

cca news



Women in partnership for justpeace

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Shaping progress



For many years, women's organisations, governments and public bodies around the world have worked tirelessly to promote women's equality and recognise their role in social development and sustainability. International women's day traces its beginning, when over 15,000 women marched through the New York City in 1908 demanding shorter working hours, better salaries and voting rights. However, the first International Women's Day was commemorated on 8 March 1911 in Denmark. Today, numerous organisations around the world are already started planning for the International Women's day centenary celebrations in 2011.

Real progress can be seen in the enhancement of women's status and equal opportunities in the fields of education, health, legislation and policy making. Some governments even have established quotas for women's political representation. Yet, nowhere in the world can women claim to have the same rights and opportunities as men. The world's 1.3 billion absolute poor population is women. On average, women receive 30 to 40 percent lower salaries than men for the same work.

Women in Asia continue to confront systematic discrimination and abuse, often with little hope of redress. According to Human Rights Watch, gender-based violence is insidious and rampant in Asia, like the rest of the world. Prevalent forms of violence include sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence, female infanticide, women trafficking, forced marriages and so on. Millions of Asian migrant women face discrimination, physical and sexual abuse at work places. Women from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines who work as domestic workers in the Middle East, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore, are only few examples.

CCA through its program Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) is looking forward to celebrate Women's Day, to promote peace and social

sustainable development with the equal participation of women. There will be a special emphasis on acknowledging and recognising the contribution of women in international peace and security process.

In church, women's groups have always played an important role in the spiritual and institutional life. The contributions of women has been significant and prominent in the ecumenical movement. In Bangladesh, the most active groups are of women in the church. In the Church of England, an organisation called WATCH-Women and the Church has taken initiatives to ensure women's place in the church alongside men as clergy. It promotes the full equality of women and men in the church as part of God's will for its people, which reflects the inclusive heart of Christian scripture and tradition.

Women's empowerment is one way to reach our mission and build communities of peace for all. We as churches need to continue with the baptismal vision that, 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).

So let us make a difference.
Make everyday, International Women's Day.
Let us struggle to ensure that the future for women is bright, equal, safe and rewarding.

International Women's Day recognises women's diverse contribution towards development and inspires their potential. It is an opportunity for us to reflect on what women have achieved so far, and consider what still remains to be done. Unless the men and women work together to ensure the equal rights of women, lasting solutions to the world's social, economic and political problems are unlikely to be found, therefore the theme 'Shaping Progress' needs to be worked on, to fulfil the dream of a better world.

—Prawate Khid-arn

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'Shaping Progress' is a global theme for the International Women's day 2008 focusing on gender equality at all social levels
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Who will roll the stone away?

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?' But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. [Mark 16:1-4, NIV]

Who will roll the stone away? This question seems to carry a note of helplessness and despair that seemed to have engulfed the women disciples. Yes, I call them disciples because they had faithfully followed Jesus, helping him in his ministry and providing their resources (Luke 8:3). They must have been there to keep vigil until he breathed his last on the cross. In order to carry out the custom of anointing the dead body of their dearly beloved teacher and friend with spices, these women went to the tomb early morning after Sabbath, not knowing how they could even get to the body - for the entrance to the tomb was tightly sealed.

The tomb of Jesus was sealed in three ways. One, through a large stone rolled against the tomb. Normally stone covers for tombs weighed somewhere between 1-1/2 to 2 tons or 1,361 to 1,814 kg., so levers had to be used to move them.

Two, through the Roman guard unit stationed at the tomb. Normally a guard unit consisted of four soldiers. These Roman guards were strictly disciplined fighting men who knew that failure on duty was punishable by death, torture and other humiliating methods.

Three, through the Roman seal affixed to the stone. This seal symbolised the power and authority of the Roman Empire. Moving the stone from the tomb's entrance would have broken the seal, thereby deserving automatic execution by crucifixion upside down.

The gospel accounts in Mark, Luke and John do not include a description of how the stone was rolled away and who was responsi-

ble for it. They simply mention that the stone had been rolled away. Only Matthew's account mentions a severe earthquake and that an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, rolled away the stone and sat on it.

Who will roll the stone away? Where Jesus' death was concerned, the stone had already been rolled away. He is not dead but alive! Let us not look for him among the dead for he is among the living.

What does this message mean for the many people who are suffering in Asia, especially for Asian women who continue to face the heavy stone of oppression, which is often justified by our Asian cultures and religions?

The church's traditional theology states that 'the death of Jesus atoned for human sin, saved the world, and is the model of loving self-sacrifice.' This atonement theology underpins the common advice to victims of abuse and violence: 'Just bear your pain; it is nothing compared to the pain suffered by Christ on our behalf;' or 'Never mind if you suffer now (or that you are poor and deprived now) for you will be greatly rewarded in heaven.' If not other people's advice, the suffering victims themselves have been taught to rationalise and make a self-judgment: 'I must have done something wrong or bad to deserve this suffering.'

Theology that keeps women and other marginalised people under the yoke of oppression is not a liberating theology. Any theology that is not liberating falls short of Jesus' purpose to bring fullness of life to all. Any theology that reinforces oppression falls short of the biblical affirmation that women and men are created in the image of God. It is

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Let us not look for him among the dead for he is among the living

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therefore important to critically revisit some of our theological affirmations. One of the most problematic theological affirmations we have is on atonement, which seems to glorify or romanticise suffering. As the verse in 'How Great Thou Art' goes:

*And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing;
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.*

If this is so, there seems to be something suicidal about Jesus' death: that God sent him to die? That Jesus was gladly bearing my sin? Now really I scarce can take that in.

The concept of atonement is rooted in the Jewish celebration of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) during which the high priest offered a sacrifice of atonement for the forgiveness of Israel's sins (see Leviticus 16). That idea has been adopted and 'Christianised' by applying it to Jesus' death on the cross. The difference is that in our Christianized version, Jesus, the holiest and highest priest, did not only offer an animal sacrifice but his very own life as atonement for sinful people.

Why would a supposedly loving and just God, who is the source and giver of life, demand the offering of life? Why would God want to be appeased by a sacrifice of life? What makes this loving and just God blood-thirsty? Is it really through Christ's dying on the cross that we are saved from sin? How can that make sense to the many women in Asia who continue to suffer from the yoke of oppression?

Theological affirmations that are related to the notion of atonement help to make us feel guilty or remorseful about our sinfulness; and therefore to be grateful for Jesus' sacrifice for our sake. But what about our being sinned-against as women and other marginalised groups in Asia?

Instead of focusing on atonement alone, it is very important to link the death and resurrection of Christ with the very reason for his coming to the world. Jesus did not come simply to die on the cross for us (that is simply suicidal). Rather, Jesus' death was the result of the strong opposition from the powers that be to what he came here for: to initiate and demonstrate a movement towards fullness of life in the reign of God.

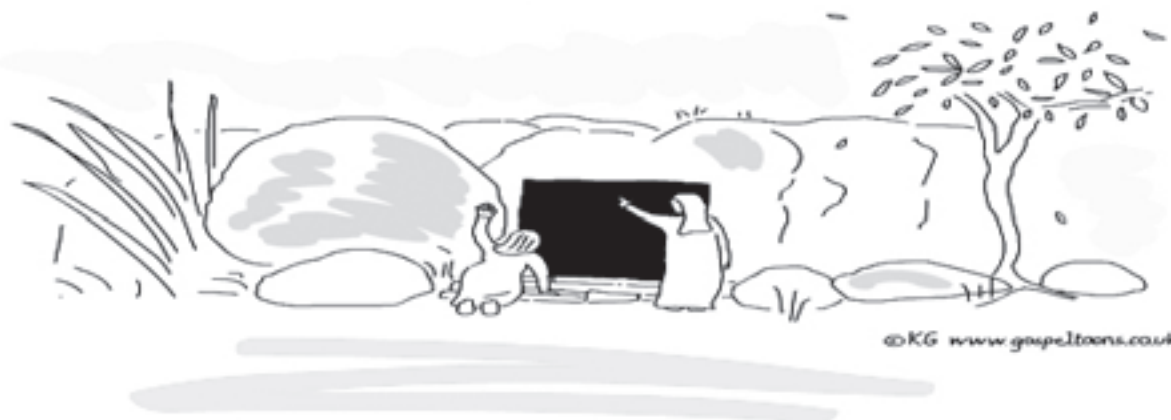
In this context, it is not enough to understand salvation only from the traditional perspective of the sinner; it should also be seen from the perspective of the sinned-against: the marginalised and oppressed peoples in Asia, whose oppression is not a fault of their own but of structures and systems, including cultures and religions that are so patriarchal and hierarchical. By oppressed I mean the suffering Asian women, poor, indigenous people, the disabled, people of different sexual orientation, lower castes, to name a few. For them, a more hopeful and helpful emphasis of Christ's salvific act is on his having come that 'they might have life in its fullness.' (John 10:10)

It is important to understand the cross, on the one hand, as a reminder of the human capacity to sin, to abuse and victimise others, and to defile the sacred. But it is not completely true that Jesus the Christ was, on the cross, gladly bearing our burden. We remember his pain and agony, his tears and blood.

We can also look at the cross as God's statement that just as Jesus died once and for all, no one deserves to suffer anymore injustice, discrimination, or oppression. Moreover, we can look at the cross as a symbol of the human ability to take risks for a higher cause - that of claiming our God-given right to fullness of life and of making that available for others as well. The offering of life in solidarity with all who hunger for justice and a fuller life always involves risks. Like Jesus, we who follow his way knowingly take the risks, not with the hope of dying, but with the hope of bringing about the better and fuller life that all deserve to have.

Who will roll the stone away? The stone of oppression that keeps women and other vulnerable groups in a dehumanized position remains entrenched till today. It is well guarded by patriarchal cultural traditions and sealed by religious teachings or justifications. But through Asian feminist theologising, many women and also some conscientised men are gently but firmly chipping this gigantic stone. In Asia we say that together, women and men can and must roll this stone away. When we ask, 'Who will roll the stone away?' we are inviting others to join us.

—Hope S. Antone



Indigenous women's spirituality of justpeace

Indigenous Asian women's affirmation

We affirm the rights of all people:

To life and cultural expression

To education, health and employment

To prosperity and security

To participation in decision making and self government

We affirm the rights of people to chart their own destiny:

To be liberated from the triple burdens of gender, class and race

To participate in the creation of just, sustainable and peaceful society free from racial discrimination

Birth pangs of IWALT project

The birth pangs of 'Indigenous Women's Alternative Leadership for Transformation' (IWALT) project in Asia have been stimulated by this affirmation of indigenous/tribal/ethnic women leaders in a workshop held in Taiwan on 12-19 September 2000. It was re-echoed in the next workshop in Chiang Mai in 2003 and in the pre-Assembly women's forum in 2005. Unpacking the gender perspective of sexism, classism and racism in Asia through sharing of life stories, feminist analysis and theologizing, and Bible study, indigenous/Dalit women reaffirmed that there are many forms of oppression in their separate lives but a common story of exclusion and marginalization exacerbated by globalisation. However, even in such context, indigenous/Dalit/ethnic minority Asian women have tremendous spirituality, skills, knowledge and feminist tools of theologizing to transform society and build communities of peace. Hence there was a need to sharpen such skills. It is with this birth pang that IWALT was born in Asia.

Journey of IWALT

IWALT is a three-year project of CCA in partnership with World Council of Churches, supported by United Church of Canada and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). In 2005-2007 three sub-regional trainings were held in India, Thailand and the Philippines. The final regional follow-up training was organised in Chiang Doi, Thailand on 4-8 February 2008 to bring together in celebration the results (or multiplying effect) of the follow-up activities of the women participants from the three sub-regional workshops. Thirty-two indigenous/Dalit women participated in this training.

Feminist theologizing and re-reading the Bible

Participants at the regional workshop were engaged in feminist theologizing and re-reading of the Bible with their lens as indigenous/Dalit women. Dr Hope Antone (Executive Secretary for CCA-FMU) facilitated the Asian feminist theologizing but



IWALT participants praying for peace

critically locating it in the context of indigenous/Dalit women. In small groups, participants went through the steps of feminist theologizing by naming oppression, identifying agents of oppression, identifying dominant theology and ideology that reinforce oppression, doing feminist critique of religious texts and cultural practices, and planning transformative action. In analyzing the difficulty to name oppression, Antone shared various attitudes of women to oppression: denial, rationalization, trivialization, judgment, and compassion.

Dr Anna May Say Pa, a renowned indigenous feminist theologian from Burma, gave the keynote address and led a Bible study on feminist leadership. 'Women are more transformational leaders, use power from charisma, interpersonal skills, and hard work, rather than power from the organizational structure, and who lead by attempting to transform the self-interest of the worker to the larger interest of the group,' she said. 'The transformational leaders serve as role models, help others to develop their skills, energize them and motivate them to be more creative,' she added.

Indigenous/Dalit women have unique resources for theologizing - their folk stories, oral traditions and myths. Dr Limatula Longkumer, an indigenous Naga feminist theologian in IWALT claims that 'folklore and oral traditions are indigenous people's expression of faith, beliefs, struggles, sufferings, fears and hopes which have ethical value. Therefore, it is an inevitable tool to understand a society and community - its past, its traditions, culture and worldview, and also to re-read the Bible.'

Limatula sang her folk song retracing the importance of women in Ao Naga tribe in India. 'Women's contribution could not be erased from Ao tribe's history as it is preserved in our folk songs,' she claims. She narrated the story of a wise woman named Ongangla. Though the story is almost lost and it is very difficult to trace her origin and the typical role she played, the fragmented folk song reveals that men folk of the village and warriors took advice from wise woman Ongangla when they were unable to take a decision about where and how they should worship. This story of a woman's wisdom is

a source for Naga feminist theologians to seek justice for Naga women who are discriminated in their own indigenous community.

IWALT participants acknowledged and critiqued many patriarchal and oppressive elements in their folk stories and myths which are often used even in indigenous communities to oppress women. They also acknowledged that many of the folk stories and myths are not known by the younger generation of indigenous women. The Christianization of indigenous people in Asia by western colonizers contributed to the wiping away from the memory of indigenous people their folk stories and oral traditions which were judged as evil, pagan, and contradictory to Christianity and modernity. Maureen Loste, an indigenous woman leader from the Philippines, rightly said, 'There is a need to train indigenous women to pen down their oral traditions, spirituality and folk stories as resources to interpret the Bible, engage in advocacy and campaign in the process of liberation. Or else our stories, traditions and culture will be erased from the memory of our young people.'

While rereading the Bible, especially the creation story in Genesis 2, Ten Nar Sein, a Lahu woman from Burma, said, 'According to Lahu creation story, both men and women came out together from a bottleneck gourd. So man and woman are equal in Lahu tradition'. Other women had a similar indigenous creation story of both man and woman coming out together from a bamboo plant. Indigenous women's 'herstory'

“ Asian indigenous women's 'herstory' is a crucial aspect of feminist theology for seeking justpeace spiritualities ”



Lahu women holding the gourd while sharing Lahu creation myth

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An important aspect of IWALT is to promote indigenous women's right to life and dignity

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Asian indigenous women's 'herstory' is a crucial source of indigenous spirituality and feminist theologizing tool for seeking justpeace. As a part of the regional follow-up training curriculum, an exposure program was organized to interact with indigenous grassroots women leaders in Lahu and Karen villages in Thailand. Through this community integration session, IWALT participants could learn and share from each other's 'herstory'.

Namisi, a village Lahu woman, narrated her story. She is a leader and choir leader in her church. Twenty-four years ago, she and her husband and children and many other people migrated from Burma to Thailand. She lost her three children and husband in this process of migration. 'My last surviving son committed suicide last year,' she shared. 'Please pray for me so that God will give me strength to overcome my sorrow and have peace in my soul. I want to go on singing Lahu songs of praise to God and teach village children'. Her story reveals the depth of indigenous women's spirituality in the midst of despair felt by migrating indigenous communities.

Towards self-reliance: handful of rice

The group discussed how they can continue promoting IWALT and multiply its effect. Ruth Raksham, a Garo from Bangladesh, and Langsanpui, a Mizo from India, shared how women keep a handful of rice every time they cook. Such handfuls of rice are later collected from every house and sold to raise funds for women's training program. Such contribution of Asian indigenous women in kind cannot be compared with dollars or pounds but it reveals the power of Asian indigenous women to contribute to grassroots women's ecumenical movement.

Inspirations from IWALT

Participants shared amazing stories of multiplying effect and outcome of IWALT in their local communities. In India, the indigenous students in the seminary wanted IWALT to be part of their college curriculum and a book, *No More Sorrow in God's Garden of Justice*, edited by Limatula Longkumer was published. In Malaysia, Elizabeth Enjut now incorporates feminist theologizing in

her pastoral ministry with the Iban long house community and in her teaching at a seminary.

All women working together

Gabrielle Russell Mundine, an Australian married to a Torres Islander, shared the challenges in striving for human rights of Aboriginal people in Australia and in helping non-aboriginal people to overcome their stereotypes about aboriginal people as 'backward' and 'primitive'. She regrets that oppressors have oppressed the aboriginals for so many generations, conditioning them to think 'that their brain is so small to fit in a match box'. She shared how the National Council of Churches' in Australia (NCCA) is engaged in the campaign, *Make Indigenous People's Poverty History* and towards a public apology to the 'stolen generations' of Aboriginal people in Australia.

Where to go from here?

The IWALT training completed its three-year project cycle but participants strategised together on the way forward. Among their recommendations, they proposed that CCA, along with partners, continue to promote capacity enhancement of indigenous, Dalit and aboriginal women in Asia and Australia through writing and theologizing workshops.

The ecumenical movement has tremendous potentials for promoting Asian indigenous women's leadership development and recognising their contributions in decision making process. CCA is thankful to World Council of Churches and CIDA for this partnership.

—Moumita Biswas

Core Group meets

CCA discusses challenges faced by Asian churches with ecumenical partners

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Core Group played a significant liaison role between CCA and its ecumenical partners

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The CCA Round Table Core Group meeting took place on 29-30 January 2008. The members reviewed the minutes and recommendations from the last Round Table Meeting held in 2006, and addressed concerns and challenges faced by CCA, its member churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia. The meeting was attended by Dr Barbara Ramsperger from Europe, Rev. Johan Hasselgren from Scandinavia, Rev. Dr James Vijayakumar from North America, Dr. Mathews George from WCC, and Dr. Prawate Khid-arn and Rev. Dr Rienzie Perera from CCA.

'The Core Group was formed in 2004, when the first Round Table meeting was held in Hong Kong. It played a significant liaison role between CCA and its ecumenical partners, meeting once in two or three years. I acknowledge the role and contribution of the Core Group in strengthening and challenging CCA for more active and effective imple-

mentation of its programs. The Core Group has also been a support in creating linkages and mutual understanding between CCA and its ecumenical partners.' Dr. Prawate Khid-arn said in the meeting. Dr. Mathews George further emphasised that, 'The Core Group aims to strengthen and support CCA with good will, mutual understanding, closer coordination and cooperation.'

The meeting included sharing of CCA updates from the past year, program overview for 2008 and beyond, and budget and financial issues.

Areas of concern

The Core Group encouraged the program plans to be implemented according to the context of emerging and challenging realities of Asia. There was an agreement on the contents and impact evaluation of the programs to be approached systematically. The ways on how inter-cluster coordination and joint implementation can extend participation and help minimise the cost, was also discussed. External evaluation was considered important for CCA in order to move effectively ahead to cope with the challenges of new emerging global and regional issues in the ecumenical movement. Enhanced Asian financial contribution as part of the holistic ministry, ownership of CCA member churches and the regional ecumenical movement were emphasised.

The Core Group agreed to hold the next CCA Round Table meeting in February 2009 in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

—Prawate Khid-arn



Rienzie Perera and Prawate Khid-arn with WCC General Secretary, Sam Kobia and members of the Core Group at the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva

Theological workshop

An interfaith sharing on naming, unmasking and engaging with principalities and powers in Sri Lanka

Around fifty participants gathered at Hotel Thilanka for a two-day theological workshop on 'Naming, Unmasking and Engaging with Principalities and Powers' on 7-8 February in Kandy, Sri Lanka. The intention to bring together people from diverse national backgrounds including theologians, representatives of secular and other religious organisations, was more than well met.

The participants, who came from different religious backgrounds and 'levels' of society, mirrored the situation of Sri Lanka. Participants from the grassroots, plantations in North-East and Southern Sri Lanka shared their experiences of violence. They shared experiences of disappearance, abduction, abuse and rape. Reports on the 'military occupation' in the North and North-Eastern parts of Sri Lanka, where the Tamils are settled, were shared. With these reports the workshop was able to bring out concrete examples and experiences from reality, which are materials for critical theological reflections.

Surprising for a 'theological workshop', it began with a Buddhist reflection presented by Mr Raja Dharmapala, a Sinhalese Buddhist scholar. He introduced four types of people within society. One, a person not doing anything good to oneself and to others; and doing nothing for improving or developing oneself. Second, someone not doing anything for oneself but doing every effort for the wellbeing of others and the society. Third, a person, doing only good things for oneself, but totally ignoring others and the society. Fourth, a person doing the best for oneself and the society. He reflected from a Buddhist perspective on the concepts of peace and justice in conflict situations. So if we are to contribute to the society, the first priority lies on personal development and improvement. Individual contributions, even if they are good, are not 'good enough', unless they are coming from a 'good' person. This shows the significance of considering the inner strength of a society, when talking about overcoming violence and peace.



Participants at the theological workshop in Kandy, Sri Lanka

Rev. Ebenezer Joseph presented a Bible study on 'the man possessed by an unclean spirit' (Mark 5). He focused on the symbolic meaning of the name of the unclean spirit, 'Legion'. Claiming that this is to be regarded as the Roman army unit, which was stationed in that area, he emphasised the courage of Jesus, when he told his disciples to go together 'to the other side of the lake' (Mark 35). This biblical approach to the theme of the workshop illustrated through Jesus shows that it takes a lot of courage to name, unmask and engage with powers. Switching to 'the widow's offering and destruction of the temple' (Luke 21), Rev. Ebenezer Joseph showed the naming and unmasking process through the words of Jesus. He shared how Jesus accused the structural and institutional ways of temple offerings, as the people were forced to give offerings at the temple, even with the little money they had. He concluded with a well known story of Abraham, who was called to go beyond his nationhood and become a blessing to all.

Mr. Ajith Rupesinghe's presentation on 'Global Regional impact on Sri Lanka' urged to go beyond domestic boundaries. He shared critical reflections on globalisation process, and the global US hegemony initiated by the 'war on terror'. He pointed out that the conflict situation in Sri Lanka should not be dealt within domestic boundaries only. A worldwide network to tell the truth, instead of distorted stories and propaganda, needs to be initiated. This was adopted later in the Plan of Action.

Churches also have to reflect themselves, when going forward in their efforts for peace. This was a clear point of Dr. Shirley Wijesinghe. He pointed out the distortions and shifts in mere spiritual levels of liberation. However, he emphasised that worship is a celebration of liberation, which has its origin in the experience of exodus.

Another shift of point of view on the theme to global level was brought by Dr. M.P. Joseph. In his very critical analysis, he introduced many aspects of the distorted image of the world. He shared on how the whole mechanism, in which the world is embedded, follows the idea of power and is dominated by the super powers.

Another input from 'outside' Sri Lanka, was given by Rev. Dr. Sungkook Park who shared Korean experience of 'Remembering 3rd April 1948', which included reflections on overcoming violence and struggles for survival.

Beside these theological and analytical inputs, there was a sharing of experiences from plantations, rural and urban areas, which moved the hearts of the participants.

The workshop introduced the participants with several ways of thinking and reflecting on the problem. Experiences of suffering and discrimination, followed by critical social analysis moved concrete life stories to a level of objectivity and dispassionate reflections. Theological and ethical sharing helped and encouraged participants to engage in the whole matter with religious values. Along with contributions from Christian side, similar view points came from Muslims and Buddhists. This strengthened the confidence of solidarity among religions to engage in self-reflection.

After a very tight two-day's schedule, all participants agreed to form a core group to follow up the plans, which were categorised in immediate, short and long term activities. In a situation of conflict, discrimination and disappearance, the workshop gave a trusted space to share pains, sufferings, critiques as well as constructive ideas.

With the closing act a very vital and effective workshop came finally to its end. However, the concern remains about those who may suffer from the frequent and arbitrary controls of the many forces at security check-points all over the country. May God guide their way through life and give them and all the people in Sri Lanka wisdom to live the freedom and rejoice in God's image.

—Park Sungkook

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Sharing experiences from plantations, rural and urban areas moved the hearts of the participants

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Asia Sunday 2008

Churches cannot remain passive spectators to the elimination of Article 9 in Japanese Constitution

Every year since 1974, on Sunday before the Pentecost, member churches and councils of CCA observe Asia Sunday to commemorate the birth of CCA, then the East Asia Christian Conference. This year, Asia Sunday falls on 4 May. Asia Sunday is a time for CCA constituency and partners to pray together on a particular issue or a member church in need. This year, the focus is on Japan and the theme is 'Peacemaking in Asia and the Realization of Article 9.'

The focus on Japan is CCA's response to the request of the National Christian Council of Japan for solidarity in their struggle to keep, observe and actualise Article 9 in their Japanese Constitution.

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It is clear that Japan would become a threat to peace and security in Asia and the Pacific if Article 9 were eliminated

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Article 9 is a 'No War' clause of the Japanese Constitution. It took effect on 3 May 1947, immediately following World War II, which claimed over fifty million lives through the atomic bombs (A-bombs) of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Through Article 9, the Japanese government formally renounces war as a right of sovereignty and the use of military force to settle international disputes. The article also states that military forces with war potential will not be maintained. Thus, it forbids Japan from maintaining an army, navy or air force. Here is how Article 9 is worded in the Japanese Constitution:

'Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.'

'In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognised.'

Article 9 may be the result of the hard and painful lessons from the cruelty of war, the A-bombs, and when military force is used to settle disputes. It can also be an expression of Japan's 'enormous responsibility for having continuously pursued a war of invasion' and a resolve to 'work towards realising a global vision' of peace [from an Appeal from the Article Nine Association]. It must be remembered that there are peace-loving Japanese who are working very hard to counter their government's efforts to play down if not erase from history (and the educational textbooks) Japan's war of aggression and its accompanying ills such as forcing many Asian women to become 'comfort women' to service the Japanese soldiers. For many Japanese people,

Article 9 is a firm pledge to the people in Japan and Asia not to wage war and military invasion ever again.

However, the move to revise the Constitution, particularly Article 9, seeks to turn Japan into a war-waging country. This change is clearly connected to the global realignment of the US defense strategy in the Asia and Pacific region with the aim of consolidating the defense structure of what the US has called 'arc of instability' from East Europe over the Middle East and India to East Asia. This realignment means strengthened military cooperation ranging from Japan's commitment to full participation in ballistic missile defense, search and destroy operations, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, counter-terrorism, including fingerprinting of visitors to the US and Japan.

With its very strategic location, Japan has been lured to enter into a bilateral agreement with the USA in May 2006, allowing the transfer of the global headquarters of the First Army from Washington to Camp Zama near Tokyo, and for Japan's Self Defense Forces to be deployed overseas. This means a unification of both forces and Japan's full collaboration with the US global 'war on terror'. Moreover, efforts to strengthen the sense of 'nationalism' or 'patriotism' of Japanese people have resulted in the amendment to the Fundamental Law on Education, which is patriotic-centric.

It is clear that Japan would become a threat to peace and security in Asia and the Pacific if Article 9 were eliminated. In the light of these dangerous moves in Japan, we cannot remain as passive spectators. We, the religious community, will affirm the realisation of peace by non-violence and will act on the basis of our faith. We will further tackle the urgent tasks of keeping and putting life into Article 9 together with people throughout the world.

This call for peace is contained in the background material prepared by the religious community in Japan for the Asia Inter-religious Conference on Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and Peace in Asia was held on 29 November-1 December 2007 in Tokyo.

Meanwhile, calling on all Japanese citizens to come together and protect the Japanese constitution from the so-called 'consti-

tutional revision', the Article 9 Association offers an alternative path to peace:

Based on Article 9, Japan needs to develop ties of friendship and cooperation with the peoples of Asia and other regions, and change a diplomatic stance that only prioritizes a military alliance with the United States. Japan must play an active role in the tide of world history by exercising its autonomy and acting in a pragmatic manner. It is precisely because of Article 9 that Japan can engage its partner nations in peaceful diplomacy while respecting their various positions, and collaborate with them in the fields of economy, culture, science and technology.

The CCA member churches and Christian council in Japan are part of the ongoing movement to keep and realise Article 9. They asked for Asia Sunday 2008 to focus on this issue with the hope that other member churches and councils in Asia can express solidarity with them in their struggle. They also hope that this struggle can provide lessons for other countries in Asia and the world - after all we are but connected. When one country goes to war with another, we are all affected. When there is a lack of peace in one country, the rest are affected. Indeed, the realisation of Article 9 in the Japanese Constitution can serve as a mirror for other countries to look into their respective Constitutions in order to strive to keep or make them peace Constitutions for the survival of the human race and for peace all over the world.

—Hope S. Antone

The complete Asia Sunday 2008 booklet is downloadable from www.cca.org.hk

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When one country goes to war with another, we are all affected

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Theological training

FMU equips pastors with theological tools in Cambodia

To help enhance their capacity as church workers and leaders in Cambodia, the CCA-Faith, Mission and Unity (FMU) program area has been conducting a training program for sixty selected pastors since 2006. The training has been conducted separately for two batches of thirty each.

A total of twenty-eight pastors and church leaders completed the two-year training and were given certificates of completion at the end of the training held at Kompong Som City in Cambodia on 5-9 November 2007. Of this number nineteen were men and nine women. The second batch will have their turn for a second-part of the training sometime this year.

Courses taken in the last training and their respective facilitators were: Community Reading Bible Study Method, by A Wati Longchar (then CCA-WCC Joint consultant for Ecumenical Theological Education); Mission in Contemporary Context, by H S Wilson (Executive Director of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia); Feminist Theology and Interpretation of the Bible by Hope S. Antone (CCA-FMU Joint Executive Secretary); and Effective Leadership and Church Administration by Solomon Rongpi (theologian from Northeast India).

At the end of the training, participants evaluated their experience and commented on the relevance of the themes. They suggested that a group of twenty people should be selected from the two batches for further training. They asked that community reading Bible study method, feminist theology, and interreligious dialogue be continued. The training can also include resource mobilisation, finance management, effective leadership, worship planning, practical evangelism, and community building. In terms of methodology, they asked that more homework can be given and space provided for practical sessions on preaching related to contemporary issues and challenges, such as environment, peace and reconciliation.

A woman participant expressed the need for more skills in reading the Bible from women's perspective. She said, 'Women have rights just like the men. Men and women are equal for we can do the same things and we are created in the image of God. Feminist theology will help both men and women to understand the various forms of discrimination by culture and tradition and to change their attitude towards women and thereby become agents of transformation'.

With reports from A Wati Longchar and Uy Dy (KCC staff)



Participants in one of the earlier training sessions in Cambodia

Interfaith efforts for peacemaking

Around fifty-six religious leaders from Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hindu faiths got together for CCA's Asian Religious Leaders Conference on 'Being Peacemakers in Asia Today' held on 13-15 November in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

The conference affirmed the role of faiths, religious leaders and individual believers in building peace and transforming the conflicts. It was another step in CCA programs providing inspiration for wider interfaith harmony and cooperation.

The main objective of the conference was to bring issues related to peace and reconciliation into the context of religions. Also to pay attention to the call of religious responsibility in supporting, motivating and enhancing the 'holistic ministry' by equipping faith communities adequately towards solidarity and initiating a proactive role in building peace and justice.

During the conference, participants also took part in building two houses for the poor

in Doi Sakhet District in Thailand. The activity was hosted by Habitat for Humanity. This provided a practical experience for participants to express solidarity with the people.

The statement made by the conference affirmed:

Basic thrust of religion is to nurture life and provide [a society] for human beings to live in harmony with one another and nature. Religions in different ways have laid down the spiritual basis for a just and moral human order. Religious communities have also kept alive social networks of solidarity with all, including the marginalised, discriminated and oppressed.

Participants agreed that CCA set up a follow-up team and design necessary mechanism that can bring recommendations into practice. The full document of the statement can be read on CCA website at www.cca.org.hk.

—Prawate Khid-arn

“ Religions in different ways have laid down the spiritual basis for a just and moral human order

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Struggles and challenges

Churches in Asia strive for peace, reconciliation and democracy

Asian countries witnessed several sociopolitical crises in the past year and continue to face numerous challenges in the struggles for democracy, peace and justice.

CCA member churches in Myanmar, India and Pakistan have been confronted with communal strife, lack of good governance, violent conflicts and threats of religious fundamentalism. Where it was a challenge to voice the demands and needs of Asian churches in an ecumenical voice, the common Christian concerns also became visible over the crucial sociopolitical issues at several occasions.

CCA staff visited Myanmar in November 2007, to hear and share the concerns of

churches in the country. The Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) shared that they were in complete solidarity with the voices for peace. Being part of the religious voice for peace and democracy, they hope to work more closely with ecumenical organisations in order to highlight Christian voice in the peace process in Myanmar. CCA General Secretary Dr Prawate Khid-arn said in his sharing with the churches,

There is much more to be done to support the people of Myanmar, who are marching towards the betterment of the country. Therefore, we appeal to the government to uphold the rights of people for peaceful legitimate expressions for freedom and democracy in Myanmar. We also encourage the government



Dr Prawate Khid-arn (extreme right) and Tony Waworuntu (second from right) from CCA made a pastoral visit to Myanmar churches

to engage in a peaceful dialogue with all people of Myanmar in order to bring stability and build bridges towards reconciliation and healing for all.

Pakistan also remained engulfed in the constant political turmoil and conflict in the past year, till its recent elections in February. The lives of many, including common people and prominent political leaders were affected due to the lack of democracy, constitutional crises and extremist threat. Along with militant conflicts and suicide bombings, one of the greatest tragedies for the country was the assassination of twice elected Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who was seen as a hope for the subtle transition to democracy. Several churches in the country condemned the killing and held memorial services. Mr Victor Azariah, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Pakistan (NCCP), said in his appeal for prayer;

The Christian community along with the whole nation is grieved and have no words to express their feelings on the brutal assassination of Benazir Bhutto. The National Council of Churches, on behalf of Pakistani churches and Christian community, strongly condemns the brutal assassination. We pray for the departed soul and pay condolence to the bereaved family, husband,

children, mother and sister. We earnestly appeal and request the national and global communities, and specifically churches to pray for the welfare of the state of Pakistan, which is passing through a very difficult period in its history and encourage the nation to bear such a big loss.

In India more than fifty churches were damaged and several hundred Christian families were displaced in the state of Orissa. According to the news sources, clashes between Christians and Hindus over the construction of a traditional Christmas arcade in a market resulted into more than eighty Hindu homes and thirty-one Christian homes set on fire in the jungle village.

In response, churches held a press conference at the Temple city of India, on 7 January 2008, which was jointly convened by the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), a grouping of twenty-nine Orthodox and Protestant churches along with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. Executive Secretary for NCCI-Commission on Life, Justice, Peace and Creation, Ms. Sagarika Chetty, shared with CCA that NCCI had a solidarity visit to Kandhamala areas in Orissa such as Daringbadi, Brahmani, Gaon, Phiringia and Barakhama. She said, 'People are not able to worship as a congregation in the churches. Mission agencies are not allowed for relief interventions. Freedom of religion is once again jeopardized.'

The threat of violence along with its challenge for peacebuilding continues for churches in Asia. Where it is critical to express solidarity with the churches in ecumenical spirit, there is a great need for concrete and visible steps towards conflict transformation. This might sound a daunting task yet the hope lies in the courageous spirit of people and the communities yearning for peace.

—Naveen Qayyum



Source: Flickr.com

Prayers and memorial services were held in churches for Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan

Addressing climate change

All countries need to fight climate change, but greater responsibility lies with developed countries

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How can further commitment to climate change be entrusted, when the implementation of the present commitment is not visible yet?

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The UN Climate Change conference in Bali began on 3 December 2007, including the 13th conference of the Parties. The conference, hosted by the Government of Indonesia, brought representatives of over 180 countries together with observers from governmental and nongovernmental organisations and media. The two-week event included the sessions with Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), its subsidiary bodies as well as the Meeting of the Parties of the Kyoto Protocol.

I was privileged to represent CCA in the World Council of Churches (WCC) delegation, with twelve members from around the world. The WCC focused on promoting the importance of practical post Kyoto options, that allows economic growth, continued poverty alleviation and reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions.

The Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change has set legally binding emission cuts for group of thirty-eight countries in developed and developing countries. These commitments are to be met during the first phase, spanning from 2008 to 2012. Parties proceeded on the basis of decisions made in Climate Change Convention (COP) draft forwarded by Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA - a body under UNFCCC) 26. Parties called for a more ambitious text that highlights the degradation and promotes pilot activities.

Brazil, supported by others, called for a productive approach, inviting parties in de-

veloped countries to mobilise resources. European Union countries, including UK and New Zealand also emphasised indicative modality and fevered flexibility regarding national and sub national approaches. Ghana called for the compensation funds for forest maintenance, while Costa Rica and India emphasised conservation. The International Forum of Indigenous People on Climate Change expressed concern over market based mechanisms, which threaten the rights to land and culture.

Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was established in 1997 under the UN Convention on Climate Change. Under the Kyoto Protocol, members from developed countries are legally required to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. They agreed to cut emissions collectively by five percent from 1999. Each country has its own specific targets including both developed and developing countries. Developing countries are not required to commit to emission reductions due to lower development level. They contributed little to the historic build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. They committed themselves to collect data on greenhouse gas and formulate national measures to curb climate change.

Conference outcome

The outcomes of the conference included inviting parties to support ongoing efforts for reduction of emissions from deforestation on voluntary basis; encouraging all parties to support capacity building, technical as-

sistance and transfer of technology. Improving data collection, estimates of emissions from deforestation, monitoring and reporting was also emphasised. The need for institutional requirements of the developing countries to estimate and reduce emissions from deforestation was stressed. Parties were encouraged to explore a range of actions, identify options and undertake concrete steps. This included activities like promoting forest conservation, enhancement of forest cover, addressing deforestation in national contexts and reducing emissions from deforestation.

The conference encouraged the use of indicative modalities set out for developed countries to promote a consistent approach to support efforts in curbing climate change. It introduced the use of the recent guidelines as basis for the reporting of greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation. Parties not included in Annexure 1 were also encouraged to implement Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) guidelines.

Requests to the SBSTA were made to adopt policy approaches and incentives, and to reduce emissions from deforestation in the developing countries. The work needs to include; inviting submissions from the par-

ties by 21 March 2008 on addressing outstanding methodological issues e.g. assessments of forest cover and associated carbon stock, greenhouse gas emissions and reduction of emissions from deforestations. This has to be accompanied by reference emission levels, implications of national and sub-national approaches including displacement of emissions. This means assessment and enhancement of forest conservation, forest carbon stocks and effectiveness of the implemented actions.

Another step was requesting the secretariat to organise a workshop (subject to availability of supplementary funds) on methodological issues identified in December 2007 session, and to prepare a report for consideration by SBSTA. This included developing the methodological approaches and taking into account the outcome of the workshop mentioned above at the twenty-ninth session. A request was also made to SBSTA to report back to COP, at its 14th and 15th session, on the outcome of the efforts mentioned above including recommendations on possible methodological approaches. This also included inviting relevant organisations and stake holders, without prejudice to any further decision of the conference and parties

“ Sustainable development is the key to fight climate change ”



Source: Flickr.com

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Developing countries should be assisted in planning and implementing a development pathway

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on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries. In addition to this, supporting efforts mentioned above, sharing of the outcomes from efforts made with SBSTA in providing corresponding information to the secretariat were also part of the approach.

These actions also contained a request for the secretariat to support (subject to availability of supplementary funds) the activities of all parties, particularly developing countries as mentioned above. This was done through developing web platforms, where information submitted by Parties, relevant organisations and stake holders will be made available. A decision was also made to address the range of policy approaches and positive incentives as proposed by parties on issues of reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries. This also included consideration of the matter in context of discussions on further international cooperation on climate change, by taking into account other relevant actions under the Convention.

Observations

The concrete steps and actions on how developed countries meet their protocol commitments to provide finance and technology to the poorer countries initiated a debate in the conference. Year 2012 is particularly significant as the first commitment period of the developed countries ends with this time frame. The protocol has a mandate for further commitment period and the second commitment period starts in 2013.

The first week of conference contained bizarre statements, and how large developing countries must be asked to contribute substantially to resolve the situation. If this does not happen, the second phase of commitment for developing countries to cut greenhouse gas will be jeopardised. It is true that all countries need to contribute to resist grave implication of climate change crisis, but greater responsibility lies with the developed countries. This can be done when developing countries are assisted in planning and implementing a development pathway. In other words sustainable development is the key to fight against climate change. Observing the negotiations in the first week, the signs of this happening were not visible. Delegates

seemed to be obsessed with the post 2012 climate change regime, which can make developed countries ignore the urgency of the current situation and the commitment to implementation of technology transfer along with funding for adaptation and deforestation.

After years of discussions between SBSTA and the Experts Group on Technology Transfer (EGTT), developing countries asked for the issue to be discussed at the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI-another body under UNFCCC) to move forward to concrete implementation. President of the Conference of Parties (CoP), Rachmat Witoelar, having heard no objections during the plenary, ruled the point. However, during the SBI sessions developed countries objected to it. It was clear how developed countries were reluctant to commit to technology transfer.

However, a future framework can be hoped for that can convince the US to participate. First, to target some countries such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa and others to have binding emissions cuts, under the guise of the need to provide content to common terms, but with different responsibilities. Second, this was used to shift public attention to the fact that developed countries have not fulfilled their commitments yet under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto protocol. Not only in the technology transfer and adaptation fund but also on emission cuts.

Therefore the world needs to ask thirty-eight rich countries on what commitment they are making for 2008-2012. What is their existing commitment, and how will it be implemented and how do they bear more, if not equal burden? It is a crucial question as how can further commitment to climate change be entrusted, when the implementation of the present commitment is not visible yet. Developing countries and the world need to ask the developed countries to create a roadmap for implementing their commitments in 2008 - 2012 as a priority.

—Freddy De Alwis

Apology to the 'Stolen Generations'

On 13 February 2008, Australia witnessed a historic event, when the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Parliament and the country, apologised to the 'Stolen Generations', referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, who were forcibly removed from their families and communities. This apology, which had been a long time coming, was met with tears and relief.

Three members of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) went to Canberra, and were able to watch the proceedings in the House of Representatives. NATSIEC for being there was privileged to see and share how much this day meant to Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. While recognising that without action the words will end up being empty and meaningless, on that day there was more hope that things might change than they were experienced in a very long time.

NCCA celebrates the apology

National Council of Churches in Australia responded to the apology in a spirit of positivism, yet emphasising that the words should be met with actions. In the official statement NCCA says,

'The NCCA welcomes the apology offered to the 'Stolen Generations' by the Federal Government last Wednesday in Parliament. The churches have long held hope that our Federal Parliament could acknowledge the past and the pain that many of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters have suffered.

'The "Stolen Generations" have held a special place in the heart of many of our faithful. We rejoice with them that finally their life experiences have been recognised and that

we, as a nation, can accept our failures of the past. This apology has created an atmosphere of hope and forgiveness that, at more than any other time in Australia's history, allows for the possibility of real advancement along the journey to reconciliation. Words of course we've heard before, but what is needed now is to back them up with action.

'We [the] churches must also play our part. We cannot ignore our role in the events of the past. Many congregations have already offered their apologies to the "Stolen Generations". We too, as people of faith, must move beyond words and convert our recognition of the plight of our fellow Australians the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples into action.

'We call on all our faithful to reflect upon the words of the Prime Minister last Wednesday and to honestly examine our own heart and conscience to recognise where we continue to fail our fellow Australians. We too must act to diminish the many disparities between indigenous and non-indigenous in our common lives. As people of faith and good citizens it is our responsibility to ensure that our elected representatives remain true to their words.

'We pray that this new beginning can be carried forward with the same good will and bi-partisan spirit that was shown in parliament and all around the nation on Wednesday morning.'

From the website of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC), a commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia accessed at <http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec>

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The 'Stolen Generations' have held a special place in the hearts of many of our faithful

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Water justice

An ecumenical understanding from an Asian woman's perspective

Thirst for life

'Water transforms chaos into cosmos and disorder into order

Water never lets injustice be perpetuated'

—Park Seong Won

If this is true, then why did the little girl in Patan district in Gujarat in India die in thirst? Ranbai Ben, a village woman who witnessed the death of the eight year old girl, recalls, 'We had gone to collect gum from the trees. The child was thirsty and we had no water to give. The water source was three km away. She died crying for water.'¹ Such experience of death due to scarcity of water is not uncommon in Asia.

It is really ironic that though two-thirds of the earth comprises of water 1.1 billion

people in the world suffer from water scarcity. According to World Health Organization, more than 5 million people die every year due to drinking contaminated water or water related diseases.

Chaos of water wars

B. M Reddy reveals that the two-week old war which broke out in July 2006 between the Sri Lankan Government and 'Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam' (LTTE) in East Sri Lanka can be interpreted as 'water war'. The LTTE chose to block Mavil Ary, a water way under its command. It provided water to 30,000 acres under cultivation of poor farmers and it is the source of livelihood for 15,000 families of all communities. Initially LTTE claimed the blockade was imposed by local community in protest against government to construct the water tank as promised.² However the Sri Lankan Air force selected targets to attack LTTE around the vicinity of water way escalating the conflict. In such conflicts we know that often women and children are the worst victims.

Asian women's relationship with water

There is a very close connection between women and water in Asia. In fact Asian women are historically and traditionally the water collectors and water managers. A Pali poem, 'Therigatha', reveals the voice of a woman named Punnika, who more than 2500 years ago said "I am the water carrier. Even in the cold I have always gone down to collect water to quench the thirst of others." From nurturing the child in the water of the womb, breaking the water to give birth, using water for the health care of children, sick and elderly, cooking rice with water, using water in worship rituals at home, watering the plants and livestock's, using ecological insights for water management in agriculture to domes-



Source: Flickr.com

tic water management and recycling of water—these are traditionally part and parcel of Asian women's life.

Oppression of women and nature

There is also a close connection between oppression of nature and oppression of women and people of vulnerable communities like indigenous people and dalits in Asia. In the patriarchal understanding, women, nature and water are regarded as commodities. As water is being polluted by industries or harnessed by modern development projects like mega dams, and forests are being plundered by human beings, it is women and indigenous communities in Asia, who suffer most in such process. For example, a rural Indian woman walks 14,000 km per year to fetch drinking water as rivers are either polluted or dried up. In Rajasthan, a rural girl child often has to walk six hours a day to fetch drinking water. In Bangladesh, many people are dying everyday due to arsenic poisoning of water. Tsunami also caused great devastation in many countries in Asia as the mangroves, which act as barriers have been destroyed by human beings.

Ecumenical understanding of water justice

Water is gift of God and source of life. Human beings are composed of sixty percent water, fish about eighty percent, flowers and trees about eighty to ninety percent. Every living creature in this 'oikos' needs water. Thirst for water is an ecumenical experience because every human being irrespective of race, caste, class, religion, sex etc. and every living organism in this 'oikomene' (whole inhabited Earth) needs water for survival. Since water is not invented by humankind one cannot have monopoly over water, or own water as private property, or use it as a commodity to sell for profit. Water justice emerges from the understanding of sharing water with all and restoring our relationship with mother Earth in order to alleviate poverty, suffering and violence.

Stop romanticizing the cross

Ecumenical understanding of water justice begins with our reinterpretation of traditional theology of the cross and suffering.

During this time of lent, let us not romanticize the cross and suffering as the only paradigm for liberation. Suffering is also regarded as fate of many poverty stricken women, children and vulnerable communities in Asia. In the Church the idea that all suffering will end when we die and go to heaven is preached. However Jesus taught us to seek 'Heaven on Earth'. So in order to alleviate poverty and suffering we need to eradicate the roots of suffering and exploitation. Let us understand that Jesus also had thirst and was victim of violence like many other Asians. He cried from the cross, 'I am thirsty', and his dry throat was choked with sour vinegar (John 19:28-29). Jesus also felt forsaken and cried from the cross, 'My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?' (Mathew 27:46). This forsakenness is the crux feeling of many Asian women and children who are innocent victims of violence. As we observe the Holy week, 'World Water Day' and 'International Women's Day' in March, the Asian Churches have crucial responsibility in renewing their pledge to educate people to reflect 'faith reflected in action' to alleviate poverty and suffering. There is no peace without justice and it is this sort of 'justpeace' ministry which the Church should engage in.

Asian women seeking water justice

Asian women, despite their feeling of forsakenness and oppression, sometimes are continuously striving to seek justpeace and water justice to nurture not only human life but the entire mother Earth. One example is Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save River Narmada Movement) in India where the largest dam is being constructed, displacing millions of indigenous people and Dalits destroying the ecological balance. It is women who are in the forefront of 'Save Narmada River Movement'. In South Korea, a Minjung woman Pastor, Rev Shon Unha opened a Church near the sea protesting against the Sae Man Kum dam construction on the sea. In many countries in Asia, women in partnership with men are harvesting rain water for irrigation purposes. There are many such stories some of which are unheard or not documented.

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Ecumenical understanding of water justice begins from our reinterpretation of traditional theology of the cross and suffering

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Spirituality for water justice

Asian women's continuous journey for water justice is steeped in their spirituality. In Hindu spirituality, the Rig Veda mentions, 'water, you are the one who brings us life force...let us share the most delicious sap you have, as if you are loving mothers'. Asian Church women draw their inspiration to strive for water justice from the God of justice who heard the cry of Hagar in the desert for the life of her thirsty dying son. She cried, 'Do not let me look on the death of the child' (Genesis 21:16) and God quenched the thirst of her dying thirsty son and made a nation out of him. It is not the suffering and violence on the cross which is the source for liberation for Asian women who are also victims of violence but the empty tomb, the resurrected Christ, who wanted to put a full stop to all violence.

International Women's Day

As we celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 2008, is it not possible for the Asian Church to acknowledge Asian women's contributions and engage in more efforts in Churches' ministry for Gender Justice? Is it not possible for the Asian and global Churches to engage in a movement for water justice so that all may have 'life in its fullness'?

Endnotes:

1. Rashmi Saxena, 'Pooling Their Resources', in *The Week* (May 11, 2003).
2. B. Muralidhar Reddy, 'Water War', in *Frontline*, vol. 23, no.14, (August 25, 2006), 54.

—Moumita Biswas

Water facts

Scarcity: 2025, it is expected that 3.4 billion people will be living in countries defined as water scarce.

Food: It takes about 3,000 liters of water to produce our daily food ration, about 1,000 times what we need for drinking purposes

Environment: Water-related disasters such as tsunamis, floods and droughts are the second most frequent and devastating natural disasters. Between 1991 and 2000, over 665,000 people died in 2,557 natural disasters, of which 90 per cent were water-related events.

Energy: Hydropower supplies at least 50 per cent of electricity production in 66 countries, and 19 per cent in 24 countries. Worldwide, small hydropower development is expected to grow by a further 60 per cent by 2010.

Trans boundary water issues: One hundred and forty-five nations have territory within a trans boundary basin, and 21 lie entirely within one. In the last half century, approximately 200 treaties have been signed concerning trans boundary water basins.

Culture: In nearly all the world's major religions, water is attributed important symbolic and ceremonial properties.

Sanitation: One dollar invested in water supply and sanitation can provide an economic return of up to 34 times, depending on the region.

Pollution: In developing countries, more than 90 per cent of sewage and 70 per cent of industrial wastewater is dumped untreated into surface water.

Agriculture: Irrigation increases yields of most crops by 100 to 400 per cent. Over the next 30 years, 70 per cent of gains in cereal production will come from irrigated land.

Source: UN Document on 'Water for Life'

Christ is risen!

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses (Acts 2:31)

If we were to take a survey among Christians and ask the question: what is the most important Christian festival in the Christian Liturgical calendar, one would hear the majority saying that it is Christmas. It is true that Christmas is an important festival in the life of the Church. However, the most significant event in the life of the Church is Easter. It is Easter which gave a New Life to Jesus and gave birth to the Church to be the re-incarnated community and witness to the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ. I believe the Christian community which recognises church as the Body of Christ, is called to witness that God raised Jesus from the dead and struck a death blow to all the principalities and powers of the world. In other words, God's raising of Jesus from the powers of death is a reminder to all of us that God is not dead, and God is still in control of the world.

Therefore, the task of the Christian community is to re-enact or imitate the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ in contemporary history, which alone could be the message of hope for the world in despair. The re-enactment of the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ is the only credible witness to the power of the living God and a challenge to the dehumanizing principalities and powers of this world. The credibility of the Church gets authenticated purely by that witness and nothing else. According to my understanding the call to evangelize is a call for the Church to witness to the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ in its totality.

Who is this Jesus?

This is the question that Jesus himself asked his disciples towards the middle of his ministry on his way to Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27-38). In fact there were two questions asked by Jesus and they were '...who do men [people] say that I am?' and '...who do you say that I am?'

I am of the view that the Church's answer to the question should not be an intellectual answer alone. What is said in verbal terms as an expression of one's faith has to be demonstrated by action. In other words, Orthodoxy (correct doctrine) must be matched with Orthopraxis (correct practice of the doctrine). Hence, it is the witness of the Church in the world which will determine what sort of response people will give to Jesus' first question: 'who do people say that I am.' It is the re-enactment of the faith by the Jesus community that will influence the people who are not part of the faith to say who Jesus is.

Jesus the Christ, according to the Gospels is an embodiment of God, and Jesus' entire mission was to live and demonstrate love, compassion, truth, righteousness and justice of God. It is the passion for that mission which brought him into confrontation with the political establishment of his day like Herod (Luke: 13: 31-33), and the religious establishment (Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees).

The cause for the death of Jesus on the first Good Friday was to silence God and God's compassion and truth for the world. On that first Good Friday there was an alliance between religious and political powers to execute Jesus, who stood for human freedom, dignity, respect, and also to cleanse the institutionalized religious establishment of his day, which had become corrupt.

The resurrection of Jesus by God (Acts 2:13) is more than an endorsement of Jesus' earthly ministry and all that he stood for. It was God's way of saying that the principalities and powers of this world have no final say on any matters, although they appear to be triumphant. Jesus' resurrection unmasked their deception and exposed their weakness.

Although the corrupt religious and political leaders conspired to kill and destroy Jesus, God's raising him from the dead is a sign of hope that 'neither death, nor life, nor

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God raised Jesus from the dead and struck a death blow to all the principalities and powers of the world

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God's raising of Jesus from the powers of death, is a reminder to all of us that God is not dead

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angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8: 37-39). Therefore, the message of Easter to this broken and bleeding world is that God is still in control of this world and therefore do not despair. 'Peace be with you' is the message of hope that the risen Lord gave to the disciples who were behind closed doors living in fear, despair and shaken. It is the same message he gives to all of us, who are committed to transform the world to be a place where one can experience and have a foretaste of the Reign of God.

What surprised the world is that although the powers that tried to kill Jesus to silence God's messenger and the embodiment of truth, justice, peace compassion and mercy, God still surprised them and the entire world by resurrecting Jesus and saying no to the driving forces of death. The biggest surprise is that the resurrection of Jesus the Christ is not confined to the historical Jesus alone, but Jesus is re-incarnated in a community called the Church and this is the reason the Church is called the Body of Christ. The religious and political principalities and powers killed one man called Jesus but God surprised all of them by resurrecting a whole new community to carry forward the mission which was entrusted to this one person called Jesus.

Mandate to the resurrected community

The Church which is called the Body of Christ exists only to witness the life and mission of Jesus. It is because the early Church re-incarnated the mission of Jesus, which they called 'the people of the Way' (Acts 9:2), 'people who turned the world upside down' (Acts 17:6). In fact the people who belonged to the Resurrected Community had made a firm commitment to go against the dominant and the domineering culture of their day (Acts 4: 32-37). This was a great commitment on the part of the re-incarnated community and they became a challenge and a threat to the Empire and to the dominant culture during that time.

However, over the years, especially after the re-incarnated community made alliances with the Empire or the political powers, starting with the Emperor Constantine in the 5th Century, the re-incarnated community began to get corrupted and thereby tempted to compromise and distort the message of the Reign of God, which was central to the teaching of Jesus the Christ.

It is unfortunate that the Church which was set apart at the beginning to re-enact the Mission of God has often become a scandal and a contradiction to the very purpose for which it was called to be. Therefore, the task before those who are still inspired by the power of the Resurrected Jesus the Christ is to cleanse the institutional church where it is corrupt, renounce leaders or those who use the name of Christian and act contrary to the Mission of God and liberate the institutionalized Church so that it can once again become the re-incarnated community in contemporary history. When that cleansing happens within Church, the first question of Jesus to the disciples on the way to Caesarea Philippi 'who do people say that I am' will be answered by the people themselves in words such as indeed they are God's people and they turn the world upside down. Alleluia!

—Rienzie Perera

New Executive Secretary



Rev. Dr Sungkook Park from Korea has been appointed as CCA Joint Executive Secretary for Faith Mission and Unity (FMU)-Theological Concerns. He is a member of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK). He was educated at Hanshin Theological Seminary in Korea and later accomplished his doctorate at the University of Hamburg, Germany on 'Reconciliation as a concern of the church in South Korea'. He had been associated with Yudalfirst-Church, Mokpo as Vice Minister and later with Korean Church in Hamburg as an Associate Pastor.

Dr Park has delivered several lectures and talks on the subject of church, reconciliation and ecumenism at the human rights, ecumenical and Christian events organised by Asia Pacific Peace Foundation, Academy of Mission Hamburg, University of Hamburg and Korea Association in Germany, to name a few. He is author of different publications on reconciliation from interreligious, ecumenical and church perspectives. Dr Park Sungkook commenced his work at CCA on 1 January, and will hold this responsibility for a period of four years.

CSI moderator

The largest Indian protestant church has elected a new moderator for the next two years. Bishop J W Gladstone became the new moderator of the Church of South India (CSI) at its 31st synod held in the Southern

Indian coastal city of Visakhapatnam on 11 January. Gladstone is Bishop of the South Kerala Diocese of the CSI based in Chennai.

More than 425 delegates, comprising of bishops, pastors, representatives from different dioceses and friends from overseas attended the once-in-two-years synod. The CSI with four-million members was founded in 1947 and have twenty-two dioceses, including the Jaffna diocese in Sri Lanka.

The Synod also elected Bishop Christopher Asir of the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese as its vice-moderator. The Rev Moses Jayakumar from the Karnataka Central Diocese was elected as the general secretary. The CSI, one of the oldest united churches in the world, has 15,000 congregations in the five South Indian states and overseas. The church has 101 women and 3,000 men presbyters. Besides being part of the Anglican Communion, the CSI has membership in CCA and the World Council of Churches.

(Source: Asia Pacific Ecumenical News, Philip Mathew)

New Youth Consultant



Adam Anand Row, 26, is the new Youth Consultant for CCA-Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY). He hails from Malaysia and is a member of the Tamil Methodist Church in Kuala Lumpur. He was educated in Malaysia till the age of eighteen and later pursued a degree in Biotechnology, followed by Psychology in New York State University, Buffalo.

Being a Malaysian and a Methodist, Adam has been exposed to many different religions, beliefs, and the experience of a multiracial nation, which accepts all religions, despite being predominantly Muslim. It is this spirit of acceptance that he wishes to bring to the youth of the ecumenical movement, to foster the enrichment of relationships with other Christians, and to continue the struggle to achieve God's purpose in the life of Asian communities.

Adam's interest in ecumenism was instigated by the prevalent dilemma of young people moving away from the church. He wishes to organise programs, which are relevant to the daily life of Asian youth, so that they are drawn back to the church, and are able to contribute the unified mission of spreading the Gospel. He says, 'Ecumenism is one of the strongest forms of witness, as it is the best living proof that the good news is for all people, and should be shared by all. Our diversity is our strength, and it is my hope that by uniting all Christians, we equip ourselves to minister to the myriad of different people and cultures, that the Lord has so richly blessed the world with.'

CCA consultant joins UNICEF



Shirley Susan, consultant for CCA-UNESCAP joint program has joined the HIV/AIDS unit at UNICEF-EAPRO (United Nations Children's Fund- East Asia and Pacific Regional Office) in Bangkok.

Shirley was appointed as consultant to the CCA-UNESCAP (United Nations Social and Economic Commission for Asia Pacific) joint program in April 1995. The program on 'Strengthening Life Skills for Positive Youth Health Behaviour' is being implemented in Xinjiang (Uyghur Autonomous Region), China, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. The four-year project focuses on empowering young people aged 15 - 24 with essential life skills so that they are better able to protect themselves from the threat of HIV/AIDS and drugs.

Shirley along with her major responsibility of CCA-UNESCAP program has made a positive and consistent contribution in the area of communications. CCA benefited from her gifts and abilities in many ways. In her new role at UNICEF, Shirley will focus specifically on HIV/AIDS, an area of her expertise and interest.

We at CCA wish Shirley the very best in her future endeavours and hope that her commitment and association with the ecumenical movement and church will grow and continue in other capacities.

Opening in CCA-JID

CCA invites applications for the position of Joint Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service (JID) program. The secretary will be working closely with other program desks to promote CCA's holistic ministry. Work includes promoting social justice, human rights, health-healing and wholeness, gender awareness, sustainable development, environmental concerns, migrant workers, refugees, internally displaced people and capacity building in Diakonial service of Asia. The appointee will be responsible for promoting national and local resources for sustainable development and self reliance of churches and communities. This involves developing relationships and networking with ecumenical, governmental and non governmental organisations

and UN agencies working for justice, peace and development issues.

CCA-JID works to promote human resources for social development and sustainability of life to build communities of peace for all. The applicant is required to have experience in ecumenical work and commitment to the ecumenical concern of justice, peace and unity.

More information is available on the CCA website www.cca.org.hk, or from the General Secretariat at ccagensec@cca.org.hk.

Interfaith dialogue in Iran

rope, Africa, North America, Asia and Middle East added interesting dimensions to the dialogue and initiated free spirited sharing of experiences.

The workshop included an exposure trip to the Holy city of Qom, where one of the largest women's universities in Iran, *Jamat-ul-Zahra* was visited. This was followed by sight seeing of the astounding shrine of Hazrat Masoumah, with a great historical and religious significance. The workshop also arranged a meeting with Iran's Former President Mohammad Khatami, known for his interest and stance on interreligious dialogue, followed by a question answer session. CCA-Communication Consultant Naveen Qayyum attended the workshop as WCC constituency



Source: Sima Mehr Azar

Participants with Iran's Former President Mohammad Khatami in Tehran

As part of peacemaking efforts through interreligious dialogue, twenty-five Christian and Muslim women from around the world, took part in a workshop on 'Women as peacemakers through religion' organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Institute for Interreligious Dialogue (IID) in Tehran, Iran on 24-28 November 2007.

The workshop raised crucial issues regarding the role of religion as a way towards peacemaking. Women from the field of education, media and development addressed these issues and contributed their analysis in context of their unique backgrounds. The diverse combination of participants from Eu-

and presented on 'peacemaking through media - women's perspectives'. This joint project of WCC and IID will continue other activities in the following year, focusing on the same theme.

Award for S.M. Chowdhury

Dr S.M. Chowdhury, a former member of CCA Presidium and former Medical Director of Christian Hospital and Christian Leprosy Centre, Bangladesh has been

awarded the Life Time Achievement Award for his outstanding and dedicated services to the Christian Hospital, Chandraghona. The award was presented to him during the centenary celebration of the hospital held on 7-9 December 2007.

Louise Scott passes away



Louise Scott passed away on 8 January at her home in Perth, Australia. Louise Scott served as the Chairperson of the Kowloon Union Church (KUC), Hong Kong and was associated with CCA for over a decade.

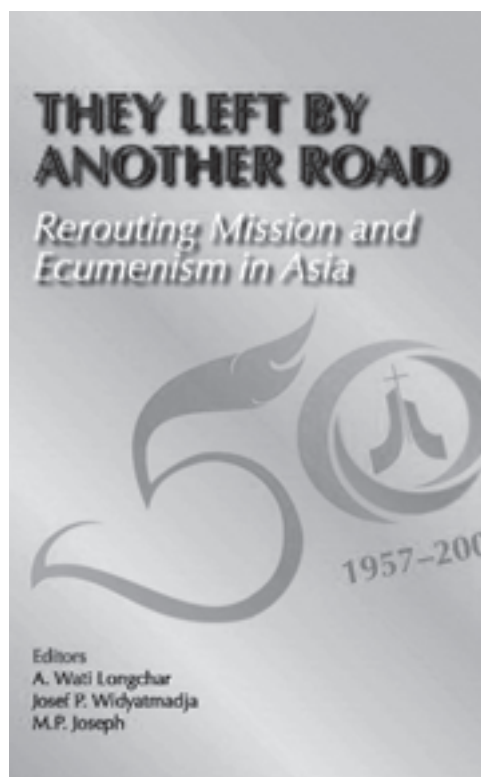
During her time in Hong Kong, she volunteered her services to CCA and meticulously archived the valuable publications and documents gathered over decades. At the 11th General Assembly of CCA in 2000, Louise was co-opted as staff to help with the exhibition and documentation of events and proceedings. She also participated at the 50th anniversary celebrations of CCA in Parapat, Indonesia in March 2007.

Louise lived life to the fullest. She was committed to God and the mission of the church. CCA upholds her husband, Prof. David Scott and daughters Pippa, Norna and Hannah in prayers.

FMU publication

They left by another road: Rerouting mission and ecumenism in Asia contains selected papers from the workshops on 'Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism' in Chennai, Jakarta and Hong Kong in 2006 to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of CCA. Edited by Dr A. Wati Longchar, Rev. Josef P. Widyatmadja and Dr M.P. Joseph, this book was published by Faith Mission and Unity (FMU) program area of CCA in 2007.

The study process on 'Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism' was initiated by CCA- URM (Urban Rural Mission) with a view to bring new dimensions to the life of church, mission and ecumenism in context of fast changing global scenario and challenges from people's perspectives. This study was undertaken in the light of the Centennial of the World Mission Conference in Edinburgh, UK to generate discussions on new ecumenical and missiological practices and trends of the



new century. Therefore the publication covers diverse subjects from the Asian realities and people's ecumenism, its traditions and interfaith dialogue from purely theological perspectives of ecumenism.

Ahn Jae Woong awarded



Dr Ahn Jae Woong receiving the award at the ceremony in India

Rev. Dr Ahn Jae Woong, a well known Asian ecumenical leader from Korea, has been awarded Degree of Doctorate in Divinity by the Senate of Serampore College, one of the first institutions in India to be given the status of a university. The degree was presented to him by Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, president of the college, at a convocation held in Tiruvalla in Kerala, India on 9 February 2008.

'The Senate and the Council of Serampore College heartily welcomes Dr Ahn Jae Woong among the honoured and distinguished fellowship of graduates of the College,' read the citation presented to him.

Dr Ahn Jae Woong, aged sixty-eight, is the first Asian to be selected outside South Asia to receive this honour from the Senate of Serampore College. He served CCA in varied capacities: as executive secretary of Urban Rural Mission (URM), then as associate general secretary for finance and relations; and later as general secretary from 2001-2005. Ear-

lier he was regional secretary of the Asia-Pacific Region of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).

Ahn is also a recipient of the Degree of Doctorate of Humane Letters from the Mary Holmes College, USA in 1993.

Now he is the president of Korea Foundation for Working Together, an NGO generating employment opportunities for less privileged Koreans in the country. He also serves as the Chairperson of the Dasomi Foundation providing care for underprivileged and senior citizens in Korea, and a visiting professor at the Hoseo University, near Seoul.

Windows into Ecumenism is a 388-page volume brought out in 2005 in honour of Ahn, who is also the author of several books in English and Korean.

(Source: Asia Pacific Ecumenical News, Philip Mathew)

The last judgment

Why wait for the last judgment
When living is like hell
I wish the sun will not set
And the moon never rise up
The men will come in busloads
Looking for young girls for fun
I put red lipstick on
And smile when their fingers touch

Last night the soldiers came
And raided my vineyard
I begged them to spare the tree
Grandpa planted as a boy
My baby screamed all night
The dogs lying in blood

What do I see through the bars
Stars and parting clouds
I finally fell asleep
Under the blankets with bugs
My rice is mixed with sand
Freedom is seasoned with salt

I wish to take the last gasp
And see this world no more
The pain will not go away
My T-cells down to forty-four
The priests searched for prayers
The drugs ran their course

I went to the shanty town
And saw him on the cross
I wanted to touch his garment
And kiss his broken feet
He is one of us
The long suffering minjung*
The phoenix will rise again
The condor with a new song

-Kwok Pui-lan

*ordinary people (Korean)

From Christ for All People Asian Christian Art Association, 2001