion service held by the Koreans, from both south and north, attended by Sam Kobia, the WCC general secretary. The Decade to Overcome Violence Focus on Asia got due attention. The focus has now been handed on to Latin America. The *mutirão* were meant to provide space for the wider ecumenical movement's concerns and issues and involve more than the delegates. Summaries of their findings will be fed to the central committee

Mathews George felt the assembly had been well organised, and nearly all who attended would agree with him. Handling 4,000 people from all over the world is not an easy task, but the logistics were excellent and it ran very smoothly. The active participation of everyone in worship and Bible study was appreciated. An enthusiasm was noted among the participants, especially from the young people, which is vital for revitalising the ecumenical movement.

The Porto Alegre assembly considered future directions, and significant changes will occur in the post-Porto Alegre period. The Program Guidelines and Policy Reference committees have made suggestions for the future and these will need to be seriously considered by the new central committee when it meets in August–September 2006. There will be much discussion until then planning the future programmatic structure and agenda of the WCC. The CCA and WCC will continue its strong liaison in Asia.



God's abundant grace: offering during the opening prayer



Peggy Mekel (Indonesia)

Twenty-six people from the Asian region were elected to the central committee of the WCC. A number of these people are featured in this issue.



Carmencita Karagdag (Philippines)



Anthony Row (Malaysia)



Gregor Henderson (Australia)

# Solidarity with Women

The women's pre-assembly meeting equipped women to participate in the assembly more effectively

**C**ora Tabing-Reyes, the CCA staff member with a particular concern for women's issues, attended the pre-assembly women's meeting. She said it was particularly helpful for the women to come together, to get to know each other and to equip themselves as to how they could participate in the assembly more effectively.

They studied the theme, 'God, in Your Grace, Transform the World', and heard speakers from Latin America and Africa and Orthodox churches. The women had dialogue with WCC general secretary Sam Kobia, who affirmed his solidarity with women.

Another feature of the pre-assembly meeting was 'sister groups', where participants grouped themselves to get to know each other, to exchange their experiences, fears, vision and excitement. Although called

sister groups, some brothers joined in these discussions.

Together with other pre-assembly people they had a session on the consensus approach to decision making. This was done in a very creative way, including role play. Bible studies and meaningful worship were held and Cora made an Asian contribution by conducting shibashi meditative exercises.

Cora found the creativity of the whole women's pre-assembly meeting meaningful. It was not boring at all and was holistic in its approach and methodology. There were serious discussions, but it was also fun. What was very exciting in this regard was the presence of a feminist theologian, Dr Seibold from Germany, a clown, who used her clowning in worship and role play.

In the assembly itself Cora was impressed that the planners had really tried to be in-

clusive. There were women moderators and speakers, there were women on the stage and women's concerns were reflected in the reports.

But although there were statements such as, 'The voices of women should be heard,' the issue of violence against women was not raised. However she was happy with the percentage of women delegates (37.2), the highest in the history of WCC assemblies. She was pleased that workshops (for example one on HIV/AIDS) were taking up gender issues, so the perspective of women is starting to be recognised.

However in an ecumenical conversation on women and men, only three men turned up. She hopes the churches can move to the next step, where building a community of women and men is a concern of men, not just women.



African participants in the women's pre-assembly meeting

# A Consensus Assembly

## A new model smooths decision making

**A**s part of an underlying shift of culture, the WCC central committee in February 2005 adjusted its rules and adopted a consensus decision-making model for its discussions. It was hoped the move would strengthen the participation and commitment of member churches.

The issue arose within the WCC via the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation, which examined ways of making sure that the Orthodox voice would be heard in WCC decisions. The parliamentary system can often result in a significant minority voice still ending up on the 'losing' end of a vote, so alternatives to the voting system were sought.

D'Arcy Wood from the Uniting Church in Australia was a member of that commission and drew on the experience of consensus decision-making in his church. It was tried in the central committee and adopted for Porto Alegre assembly. Jill Tabart from the UCA put a great deal of time and effort into the process. She went to Geneva late last year to train committees, vice moderators and rapporteurs to achieve an integrated approach. (These people had never met before an assembly in the past.) She also attended the pre-assembly meetings to explain the process and conduct role plays.

A number of observers came to the assembly from America and southern Africa specifically to see the process in action.

Jill felt it worked as well as could be expected, and that it improved as the assembly continued.

Incidentally the use of the coloured cards, a feature at Porto Alegre, is more of a gimmick than being integral to the process of consensus decision making, but surprisingly it captured the imagination of the delegates. Minority groups—women, youth etc.—were

able to easily signify their views through this simple method, making their participation meaningful. It often gave participants the freedom of not having to provide a clear 'yes' or 'no' answer.

So even though it was a little stultified in its execution it was a worthwhile exercise, with plenty of room for development. It will continue in the life of the central and other WCC committees. Jill was encouraged by people's willingness to give it a try, and by the number of people who sought her out asking her how it might benefit their church back home



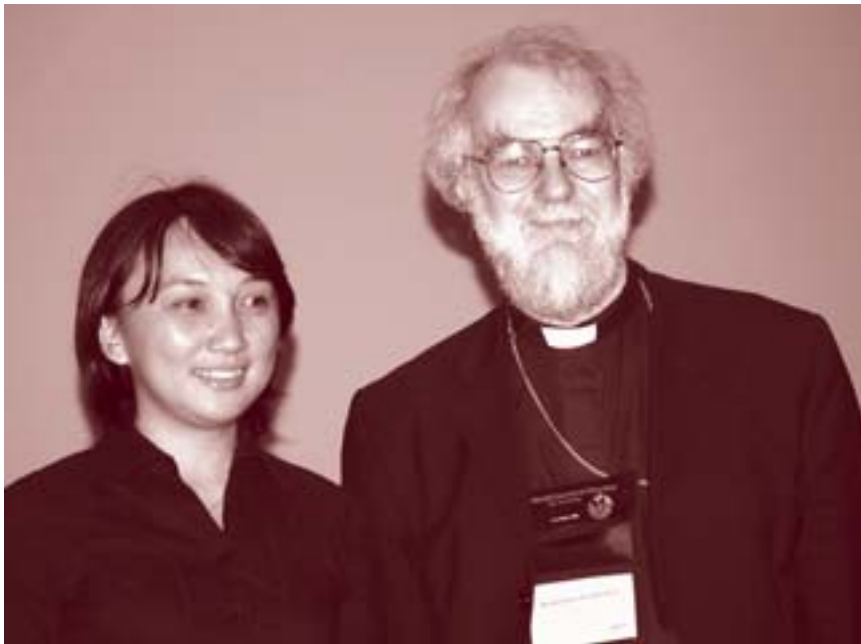
Jill Tabart (Australia)



The cards in action

# Economic Bate-papo

A young economist and the archbishop chat about the state of the world



Peggy Mekel with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams

For half an hour each day at the WCC assembly from 12.45, the *bate-papo*—or ‘chat’—was an informal conversation between a leading ecumenical personality and an up-and-coming young ecumenist. It explored issues from liberation theology to the future of Christianity. Speakers included Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, the Archbishop of Canterbury and several Nobel Peace Prize winners. The *bate-papo* quickly became a highlight of the assembly.

The Most Rev. Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, was the guest one lunchtime, paired with Peggy Mekel of Indonesia. The two discussed globalisation and economic justice issues. Dr Williams was concerned about the way people are taught that economics as a self-contained entity as though it had nothing to do with the rest of

life. He noted that ‘economic slavery is as much slavery as other kinds’.

Peggy, an economist, told of a US-owned goldmining company in her country, which was making huge profits, while the locals were still in poverty. As the topic shifted to the lack of youth involvement in the church (Peggy making the point that there were no young people in the Church of England delegation), Williams observed that young people are often disappointed. They see in Jesus Christ someone who says change is possible, but they often fail to see that transformation occurring in churches, he said. ‘The answer is not for the church to say we have to be more entertaining. We have to look more seriously at humanity,’ Williams said. ‘[Young people] don’t want to be entertained or patronised. They want to be stretched—and they might stretch us, too.’

## Peggy Mekel

Peggy Mekel is the vice chair for mission and ecumenical affairs in the Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa (GMIM) Youth Fellowship. She comes from a small village in North Sulawesi, and after graduating with a degree in economics in Manado, received a scholarship to do her master’s degree in Atlanta in the USA. She has also studied in the Netherlands. She is now a university teacher in Manado. She was due to go to Porto Alegre as a steward, but her church chose her to be one of their delegates.

She works hard to encourage the young people of Minahasa to be part of the church. But they are open to new influences, and sometimes prefer to go to the movies than the prayer group on Saturdays. She does not want to see what she has observed in Europe, where young people are being seduced by consumerism. In Asia many young people have to work very hard for a living.

She has found the assembly promising, that we can transform the world. But the challenge is to get the churches to implement the ideas. She feels they have to become involved, and build solidarity between north and south and east and west.

As an economist she has strong views on globalisation. Globalisation, she says, is not fair, therefore we have to work to make it fair. How can this be done? One way would be to reduce consumption, to curtail the worse aspects of consumerism. She also liked Rowan Williams’ idea of ethical investment.

Going from a small village to the big, wide world has given Peggy a broad outlook. She picked up many good things overseas, but she hopes she has retained the good things from her own culture and tradition. She tries to share this wide perspective with her students.



# WSCF Resurgent

World Student Christian Federation prominent at WCC Assembly



Necta Montes Rocas

**N**ecta Montes Rocas from the Philippines is the Asia Pacific regional secretary of the World Student Christian Federation. The Asia Pacific region is the most active region within WSCF. It has had the most sustained work and the most students of any region and it has stable finances and leadership. Because of its large base it has no difficulty in finding staff or leaders.

This is perhaps because of sustained programs throughout the years, a focus on leadership formation and a very strong women's program. The region is also involved in social justice activities. In the Philippines, for example the Student Christian Movement is involved in human rights and economic justice issues. In India the SCM is concerned with Dalit issues. In Indonesia the concern is interreligious dialogue. These last two countries have large numbers involved in the movement. India has 10,000 members and Indonesia 70,000. It is interesting to note that most Asian delegates to the WCC assembly have or have had an involvement with the SCM.

The executive committee meeting held after the last WSCF assembly in Chiang Mai in 2004 decided it would meet prior to the WCC assembly in Porto Alegre. This was a brave move, designed to raise the visibility of WSCF, to show that it was still around, and that it was doing great work. The WCC welcomed the decision enthusiastically. The WSCF booth at the assembly was a great success. People were able to talk to committee and staff members, and they were pleased to

see the students interacting with the wider ecumenical movement.

In previous years the work of the WSCF was stifled due to a poor financial situation. However this has now been turned around and the executive committee has made an important decision to implement global programs again. At least one global program will be held each year, hosted by the regions. In August 2006 Africa will hold a program on 'Empire', 2007 'Migration' (Latin America) and in 2008 'Students and Higher Education' (Europe).

Necta herself has been very active in work among students and youth in her own country. Although she did not find out until many years later, she has a family link to the WCC. Her grandfather, Valentin G. Montes, died in a plane crash in 1962 on his way to attend a central committee meeting in Geneva.

On the WSCF booth there was a sign with the statement, 'Those who join a seemingly harmless SCM group in some country risk opening themselves up to a future that is unimaginable.' Many of the delegates at the assembly could say 'amen' to that.



Michael Wallace (Aotearoa New Zealand), WSCF Secretary General

# Praying for the Jubilee

The reunification of the Korean peninsula is a global issue

**Y**un Jae-Hyang is CCA's general committee member from Korea. At the World Council of Churches assembly she spent her time in the exhibition hall in the booth of the National Youth Association of the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK-Youth), of which she is treasurer. The theme of the Korean youth booth was reunification. Korea was divided over fifty years ago, and remains divided, one of the few countries in the world left in that condition. Recently the two governments have begun to speak to each other, but reunification remains as elusive as ever.

Jae-Hyang said there are two influences at work—internal and external. Inside, she said, the people of each part of Korea need to understand more about each other, as in the intervening years since partition the north and the south of the country have developed different systems of government and customs. But there is also an external pressure that wants to keep the situation as it is. This is the position of the USA, which seeks to uphold its military hegemony in the region following the rise of China as a possible future superpower.

So the youth of the church in Korea, if they once felt it was a purely Korean issue, now realise reunification is a global issue. Jae-Hyang Yun said that they are deeply worried about the US congress passing a law on human rights on North Korea. They feel that this law could be misused for US political interests. They believe instead that a critical requisite for improving the human rights situation in North Korea is to continue humanitarian food support and lift the economic sanctions.

Young Christians felt this issue was so important they came to Porto Alegre to bring the division of their country to the attention of Christian leaders.



Yun Jae-Hyang

They of course have also been active in their own country. They have tried to make contact with their fellow Christians in North Korea. In the south many people are ignorant of the lives of people in the north, so education and the dissemination of information is a vital role for the young people. They meet and pray together with other young people from other denominations.

Yun Jae-Hyang is sure that she will see reunification come in her lifetime. In the Old Testament the 'jubilee' is variously described as 'the acceptable year of the Lord', 'the year of freedom', and 'the year of recovery'. Korea is still praying for the coming jubilee of reunification, and it is young people such as Jae-Hyang Yun, a new generation, that will help to bring it about.



WCC Sam Kobia speaks at a service for the reunification of Korea

# Service for Reunification

Joint worship service with North and South Korea builds hope

**A** joint worship service between the South and North Korean churches for peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula was held in the university chapel during the assembly.

Korean Christians at the assembly demonstrated deep commitment to making Korea one nation again. They lamented the divisions of families living on both sides of a heavily fortified border. They also believed that tensions created by a divided Korean peninsula are a major threat to world peace.

The service was presided by Rev. Yoon Gil-soo, the general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the WCC, attended the service, along with participants from other countries. It was a moving time, in which, for a short time at least, the two Koreas were reunified. Others taking part in the service were, from the South, Rev. Cho Sung-gi, the general secretary of Presbyterian Church in Korea, Rev. Paik Do-woong, general secretary of NCC Korea, Bishop Shin Kyung-ha, president of the bishop's council in the Korea Methodist Church, Ms Yoon Jaehyang and Ms Shin Sun, NCCK, and from the North, Rev. Kang Young-sup, chairperson of the Korea Christian Fellowship, Mr Jong-ro Ri, director for international affairs in the KCF, and Mr Kim Young-chul.

In addressing the service, WCC general secretary Sam Kobia said, 'This joint prayer meeting is another historic milestone in our journey together towards peace and reconciliation in the Korean peninsula. It is thus my fervent prayer that at the WCC 10th assembly participants will be coming from a united Korea.'



Communion led by representatives of South and North Korea

# The Wider Side of the Assembly

The ecumenical *mutirão* enable many to take part in the life of the assembly



Dr K.B. Rokaya speaks at a *mutirão* organised by the South Asia Council of Churches

**W**hile the number of official delegates was relatively small the *mutirão* enabled much broader participation in the life of the ecumenical movement. As an integral part of the assembly, the *mutirão* provided space for workshops, celebrations, seminars and exhibits for the whole assembly community.

The word *mutirão* comes from a Brazilian word meaning a meeting place and an opportunity to work together for a common purpose. In Brazil, for example, people in poor communities sometimes 'make a *mutirão*' to build a house together. They ensure that there is the needed expertise on how to build a house and then the community works together to realise a concrete objective.

The *mutirão* offered workshops and seminars, cultural events and exhibits to all

participants. It provided a space for home groups to meet. It provided an opportunity to deepen substantive reflections on the theme of the assembly and the plenaries presented

in the first half of the event. As an integral part of the assembly, the workshop offerings in the *mutirão* were intended to supplement and accompany the assembly deliberations. Assembly insights and deliberations were expected to help guide the work of the many churches and ecumenical organisations which participated in the *mutirão*.

What did participants in the *mutirão* do? People had a huge choice of activities. There were prayer and worship services, Bible studies, seminars and exhibits.

Every day fifteen workshops were conducted on a wide variety of subjects.

The number of workshops and issues covered was enormous and no one person could see them all.

All we can do is give a taste of some of the subjects of particular interest to the Asia region:

- *Building HIV-competent churches*. This workshop hosted a discussion of specific experiences and initiatives of churches



Prawate Khid-arn speaks at a *mutirão* on Justice through Tourism

that seek to effectively fight HIV by transforming communities through capacity building of clergy and congregations. It demonstrated that the utilisation of resources and power existing within communities and churches are the basis for seeking solutions

- *Looking at violence from a health perspective.* Violence is usually looked at from a political or criminal justice angle. A World Health Organisation (WHO) report points out that violence is also a public health issue. This workshop looked at the WHO definitions and typology, as well as violence prevention recommendations.
- *Caste discrimination: counter struggles towards transformation.* This workshop engaged in the discourse on what constitutes caste discrimination. It explored the counter struggles and various forms of dissent against caste oppression at the local and global levels. It also exhibited cultural action, which is a symbol of protest and dissent toward transforming the politics of Dalits.
- *Justice through tourism.* Modern-day tourism is the story of abused hospitality by unscrupulous people whose only goal is to make profits while disregarding social consequences. This workshop explored ways to counteract such forces by emphasising mutuality, solidarity and the real discovery of human community through stewardship and a reverence for God's creation.
- *Toward peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula.* In light of the ongoing division of the peninsula, inter-Korean reconciliation, and the North Korean nuclear proliferation threat, this ecumenical study and discussion invited participants to a shared journey toward peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula
- *The involvement of the Chinese Protestant Church in society.* This workshop introduced the current situation and ministries of the church in China through an audiovisual presentation and discussion. It also expanded on the experience of the churches' participation in social development and progress.

## Interpreting the Assembly

**S**onny Emmanuel Cornelius was one of the two Indonesian interpreters at the assembly, the other being Hanneke Mandagi. Bahasa Indonesia was the only Asian language interpreted at the assembly, and was a most valuable service for the seventy-five Indonesian participants. Sonny is a pastor in an English-speaking Methodist church in Jakarta, so is well practised in interpreting, though the big challenge in Porto Alegre was simultaneous interpretation, especially if a speaker talked very quickly or had a heavy accent. He felt very proud doing this work, which also involved interpreting Indonesian to English.

His funniest moment in the glass booth at the back of the hall came when he was interpreting into Indonesian from the English interpretation of a Japanese speaker, only to find the English interpreter had not been following the speaker in the hall, so Sonny finished long before the speaker did.

Sonny and Hanneke received much appreciation for their efforts. An Indonesian colleague listened to the English interpretation of an Indonesian speaker to see if the delegates were getting an accurate account of what was being said, and pronounced the English was 'excellent'.



Sonny Cornelius in his interpreter's booth at the back of the plenary hall

## Assisting the Assembly



Just a few of the almost 150 stewards who helped the assembly run smoothly

# Telling the World

Exhibitors bring colour and life to the assembly



CASA's booth at the WCC Assembly

**A**ssemblies of the World Council of Churches see Christians from all over the world come together, and many church-related groups take advantage of the display window this event provides. More than 100 groups were represented in dozens of booths in the assembly's exhibit hall adjacent to the main plenary space. Colourful displays covered a variety of issues and topics representing all geographical areas of the world.

Unfortunately only a few of the booths were taken up by Asian organisations.

The National Youth Association of the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea (PROK-Youth) had a booth which sought to raise the consciousness of the Christians at the assembly to the issue of the reunification of Korea.

The Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism, now based in Thailand, had a booth. Ranjan Solomon, the coalition's director, says that they were in Porto Alegre because

he believes the ecumenical movement needs to focus more attention on issues of tourism as a primary mission. The number of victims

of this industry is growing hugely—and not just because of sex tourism. Entire cultures are at risk, indigenous people threatened and urban and rural poor displaced. The tourist trade is taking away whole islands and many countries' resources. Only 5 to 10 per cent of the tourist dollar goes to the receiving country. With cruise ships it is close to zero, yet the ships bring ecological damage to the sea.

Ranjan had a very good reception from the delegates. Although he is happy to speak to people about the violence of tourism he is also keen to talk to them as to how tourism can overcome violence and promote true dialogue. For example due to the recent destabilisation in Nepal, the 70 per cent of national income that used to come from tourism has gone. The solution in that country is advocacy for political stability. There is the opportunity for the churches in Nepal to reconstruct tourism as a community-based activity.



At the booth of Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism

ECTWT has now moved to Chiang Mai, and is no longer located at the CCA Centre in Hong Kong. The culture of organisations is shaped by the way things happen around them. Contact with local groups has made all the difference as to how ECTWT functions. They have had a great welcome from the Church of Christ in Thailand, with a solid sense of ownership. ECTWT now has a home in a country where it belongs.

The focus recently has been on the tsunami and tsunami-related issues. The tsunami hit small islands and the coast, where many tourist resorts and hotels are located. In some ways the behaviour of the tourist industry allowed much damage, resorts having replaced sand dunes and mangroves that would have protected the area. Any rebuilding should not just be in the old form. ECTWT is also concentrating on a disaster-management approach, and community based tourism.

Another Asian presence was that of India's Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA). This is a partnership of twenty-nine Orthodox and Protestant churches working in relief and development. CASA's primary objective today is to strengthen the poor and promote the efforts of marginalised groups of Indian society towards sustainable development leading to social justice and self-sufficiency. In the wake of the 26 December tsunami last year, CASA is helping to plan and rebuild villages which were destroyed, with new cyclone shelters and pastoral care schemes. Its approach is locally based, with groups of villages working together on redevelopment projects. 'We wanted to show the global church how the church in India is trying to respond,' said Sam Selwine. In addition CASA is involved in the training of disaster mitigation task force members under community-based disaster preparedness program—a vital tool used by CASA to combat future disasters.

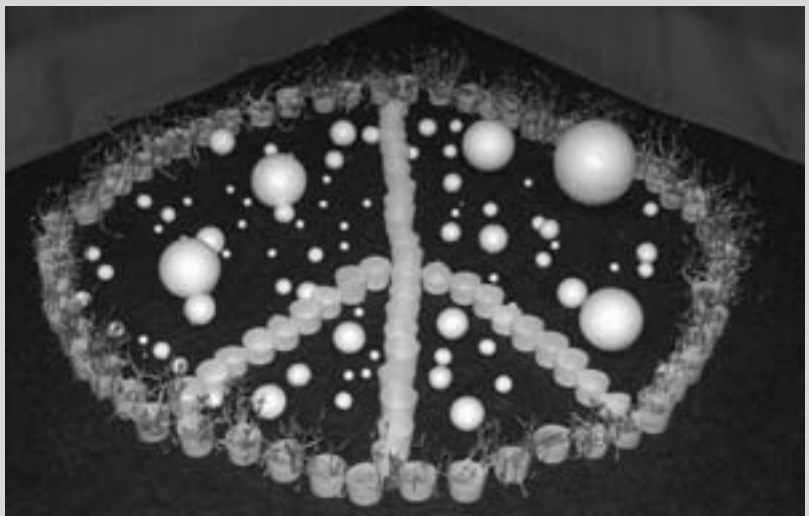
Contak Philippines had a piece of installation art, 'Seeds of Peace', designed to call attention to the human rights situation in the Philippines. Lei Garcia, of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, said the art was an offering to the WCC assembly. It consisted of a circle of small mung bean plants that grew during the course of the assembly.

She said the plants were saying that through God's grace and people's collective response the seeds could grow. It is only by God's grace that we receive the sun, air, soil and water needed for growth, but we also have to do our part, watering the plants and protecting them. Mung beans are the food of poor people. The pot, formed into a huge peace sign, was made of plastic trash, a symbol of

making use of seemingly useless and throw-away items into instruments of peace.

This was all to highlight the situation in the Philippines, where in the last four years 4,207 cases of human rights violations, including killings, enforced disappearance, illegal arrest and forced evacuation have occurred. In the last year this has got worse, including the killing of clergy.

## Seeds of Peace



The piece of installation art, 'Seeds of Peace', designed to call attention to the human rights situation in the Philippines, consisted of a circle of small mung bean plants that grew during the course of the assembly

# New Leadership

## Election of presidents and central committee

**A** new body to lead the World Council of Churches (WCC) into the next decade was elected in Porto Alegre. Delegates at the assembly also endorsed measures designed to strengthen youth participation in the organisation's decision-making.

The assembly elected a 150-member central committee, which serves as the main decision-making body of the council between assemblies. The assembly also appointed presidents for each of the world regions and for the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches.

During the assembly, the WCC leadership and many delegates urged the council to find

ways of strengthening youth participation and of involving young adults in the leadership and decision-making of the church fellowship.

The new 150-person central committee consists of sixty-three women (42 per cent), twenty-two youth (15 per cent), and six indigenous persons (4 per cent).

Ninety-seven members of the committee are ordained (65 per cent). The nominations committee worked with a pool of names put forward by the WCC's 348 member churches.

The role of the WCC presidents is to promote ecumenism and to interpret the work of the WCC, especially in their respective re-

gions. The presidents are ex-officio members of central committee.

The eight WCC presidents are Rev. Prof. Dr Simon Dossou, Methodist Church in Benin, Rev. Dr Soritua Nababan, Protestant Christian Batak Church (Indonesia), Rev. Dr Ofelia Ortega, Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba, Dr Mary Tanner, Church of England, Rev. Dr Bernice Powell Jackson, United Church of Christ (USA), Mr John Taroanui Doom, Maohi Protestant Church (French Polynesia), Archbishop Dr Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, and His Holiness Abune Paulos, Ethiopian Orthodox Church.



New presidents, John Taroanui Doom, Maohi Protestant Church (French Polynesia), Bernice Powell Jackson, United Church of Christ (USA), Mary Tanner, Church of England, Simon Dossou, Methodist Church in Benin, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, Soritua Nababan, Protestant Christian Batak Church (Indonesia), and Ofelia Ortega, Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba



The Asia region president is Rev. Dr Soritua Nababan. Dr Nababan's international ecumenical involvement began with membership in the WCC's Youth Committee in 1961, followed by service as youth secretary for the Christian Conference of Asia (1963–1967) and as CCA president (1990–1995). He has been involved at various levels of ecumenical work through the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (general secretary, 1967–1984, general chairman, 1984–1987), the World Council of Churches (vice-chairman and then moderator of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (1968–1985), member and then vice-moderator of central committee (1983–1998), and the Lutheran World Federation (vice-president, 1970–1977 and 1984–1991). He has provided leadership to his own church, the largest Protestant church in Indonesia, serving as ephorus (bishop) from 1987 to 1998.



Soritua Nababan

## Asia Region Members of the Central Committee

Mrs Hera Rere Clarke, Aotearoa New Zealand  
 Ms Alison Jane Preston, Australia  
 Rev. Renta Nishihara, Japan  
 Rev. Ying Gao, China  
 Mrs Meilin Chen, China  
 Rev. Dr Andreas Yewangoe, Indonesia  
 Ms Peggy Adeline Mekel, Indonesia  
 Rev. Dr Sint Kimhachandra, Thailand  
 Mrs Prabhjot Prim Rose Masih, India  
 Bishop Samuel Robert Azariah, Pakistan  
 Rt Rev. Dr Govada Dyvasirvadam, India  
 Dr Minda Peranginangin, Indonesia  
 Ms Hae-Sun Jung, Korea  
 Bishop Isaac Mar Philoxenos, India  
 Bishop Taranath S. Sagar, India  
 Mr Anthony Row, Malaysia  
 Rev. W.P. Ebenezer Joseph, Sri Lanka  
 Dr Anna May Chain, Myanmar  
 Mrs Carmencita Karagdag, Philippines  
 Mrs Ming-Min Lin Cheng, Taiwan  
 Prof. Dr Seong-Won Park, Korea  
 Rev I Made Priana, Indonesia  
 Rev. Dr Margaretha M. Hendriks-Ririmasse, Indonesia  
 Mrs Jenny Rio Rita Girsang, Indonesia  
 Ms Sanchita Kisku, India  
 Rev. Gregor Henderson, Australia

## Assembly Statistics

Delegates	691
Other participants with a right to speak	257
Lay	40%
Women	37%
Youth	15%
Asia region	19%
Most represented Asian country	Indonesia, 5%
All participants	4,014
Men	55%
Youth	19%
Asia	423
India	111
Staff and volunteers	364
Journalists	146
Portuguese speakers	16%
Budget	7,133,263 Swiss Francs

# What Direction Now?

## Challenges and opportunities in ecumenical formation

One of the unique, creative and participatory ways in which participants of the WCC assembly could contribute towards the direction of the World Council of Churches in the next seven years was the various ecumenical conversations.

Invited as resource person at the conversation on 'Memories and Renewed Quest for Ecumenical Formation', CCA's Hope Antone was asked to be a voice from Asia, sharing reflections on some challenges to ecumenical formation and aspects of good practice to overcome some of those challenges in the region. The following points were shared by Hope as the major challenges in ecumenical formation in Asia:

- Although some ecumenical ventures in Asia are still very much alive, e.g. the united and uniting churches, and national councils of churches in various countries, there is also a prevalent allergy to ecumenism and a resurgence of denominationalism. Somehow, for some Asian Christians ecumenism means a loss of identity. Many mainline denominations are carrying out activities for self-preservation and self-propagation.
- While there is an ongoing warm relationship and increasing collaboration between the CCA and FABC at the regional and sometimes also at national levels, some relationships are still cold at the local level due to the tendency of some Christian communities to regard the Catholics as objects of mission/conversion.
- The increasing presence and influence of other Christian groups brings new challenge in the face of differences between the prosperity gospel and the gospel of total transformation, of consumeristic and entertainment spirituality versus spirituality of life.
- Since many of the Asian churches are products of mission, many of them are now the zealous promoters of nineteenth- or eighteenth-century mission orientation—that of converting others to the fold.
- In the face of plurality in races, cultures, religions, there is a need to overcome the sense of arrogance or superiority inherited from imperial Christianity and a need to overcome an adversarial tendency to otherness.
- While there are positive efforts at interfaith understanding and cooperation, these are being threatened by the rise of religious fundamentalisms, including Christian fundamentalism. Some of these groups provide relief to victims of calamities, such as the tsunami, but with conversion strings attached.
- One of the continuing results of the Cold War (between the United States and the former Soviet Union) is the stigmatisation of ideological causes as communist, and therefore, god-less. In some parts of Asia, the labelling of human rights activities as communist-linked is scaring (often resulting in the killing of human rights workers) and dividing the churches. There is a need to overcome this stigmatisation and to see that ideological causes are signs of resistance to oppressive structures,



Hope  
Antone

which Jesus also demonstrated in his life and ministry. Faith-based groups also need to join these causes if they believe that faith has something to say to the way things are economically and politically. Also, the problems of socio-economic-political and ecological dimensions are often beyond the church's expertise—we need to work with civil society and people's movements.

- The state of ecology—human and natural ecology—can be characterised by disintegration and brokenness. We have the problems of sexism and patriarchy, with men lordling over women, racism and ethnocentrism, classism, casteism and anthropocentrism—which has led to the abuse of creation, exacerbated by globalisation's profit-oriented development paradigm. We need to recognise, affirm and respect the image of God in one another and reclaim our connectedness with creation.

In view of all these challenges, ecumenical formation in Asia needs to help facilitate the following shifts in the mindset, perspective, thinking and lifestyle of Asian people:

- From competition to cooperation among denominations: One of the ways that CCA's Faith, Mission and Unity program area tries to do this is to bridge the gaps between mission, evangelism and ecumenism, revisiting the radical or root meaning of the words in view of Jesus' own demonstration of these in his life and ministry.
- From condemnation to dialogue among religions: Affirming that to be truly Asian is to be interreligious, CCA intentionally takes an interfaith approach in all we do—in liturgy, in dealing with life issues such as HIV and AIDS, gender injustice, globalisation and religious fundamentalism.

- From isolation to collaboration with ideological or civil society groups: We acknowledge and make use of the expertise of these groups in social analysis and we collaborate with them on issues such as economic justice (anti-WTO movement etc.) and alternatives to globalisation.
- From disintegration to integrity of creation: Concern for gender justice, and healing and reconciliation among divided groups and in relation to creation figure strongly in our work at CCA. In fact, during the Decade to Overcome Violence

Focus on Asia in 2005, we highlighted the aspect of ecological violence in addition to personal, group and structural forms of violence.

The first day of the conversation focused on recalling into memory people's experiences of having been shaped ecumenically and for ecumenical involvement. Rodney Petersen from the United States shared what it means to be in conversation and why intentional ecumenical formation is essential for Christians in God's mission today. The second day focused on major challenges in

ecumenical formation, with an input from Asia by Hope Antone, and a time for participants to share stories of good practice in ecumenical formation in their respective contexts. The third day focused on identifying the spirit of renewal and transformation in the church as a basis of creating realistic models of ecumenical formation, with a reflection by a youth participant, Anastasia Vasiliadou, from Greece.

Minda Peranginangin, a member of CCA-FMU program area from Indonesia, served as one of the rapporteurs in the conversation.

# Keep the Promise

A call for recommitment by churches in response to HIV and AIDS

**A**s the HIV and AIDS epidemic continues to cause death and devastation in our world, the World Council of Churches recommitted itself to the struggle against the epidemic. Guided by the gospel proclamation of abundant life for all (John 10:10), the WCC reaffirmed its solidarity with people living with HIV and AIDS and all those affected by it. It remains one of the most pressing issues of our time. The assembly condemned HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination and called upon churches to become centres of acceptance and healing. It confessed that we have shortcomings in responding to HIV and AIDS and undertook to redouble its efforts.

## The Current Situation

HIV/AIDS is the fastest-growing epidemic in the world. It is a global disaster, with over 70 million people having been affected. More than 30 million men, women and children have died. The infection rate continues to rise at an alarming rate. Millions face certain death with an incalculable impact on families, communities and whole social structures.

## Affirmation

The church is a community of believers that should exude love, care and solidarity. It opens its arms in welcome to those seeking refuge. It accompanies the lonely and suffering. It offers love and acceptance to those experiencing stigma and discrimination. It calls for justice for the marginalised. Therefore the WCC affirmed that the church should become a beacon of love and hope. It has a prophetic duty to drug manufacturers, governments, political leaders, sister churches, all those whose decisions have a bearing on the quality of life of people living with HIV and AIDS.

## The Challenge to the Churches

While acknowledging the sterling work visibly demonstrated by the members of some churches, the WCC called on its members to strive to achieve the following:

- Condemn stigma and discrimination.
- Transform churches into open and accepting homes for people living with HIV and AIDS.
- Provide for more involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS in church life.

- Call church leaders to respond to the epidemic.
- Acknowledge the role of women in providing care to people living with HIV and AIDS and their specific vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.
- Prioritise the needs of orphans and vulnerable children.
- Sharpen theological training and reflection to equip members to become effective in their responses to HIV and AIDS.

## Conclusion

The World Council of Churches concluded, 'Through our faith and hope, we anticipate God's transformation of our world. We long for a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1-4) and recommit ourselves to respond effectively to HIV and AIDS. We undertake to transform our churches into compassionate centres of response to the epidemic. We shall endeavour to keep our promises, and to call upon political and business leaders to do the same. As we seek to overcome HIV and AIDS, the World Council of Churches calls upon its members to proclaim messages of reconciliation, healing, hope and life.'

# Good News for the Oppressed?

A journey to justice for those suffering from the caste system in India

**I**f the gospel fails in India, we have no gospel to preach.' These were the words of the Rt Rev. Dr V. Devasahayam, bishop of the Church of South India, at a mutirão session on Dalit perspectives on the assembly theme. A panel of theologians moderated by the Rev. Chandran Paul Martin spoke of the oppression suffered by Dalits, the casteless members of Hinduism, who make up more than three-quarters of the Christian church in India. The session was introduced with a film entitled *Journey to Justice*, which focused on the experience of Muthu Mari, a Dalit woman. Assaulted by an upper-caste

landowner, Mari was further victimised when she complained.

Devasahayam said that Dalits had become Christians in large numbers, but the caste system was still entrenched in the church. Missionaries made an effort to attract upper-caste Hindus, and 'when the leadership of the church passed into upper-caste Indian hands, Dalits realised that their rights were being denied within the church itself,' he said. 'Christian faith has to interface with the caste culture and say, "This is inconsistent with the gospel of Christ. It is a denial of the concept of the church."'

Dr Mohan Larbeer, principal of Tamil

Nadu Theological Seminary, said that the fact that missionaries had not challenged the caste system was a continuing problem for Dalits. 'We Dalits continue to see the God who sanctifies this,' he said.

Elizabeth Joy, executive secretary for Mission Education of the London-based Council for World Mission, told of Dalit children punished for taking water without asking for it, which was relevant to the assembly focus on water for all.

The bishop challenged the WCC to be more robust in its interfaith dealings with Hindus who, he said, were represented by the Brahmin caste and not by Dalits.



Protest march for the rights of Dalits

# The Chance to Listen

## Indigenous participation in the WCC assembly

**H**erarere Clarke was one of the two delegates of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia.

At home in Otahuhu in Auckland she is the Director of Te Whare Ruruhau O Meri, Anglican Social Services. As a Maori, she attended the pre-assembly event for indigenous peoples.

The pre-assembly event gave Hera a good introduction to the assembly as well as an opportunity to listen to other indigenous people who had been to past assemblies. It gave her a chance to see where indigenous people sat in the community that is the assembly, and make connections. She was able to connect with indigenous people she had not met before, for example the saami from Sweden. There were six saami from Sweden, but only two Maori. There were over fifty attenders at the meeting, from every part of the world, including Africa, Asia and North America. Many of the participants at the indigenous pre-assembly meeting came from Bolivia.

Hera was asked to do a presentation about her country Aotearoa New Zealand at the meeting and the work she does with Anglican Social Services. She works predominately with Maori families, and has developed models of practice using traditional methodology. This generated much interest among the participants. She spends time working with the perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse. It is a disturbing fact that 47 per cent of all crime in Aotearoa New Zealand involves Maori, although they constitute only 8 per cent of the population.

She found threads of commonality with the participants from other countries and in doing so suggested initiatives done at the local level that could help others. The indigenous pre-assembly meeting produced

a statement that worked its way up the WCC system. She was not entirely satisfied with the first reading of this in the plenary and a lack of time prevented her from speaking on this matter. However other aspects of the assembly were much more satisfactory. The Bible studies were particularly helpful. Her group had a wide selection of people from different countries and confessions, who were receptive of each other, and with whom each was able to share beliefs without criticism, a wonderful 'conversation of theology'.

The ecumenical conversations provided Hera with a platform to listen to the views of others and she moderated a session on coexistence with God's creation.

This made her appreciate simple things such as water, toilets and having a roof over one's head.

Hera attended the assembly with her husband, a mutirāo participant, who was a wonderful support for her.



Hera Clarke



Pre-assembly indigenous participants, Rose Elu (Australia) and Jennifer Koinante (Kenya)

# My Place/My Identity

Christian identity and religious plurality: a personal view from Anna May Chain

**O**n the issue of Christian identity and religious plurality I want to concentrate on one point—and that is the place Jesus is in, and as followers of Jesus we are in, in relation to a loving and forgiving God and in relation to the world, both human and non-human

For a start I would like to begin by identifying myself as a Karen Baptist from Myanmar, a minority group among the Burmese Buddhists who make up 92 per cent of the population. Further, I would like to describe my place as a Karen Christian at a time of political chaos in our homeland, that is, in January 1949.

After the Japanese occupation of Burma ended with the allied victory in 1945 we all thought that with independence from the British, Burma could now build *Pyi Daw Tha*—Peaceful Nation. But our peaceful world again erupted into flames with the Karen insurrection in 1949. The background for this conflict was the British colonial policy of ‘divide and rule’, which had pitted the Burmese Buddhists against the ethnic minorities, who were mainly Christians, such as the Karens. As ethnic Karen Christians we suddenly became the enemy to our Burmese Buddhist neighbours. The Karens tried to find safety anywhere they could amidst cries of, ‘Kill the Karens. Kill the Christians’. When a mob met a person they asked, ‘Are you a Karen? Are you a Christian?’ A ‘yes’ most often led to death.

In this life-and-death situation, our family desperately looked around for help. At this point, Muslim neighbours offered us sanctuary. My father and brothers were hidden in the mosque and I and other women of our family were taken from one safe house to the next. These Muslim neighbours, at great risk to their lives, kept us hidden and fed us out of their meagre supply of food. Later, we were



Anna May Chain

taken to prison for safety. Burmese Buddhist friends had been trying to get news of us. When it was against the law to help the enemy these Buddhist friends forgot their own safety to demonstrate their solidarity with us by bringing food, medicine and clothes to the prison.

From jail, Father Perrin, a French priest, came and took us to safety to St Joseph's Convent. In those days, for the Baptists, the Catholics were outsiders. To get help from the Catholics was unimaginable for Baptists. However, the sisters and brothers warmly welcomed us, gave us a place to sleep and food to eat. Father Perrin, a French priest, would go out into the countryside and try to rescue both Karen Christians and Burmese Buddhists, saying, ‘Stop this fighting!’ On one of his missions of rescue, Father Perrin was killed.

All of us who had been brought to a safe place through the love of this man forgot our differences for one day and joined together in mourning him. In times of conflict and

war, the best is brought out of us as well as the worst. At this point in my life, the neighbours, Muslims, Buddhists and Catholics, were in the place of Jesus to me. I was at my most vulnerable and weakest. They were my guard and shield. They were the risk takers and life givers. They gave hospitality to me. My Muslim and Buddhist neighbours may not know the name Jesus but I believe God had found a path for himself to them.

## My Neighbours' Place

Next, I want to talk about ‘my neighbours’ place’, the place where they come from, their perspective on life today and in the future.

When I say neighbours, I mean my close friends. There are six of us, all women who went to school together, who meet irregularly. We have been friends since we were in Grade One in a mission school. Two of us are Christians, three Buddhists and one Muslim.

We have taken part in each other's festivals and family rituals. Talking is an important activity in our get-togethers. As teenagers we talked about make up, clothes, movie stars and boys. As young adults our interests were on college, work, husbands and children.

Now as senior adults our talk turns more on serious subjects. All six of us are committed to empowering women. We find things in our religions that are liberating for women and others that oppress us. For instance, in Theravada Buddhism as practised in Myanmar, although the path to Enlightenment is open to all, women cannot be a Buddha unless they are reborn as a male. To be a son is to be valued. My friend cannot climb a pagoda. My friend Miriam, the Muslim, also finds some restrictions against women in Islam. As a Christian, I find the evangelical tradition prevalent in our country limiting

the leadership and status of women in the churches. As women, although from different faith traditions, our common interest for the empowerment of women unites us.

In another area, we do not agree, but are learning from each other. Last June, one of us, Than Nwe, died unexpectedly in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. She was the first in our group to die. We thought we were invulnerable, special. But one of us, still relatively young, was dead.

We five gathered in sorrow and remembrance. At one point I asked my Buddhist friends, 'At Buddhist funerals, when the dead person leaves the house for the last time, the eldest son breaks a pot of water. What does it mean?'

Tin Tin, who had lost her husband three years ago tried to explain, 'For Buddhists it signifies that the person as we know him is no more. The stream of his life which had mixed and flowed with ours has ended. As the spilt water from the pot cannot be gathered together again, that person no longer can be the person he was.'

Aye, another Buddhist added, 'The person we know as Than Nwe no longer exists. Depending on her thoughts and deeds she will have another reincarnation.'

Marjorie, the other Christian in the group asked, 'Then there is no way we can meet each other after death?'

'No, for us death is the end. So our life here together is so precious.'

Marjorie said, 'Last Christmas my eldest son died. This year my little granddaughter died. It would be unbearable for me as a Christian if we had no hope of a future together.'

As a Christian I respect my friends' spirituality, their commitment to live each day mindfully, to work to improve other peoples' lives today and not wait for tomorrow. For me, death is not the end but a new beginning in Jesus Christ.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams has said we should not turn away from those who see from another place, not ours. So I will continue to walk and talk together intimately with my friends. Our lives are intertwined. As I have learned from them to value living life today mindfully my con-

viction is that they will also learn from me about the lovingkindness, the forgiveness and mercy of God. God in loving relationship with us and in infinite grace and compassion

for us, may have a plan for us, my friends and I, to continue this walk and this talk even beyond death.

—Anna May Chain

## Do We Need a Tsunami to Bring South Asia Together?

**T**he devastation and agony of the tsunami in South Asia is still not forgotten. Out of this shared pain emerged the identity of a human being devoid of all outward superfluities of caste, creed, religion and ethnicity, where communities reached out to each other without distinction. This and other natural calamities brought together a region fraught with disparities and dissimilarities, something that human effort could not achieve till now. A prime example is that of the earthquake in Pakistan. For the first time an Indian army plane landed in Islamabad carrying relief material for the quake affected. People helped their neighbour in need without bothering about their caste or religion.

All the five countries of South Asia—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka—have rich historical pasts, diverse ethnic groups, religious beliefs and linguistic clusters. In spite of this apparent heterogeneity, there are a few common denominators—poverty and malnutrition, terrorism and militancy, exploitation and misgovernment, ethnic and religious strife, rising religious fundamentalism and government policies that actively discriminate against the poor.

In this context, a *mutirão* organised by the South Asian Council of Churches explored a transcending identity for South Asia. Moderated by Bishop D.K. Sahu, General Secretary, National Council of Churches in India, the *mutirão* was a platform to explore the similarities in South Asia in spite of the glaring and obvious differences. The impact of the mission of the ecumenical movement in South Asia was also discussed. The need to emphasise proactively a more humane identity was also felt.

The other speakers included the Rev. Dr Jayasiri Peiris, Dr K.B. Rokaya and Mr Victor Azariah, general secretaries respectively of the national councils of churches in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan. They shared the unique experiences of their countries. Dr K.B. Rokaya challenged the Christians of the world, especially those in the USA, to show solidarity with the suffering Christians in Nepal and to speak out against the political unrest within that country. Mr Azariah shared how the controversy over the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad had triggered a backlash against the Christian community in Pakistan. In the city of Peshawar of Pakistan, churches were burnt and Christian schools were attacked. Rev. Dr Jayasiri Peiris described the ecumenical movement in South Asia as a 'potted plant' that has not yet realised its true potential. The participants felt that the true potential of the ecumenical movement will be a centrifugal force to forge a new identity in South Asia.

The discussion also centred on emerging threats. Primary among them was the question of nuclear weapons proliferation and the small arms race in South Asia, which could have adverse effect on the fragile peace and security of the region. Herein lies the dilemma—can we attain peace and security with dignity without depriving others of theirs? In order to achieve it the focus of all endeavours has to be the 'human being' and the ultimate goal is to ensure that each human being enjoys 'life in all its fullness', thereby realising the vision of 'a new heaven and a new earth' right here, right now.

—Amelia Andrews, Associate Executive Secretary—Communication, National Council of Churches in India



# Wish You Were Here

**‘W**ish you were here!’ I suppose you’ve heard that phrase before. We get it on postcards from overseas, waterfalls and cathedrals, and a loved one writes, ‘Wish you were here.’ They mean, ‘I wish you were here so you could enjoy this too and enjoy with me the thrill of seeing this incredible waterfall, or be amazed by this magnificent church with its stained-glass windows.’ Well, we wish you could have been at the assembly, but there was only the opportunity for a limited number of delegates. If every member of every church in the world came there would be no venue large enough to hold them all. So all we can do is send you back a postcard with, ‘Wish you were here,’ scrawled on the back of it.

What does the postcard depict? I asked many people, ‘What do you think of the assembly?’ Most were a bit overwhelmed, and just said things like, ‘Amazing!’ They were overwhelmed by the sheer size of the assembly, the number of people there and the fact that there was far more going on than anyone could absorb, let alone attend. I went around looking at people’s nametags. They came from almost every country on earth. There were quiet people, colourful people, energetic people, reserved people and passionate people and large numbers of Brazilians delighted that it was all happening in their country.

Then there was the diversity of the faith communities the people came from, including some you have never heard of before.

The Bible studies were challenging—What does this passage say to me? What does it say to the church? The worship was inspiring. (We wish we could bring the choir back to your church.) The dialogue stretched the mind, the presentations opened our eyes to things we never knew before. Oh, we wish you were there!

On the Sunday we went to worship with local churches in Porto Alegre. It was so good to come down from the top of the tree to the church’s roots. How wonderful to be once again in the familiar setting of a local

congregation, singing hymns, praying, reading the Bible, listening to a sermon, and sharing around the Lord’s table.

In his book, *The Local Church* (reviewed in this issue), Kwok Nai Wang, from Hong Kong, CCA’s honorary consultant for ministry with local congregations, says if the worldwide church is to move forward it has to get local churches involved as well. I realised then that what is most important is not the huge amazing assembly, but the small, local, amazing assembly.

So, when the postcard comes saying, ‘Wish you were here,’ you can answer, ‘I am here already!’

—Geoff Alves



Roasting the meat for Sunday lunch at a local Porto Alegre church



## Shanthi Karma

**O**n the edges of the assembly there were all kinds of activities to delight and instruct passers by. One lunchtime the national Christian Council of Sri Lanka presented a street drama on peace and reconciliation. The drama was written and directed by Jagath Chandrasiri.

The plot concerns a rural family whose daughter is possessed by evil spirits. The family approaches a famous *kattadiya* of a distant village to invoke blessings and cast out the evil spirit. He accepts the invitation and, accompanied by his pupil, starts the journey to the village. On entering the village the pupil sees a strange tree, and a discussion ensues.

The pupil asks what the tree is and why is in such a pathetic condition. The teacher explains the tree is called the 'Development Tree' and that it has failed to bear fruit. He says that different types of tribalism in the form of colonial powers, with their haughty attitudes, their tactic of colonising the minds

of the colonised through religion, language and civilisation are the causes of the sorry state of the tree. The teacher makes the point that this tree is not planted in Sri Lankan soil, but in a pot. The tree has been unable to draw sustenance from the natural cultural resources of Sri Lanka. It has been kept alive artificially.

The sick tree hints at what ails the girl. When they arrive at the village the teacher and his pupil begin a *shanthi karma* to exorcise the evil spirits that have ruined the life of the girl as well as the entire community. In the process he lays bare the identity and the characteristics of the demonic forces of oppression.



Sri Lankan drama

## WCC and Regional Ecumenical Organisations and National Councils of Churches

**T**he World Council of Churches' Policy Reference Committee considered the nature of its relationship with regional ecumenical organisations and national councils of churches worldwide, which comprise expressions of the ecumenical movement with a wide variety of structures and varying degrees of relationship with the work and programs of the WCC.

These independently constituted organisations have a composition of membership that is broader than that of the WCC, some including as full members representatives of bishops' conferences of the Roman Catholic Church and Evangelical and Pentecos-

tal churches that are not members of the WCC. The current relationship between the WCC, regional ecumenical organisations and national councils of churches is mutually enriching and important to their common work and witness to the world, yet lacks clarity as to the specific character, role and particular strengths of each ecumenical instrument and the relationship of each to the local churches, and also lacks coherence of common vision and cooperative efforts.

The assembly decided to:

- affirm the specific and important relationship between the WCC and the regional ecumenical organisations and the national councils of churches as essential

partners in the work of the ecumenical movement;

- encourage the WCC to continue to facilitate the annual meetings of leaders of regional ecumenical organisations,
- endorse the recommendation of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC that the WCC and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity be asked to cosponsor a consultation of representatives of national councils of churches, regional ecumenical organisations and episcopal conferences from places where the Roman Catholic Church is not in membership.

## Impressions of the Assembly



Bishop Duleep de Chickera

**B**ishop Duleep de Chickera, from the Church of Ceylon, Sri Lanka, was asked to give his impressions of the World Council of Churches assembly. This is the first assembly he has attended. First, he noted that the logistics of the assembly were extremely good—the transport, accommodation, water were well done. Then he looked at the people attending the assembly. He noted that some smiled all the time, some smiled only when you smiled at them, and yet others never smiled at all. Some people seem to know everybody, while others appeared to want to be alone. He acknowledged that some might prefer solitude for spiritual reasons, but perhaps there could be chaplains for the lonely people.

Bishop Duleep found the worship good, and representative of many cultures. The thought the choir was lively and dynamic. As he went around the assembly site he was impressed with the colour, the diversity, the movement, the space. He particularly liked the prayer tent. It reminded him that we are a pilgrim people. In this regard he found the constant movement of people from place to place appealing. There was an atmosphere of

goodwill, politeness and purpose. However he questioned the role and the purpose of the WCC. He was not sure if the council was a truly representative legislative body. He feels the WCC could be more of a catalyst, raising issues and providing fellowship, but leaving the nitty gritty of doing things to councils and churches.

What is the role of the delegates? He noted there are over 4,000 participants at the assembly, enriching the ecumenical discussions, but that there are only 691 delegates. Does this number need to be increased? He was concerned that the experience of Asians was not properly reflected in the discussions. Finally he wondered if an outstanding world figure should be elected as a president to give the WCC and a greater voice.

## Youth on the Central Committee

**A**lison Preston from Australia finds it is exciting and daunting at the same time to find she is on the central committee of the World Council of Churches. She says young people find the ecumenical movement a natural thing—it is how they live their lives. Living in a postmodern context they are influenced by the idea that you can learn from anyone. They are open to learn from what is shared, not necessarily from history. Of course, she acknowledges there will always be those who look for the differences, for division.

Alison recently attended an ecumenical summer school, where she was a guest speaker about her participation in the assembly on Porto Alegre. She was shocked that most of the participants were of an older generation and that there was a feeling of crisis in their churches—that young people were not taking part. Alison's experience has been otherwise. She is part of a church community with a strong youth group. When she was 12 her family moved to a town with a church that was deeply attractive to her. She felt she was part of a global family of Chris-

tians. Later, when she moved to Melbourne to study journalism she attended a church that was heavily involved in a ministry to students, holding special services and Bible studies for them.

After graduation she worked for World Vision in Rwanda and the Congo as a photojournalist and has also spent time in the Middle East. At school and university Alison studied Indonesian, and she has worked in Indonesia on delegations, for instance in Ambon, where she was concerned with the question as to how communities learn to live together after internal violence. She is part of the Institute for the Healing of Memories, looking at bringing diverse groups of people together to hear from one another.

What will Alison contribute to the World Council? She says it is clear that the ecumenical movement needs renewal. She is particularly concerned that it needs to strengthen relations with Pentecostal, charismatic and emerging churches that question the institutional church. She feels it needs to be proactive in reaching out to these groups. As a young person she has natural relationships with other young people in these churches, so she is a little frustrated with an assembly that still seemed to be looking for a genuine framework about how we might renew the ecumenical network. A new vision is needed.



Alison Preston

# International Women's Day— A Call to Defend Life!

'By your endurance you will gain your lives.' (Luke 21:19)

**E**cumenical women, arise! On 8 March we celebrated women's lives and work, celebrated the struggle to elevate women's status. Celebrated sisterhood with all women of the world. Celebrated International Women's Day. This was also a call for ecumenical men.

We remembered the thread of herstory, of the IWD's beginning. Ordinary women garment factory workers wove their dream for a fair wage, healthy working conditions and a shorter time of work than the twelve hours imposed on them. They organised and marched on the streets of New York City on 8 March 1857 in protest for their women's rights.

Women, weaving their dream for the right to vote, joined forces with women industrial workers. Once again they protested, marching down the streets of New York City in 1908 for their economic and political rights and to end child labour in factories.

The women's movement in the United States spread its fire in Europe when the Socialist International declared the International Women's Day in 1910 in a conference in Copenhagen to honour the movement for women's rights and advance the international struggle for women's right to vote. The first observance of IWD however took place in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland on 11 March 1911 as a follow-up to the Copenhagen conference. Aside from the right to vote and to hold public office, they demanded the right to work, to vocational training and to an end to discrimination on the job. A few days after the event, the horrifying death of 146 young immigrant women garment workers in the tragic Triangle Waist-shirt Factory Fire in New York took place. Low wages. Extremely long working hours.

Hazardous working conditions. These sub-human conditions led to the death of these women whose memory is invoked during IWD events like threading women's dreams and hopes for change.

After a lull, the feminist movement of the 1960s revived the spirit with which the first IWD was celebrated. Soon, the United Nations General Assembly declared 1975 as International Women's Year, 1975–1985 as the UN Decade for Women and began observing 8 March as International Women's Day.

Since then, International Women's Day is a day of celebration of women's lives and work in many countries. In some countries it is a public holiday. It is a day for all to reflect on how women are valued as human beings equal with men. It is a day of recognising women's contributions in the home, community and society. On the other hand, IWD is a day of struggle. Women (and

men) participate in rallies, gatherings and events around issues of women and poverty, violence against women and children, trafficking of women and children, women and migration, women and health, prostitution, women and mining, women and water, women against war, women for peace etc. Thus it is a day of protest for life—a day of solidarity with and among women for all of humanity and creation. It starts with a day, with the hope that transformation will come when all the days will be better and all of life will be of righteousness and peace as God wills. Not without women and children.

Being mindful of the onslaught against our woven dreams in Asia, the ecumenical movement calls for a celebration of IWD as a day of commitment to defend life. Jesus himself said, 'By your endurance you will gain your lives.'

—Corazon Tabing-Reyes



Aruna Gnanadason of the WCC with Cora Tabing-Reyes of CCA at the WCC assembly

# DOV Focus on Asia

## The Decade to Overcome Violence moves from Asia to Latin America

It's been five years since the World Council of Churches launched the Decade to Overcome Violence. Participants at the ninth assembly paused to mark that midpoint, reviewing what has occurred so far and looking to what can yet come.

A powerful afternoon plenary session used multimedia, music, speakers, storytelling and liturgical dance to illustrate instances of overcoming violence around the world. A special focus was given to violence that affects children and youth.

'Saving God's children from the scourge of war: few missions could be more compelling for the world today and for this assembly,' said Olara Otunnu, a former United Nations under-secretary general and current president of LBL Foundation for Children. 'Children have a right to protection and wellbeing.'

Otunnu asked the Assembly to become 'Friends of 1612', referring to a UN Security Council resolution on children and armed conflict that holds especially accountable those who violate the basic rights of children. He also appealed to the WCC to be a 'prophetic voice' in Uganda, where he said people in the northern part of that country are victims of 'comprehensive genocide' and are asking, 'Where are the leaders of the people of God?'

Four young people from Palestine shared stories of working against violence in that part of the world through peace education, bringing together youth from Israel and Palestine, and other means. They noted that nonviolence can be a difficult way to solve problems, since it requires patience and a long-term view. 'We cannot stand still in silence,' said Alfred Rock, a Palestinian from Bethlehem. He said they hoped to 'break the chain of violence'.

Dr Janice Love, moderator of the international reference group for the DOV, said the exchange of such stories was at the heart of the DOV's mission, to create a snowball effect of networking and empowerment. Instead of 'sterile debates' on when violence is permissible, she said, the DOV intends to highlight proactive ways in which Christians are engaged in peace and reconciliation work.

Overcoming violence is not a new idea for Asian churches and ecumenical councils, and particularly the Christian Conference of Asia. The mission to overcome violence was an integral part of CCA's life and ministry. In 1973 it was declared that the church as a community of people had the responsibility to be involved actively in the life and struggle of the larger community. A paper published in the handbook of the assembly, entitled 'Justice and Service', said 'Poverty and powerlessness are also overwhelming phenomena in Asia today except in a few societies. Concentration of power in the hands of a few, ethnic and racial tensions, traditional and social structures and value systems that inhibit equal opportunity for self-development, as well as disasters, both natural and human, political and military conflicts, all contribute to the suffering of people in their daily life, often creating apathy and frustration.'

This profound understanding of the Asian situation and the significance of the Asian

ecumenical movement rooted in the life and experiences of people living in poverty, powerlessness and oppression moulded the CCA to do its prophetic and redeeming role as an ecumenical organisation. So upholding and protecting human rights became an important ministry of CCA. It even shook CCA's ecumenical relations with other ecumenical councils, particularly Indonesia on issues over East Timor and Irian Jaya. The East Timor issue caused considerable tension at the Seoul Assembly in 1985.

However, this tension did not stop CCA in its prophetic witness of the life and struggle of people of Asia on issues of democracy, liberation, justice and peace. On 30 December 1987 the government of Singapore ordered the 'expulsion' and 'dissolution' of CCA. In the official statement of the Home Ministry, it was said, 'The Government has taken these actions because the CCA has breached the undertaking it gave in 1974, not to indulge in any political activity or allow its funds to be used for political purposes ... CCA has been

using Singapore as a base to support "liberation movements" in other Asian countries, helping to fund pro-Communist movement, solidarity conferences and exchanges for political activists and dissidents.' Therefore CCA has continually put into practice what it learned from experience in doing its mission and ministry together with people's movements and other members of faith communities.

When the World Council of Churches launched the Decade to Overcome Violence for the years 2001 to 2010 in parallel with the UN declaration in the same year as the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World, CCA joined the campaign. Together with its member churches and ecumenical councils throughout Asia it enhanced the historical experience and the challenges brought by the current political, economic, cultural and environmental issues that directly affect the wellbeing of the people in the region. The National Council of Churches in the Philippines launched the

Decade to Overcome Violence in a Philippine context in 2001 as a response to ongoing massive human rights violations, abject poverty and environmental destruction in the country. The National Council of Churches in Australia focused on human trafficking and prostitution and the rights of its indigenous people. In essence the Decade to Overcome Violence and particularly the DOV Focus on Asia is another expression of a long struggle of people of Asia and of the world towards justice, peace and life in abundance. In the Asian context it is a campaign of, from and for the people. Many lessons were learned from last year's DOV focus on Asia.

### The Asian Context

Violence differs from country to country and from region to region. The major forms of violence now happening in Asia are interstate conflict, intrastate conflict, systemic or structural violence and violence brought by the World Trade Organisation or globalisation, religious and political violence, interpersonal conflict and ecological violence.

### Overcoming Violence in an Asian Way

The DOV Focus on Asia called on Asian churches and councils to reaffirm their calling to be agents of reconciliation, justice and peace in the midst of so much brokenness and strife. Their ways of overcoming violence clearly and effectively shows the context of

Asian societies and utilise the uniqueness and diversity of Asian cultures and traditions towards building communities of peace for all, using theological reflection in rooting out the causes of violence. Interfaith dialogue and solidarity has proven to be a unique and effective way of addressing the root causes of violence that degrade the dignity of a person. It could be Asia's contribution that ecological violence has been recognised as a form of violence. Profit-driven development projects not only deny people their rightful ownership to land, especially indigenous people, but also costs thousands of lives and do irreplaceable damage to ecological system. Building solidarity with people's movements and bringing this issue to the grassroots level through networking, linking and collective work with nongovernmental and government organisations is an important way that Asian churches and ecumenical councils have enhanced.

### Asian Churches and Ecumenical Councils' Participation

The DOV Focus on Asia could not work in a vacuum. CCA, Asian churches and ecumenical councils responded well, based on their specific context and level of understandings. Different countries responded in different ways of course. The coordination of the DOV Focus on Asia, while it consisted mainly in monitoring Asian churches and ecumenical

councils' initiatives, updating the website, having regular reflections on Asian realities and the production of study materials on globalisation, nevertheless made a significant impact on the life and ministry of Asian churches, particularly in giving importance to grassroots involvement, enhancing a truly Asian strategy of overcoming violence such as interfaith dialogue and solidarity, and deepening its rich historical experience in addressing the root causes of the socio-economic, political and cultural maladies that directly affect the people of Asia. Thus, the DOV Focus on Asia could be characterised as integrated, participative and educative.

Initiatives in overcoming violence blossomed in the concrete situations faced by every Asian church and ecumenical council. It served as a challenge to every Asian church and ecumenical council to initiate their own campaigns based on their capacity. It strengthened the cooperation, dialogue and solidarity among different faith communities and people's movements.

To overcome violence does not rely only on specific programs or plans but more importantly it depends on the initiatives, responses and visioning of the people, faith communities and people's movements in Asia towards a common understanding of a community where justice, peace and life in abundance prevail. This will continue long after the decade is over.

—Joram H. Calimutan



## Marching against Violence

**M**idday rain at the WCC assembly did not dampen the enthusiasm of the scores of women who marched to end violence against women and children in church and society. The streets soon filled with men, women and young people singing to the beat of drums and carrying colourful signs and banners. They marched past the youth tents then stopped for a moment of prayerful silence.

At the WCC's eighth assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, delegates approved a statement calling violence against women a sin and launched the DOV.

# Overcoming Violence— Working for Peace

## A letter to Latin American churches

Friends, sisters and brothers in Christ,

2005 was the year for the Decade to Overcome Violence Focus on Asia. The focus on Latin America now begins.

I hold the deep conviction that the issue of violence is one of the central concerns of our times. To me, the Decade to Overcome Violence is an expression of a fundamental thought—that unless humankind learns to live in ways of dialogue and mutuality we confront the very real possibility that the world will be torn apart by hatred, competition and ways of assuming superiority and domination over others.

Last year, Asia took its turn to highlight the Decade to Overcome Violence. We did that in several ways. One of the significant steps we took was to relate the DOV to the theme of the CCA General Assembly, 'Building Communities of Peace for All'. This was essentially a call that reflected our commitment to a task and a vision in the context of Asia's religious and ethnic diversity and ongoing quest for communal harmony. We now work on the clear understanding and conviction that living in Asia, or any other continent, can no longer be conceived romantically as becoming one community. Rather we are living together as many diverse communities, held together by the same vision of peace for all.

This year the DOV focus is on Latin America. Although we have a quite dif-

ferent cultural diversity and heritage, we are bound by a common sense of spiritual purpose, namely to bring justice to the millions of poor and exploited in our regions. In that sense, we have so much to learn from and with each other. Our issues are so similar that our work is the same.

Both in Asia and in Latin America, we live with the problem of conflict-ridden situations that threaten the social fabric of our peoples.

Many of these problems have their roots in an unjust social and global economic system in which the elites of developing countries have been coopted to unleash economic misery. The wars of ethnicity, caste and religion have an economic base.

I conclude with a brief thought—a slogan I read somewhere. It simply says, 'If we do not take the risks for peace, we will have to face the risks of war.'

God, in your grace, transform the world.

Dr Prawate Khid-arn  
General Secretary,  
Christian Conference of Asia

(Dr Khid-arn presented a set of documents produced by CCA as part of the DOV Asia Focus to the friends from Latin America as a sign of the continuing ecumenical journey in the Decade to Overcome Violence.)

## CCA Relocation Update

December 2005 – March 2006

### 24–28 January 2006

An executive secretaries' retreat and meeting was held in Chiang Mai. The executive staff visited the new office premises and the search for suitable apartments in Chiang Mai is ongoing.

### 6–7 March 2006

The CCA executive committee met in Taipei, Taiwan, and approved the following:

#### Moving Timeframe

- Closing down the office in Hong Kong—30 June 2006
- Opening of the office in Chiang Mai—1 July 2006

#### Hong Kong Office

- CCA registration in Hong Kong will continue.
- CCA's US dollar account will be maintained until the accounting process in Thailand is settled.
- Part-time clerical staff will be hired to handle the incoming mail and the banking transactions in Hong Kong.

#### Temporary Office in Chiang Mai

- A contract for temporary accommodation of the CCA office with eleven rooms spread over 300 m<sup>2</sup> was signed.
- Two bank accounts—local and US dollar—have been opened.
- Advertisements for support staff have already been published and the interviews would be conducted shortly.
- Arrangement for obtaining a twelve-seater van is complete.

#### New CCA Centre in Chiang Mai

- A revised design on the landscape, main office building, staff quarters and ecumenical

# The Local Church

**T**he *Local Church* is a recent book written by Rev. Kwok Nai Wang, who is CCA's honorary consultant for ministry with local congregations. He has conducted several workshops for local church pastors in Hong Kong, the Philippines and Myanmar. CCA has decided to compile the format and contents of these workshops into a book. The book is easy to follow and it will be invaluable to pastors and seminarians.

Rev. Kwok has been deeply involved in the ecumenical movement for the past four decades. He has found that the movement often fails to yield results because by and large it remains only in the church leadership level. If the ecumenical movement is to move forward, he claims, it has to get local churches involved as well. And in order to enable local churches to actively participate in the whole movement, local congregations need to be renewed radically. This book provides some fundamental ideas regarding how to renew local churches.

Rev. Kwok began by re-examining what the Christian church is all about. The church is not a human institution. It is God's church.

## CCA Relocation Update

(continued)

menical centre/guesthouse is being finalised.

- The chapel will be an independent structure to show that the church that is God's should be the centre of all activity in a Christian foundation.
- The priority during construction will be given to the main office building and staff quarters.
- The Thailand task force will continue as the construction committee of the CCA foundation, along with Mr Anthony Row, Bishop Thomas Soo Po, Rev. Dr James Haire, Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat Leb-ang and Dr Prawate Khid-arn.

It should never be concerned about its own survival or expansion. Rather the church needs to be more concerned about the entire world that God so loves, and especially about those in dire need. Pastors and members of local churches need to get insights from the Bible as well as the history of the church and build a broader ecclesiology. Only out of a more comprehensive idea of the church will there come a more relevant and effective model of operation.

In the liturgical life of the church, Rev. Kwok points out that God is the only centre of our worship. It is only in focusing our thoughts and our total life in God can we live, move and have our being meaningfully.

In the mission of the church, Rev. Kwok insists that it is in reality *missio Dei* (or God's mission). The church must faithfully participate in God's saving acts on this planet earth. In the fellowship life, Rev. Kwok suggested that local churches should concentrate on re-educating members to be like Jesus, especially his *kenosis* lifestyle. In reformulating local churches, according to Rev. Kwok, the pastorate is the key. As vicars or deputies to Jesus, pastors must try to represent Jesus as prophets, priests and rabbis, both inside and outside the church. The primary job of local church pastors is to nurture their members,

rather than doing programs or projects only. A corporate pastorate should be initiated in every local church.

Local churches face tremendous difficulties today. There have been many and varied attempts to face these challenges. What Rev. Kwok offers in this book may give new directions and new impetus to church leaders (both lay and ordained) in their serious efforts in trying to enable their local churches to be faithful as God's servants in this world.

—Alan Chan

(Canon Alan Chan is a former president of CCA, and former WCC central committee member from Hong Kong.)



# The Cries of Asia

We come from the home of ancient and enlightened civilisations and the habitation of half of humanity.

We come from homeless children crying and begging on the streets of Colombo, Manila and Jakarta. We pray for the hundreds of child sex workers in the brothels in Cambodia, for the million or so internally displaced people in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, for the prostituted women in the red light areas of Bangkok and for the sexually abused migrant workers in Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia.

We mourn for church people and peace advocates killed in the Philippines and the victims of war and conflict in East Timor.

We cry for the tsunami and earthquake victims of South and Southeast Asia, for the invalid babies still born in Vietnam as a result of Agent Orange used during the war in Vietnam.

We cry for factory workers receiving low wages in China, Cambodia, Thailand, for the oppressed and persecuted Dalits in India and for the refugees starving to death in Afghanistan.

We cry for the victims of the long-standing division and rift in the Korean peninsula and other tensions in east Asia, and for the alarming rate of suicides in Tokyo.

We dare to hope and pray that those who struggle for dignity, justice and peace will harvest the fruits of your transforming grace!

O righteous Lord, hear us, we pray.

—from 'Cries of the World', used at the opening prayer of the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil.