



Christian Conference of Asia

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**Protecting Our
Environment**

Peace in Nepal

The Smart Virus

**Farewell to
Hong Kong**

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A Message for the Whole of God's Creation



A sustainable planet requires that we listen more carefully to the groaning of nature and the crying of people

Our focus in this issue is on the environment and ecology as our faith reflection toward God's creation. Our Lord is deeply concerned with the state of his creation—our world and its ecosystem. The environment means everything that surrounds us, including nature, human culture and social systems. All are systematically connected in one ecological system.

Across the planet the state of the natural environment is in crisis. Environmental crises—floods, droughts, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, typhoons/cyclones and storms are more critical around the globe. We are experiencing global warming and drastic changes of seasons.

Natural calamities reflect how human beings perceive and understand nature. Natural crises are basically about human greed towards God's creation.

The calamities remind us that there is a limit to everything. We are not living in a boundless warehouse of resources, but a creation with finite boundaries. This message needs to be brought to the whole world!

Natural environmental crises are also the result of a human societal ecological system. We live today in another social crisis in human history, facing uncertainty, problems and difficulties in our social, economic and political relations. Globalisation and the free-market system are potentially very powerful forces for global development and poverty reduction, but many countries and people have been left out, leaving poor and marginalised people without access to basic rights and participation in the decision-making in their country. We may not be able to turn back the world's understanding of development through globalisation. But a great challenge remains to make this world more liveable for the majority of our people and to make globalisation an opportunity for all of us to build peace and justice for all.

Nature and human relations are connected. Isaiah said we are part of the problem. He pro-

posed that we 'seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan and plead for the widow'. Let ultimate justice be reserved, as the second letter of Thessalonians says, for 'that day' at the end of time. In the meantime let your nation 'seek justice' for the oppressed.

A sustainable planet requires that we listen more carefully to the groaning of nature and the crying of people so that we can understand why nature is so cruel to us, why other nations hate us. Then we can take steps to change what we must change, accommodate what we must accommodate and how to be good neighbours in a global community.

The environmental and ecological problems we now face are not just natural, economic or political but are also spiritual, moral and ethical. Global salvation is everyone's concern. Global sustainable development is not just a struggle of the 'have nots', but must also be the commitment of the 'haves', who need to be accountable to the poor.

Also in this issue we share with you the stories and reflections of churches and friends. Rev. Jeffrey Abayasekera tells the story of the 'caller and the called'. Dr. K.B. Rokaya gives an account of an international solidarity mission for peace to Nepal. Miss Chang Chung Chih reflects on Asian youth experience in global challenging contexts, with its strengths and weaknesses.

And we are pleased to introduce one of our new CCA members, the Salvation Army Hong Kong and Macau Command and its mission.

Finally, you will read about the farewell ceremony of CCA in Hong Kong when around ninety people representing member churches and ecumenical friends took part in a 'moving on' ritual at the CCA Centre on 12 June 2006.

This issue is also the first issue printed and sent to you from our new home in Chiang Mai. If for any reason you visit Chiang Mai you are most welcome to visit the CCA office in this cultural-centre city of Thailand.

—Prawate Khid-arn



Cover: Thailand, the new home of CCA, is famous for its orchids, which introduce the environmental protection theme of this issue (Photo: Joan Vincent Cantó Roig)

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Empowering the Web of Life

The Mindanao and Sulu Ecumenical House for Healing and Reconciliation and the Empowerment of the Web of Life

People and institutions committing themselves to strengthen the creative cycle of our fragile ecosystem

The serious threats to the web of life in Mindanao in the Philippines caused by deforestation, due largely to commercial logging and irreversible environmental damage such as extractive mining industries, need urgent attention. Mindanao has a little more than half of the metallic reserves of the country. Mining operations were opened up to foreign investors beginning in 2005 when the Supreme Court declared the validity of the Mining Act of 1995. Industrial wastes and mine tailings are being dumped indiscriminately from open pits and tailing ponds to rivers and the ocean. The remaining marginal lands have been converted into commodity crop production, threatening biodiversity and pasture areas, through slash-and-burn agriculture and the use of remaining trees for fuel or for produc-

ing charcoal for economic survival. The mangrove forests, which provide protection from large waves and also as breeding grounds for aquatic and bird species, have been severely depleted for fuel production and to give way for the development of beaches, fishponds and prawn farms. The destruction of the forest ecosystem weakens the web of life. It threatens biodiversity as it replaces and alters natural ecological processes and creates monocultures susceptible to pests and diseases. It has caused degradation of forests and rivers, sedimentation, global warming, climate change, water crises and soil erosion, has diminished soil productivity, destroyed native vegetation and killed millions of living microorganisms in the topsoil. We have polluted the atmosphere and caused harm to mother earth.



The web of life is the interconnectedness of the whole of creation.

Don't Desert Drylands!

'Don't Desert Drylands!' was the slogan for this year's World Environment Day, commemorated each year on 5 June, one of the principal vehicles through which the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and enhances political attention and action.

The UN General Assembly declared 2006 as the International Year of Deserts and Desertification and 2006 also marks the tenth anniversary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

'Don't Desert Drylands!' emphasises the importance of protecting drylands, which cover more than 40 per cent of the planet's land area. This ecosystem is home to one-third of the world's people who are more vulnerable members of society.

The world's deserts are magnificent ecosystems that have been home to ancient civilisations. The day also celebrates the fragile beauty and unique heritage of our deserts.

Desertification is not just the natural expansion of existing deserts but also the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry, sub-humid areas. It is a gradual process of soil productivity loss and the thinning out of the vegetative cover because of human activities and climatic variations.

Let us resolve to do more to protect the biodiversity on which our planet depends. Let us commit ourselves to safeguarding our drylands.

Land affected by desertification is no longer able to support basic farming economies, leading to hunger, malnutrition and forced migration, with their related social implications

Wang Sanjun

Land affected by desertification is no longer able to support basic farming economies, leading to hunger, malnutrition and forced migration, with their related social implications. The destruction of the habitats of other living creatures such as rodents, birds and others has adverse effects on both the human population and the rest of God's creation. Lack of consumer education and the unbridled use of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas by industries and individuals has increased global warming and climate changes, leading to further imbalances in the web of life. Many people are not aware of global warming and climate change and their threats to the health of the whole of creation.

The Christian Conference of Asia's program area on Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service therefore, with the help of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines and the local host, Southern Christian College in Midsayap, Cotabato, Philippines, convened a meeting during

9–14 May 2006 of thirty representatives of churches and other faiths and academic leaders involved in health and ecology and life-giving agriculture. Through their visits to various communities in Kapatagan, Digos, Davao del Sur, Mindanao Baptist Rural Life Centre in Kinuskusan, Bansalan, Davao del Sur, Spottswood Methodist Centre in Kidapawan City, SCC College Hill Farm in Midsayap, Cotabato, and the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies in Cotabato City the participants saw and were informed about the destruction of the web of life in Mindanao. The participants also saw positive examples of people and institutions committing themselves to strengthen the creative or generative cycle of our fragile ecosystem and advocating for life and peace, alternative communities and ecology and health in our world.

These actions contribute towards the empowerment of the web of life, leading to justice, healing and reconciliation.

They appreciated the launching of the Bantay Ligawasan by the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies and the Ligawasan Marsh Research and Development Council, Inc. on 16 April 2006. Bantay Ligawasan is a community approach to safeguard and protect the natural resources of the marsh from human destruction and the Ligawasan Reforestation Program aims to encourage communities to reforest the marsh through individual and communal efforts. They appreciated the efforts of the Mindanao Baptist Rural Life Centre in educating the people on sloping agricultural land technology and the practice of individual Christians in greening the environment. They appreciated the efforts of educational institutions such as SCC in promoting life-giving agriculture.

The web of life is the interconnectedness of the whole of creation. Everything created by God has its place in the web of life, and the earth needs each and every living thing to keep the balance going. The health of planet earth depends on keeping the balance among all living species on land and seas and our relationship with the whole universe. The web of life concept challenges us to become creation centred rather than human centred in our biblico-theological reflections. The NCCP used to have a program unit on environment and a committee on health concerns but in the process of restructuring, both programs were closed down. However, issue-based advocacy through local initiatives is taking place to restore the environment, such as the ministry of the Eastern Mindanao Kasapulan of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches in Cotabato and General Santos City. Because of the urgent need to empower the web of life, the participants suggested that a multidisciplinary

committee under the Commission on Faith, Witness, and Service be organised by the NCCP and member churches to plan for the urgent need to address global warming, climate change, water crisis, soil erosion, deforestation, mining operations and their effects on health of the whole creation. It is also very timely that one of the member churches of NCCP, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, held their general assembly in UCCP Digos City in May. The general assembly leadership and delegates were urged to address the imbalance of our web of life.

The participants of the Asian Ecumenical Process on Ecology (Climate, Water, Soil) and Health were prepared to act themselves by living simply and ecologically. They formed the Mindanao and Sulu Ecumenical House for Healing and Reconciliation with SCC as a base. They invite others to join them in the empowerment of the web of life. As household members, they envision an empowered web of life in Mindanao and Sulu for abundant life and service. They:

- will endeavour to promote ecologically sound teaching and practice in faith communities, focusing on how the fellowship of churches and interfaith communities and peoples' movements can best strengthen cooperation in empowering the web of life locally and globally,
- will intensify ecological consciousness-raising activities,
- will build and expand an ecumenical movement for ecology and health that is politically and culturally inclusive,
- commit themselves to engage in weaving the web of life locally with peoples in other local households,
- call on educational institutions to offer courses on health and ecology, global warming and climate change,
- are aware of the existence of civil society organisations such as nongovernmental organisations, religious organisations, indigenous peoples' and Bangsamoro organisations, local government units and appropriate agencies in the government that are restoring the web of life,
- will cooperate with them in carrying out the plans for the next five years.

The participants thanked the Christian Conference of Asia for its focus on Mindanao and hope that it will continue to support the ecumenical *diakonia* process in healing and reconciliation that was launched in Mindanao.

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Loving Our Neighbours

A Christian basis for environmental action

Barry Richardson

A good place to start is the second of the great commandments: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' (Matthew 22:39) Clearly how we interpret the words 'neighbour' and 'love' in this commandment will affect our decisions and actions.

Starting with 'love', a New Testament perspective on this word is one in which God is seen as self-emptying love and, so, love may be defined as the process of 'enabling the beloved'. Love in this sense is expressed in a special kind of relationship where the lovers evoke and promote each other's identity. Such love acts to increase wholeness and maturity in the beloved.

The beloved is strengthened by the relationship, not subsumed by it.

In the love relationship between the Creator and creation, we would not expect to see coercion of creation, given the evolution of a freely choosing partner in love was the intent of the action. We would expect to see creation provided with the gift of opportunity. It is important for us to realise that before all else we are part of God's creation. We are loved by our Creator, as are all other creatures, and we (and they) are enabled to explore and evolve together in the context of our creation home. The relationships then that exist between God's creatures should continue to reflect the pattern of love we see in God's continuing act of creation. We should love, that is, we should enable, the potential of the others of creation.

This now brings us to the question of who is our neighbour? In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37), where Jesus asks, 'Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' the lawyer said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.' Thus in Jesus' view anyone to whom we are able to show compassion is our neighbour and we are bound by the law of love to do so.

So, who are our neighbours in the context of environmental issues?

- First, there are those of future generations. I do not think any one of us would see our grandchildren as other than our neighbours, though in time rather than space. If we use resources in such a way as to reduce their opportunities and options, we have not enabled them or their generation.
- Secondly, there are those with whom we now share resources, e.g. those who share the water of the great rivers. Those who live in towns and cities or farm the land are all affected by our behaviour in the use of water. As we could act differently and more compassionately towards them, they are, by our definition, our neighbours.
- Thirdly, there are those with whom we share this planet, who, as a consequence of our behaviour live diminished lives. The victims of global warming fit within this category, including those who live in drought- or flood-prone areas, cyclone/typhoon areas or any coastal areas. They will all be affected by the frequency and violence of weather conditions and by sea-level rise. As we could have acted differently (in our direct and indirect use of energy), so they are our neighbours.
- Fourthly, the plants and animals of God's creation are our kin and neighbours. We are able to show compassion on the biological world, to allow it to be truly itself, yet in many ways we choose not to. It is not that we should not draw on the natural world of which we are a part for what we need, but we rob it of its health and freedom.

Thus we are called by the primary imperative of God's sovereign command of love to enable our neighbours, to evoke and promote their identity, to provide the conditions for them to increase in wholeness and maturity. Have we done so? Could we do better? How will we answer before God for our actions when the time comes?

It is important for us to realise that before all else we are part of God's creation

Professor Barry Richardson is the chair of the Commission for the Environment of the Canberra & Goulburn Diocese of the Anglican Church of Australia



Women and Water

A morning prayer guide prepared by indigenous women

Preparation

Prepare a big bowl of water placed on the altar. Around it are pictures of oceans, rivers and seas or posters related to use of water or conservation of water. From the altar flows a long blue cloth like a flowing river.

Participants sit on the floor in a circle around the altar.

(Silence)

Invite the participants to close their eyes and be mindful of their breathing in and breathing out—a time for centring.

While their eyes are closed invite them to listen to the sound of the water and the biblical reading.

Sound of a rain stick (or spiritual music on water).

Reading

Genesis 1:1–2 (NRSV)

‘In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.’

Call to Worship

(Together)

Let our hearts unite with the Spirit of God,
With the Spirit of God who moves over the waters,
Moves over the waters since the beginning of creation,
Since the beginning of creation till today and forever.

Indigenous Women’s Ode to Water

Sisters rejoice!

For as indigenous women we have close nexus with water.
We floated in the water of our mother’s wombs.

Our children are conceived and nurtured by the water of our wombs,

We break the waters of our wombs with our strength, power and creative gusto to bring life on earth,

With the water in our breasts we sustain our sucking ‘bundle of joy’.

The watery blood that flows in our bodies gives us power and energy to live.

We want to celebrate procreative power as women as we shed water as blood every month,

We as water collectors walk miles to fetch water to quench the thirst of our family,

We make wise use of water and save water in pots as water managers.

We water the plants and the paddy,

We cook rice with water to feed our family,

We share water in our homes and the rivers and lakes with the animals and birds,

We wash the clothes, bathe our children and soothe our body with water,

We wipe away the high fever of our loved ones by pouring water on their head,

We pound herbs and mix with water to make medicine for healing,

We bless the water with our folk songs,

We dance with joy as we hear the croaking sound of the frogs
during the monsoon,
We make peace with water, God and nature with various
rituals,
We rejoice today to praise the God who created water.

(Moumita Biswas, 2002)

Song of Praise

Joal ie pran! (Water is life!)

Joal ie jan. (Water is life blood.)

Joal ke kari mann. (Let us respect water.)

Eseho sabay milay tabay kori joaler gann. (Come let us together
sing the song of water.)

Joal ie Shanti! (Water is peace!)

Dur Kare Klanti. (Water refreshes/sustains us.) (Repeat)

Sadh babohahar. (Use water with wisdom) (Repeat)

Eseho sadh babohahar, kortey nahi bhranti. (Let us make
proper use of water and respect water as gift of God.)

Eseho sabay milay tabay kori joaler gann. (Come let us sing the
song of water.)

(Composed by Moumita Biswas and Ruth Rakhan)

Scripture Readings

Genesis 1:10 and John 4:13-14

Reflection on Water

All religions in Asia value water. It is a very important symbol
in the rituals and faith expressions of the people.

- In Buddhist funerals water is poured into a bowl placed
before the monks and the dead body. As it fills and pours
over the edge, the monks recite, 'As the rains fill the
rivers and overflow into the ocean, so likewise may what
is given here reach the departed.'
- For Hindus, morning cleansing with water is a basic
obligation. Tarpan is the point at which the worshipper
makes a cup with the hands and pours the water back
into the river reciting mantras. Every temple has a
pond near it and devotees are supposed to take a bath
before entering the temple. Rivers are sacred places for
pilgrimage.
- In Islam water is important for cleansing and purifying.
Muslims must be ritually pure before approaching
God in prayer. Some mosques have a courtyard with a
pool of clear water in the centre, but in most mosques
the ablutions are found outside the walls. Fountains
symbolising purity are also sometimes found in
mosques.
- In Shinto, Japan's indigenous religion, worship of
the Kamis (innumerable deities believed to inhabit
mountains, trees, rocks, springs and other natural
phenomenon) must always begin by a ritual of
purification with water. This act restores order and
balance between nature, humans and the deities.
Waterfalls are considered sacred in Shinto.

- In Christianity water is intrinsically linked to baptism,
a public declaration of faith and a sign of welcome into
the Christian church. When baptised, one is fully or
partially immersed in water, or water may be poured
or sprinkled on one's head. Jesus himself was baptised
by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. In asking for
a drink from a Samaritan woman, he broke down the
barriers between him, a male Jew, and the woman
of Samaria and inaugurated the building of a new
community through the 'spring of water gushing up to
eternal life.'

And for our indigenous communities, we consider water as
very precious. Water not only quenches our thirst, cleans or
heals our bodies, water also sustains life. Water, like land, is life.
Deep in our spirituality is the care for water and for all creation
in our web of life.

Group Sharing of Contexts and Reflections

The participants are invited to share and reflect.

- What is the water situation in your indigenous
communities?
- Share a story of water conflict in your community and
what indigenous women do to protect water sources and
indigenous people's right to water.
- Share traditional wisdom or ritual of indigenous people
in healing relationship with water/nature.

Indigenous peoples and faith communities are called to address
water issues: the increased disparity between the water-poor
and the water-rich countries, the growing demand for water;
privatisation of water as commodity.

Peace with Water

(Sharing of peace)

Leader: Sisters, let us make peace with water. (Participants take
turn in passing the bowl of water around, sprinkling water on
each other and saying, 'The peace of God be with you.')

Blessing

(Together)

Bless the womb of mother earth that holds the water,
Bless the water that sustains us,
Bless the clouds pregnant with water,
Bless the rivers, streams, lakes and oceans,
Bless the dewdrops and morning mist,
Bless our bodies, with two-thirds water.

Adapted from the order of morning prayer prepared by:

- Ruth Rakhsan, Garo tribe from Bangladesh,
- Moumita Biswas, Bengali Dalit from India,
- Baby Vandir, Bawm tribe from Bangladesh,
- Rakhi Drong, Garo tribe from Bangladesh,

for the Indigenous Women's Alternative Leadership (IWALT)
training held at Crystal Spring House, Chiang Mai on 22 April
2006.

The Ministry of Peacebuilding

Peace and security for people in Northeast Asia

In the search for peace in Northeast Asia, there is a place for more visible expressions of Asian ecumenical solidarity

The issue of security in Asia is ongoing, due to political, ideological and ethnic conflicts in many places. Insurgency, violence and poverty have resulted in increases in migration, internally displaced people and refugees, both economic and political.

Peace and security issues in Northeast Asia are dominated by the policies and influence of Japan, Russia and China, but, in particular, the USA. Whatever achievements have been made in Asia for peace—between North and South Korea, between the government and the communist rebels and separatist groups in the Philippines for instance—are now being threatened because of the US-led war on terrorism. This has become an excuse for the US to bring back its military presence in the Philippines and to keep its military presence in South Korea and Japan.

War exercises and the forward deployment of US troops in the region must all be viewed in the light of America's renewed military aggressiveness in the region, aimed at protecting the imperatives of US foreign policy, which has remained the same, despite the end of Cold War, the absence of an external threat to the US or an era of increasing globalisation. In fact, it is because of economic globalisation that the US has continued its same security strategy, which is to maintain a 'defence capability', to open foreign markets, to 'promote democracy' and to protect the 'free world'.

In other words, the US military presence assures US economic interests. It means protecting US investments and markets, and it means securing sealanes, such as the Malacca Strait, and lines of communication that are essential for the transport of critical materials (such as oil).

The war on terrorism and the consequent US presence in Northeast Asia have far-reaching implications for the peace and security of the region. They pose a serious 'security dilemma' for such major regional powers as China and Japan. In its relationship with China the USA still adheres on

the one hand to a so-called 'one China policy', but on the other hand it maintains that if China was to attempt to take Taiwan by force then the US would stand in the front line to protect Taiwan. This approach is yet again for the sake of the US economic interests. So with this ambiguity, tensions and fears in the Taiwan Strait remain high and hostile. And as long as the tension remains high and the fears of the Taiwanese are still strong, then the desire to be well protected and have a modern defence system is also high, hence the demand to buy arms and missiles from the US. The threat to peace and justice in Northeast Asia are also the result of the manifestations of globalisation—political neo-colonialism, economic imperialism, environmental degradation, cultural domination etc.

The peace and stability in the region depend on the maintenance of a balance of power and the construction of a region-wide framework of cooperation to diffuse violence and conflict. There are moral and ethical questions here, which need to be addressed by the church. The church must be a good example, playing its prophetic role, so that peace and justice can prevail in the life of the people.

Recent developments, such as the US policy of pre-emptive war, military threats against Iran and North Korea because of their suspected nuclear weapons programs, a sizable and sophisticated undeclared Israeli nuclear arsenal in the volatile Middle East, the simmering conflict between India and Pakistan and the potential of South Korea, Japan and Taiwan to develop nuclear capability are threatening the world and, particularly, Asia. The risk of nuclear warfare is increasing. As the world moves towards another war game, some parts of the world are living very dangerously. The unfair and irrational unilateralist policy of the US government on behalf of the war on terrorism has brought conflicts and tensions. For example, all the peace and reunification efforts in the Korean peninsula, built up over many years, could

be destroyed. More and more thinkers are noting the limits of the traditional approach of analysing peace and security solely from a geopolitical framework. It is no longer adequate to examine the security of a nation-state from its external threats associated with war and violence. For years, the WCC and CCA have called for a comprehensive understanding of the threats to peace that includes both external and internal factors, in addition to the economic dimension.

In the search for peace in Northeast Asia, there is a place for more visible expressions of Asian ecumenical solidarity. Asian churches and peoples have a shared history and need to be in solidarity with one another, realising common hopes and dreams. Asia is rich in traditions and values that could be taken as valuable lessons to learn from one another. Asian churches, in solidarity with the churches and people in Northeast Asia, could explore the possibility for a new approach of peacebuilding in the region and try to find better solutions for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait issue. The barriers that still exist between the North and South Korea should be removed unconditionally, without intervention from outside. Likewise between China and Taiwan. The barriers that divide the Korean people may seem immense and insurmountable. The division of the Korean peninsula and the conflict between China and Taiwan may appear beyond the reach of the churches in Asia. But CCA will continue its pivotal role in building bridges between churches in Northeast Asia and in strengthening and mobilising Asian ecumenical solidarity for peacebuilding and conflict transformation throughout the region, and in cooperation with people from other faiths.

The churches in Asia are called on to give high priority to the ministry of peacemaking. It is an imperative laid on them by the faith they profess. They are standing in the forefront of the struggle for peace and justice. The churches are called to recognise the signs of hope in movements for peace and justice and to join and work together with their brothers and sisters of other faiths. The churches need to exploit the rich spiritual resources of the region to find a firm common ground for peace and justice. In addition, the commitment to the ministry of peacemaking and conflict transformation has to be reflected at all levels of church life. Churches have to make greater use of their congregations and institutions to uphold the vocation of peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

—Tony Waworuntu

Learning in Community

Indigenous women's alternative leadership for transformation

There are many gender injustices in our Karen families and community in Myanmar but most of the women suffer violence against women silently. Indigenous women really need to know how to face this problem. We know that most of the women fear God and want to read the Bible but they do not know how to interpret the Bible stories in an empowering way. So they really need to learn to read the Bible with women's eyes. I plan to organise two-day seminars on gender and violence and one-day seminars on reading the Bible with an indigenous women's perspective in Kayah state.—Naw Eh Klee Moo

Naw Eh Klee Moo was one of the twenty-five participants of the Indigenous Women's Alternative Leadership for Transformation subregional training on feminist theologising and reading the Bible, held at Crystal Spring House, Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 17–27 April 2006.



The women welcomed each other through rituals and flowers. The ecumenical learning community provides a safe space for exploring feminist theologising on indigenous women's experiences of exclusion and marginalisation because of their being women/tribal/dark/poor/Dalit/a minority. Dr Hope Antone led in this study towards actions for change.

The IWALT participants learned from Ms Cynthia Abdon Tellez and with the tribal communities in Chiang Mai, about their economic, political, social and health issues in the midst of globalisation—poverty, no land, no job, no citizenship, trafficking of women and children, HIV/AIDS—and

how they organise themselves to learn from each other, earn their living with dignity, pass on their trade of weaving to the next generation, support one another in caring for women with HIV/AIDS and have awareness raising on issues in their communities.



Learning from a Lahu community

In community where man and woman are both created in God's image and therefore are equal, Dr Anna May Chain led in ways women have read the Bible where:

- women's experiences and stories form the context for biblical reading,
- women retell and reinterpret the biblical stories in innovative and creative ways—poems, mime, skit, pictures and traditional crafts such as weaving,
- women use religious and cultural resources from their contexts—myths, legends, songs, dances, poems and visual arts,
- using other scriptures such as Buddhist and Taoist help illuminate our interpretation of the Bible,
- women are empowered by their reading of the Bible to transform the structures of injustice in their lives.



Celebrating community



Torajah, Balinese, Batak, Ambonese and Timorese women from Indonesia



Karen, Lahu and Thai women



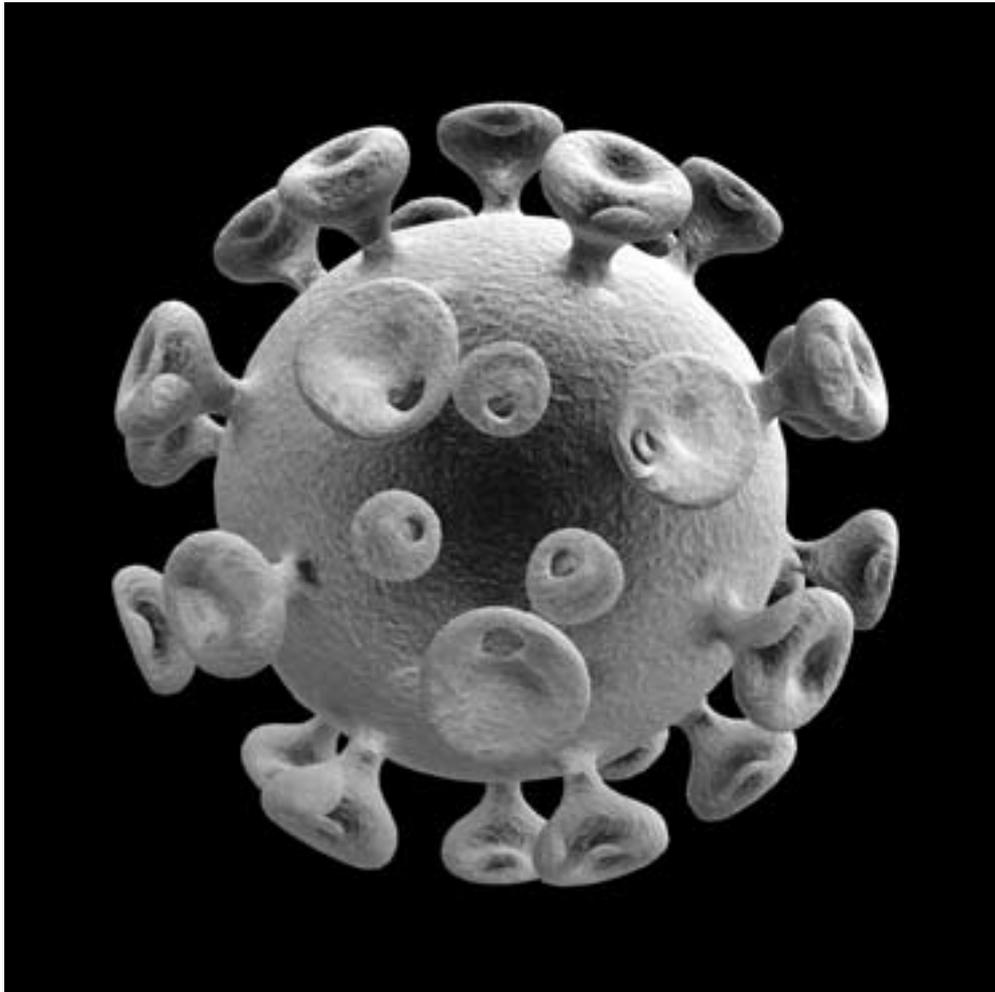
Indigenous women rereading the Bible



Myanmar women: Kayen, Lahu, Lisu and Karen

The Smart Virus

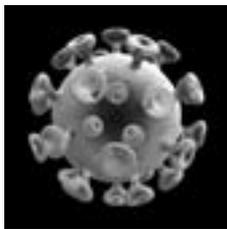
What churches and faith communities must do to win the war against HIV/AIDS



In this day of 'smart cards', 'smart money' and 'smart bombs', should we be surprised at the emergence of a 'smart virus'?

In this day of 'smart cards', 'smart money' and 'smart bombs', should we be surprised at the emergence of a 'smart virus' viz. HIV? Being a relatively 'young' disease, its 'smart' qualities are only just beginning to reveal themselves. Imagine a virus so smart it does not just enter a human body as most viruses do, to simply infect, but instead, just as an army wins a war by decimating the strongest weapons of its opponents first, this virus attacks the human body's best defence system—its immunity—by neutralising the T-cells (CD4 cells) soon after entry. Again, as in judo, where the attacker's aggressive strength is used against themselves

by the attacker, this smart virus piggybacks on the attacking T-cells, gets absorbed into them and implodes, not only destroying the T-cell but also actually utilising the T-cells' own internal 'machinery' to quickly multiply and invade other healthy T-cells. The smart virus thus produces a high 'viral load'—the measurement of how much HIV is in the blood—and the person's immune system gets quickly and steadily eroded, the CD4 count gets lower and soon, without intervention, a HIV positive person develops AIDS. The 'smart virus' never kills—it leaves the job to any number of 'opportunistic diseases', ranging from TB to loneliness.



Why is it that this virus, which first appeared in the early 1980s, cannot, even after twenty-five years, be curtailed, controlled or eradicated?

This is a virus so smart it can't be seen or felt as it stealthily enters the human body, so smart it can avoid showing up even when tested if the test is done within the 'window period', generally accepted as within six months of 'risky behaviour', e.g. a visit to a CSW (commercial sex worker). It is a virus so smart that even when suppressed by ARTs (anti-retroviral therapy), it can mutate to make the ART almost useless if discontinued (voluntarily, or due to unavailability of the drug), forcing the patient to start on a newer, usually more powerful drug. It is a virus so smart it need not show up in a pregnant mother, nor in her newborn, but then manifests itself in the same child as it feeds from her breast.

If we've located it why haven't we destroyed it?

Why is it that this virus, which first appeared in the early 1980s and proved itself to be a killer (in the early stages), cannot, even after twenty-five years, be curtailed, controlled or eradicated in spite of our great scientific achievements? Science's shortcomings alone cannot be held as responsible for its continued rampage.

This smart virus has the uncanny ability to 'divide' its human victims and to outwit its opposition—its prey—in many ways that are slowly becoming apparent. It is so smart that it prevents human beings from seeing its insidiousness, its ability to destroy lives, tear apart families and stretch the fabric of society.

First, there is a question rarely asked but that could be at the root of why the issue is not receiving concerted opposition: 'Is HIV really as dangerous and critical as its proponents make out?' The reality of HIV/AIDS in the world—as can be seen in many African states—should be evidence enough. In spite of this, people universally seem to fall into one of three categories:

- Those who believe the present statistics err and are too low, and that the world is sitting on an HIV time bomb, that the virus needs to be tackled on a war footing.
- Those who acknowledge the virus as a danger, but maintain the situation is not as critical as the first group proclaim. Many in this second group feel that the issue is being exaggerated for personal or monetary gain, e.g. to get 'more aid for AIDS'.
- The third is a mixed group of those who are aware of the dangers of the virus as well as those who don't but who are united in their general complacency and the mistaken idea

that HIV/AIDS is something that affects 'others', never 'us' and our families.

Denial and trivialisation still rule the day, as the first group remains a minority when compared to the other two. Round one to the virus!

Secondly, judgmentalism and issues of ethics and morality have clouded the battlefield to the point where the real enemy is not seen and instead people take up cudgels against many other issues that are thought to be more critical than the virus itself. By bringing up issues such as whether HIV-positive people are those who have indulged in some form of sinful (or at least 'immoral') behaviour, and debates as to whether MSMs (men who have sex with men) and CSWs are deserving of punishment—possibly from God—in the form of disease, the focus on finding the ways and means to locate and destroy the enemy takes second place.

Thirdly, the traditional weapon in the human armoury against this smart virus has been the 'ABC' system of prevention, which now has many detractors. It has been found that the majority of women in developing countries who have been infected were religiously following A or B—abstinence and being faithful. Meanwhile C (for condoms) creates its own problems. The CSWs (except in rare cases) and women in many Asian countries are not in a position to dictate the use of a condom to their male partners. Those who use condoms are stigmatised as people who are not faithful or who don't abstain. Moreover those propagating the use of condoms run into rough weather, mainly from faith leaders and religious groups, who feel it is glorifying sex, rather than sanctifying it. This was reflected in the recent United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in May–June 2006 in New York where the US government was castigated for refusing to fund programs that called for increased condom usage. This has also led organisations such as Christian Aid to accept a new model for a more comprehensive HIV response from ANERELA (African Network of Religious Leaders living with or personally affected by HIV and AIDS) called 'SAVE' (S = safer practices covering all modes of transmission, A = available medicines (not only ARTs), V = voluntary counselling and testing and E = empowerment through education).

Fourthly, the smart virus has used globalisation and the global village concept to spread. For example Ranjan Solomon of the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism reminds us in a paper, 'Tourism and HIV/AIDS' (April 2006) that although sex and tourism have long been associ-

ated, it is not groups of peoples (such on tourists or CSWs) who are high risk, nor even types of behaviour (such as drug use), but rather that a particular behaviour becomes risky because there is a disease in the environment that is rampant. Hence the tourist sector is being used by the smart virus to accelerate the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This could ultimately cost a country more in lost human resources and additional expenses than the tourist industry contributes. Unfortunately this alarming situation is not evident to many Asian planners for whom tourism spells money.

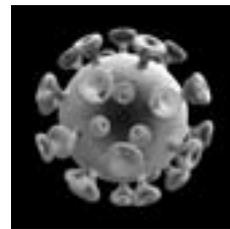
Finally, it would also be interesting to see how many local governments in Asia have kept the virus away from the public eye by enacting (or failing to enact) necessary legislation that has forced high-risk groups such as intravenous drug users, MSMs, transgenders, and CSWs underground (from fear of arrest or harassment) and away from programs where they could have had access to key information and essential treatment—ultimately benefiting society.

What needs to be done to contain this terribly smart virus?

Experience shows that this smart virus demands a multisectoral and multidimensional response involving all segments of society. Most countries still approach the epidemic from a 'crisis management' perspective of short-term goals and attempted quick fixes. They try to manage the epidemic as if it were a passing emergency, whereas it is a massive and long-term problem, one of the make-or-break issues of our century. What we need is to bring a little more clarity to the issue, better-researched statistics on the situation, greater awareness among the general population and committed leadership at all levels with the decisiveness and the will the deal with a global enemy. There are some steps that those in leadership—both political and religious—would then have to take up in each of the points mentioned above—and have implemented. However, political legislation alone will never be sufficient, if the spirit or the will is missing. HIV/AIDS must remain a permanent global political priority at the highest level in every country. That resolve must also be a commitment to true partnership so that governments, people living with HIV/AIDS, vulnerable groups, civil society, faiths and businesses work shoulder to shoulder to save lives, in partnership with two other global communities that are indispensable to the struggle—young people and women. Faith leaders and faith based organisations (FBOs) are playing an increasingly

crucial role. Until two to three years ago, aid agencies such as the UN, the Gates Foundation and the governments of many countries were of the opinion that faith leaders and FBOs were detrimental in the fight against HIV. This has changed. Today the mantra that works seems to be the interfaith response. It is a strange fact that religions and faiths that could not come together on crucial issues such as corruption, war, terror and poverty in Asia have, over the last few years, come together at all levels to acknowledge the danger of HIV/AIDS to their faith communities, and to show solidarity in fighting it. Faith leaders and FBOs have come forward to use their scriptures and faith traditions to break the silence. They have begun to influence their faith communities to end guilt, denial, judgmentalism, stigma and discrimination. And they are doing this side by side with people of other faiths, casting aside traditional mistrust in the face of a common enemy—this smart virus. In Asia, the CCA's brainchild, AINA (Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS), on the South Asian regional level the UNICEF-sponsored SAIRC (South Asian Inter Religious Council) and in several Asian countries national-level faith consultations and groups are coming together to work out a convergent response, e.g. INAT (Thailand) and the Interfaith Coalition on HIV and AIDS (India) to name just two.

Finally, the most important thing on the agenda right now is that we must scale up all HIV/AIDS services immediately till we are firmly on course, getting us as close as possible to universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support by the year 2010. However, while ARTs are crucial in fighting this smart virus, there are alternatives that we need to open our minds to. In the African and Asian contexts, HIV/AIDS is part of a bigger picture of malfunction and suffering—it cannot be treated in isolation. ARTs belong to the 'Western' class of solutions which can be called bio-medical or technological, but they do not necessarily provide all the answers. Local culture and traditional medicines can play an increasingly larger role in the near future. Michael Czerny, SJ, reminds us that along with ART we need to do everything else that constitutes building the kingdom of God. Christians need to simply do what Jesus did—feed the hungry, preach and educate, visit the sick, pray for healing, accompany the dying, comfort the bereaved. This perhaps would be the final frontier where the church—including its members—could wage the final battle to defeat the smart virus. Human history would expect no less from us.



The smart virus demands a multisectoral and multidimensional response involving all segments of society

Transforming Society in Northeast India

Grassroots leaders capacity building program held in Assam

A training program organised for grassroots leaders to help them understand contemporary situations, especially the issues of religious fundamentalism, ethnic conflict and the impact of globalisation in Asia and in India in particular

A grassroots leaders' building program was organised jointly by the National Council of Churches in India Urban Rural Mission, Northeast Concerns and the Christian Conference of Asia URM on 22–26 April 2006 at the conference centre of the Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India (CBCNEI), Guwahati, Assam. There were twenty-eight participants representing different churches and organisations from northeastern states of India. The resource persons were Josef Widyatmadja, joint executive secretary, CCA FMU, Bishop D.K. Sahu, general secretary of NCCI, Asir Ebenezer, executive secretary, NCCI URM, P.C. Jena, field staff, NCCI, and Awala Longkumer, executive secretary, COT, NCCI. Bible studies were led by A. Wati Longchar, ETE consultant Asia/Pacific, Limala Longkumer, Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, and Ngul Khan Pau, general secretary, CBCNEI, Guwahati.

This training program was organised for grassroots leaders to help them understand contemporary situations, especially the issues of religious fundamentalism, ethnic conflict and the impact of globalisation in Asia and in India in particular. The whole process of training employed participatory methods of learning and so all participants shared their stories of the struggles that they encounter in their daily lives. Many burning issues were raised—ethnic conflicts, cross-border migration, HIV/AIDS, atrocities, rape, torture, molestations, killing of innocent people, human rights violations committed by the Indian Army and nationalist groups, repressive laws such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958, intertribal and intratribal conflict, border disputes, land alienation, violation of freedom of the press, religious fundamentalism, divisive communal ideologies and misuse of political power to suppress peoples' movements.

The participants recognised that churches in Northeast India are enthusiastic in mission work but their mission is focused more on soul winning, church planting and denominational expansion. The fellowship, service and witness of the churches are confined to a one-sided charitable and other-worldly approach.

This approach is not adequate to meet the new challenges emerging in society today. A new paradigm shift in mission and reading the Bible is needed to help churches engage in the holistic mission of God.

The participants were facilitated with different tools of social analysis, new biblical hermeneutics, URM history and methods of doing theology. At the end of the training program, the participants strongly affirmed and recommitted themselves to engage in the transformation of society and encourage churches to carry out God's mission, especially for oppressed and marginalised people. They appealed to the churches to:

- organise workshops and seminars on new ways of reading the Bible,
- explore new dimensions of doing God's mission,
- no longer be silent observers of rampant cases of atrocities, rape, molestation, torture, killing of innocent people by armed forces and militant groups in the region, but to speak out and stand beside the victims,
- conduct awareness programs such as medical health camps and counselling and initiate rehabilitation centres for substance abuse, HIV/AIDS problems.

NCCI URM and CCA URM was asked to help and support the people of Northeast India by continuing to organise such grassroots leaders' capacity building programs and new ways of reading the Bible.

Towards a Revitalised Ecumenical Movement

National councils of churches general secretaries meet in Cambodia

To the city of Phnom Penh in Cambodia, we—the general secretaries of national councils of churches/Christian councils and other church leaders from various countries in Asia—came together at the invitation of the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia. We met in this war-torn country where Christianity was once completely wiped out and is now in a process of resurrecting in a new form. One of the youngest national ecumenical councils in Asia, the Kampuchea Christian Council, extended to us its warm hospitality during our stay in this Buddhist-majority country and hosted a consultation held from 7–10 May 2006, at the Imperial Garden Hotel. Our worship, study, reflection, discussions and listening in the spirit of celebration of God’s goodness enabled us to understand more about Asian realities as well as in a humble and repentant recognition of our shortcomings and an awesome realisation that much more has yet to be done in Asia to strengthen our Christian witness and to equip the Asian ecumenical movement to respond to God’s call to be true witnesses in a pluralistic Asia.

We scanned the ecumenical terrain in Asia and traced our ecumenical journey in the light of a critique of our faithfulness to the compelling vision of the ecumenical movement. Anguished with the fragmentation of the body of Christ in various ways, we examined and analysed how the Asian ecumenical movement has been degenerating due to our own shortcomings. Increasing denominationalism, competition to assert confessional identity and ecclesiastical supremacy, the proliferation of ecumenical organisations and structures, lack of interests and commitment among churches for ecumenism, freelance missionary evangelism and competition without any cultural sensitivities, denial of opportunities for young people to participate in the ecumenical movement, lack of coordination among overseas mission and ecumenical partners are some of the reasons we identified that

have contributed to the degeneration of the ecumenical movement in Asia in recent times.

While identifying the reasons for such fragmentation of the body of Christ and reasons for the hindrance for visible unity of the churches in Asia, we repent of the moral, ethical and spiritual bankruptcy within the house of God, the alienation, marginalisation and exclusion that continues to divide the children of God in Asia. This situation warranted us to reflect loudly on our own sins and weakness and to raise questions of ourselves:

- Have we been responsible stewards of the task that God has entrusted to us?
- How far have we gone in promoting the enduring concerns of the ecumenical movement?
- What deep impressions have the churches made in ushering in that ‘friendlier tomorrow’ where justice and peace are lived realities for our people?



In the midst of a situation crying out for redemption, the churches have not been silent

Grappling with this self-critique, we explored creative expressions of fundamentally new and better ways, in the hope of revitalising the ecumenical movement in Asia today.

During our stay together, we were enriched from learning from each other's experience. We listened carefully to the stories of joy and sorrow and the voices of pain, anguish and frustration, and discussed the existing political, economic, social and cultural realities in the Asian context, and were appalled at the political intolerance and intimidation of religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities, the subtle attempts to repeal the rights of citizens to profess any religion, human rights violations and efforts that foster and spread insecurity among people, especially minority groups and other marginalised sectors, rising militancy and countermilitancy resulting in the destruction of peace and harmony in everyday life, and the creation of an atmosphere of suspicion and hatred among religious communities. We saw the Torture Prison Museum and the monuments of the Killing Fields in Cambodia and, in both places, we could not help being moved by the horror and ugliness of this human tragedy experienced by the millions of people in Cambodia. We saw poverty-stricken people, orphans and HIV/AIDS-affected children in orphanages and shelters. This led to the realisation that a majority of Asians still face abject poverty, unemployment, landlessness, forced migration and skyrocketing prices—often resulting in suicides—and the concern that a major chunk of national spending is on defence and procurement of nuclear arms and other weapons, whereas social issues such as health care, education and welfare and development are grossly neglected. Acknowledging that we are called to be witnesses of Christ, sharing 'the pain of life' is the starting point of the ecumenical mission, we are reminded that our continent continues to beseech the need of God's transforming grace.

In the midst of a situation crying out for redemption, the churches have not been silent. Conscious of their limitations, contradictions and sins, they have engaged in social analysis, buoyed by theological reflection, to help deepen their awareness of the objective conditions obtaining in their respective societies. They have called to task the powers and principalities into accountability towards good governance by exposing and opposing government agendas that deny people their God-given freedom. Churches and national councils are being moved to call and work for social reversal so that everyone may live and lead lives worthy of hu-

man dignity. In many places, churches are engaged in missions where people in local communities are being empowered to speak their word about themselves. The ministry of the Asian churches has been one of opening the windows of the church upon the world. In the process, they have found common cause with sisters and brothers of other living faiths. They have learned a salient lesson: 'In Asia, the church must be intentionally respectful of diversity, else it will suffer the consequences of religious irrelevance.'

We are reminded that God calls individuals and communities to intervene in given historical contexts. The churches and the Asian ecumenical movement are deeply concerned and committed to the responsibility of taking the historical context seriously. We also recognise that God's mission continues with or without the church. However, we recognise that we are called to be obedient disciples as an ecumenical body. We must seek God's encouragement and cooperation with others as we strive towards revitalising the ecumenical movement in Asia.

In this context, our humble efforts to respond to God's call to be faithful servants in his mission, we also realise that the priorities on our journey towards this goal include:

- an assessment on the 'state of ecumenism' in Asian countries by each national council, in cooperation with the member churches,
- development and promotion of Asian ecumenical spirituality and theology, to be shared at the local, regional and global levels,
- working towards ensuring good governance at all levels of our engagement in Asia as the responsibility of all national councils and member churches,
- advocating religious freedom within the national context and responding to religious intolerance in specific country situations as a priority concern in the increasingly polarised social and religious contexts in Asia,
- international solidarity in the face of the varied social, economic, and political obstacles experienced across Asia. Several issues were identified to help network among countries experiencing similar circumstances. Specific issues, such as increasing armed conflicts, religious intolerance, militarisation, HIV/AIDS, human rights violations, human trafficking and the situation of migrants, refugees and internally displaced people were identified as priority areas of concern for

the Asian ecumenical movement's involvement. In order to enhance networking among countries that experience similar problems appropriate subregional responses should be developed to address the issues effectively. CCA and the WCC need to ensure better ecumenical coordination in these areas of work in Asia,

- ecumenical leadership formation should be further developed in order to develop and enhance the capacities of the various national councils, with specific attention given to the young and emerging churches and national councils in countries such as Cambodia, Nepal, Bhutan, East Timor, Vietnam, Laos and Mongolia. Special attention and focus should be given to educating young churches, with a curriculum designed to impart a deeply rooted biblical understanding of 'ecumenism',
- developing dialogue both with other faiths and with other Christian groups in order to ensure good relations with neighbouring faith communities and also among various Christian churches. Common ground and creative mechanisms need to be found for improving and sustaining our relations with various confessional and ecclesiastical bodies, especially the Roman Catholic Church, Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Appropriate pluralistic responses also need to be developed at the local levels,
- ecumenical formation and capacity building training for youth. This should be considered as a priority in all Asian countries in the coming years. These training and other capacity building initiatives should include a focus on language and better communication skills, as well as ecumenical content that seeks to ground youth in a deeper understanding of the ecumenical context,
- systematic efforts to pool together financial resources within Asian churches and NCCs to extend support to financially weaker churches and national ecumenical bodies that will help them to be less dependent on funding agencies.

We trust that God calls us at this historic juncture to undertake such activities of caring, sharing, nurturing and building in our common ecumeni-



cal journey. We believe that, in order to revitalise the Asian ecumenical movement, the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, the national councils of churches and member churches in Asia are called to develop an integrated, interactive and collaborative working style and avoid duplication of our tasks. We are called to be engaged in a process that will ultimately lead to more sense of ownership of the Asian ecumenical movement by member churches as well as coherence and coordination of one ecumenical movement in Asia. We also recognise the need for both the Christian Conference of Asia and the national councils of churches to move gradually toward financial self-sufficiency. In order to make this a reality, the ecumenical movement in Asia is called to adopt and lead a 'simple lifestyle' and further promote 'simplicity' by following Jesus of Nazareth.

Although we rejoice in various initiatives towards the direction of visible unity in most Asian countries that have already been taken over the years, but in penitence, we accept our failures and weaknesses in presenting a divided witness to the world he came to save. We give thanks to God Almighty for his abundant grace for the churches in their life and witness in Asia and the desire for unity in the common life of Christ's body. We beseech God's transforming grace in our humble efforts to revitalise the Asian ecumenical movement in the days to come.

Dancing school gives a performance in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, for the general secretaries of national councils of churches/Christian councils and other church leaders

Illegitimate Debts

Debt and life from a faith perspective

One of the causes of the deepening economic backwardness and social underdevelopment of the South has been onerous and usurious loans

One hundred and fifty representatives from Southern and Northern social movements and civil society organisations from fifteen countries of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas attended an International Conference on the Cancellation of Illegitimate Debts, in Jakarta, Indonesia, on 27–30 May 2006. Parliamentarians and government officials also participated in the activity in solidarity with the people's efforts against the oppression of enslaving debt.

The conference was organised by Reality of Aid and cosponsored by Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), the European Network on Debt and Development (Eurodad), the African Network on Debt and Development (Afrodad), CCA Urban Rural Mission and Kairos-Canada.

The participants devoted their time and efforts to develop a common understanding of illegitimate, odious and dictator debts and their impact on the peoples of Southern countries. They also planned strategies and made action plans as to how the debts could be cancelled.

It was pointed out that one of the causes of the deepening economic backwardness and social underdevelopment of the South has been onerous and usurious loans.

These were imposed by governments of the so-called Paris Club, other organisations related to it and international financial institutions. Governments of the South, including dictatorships collaborated with these entities in acceding to the debts and the oppressive conditions dictated by the lenders.

A workshop on planning/strategising for a campaign against illegitimate debts was held. It was agreed:

- that people should repudiate these illegitimate debts and call for their absolute and unconditional cancellation,
- that there be an immediate cancellation of dictator debt, the most brazen and odious debt endured by Southern peoples,
- that there be a return of the payments on illegitimate and dictator debts,

- that public and transparent audits of Southern debts be carried out in support of the campaign for the cancellation of illegitimate and dictator debts.

In a speech on 'Cancellation of Illegitimate Debt from a Faith Perspective' Josef P. Widyatmadja, executive secretary for CCA Faith Mission and Unity (Urban Rural Mission) spelled out that the debt issue is not solely an economic and political one but a matter of morals, ethics and faith.

Most faith has focused on teachings advocating life and championing the rights of the poor, widows and orphans. No faith emphasises material accumulation that unleashes greed and selfishness for a few, Joseph Widyatmadja said.

He quoted Mahatma Gandhi, who said that there are enough resources to satisfy the needs of all people, but not sufficient material to satisfy the greed of just one. Jesus in his prayer asked his followers, 'Give us our daily bread.' Greediness is the root of evil.

Joseph said that debt cancellation could not be discussed without mentioning the global injustice designated by the Empire and greedy economics. How can a people's movement campaign for the cancellation of illegitimate debt without touching on and challenging global justice in trade, economics, politics, values and technology?

He said it should be clear that it is oversimplistic to uplift the life of the poor in the South through a struggle for the abolition of illegitimate debt as a final goal. The campaign for the cancellation of illegitimate debt is only a stepping stone to a wider goal. Without challenging the oppressive global injustice debt cancellation is useless. If the debts were cancelled but global injustice and greedy economics still existed, the life of people would be even worse.

The goal of people's movements and civil society should not just be the abolition of illegitimate debt. It is imperative that people of all faiths work together to promote peace for life where all are equal under God, the source of life. No-one should be allowed to deny the right to life that comes from God. Justice and peace should be the final goal.

Embraced by God

A Theological Autobiography by Jeffrey Abayasekera

The personal memoirs of men and women, both public figures and private persons, often make inspiring reading. The life story of every person has a message to convey. This book by Rev. Jeffrey Abayasekera is in this genre of writing. It is a narrative of a spiritual journey over a period of nearly fifty years. It weaves together three broad themes under the story of the Caller and the Called.

The first is a personal story of unlearning and relearning by Fr Jeffrey, of faith and discovery that leads to a widening of horizons and of a vision of the purposes of God. He recalls many events in his early adult life and of his coworkers and colleagues in the kingdom of God. As in all Christian autobiographies, it highlights the importance of awareness and timing in the Christian journey.

There is next the continuing story of the Christian socialist movement in Sri Lanka with which Fr Jeffrey has been associated since the late fifties. During the youth uprising of 1971 and the racist anti-Tamil pogroms of the late seventies and early eighties, the movement faced many challenges. It emerged through these struggles as a purposeful movement that attracted and inspired not only many Christians but also many socialist-oriented persons of other faiths as well. But it leaves the reader with the question as how and why such a movement has failed in recent years to maintain its momentum and relevance.

The third strand in the book identifies internal tensions and challenges that the church in Sri Lanka faced around the turn of the millennium. Fr Jeffrey offers a vision for the future church. He calls for a new ecclesiology and a new understanding. It may be necessary, he feels, to deinstitutionalise the church by a process of *kenosis* or self-emptying.

The work of the church is an unfinished task. God raises through time persons and movements within and alongside the church. The book draws us to reflect on the dichotomy between personal struggles and the work of the institutionalised church. Ironically, those persons who helped most in Fr Jeffrey's formation have and continue to be at the centre of the institutionalised church. The book does not try to offer answers yet raises rele-



vant questions to help the church frame its agenda in the light of current crises in the world.

For the experiences it describes, the challenges it poses and the inspiration it provides, all connected with the spiritual journey of Fr Jeffrey and his wife Annathaie, this book is recommended reading particularly for pastors and those of all faiths committed to participatory social analysis and transformation.

—Duleep de Chickera

The Rt Rev. Duleep de Chickera is the Anglican bishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Embraced by God was sponsored by CCA-URM and is available from the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue in Sri Lanka or from the publisher at 688/1, Peradeniya Road, Kandy 20000, Sri Lanka, for US\$15 (or 400 SL Rupees).

Peace in Nepal

International solidarity mission for peace visits Nepal

The objective of the peace mission was to observe and study the situation of Nepal through interaction with representatives of the widest possible sections of the Nepalese society in order to contribute to the peacebuilding process in Nepal through lobbying at the international level

An international peace mission led by Peace for Life, an international inter-faith peace group, visited Nepal at the joint initiative of CEPJAR, the peace and reconciliation program of the National Council of Churches of Nepal (NCCN). The objective of the peace mission was to observe and study the situation of Nepal through interaction with representatives of the widest possible sections of the Nepalese society in order to contribute to the peacebuilding process in Nepal through lobbying at the international level.

Meetings

The members of the team had meetings with:

- representatives of the wider civil society in Nepal. Prominent members of the civil society spoke on the occasion on the political and human rights situation in Nepal with special reference to the recent people's movement for democracy and the political scenario in the aftermath of it including the declaration by the parliament to make Nepal a secular state. This meeting was organised by the Citizen's Peace Commission,
- executive committee members of NCCN, CEPJAR and the Kathmandu Valley Christian Council. The team members shared their experiences on the role of the church in peacemaking and learned about the role the church in Nepal had played in the peacebuilding process,
- Mr Krishna Bahadur Mahara, the spokesperson of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and coordinator of the Maoist dialogue team. This gave the team members an opportunity to get to know the view and position of CPN (Maoist) on various issues,
- representatives of religious communities—Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Baha'i and Kirat. The team members shared their experiences on the role of religious communities in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in other parts of the world and appreciated the harmony existing among the various religious groups in Nepal and

the role the Interreligious Council Nepal is playing in the peacebuilding process. The members of the peace team urged the religious leaders to continue to make efforts to maintain the religious harmony and continue to play an even more effective role in ensuring peace and social justice. All the religious leaders present were of the opinion that the decision of the parliament to declare Nepal a secular state was right. Prominent Hindu leaders said that as Hinduism is itself a secular religion the declaration of a secular state did not really make much difference as far as the true spirit of Hinduism is concerned. They also urged people not to link Hinduism directly to the monarchy. This meeting was organised and coordinated by the Interreligious Council Nepal.

Asia Sunday

In the afternoon on Sunday, 28 May 2006, the members of the peace mission participated in a special prayer meeting jointly organised by NCCN and the Valley Christian Council to celebrate Asia Sunday. This special event was held in Putali Sadak Church, the first church to be started in Kathmandu after Nepal opened to the outside world in 1950. It was also a thanksgiving service for the success of the people's movement for democracy led by the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and supported by Nepal's civil society. This year the focus of Asia Sunday was Nepal, as the youngest council member of the ecumenical family.

Field Visit

To have a closer look at the impact of the decade-long conflict in Nepal and to have an opportunity to interact with the local people affected by the conflict, the peace mission visited a village in Dhading. They came back with exciting stories to tell about their interaction with the village people and first-hand experience of the impact the conflict has had on the lives of the people in rural areas. The field visit was coordinated by First Environmental Trekking (P) Ltd.

Conclusion

The visit by the peace mission was very timely and it will certainly contribute to enhancing the peacebuilding process in Nepal by creating an increased awareness at the international level about the situation in Nepal and the constructive role the international community should play in peaceful resolution of the conflict and establishing lasting peace with justice to all the stakeholders in Nepal. This was probably the first peace mission of this kind, with people from many countries in the

world joining hands for peace, justice, democracy and religious freedom in Nepal.

The international delegation derived inspiration and empowerment from the stories of the Nepali people's heroism and dedication to the cause of peace, justice and democracy and.

The National Council of Churches of Nepal (NCCN) took pride in being able to play a key role in this.

—K.B. Rokaya
(General Secretary, NCCN)

Recommendations

As an interfaith movement that seeks global peace with justice, Peace for Life joins peace groups in Nepal, including the IRC Nepal, the National Council of Churches in Nepal and the Citizens Peace Commission in affirming the need for enabling and equipping religious communities and civil society groups to establish common ground for dialogue and cooperation for peacebuilding in Nepal. The people of Nepal have won the first round of their struggle to attain lasting peace. However, much more remains to be done to address the roots of the crisis. Building genuine peace with justice and freedom demands sustained vigilance by the people's movement and continuous witness by the faith community and the international solidarity movement to ensure that the peace process is not hijacked by interests other than those of the Nepali people. Unfavourable economic conditions and massive poverty, exacerbated by foreign-power manipulation, continue to pose severe tests. But with vision and wisdom, the quick realisation of the dream of a united, just and prosperous Nepal can be realised. Based on the above findings and conclusions, we, the Peace for Life-led mission:

- call on the interim government of Nepal to immediately begin the process of constituent assembly elections and ensure the full representation and participation of marginalised sectors—Dalits, women, indigenous nationalities and religious minorities. The process of charting Nepal's future political course needs to be grounded on an agenda of inclusion and recognition of the various categories of people comprising the Nepali nation, especially the indigenous communities, who make up the majority of the population,
- call on the international community to support the peace process in Nepal and, in particular, to press for the removal of the CPN(M) from the US State Department's 'Watch List' of terrorist organisations. In early May, the newly installed cabinet removed the terrorist tag and Red Corner Notice from the Maoists and de-

clared an indefinite ceasefire. Peace talks have begun between the CPN(M) and the new government, with the former affirming their commitment to the democratic process and to abide by the wishes of the people. The continued inclusion of the CPN(M) in the US terror list will not only obstruct any progress in the current peace process, but also pave the way for foreign meddling in the peace negotiations,

- challenge foreign powers—especially the US, India and the UK—not to meddle in the peace negotiations and in other aspects of Nepal's internal affairs. The people of Nepal, who have achieved a level of political awareness and sophistication unseen at any other time in their history, are in the best position to chart their own political future and devise the kinds of institutions and structures that would meet the needs and aspirations of the various categories of people populating the nation,
- demand that foreign governments stop all forms of foreign military aid to Nepal while following a policy of assistance without interference. Military aid has usually been used to suppress legitimate democratic protests and to kill and eliminate innocent people in the name of the 'war against terror'. Nepal's economy on the other hand is in dire need of assistance, but any aid towards this end must come without dictated conditions,
- urge faith communities in countries that play a significant role in Nepal's development to press their governments and politicians not to intervene in the internal affairs of Nepal and to let the Nepali people decide their own future. We especially direct this challenge to the Christian church and the Muslim community in India, the Christians in the US and the Buddhist community in Thailand, and likewise urge the Hindus in India not to disrupt the peace process in Nepal and the Nepali people's right to decide their future.

The Salvation Army in Hong Kong and Macau

Service to the community

At the CCA assembly last year the Salvation Army Hong Kong and Macau Command became the ninety-seventh church in the Christian Conference of Asia.

The Salvation Army was founded in 1865 in England by William Booth and his wife Catherine to provide material support and spiritual comfort to the poor. To promote a more effective 'warfare' against evil, in 1878 it was transformed into a quasi-military organisation, with uniforms and flags. Today the Army serves in 111 countries throughout the world and is highly respected for its concern for the wellbeing of the disadvantaged and the development of the community.

The Salvation Army's first service in China was to provide humanitarian assistance to the millions of refugees in Beijing in 1916. It rapidly extended its services on the mainland and reached Hong Kong in 1930. In addition to providing accommodation to women and children during those unstable years, the Army also established corps (churches)



in different districts to preach the gospel. Over the years its services to the community grew to help more people in need.

Today the Hong Kong and Macau Command of the Salvation Army's strategic and proactive social services operate in four areas—youth and family, community, senior citizens and rehabilitation—aimed at strengthening people in need to fight for the good of themselves and the future of society.

The range of social services offered by the Army in Hong Kong and Macau is impressive. Through the operation of children's and youth centres, education and development centres, residential homes and youth camps the Army provides a wide range of services for the welfare of young people and families, including services for young night drifters, school social work, family support services and youth pre-employment training projects.

Community services include an integrated service for street sleepers, hostels for single persons, neighbourhood community development projects and an urban renewal social service team.



The twenty-fourth anniversary ceremony of the Salvation Army's Tin Ka Ping Kindergarten

The Army operates residences, service centres, day care centres and integrated home care service for senior citizens. It provides rehabilitation services to help differently abled people integrate into the community.

The Army operates a number of schools in Hong Kong, bringing education at all levels to over 8,000 students.

The Army is a Christian church. Its religious function is mainly performed by eighteen corps in Hong Kong and one in Macau. There are nearly 2,000 soldiers (church members) in the command area. The corps officers (clergy) who administer individual churches are also responsible for looking after the spiritual needs of individuals at the Army's social services units and schools in their districts. To enhance the Army's religious services, different teams are also formed to strengthen target groups, including women, youth and people preparing themselves to be religious workers.

The Salvation Army is an evangelical part of the universal Christian church. Its message is based on the Bible and its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination.

Salvation Army work in mainland China continues. In spite of China's booming economy, many mainland Chinese are still living in rural areas threatened by disease and poverty. The Army works for the underprivileged in six provinces. The work includes, for example, medical and health training, HIV/AIDS health information centres and programs, agricultural programs, child sponsorship and teacher training.

For many people in Hong Kong the Salvation Army is strongly identified with its recycling program. It is indeed the leading recycling operator in Hong Kong. The collection of used items not only fully utilises the existing resources for environmental protection purposes but also provides the underprivileged with material support. Through ten family stores and three consignment shops, the Army satisfies the needs of consumers who support the recycling concept and look for goods at bargain prices. Money raised by the program finances Army services to the community.

The Salvation Army values its support from the general public. It organises fundraising events, produces quarterly newsletters and a wide range of publications (including its famous *War Cry*) and answers enquiries from donors, the media and the public.

Welcome to CCA!



Macau clothes collection activity supported by the Rotary Club



The launching ceremony of the Elderly Shop at TAP Tung Tau Centre



Lieut-Colonel Alfred Tsang, Officer Cammanding

A Refuge for the Oppressed?

Chang Chung Chih

My Lord you are refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you. (Psalm 9:9–10)

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes. With your right hand you save me. (Psalm 138:7)

Are there women who are marginalised in your churches? What have you done to help them be a part of your church? Have you spoken out for them? Have you thought about their needs and rights? Do you see them as a part of your church? Sometimes we forget to help each other. We ignore others.

At the World Council of Churches youth pre-assembly in Porto Alegre I was saddened to see our Asian youth so quiet. I tried to motivate them to say something, but the pre-assembly was dominated by those who spoke English well. Native English speakers could express their ideas without any problem. But our Asian young people, lacking experience and language skills, simply smiled. This reminded me of the marginalised women in our churches.

The most marginalised women are those who are not well educated, who are poor, who come from patriarchal societies and are oppressed by the mainstream. Often we only see their timid, smiling faces. They are friendly, but not confident. You probably think that they are silent because they agree with us. We may think we are caring for them, waiting for them to ask for help from us. But is that the right way of being church?

How can we help our marginalised women? Sadly, those of us in high positions in our church and society, well educated and in good economic situations, who have the chance to speak out, are not standing with the marginalised women! How

can we teach our people and churches to pay attention to these silent women? How can we make a difference for them?

We hear how men control women in many ways in order to get the power of making decisions and changes. Yet women also play these kinds of games to get an opportunity to speak. We women forget that being women means showing our sincerity, tolerance and patience anytime and anywhere. In order to get a seat at the table of power, we begin to act like men. Women, have you ever noticed the way you speak is like the men you don't like? You speak only for your own benefit and not for people in need. You talk about unity without sitting with people who are from different contexts. As a young indigenous woman, from a lay background, with a limited experience of being Christian, I want to challenge you. What is your vision of being with those marginalised women?

After Jesus had broken through barriers of culture, race and religion in order to reveal himself to the woman of Samaria, he told her that he had water that would take away her thirst forever. The water he was speaking of was not two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, but spiritual water, a water that would so fill us that all our needs would be met, all our wants satisfied and all our thirsts fulfilled. If this is the way God shows the unity of people of different genders, cultures, races and religions, surely we should try a little bit harder to sit with our sisters who are marginalised and oppressed.

I am a lay theologian who cannot tell you too much about what the Bible says to us and to marginalised people. My vision of the women's way of being church is to let all of us be comfortable and feel free in our churches and societies, no longer oppressing one another. Education, support and reflection are ideas we can try to help the marginalised.

And, of course, to always pray for those who are not seen nor respected by people in our churches. I remind you all to stand with the suffering ones, just as Jesus did with all of us.

Chang Chung Chih is CCA joint executive secretary for Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment

My Story



Chang Chung Chih

One day when I was twelve years old I heard shouting from my parents' bedroom. My mother was crying and kept saying, 'No!' to my father. They were fighting. While I stood in front of them my father kicked my mother. This scared me a lot. Immediately, I ran in between them and pushed at my father. I did not know why they were fighting but after that my life was full of fear and dread.

I was born into an intercultural family. My mother was an indigenous woman from the Pinuyumayani tribe in Taiwan and my father was Taiwanese. I was given a boy's name because my father was eager to have a boy in order to get an heir for his family. Unfortunately (for my father) I am a girl, with my mother's beautiful eyes. This means I do not look like my father's daughter, which he did not like at all.

In the early years of my life I was happy to be with my family. My friends made jokes about me looking like an indigenous person with darker skin and bigger eyes than them, yet I really enjoyed growing up with two different families. I did not know it was really hard for my mother to be married to a Taiwanese with a different culture.

After several years of domestic violence we could not stand my father any more. Instead of keeping silent, we moved to my mother's hometown to stay with my grandmother. Life was hard as we did not get any help from my father. Some of our relatives and friends discriminated against us but a

few did support us. Often I would hear my mother crying, regretting she had married a man like my father simply for his economic situation and because he had a good job. She felt she was worthless and complained to God. Sometimes she drank with her friends till midnight. Two of my sisters stopped their studies because of this situation. Finally my mother got a job and tried to start a new life. Tragically, when I was 18, she was hit by a car and lost her life. I still remember how a week before the car accident she told me she would like to see me study at university. 'Be an independent girl. Do not only count on a man,' she said to me. I did not know that that these would be the last words she would share with me.

To this day I can still hear my father shouting at my mother saying she was a stupid and despicable woman. I also cannot forget the beatings on my body that I suffered going between my parents when they were fighting with each other. Even now I sometimes ask God why my mother had to endure the difficulty of being an indigenous woman in a patriarchal society.

As a young woman who grew up with two different cultural backgrounds, it is a challenge to know which culture to identify myself with. Am I Taiwanese or an indigenous person in Taiwan? There are many difficulties in choosing to be indigenous.

The story of Hagar in the Bible reminds me of my mother's situation, a woman from an indigenous society who was a kind of 'maidservant' to my father. Because of the discrimination of Taiwanese to indigenous people, my father thought it was easy and necessary to control my mother. How sad it was to see the discrimination of one of my parents by the other! How sad it is that we are still experiencing this discrimination in our daily lives and in the churches today.

In the story of Hagar, God said to her, 'Don't be afraid.' God's promises, love and protection were just as available to her as to anyone else. Yet, in many of our churches today the women's main role is still a kind of maidservant. Indigenous women and new immigrants have a hard time in our churches. Even if there is a position available it will not be given to an indigenous person. We need to pay more attention to marginalised women.

Indigenous female pastors are respected in Taiwan because they have more education than other women. But there needs to be more opportunities for our women who are marginalised, not just as clergy but in all kinds of participation in the church's mission.

I like to think that if my mother was here she might be smiling.

Fiftieth Anniversary Video: Can You Help?

2007 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Christian Conference of Asia, which began at a conference of representatives of churches from Asia in March 1957 at Prapat in Indonesia.

To commemorate this occasion CCA, among other things, intends to produce a video on the history and activities of the organisation. We are looking for pictures and music to use in this video.

If you have any historical photographs of CCA activities, we would be interested in receiving them.

We are also interested in music for the soundtrack of the video. If you think you have some non-vocal music that would be suitable for the purpose we would be most interested to hear from you.

Photographs and music should be sent to Video Project, Christian Conference of Asia, PO Box 183, Chiang Mai, Muang, Chiang Mai 50000, Thailand.

Email inquiries may be made to Geoff Alves at gvalves@cca.org.hk.

Fiftieth Anniversary Logo



This is the logo to be used for the Christian Conference of Asia's fiftieth anniversary in 2007.

The logo was designed by Sawai Chinnawong. The feather of the '5' depicts the movement of the Holy Spirit in CCA. The different segments of the zero depict the dynamics of people of different faiths. It shows how interfaith relations and co-operation can produce unity. These surround the CCA.

New Hong Kong Cardinal



In February Pope Benedict XVI nominated Joseph Zen, the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, as a cardinal. He was formally elevated to the cardinalate at a ceremony at the Vatican on 24 March. Following his return to Hong Kong, a reception was held at the Caritas Centre. Pictured here with Cardinal Zen at the reception from CCA are Mr Tony Waworuntu, executive secretary, Dr Prawate Khid-arn, general secretary, and Rt Rev. Thomas Soo Yee Po, honorary treasurer.

Cardinal Zen is considered one of the Pope's most important advisors for the Vatican's China policies. He has been a prominent figure in Hong Kong, thanks to his frankness and his courage in denouncing injustice and hypocrisy and his active support of Hong Kong's democratic movement. He said his appointment signalled the importance the Pope attached to China, calling it 'a sign of special benevolence of the Holy Father for the Chinese people'. Born in Shanghai in 1932, the cardinal has long wished to see a rapprochement between the Vatican and Beijing.

New Address

When the move of the Christian Conference of Asia from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai, Thailand, in July 2006, please note that all communications with CCA should be at its new address:

Christian Conference of Asia
c/o Payap University
Muang, Chiang Mai 50000, Thailand
Tel: + 66 (0)53 243906/243907
Fax: + 66 (0)53 247303

Postal address:
PO Box 183, Chiang Mai, Muang, Chiang Mai 50000, Thailand

The website and email addresses remain the same.

James Haire, AM

The Rev. Prof. James Haire, a member of CCA's general committee, was honoured by the Australian government recently when he was made a member of the Order of Australia. The award was made for 'service to religion and to the community through the promotion of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, the Uniting Church in Australia and theological education.'

Our New Printer



For many years *CCA News* has been printed by Clear-Cut Publishing and Printing Company in Hong Kong. CCA acknowledges the fine work done by Anita Sieh and her staff for many CCA publications. With the move of the CCA office to Chiang Mai, Thailand, *CCA News* is being printed in Chiang Mai by Wanida Press. We are pleased to welcome Wanida Kamsarn, pictured here (right) with his wife.

Least Coin

2006 is the fiftieth anniversary year of the Fellowship of the Least Coin, a global ecumenical movement of prayer of Christian women, based on the vision of Mrs Shanti Solomon of India. Each participant puts aside a 'least coin' every time she prays for justice, peace and reconciliation. The funds collected in this way are used for projects for women and children (gender justice, literacy, health, poverty etc.) around the world. The theme for FLC's jubilee year is 'Celebrating the Jubilee, Visioning the future, Living the Jubilee.'

Interfaith Intern



Wahyudy Karaeng is an intern working as the assistant coordinator of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum, based in Hong Kong. He is a Muslim young person who was born and grew up in Manado, in North Sulawesi in Indonesia. His education involved hotel accommodation, Islamic studies and graphic design. He applied for a job with a newspaper, the *Mahut Post*, and worked on it in Manado for a year. When the paper opened a new branch in Ternate in the North Moluccas, he was transferred there. He arrived in Ternate in 1999, to find conflict between Christians and Muslims. So, in 2004, with a number of friends, both Christian and Muslim, he started and became director of a local NGO for young people. They obtained a grant from UNICEF and other organisations and began with two programs.

The first involved interviewing young people in the Moluccas (not an easy job—there are 364 islands) about their feelings before, during and after conflicts, then telling the government what the youth thought and making proposals. There are many different reasons for conflict and violence, but by listening to the voices of the people, their family backgrounds and experiences, methods of conflict resolution can be employed.

The second program used graffiti as a tool for reconciliation. The NGO, Kalesang, conducted a competition in Ternate involving groups of young people that included both female and male, Muslim and Christian. The NGO became very well known in the society and by the government, which invited them to work with them and other NGOs.

Yudi became involved with CCA when he was invited to a meeting in Jakarta, and met Max Ediger, who asked him to come to Hong Kong to work on issues on peacebuilding and overcoming violence, writing and documenting, using his newspaper and graphic design skills. The appointment is for one year.

Asia Sunday Focus on Nepal Sharing Hope

Commemorating the birth of the CCA, Asia Sunday was observed on 28 May 2006. A time for Asian churches and ecumenical partners to pray together, this year's Asia Sunday focused on Nepal, one of the countries in the region with a vibrant movement for democracy.

The theme, 'Help us pray and work for peace', echoes the request of Dr K.B. Rokaya, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Nepal, among the youngest members of CCA, for solidarity in prayer and in action, in witness and service.

Asian churches, national councils, ecumenical partners and friends observed Asia Sunday through:

- services highlighting the people and churches of Nepal,
- a special offering for the work of the Nepalese churches—with youth and women, and for ecumenical theological education of more Nepalese pastors,
- learning about the challenges faced by Nepali churches and people,
- praying for the churches and the National Council of Churches in Nepal.

CCA is also encouraging churches and national councils to make a special offering for the work of the young NCC as it strives to:

- foster unity among Christians, and encourage them to fulfil their responsibilities and obligations as members of the community and as citizens of the nation,
- study and research the issue of contextualisation of the gospel in order to help Christians in Nepal to be true Christians and at the same time true Nepalese,
- provide scholarships for the training of more ecumenical church workers,
- create an environment in which Christians and people of other religious communities can respect each other and work together in areas of common concern and interest,
- equip members to be actively involved in issues related to human rights, social justice, peace and reconciliation.

In the midst of seeming hopelessness in the world today, the Fifth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS V) will gather and reflect on the theme, 'Sharing Hope for a New World', on 20–26 August. The Divinity School of Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, under the leadership of its director, Rev. Dr Lo Lung-kwong, will host the congress.

The congress will include a one-day Women's Forum on 21 August and a sharing time that evening for women and men participants.

Four speakers on the theme have been lined up: Dr Archie Lee of the Divinity School of Chung Chi (Hong Kong), Dr Anna May Say Pa of Myanmar Institute of Theology (Myanmar), Sr Dr Clemens Mendonca of De Nobili College (India) and Dr Lester Edwin Ruiz of New York Theological Seminary (USA).

An interfaith panel will also share the essence of hope from the perspectives of four religious traditions: Dr Lai Chi Tim on Taoism (Chinese University of Hong Kong), Dr Prabhakar Bhattacharyya on Hinduism (Serampore College in India), Mr Irfan Abubakar on Islam (State Islamic University in Indonesia), and Dr Ms Parichart Suwanbubba on Buddhism (Mahidol University in Thailand).

As in the previous congresses, CATS V will provide time for theologians, educators and scholars to update one another on trends in their various fields of disciplines and to interrogate issues that impact their fields.

Congratulations

Tainan Theological College and Seminary (TTCS) in Taiwan awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree to Dr Prawate Khid-arn, general secretary of CCA, for his contribution to the ecumenical movement in Asia.

Dr Prawate Khid-arn was invited to preach at the annual commencement held at TTCS on 14 June 2006. His theme was 'Being a Living Stone in Asia Today', signifying the role and mission of churches in promoting peace and harmony.

Also during the ceremony Dr Prawate Khid-arn and Rev. Dr Huang Po Ho, the president of TTCS (right), signed a memorandum of covenant to promote theological education in Asia. CCA is also promoting memorandums of covenant with other Asian seminaries.



New UCCP General Secretary

The general assembly of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines elected Bishop Eliezer M. Pascua (left, below) as its new general secretary effective June 2006 during its eighth quadrennial assembly held in Digos City, Davao del Sur, on 24–29 May. The outgoing general secretary Bishop M. Bolocon (right) was named bishop emeritus.

Three incumbent bishops were re-elected—Benjamin G. Barloso of North-west Mindanao, Constante D. Claro of Southeast Mindanao and Ebenezer C. Camino of West Visayas. Three pastors, one a woman, were elected bishops—Jessie S. Suarez of Southern Luzon, Dulce Pia-Rose of East Visayas and Marino Ib. Inong of Northern Luzon.

The general assembly focused on the theme, 'Living Together in the Household of God'. In the wake of brutal kill-

Advanced Leadership Training and Workshop



In conjunction with CCA, the WCC Asia Desk and the WCC Scholarship Program jointly organised an advanced leadership training and workshop to provide space for deeper analysis and knowledge and to strengthen leadership capacity of younger leaders of churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia. The program was held 10–13 June 2006 at Caritas Lodge in Hong Kong. Around twenty-five young leaders from fourteen countries in Asia took part in the program.

The participants spent a day at CCA Centre on 12 June to attend the 'moving on' service and to learn and experience more about CCA.



ings of several church workers and lay members who were human rights advocates and peace activists in the country, the assembly resolved to call for a dialogue between the military and the national president, together with leaders of religious groups and ecumenical partners.

New Staff in Chiang Mai



Pictured here are the new CCA support staff in Chiang Mai, who started on 1 June. They are (from left), Mr Nont Mahittarrithigrai (finance), Ms Warunsara Duangseang (secretary), Ms Patchayotai Boontama (secretary), Ms Woranuch Pramualkarn (secretary), Mrs Sirinan Harnyut (finance), Ms Warunee Klinsukhon (secretary), Mrs Ahpa Yaichit (housekeeper), Mr Songkiat Tungyen (manager) and MSgt Witaya Makasuk (driver).

Farewell to Hong Kong



On 10 June 2006 a service of remembrance and thanksgiving was held at the CCA Centre in Hong Kong as a symbolic action of moving on to Thailand. Over ninety people gathered in the reception area of the centre—present and former staff, officers, family members and friends of the Christian Conference of Asia. In her prayer at the service Wong Wai Ching, a former president off CCA summed up the feelings of those present:



Bishop John Samuel

‘We gather here with pride and honour for the history that CCA has journeyed, from Bangkok, Singapore, Manila, Osaka and Hong Kong to the next stop in Chiang Mai. We are proud of the journey not just because of the success in the mission God has asked of us, but for the rich gifts and talents God has showered on us through enthusiastic people, ecumenical churches, grassroots communities, partner organisations and, not least, the humble shelter in the village of Pak Tin in Hong Kong. Journeying together we have memories

of happiness and grief, excitement and disillusionment, personnel difficulties and great leadership, financial challenges and never-ending support. Many of us have come and gone, providing our services and being rewarded bountifully along the way.

‘In the past thirteen years we have had the special blessings of experiencing great gifts, memories and hope here at the CCA Centre. We have enjoyed the support of the ecumenical networks and church leadership in Hong Kong. We have shared change and transition, politically and

financially, with the people of Hong Kong. We lived through the SARS epidemic. These changes and transitions also symbolise the change and transition of CCA. Now it is time for CCA to move on. We trust God, who brought us here from Singapore, will continue to lead us in the journey ahead. With God, CCA will continue to move on, to wherever he calls us.’

Former CCA general secretary Bishop John Samuel, a ‘midwife’ of the CCA Centre in Hong Kong, brought historical memories about the centre, especially God’s blessing through the support of churches and ecumenical organisations.

Chan Beng Seng, a former CCA youth secretary, shared many memories, socially and personally. With a small community in the compound, a spirit of fellowship and friendship existed through barbecues, worship and fellowship. Nature—monkeys, snakes, dogs, cats, mosquitoes and various kinds of birds are all part of CCA’s legacy.

In his moving on message, Archbishop Peter Kwong of the Anglican Church in Hong Kong reminded everyone present that CCA is not just a registered office or organisation, but a movement of the church, the people of God. Moving from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai becomes another ‘spiritual development’ within Asian churches, and ‘wherever CCA moves, Asian churches are moving with us’.



Archbishop Peter Kwong

Staff, officers and interns at the ‘moving on’ service

