

# cca news



Churches together in God's mission

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# Revealing God's work



I write this editorial at a time when thousands of people in Myanmar and China are in deep pain due to recent cyclone and earthquake disasters. The two catastrophes caused the loss of thousands of lives and left millions of people struggling for survival. Many lost their loved ones, became homeless and are striving for the basic necessities of life. However, amidst this desperate situation, God's work is visible. The efforts of several organisations, groups and individuals trying to provide relief to the victims are inspiring. There are many who strive to help the devastated communities in both countries, despite difficulties on the way. This reminds me of Tsunami 2005, when the crisis united people from around the world, to share the pain and offer humanitarian aid to the victims.

Media reports often inform us of hundreds or thousands of deaths due to earthquakes, cyclones, accidents, wars, violent conflicts or famine. It seems that we often tend to make a connection between all these tragedies and God's will, believing that God is the one responsible for these mishaps. This was a common perception even during the Tsunami crisis that God must have been judging people for their loose morals.

It reminds me of the biblical story of Jesus healing a man born blind (John 9:1-5). It shows why some are born handicapped and not others, why cyclones, storms, floods and earthquakes affect some and not others. We as God's children need to realise that these tragedies are not parceled to humans according to the number or degree of their sins.

The truth is that God has a plan for every person. Christ showed his power of helping others in the most desperate situations. The poor man could not see Christ, but Christ saw him. Christ showed that calamities are not always to be looked upon as punishments for one's sin. Sometimes they show the glory of God and are meant to manifest God's works.

*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him (John 9:3).*

The heart of this message is that God is close to us in all circumstances and listens to our earnest cries for help and hope. God works in the disastrous situations, when God's people try to save human lives. As for Christ, life has more value than anything else.

*What if one of you have a sheep and it falls into a deep hole on the Sabbath?*

*Will you not take hold of it and lift it out? And a human being is worth much more than a sheep.*

*So then, our Law does allow us to help someone on the Sabbath.*

*(Mathew 12:11-12)*

Similarly our lives require us to do the work of the day. The natural disasters, injustice and lamenting for peace are opportunities for us to participate in God's mission, by becoming the voice of the marginalised and holding hands with the destitute. Amidst the natural calamities, we as churches are called to rehabilitate the broken communities. We are called to heal and be with our brothers and sisters who need us. Therefore, these challenges are opportunities for us to be inspired, in order to play our required role as churches and faith communities. Let us try to bring the deepest cry of our spirits to surface, as we imagine Christ saying to us, "What do you want me to do for you?"

—Prawate Khid-arn

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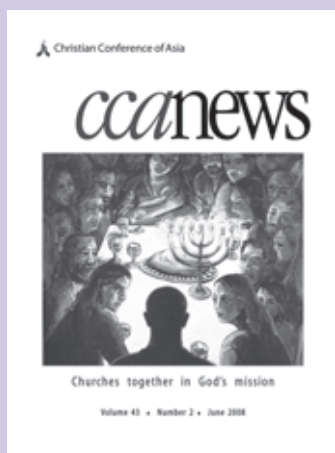
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# Re-visiting the great commission

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Only after the resurrection is the invitation to discipleship open to all people, men and women, of all nations

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In Matthew 10:5-6, when Jesus sends out the twelve disciples, he says to them: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” To the Canaanite woman Jesus says, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24). And when the woman insists Jesus to help her, Jesus adds, “It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs” (v. 26). The Jesus of Matthew's gospel limits the missionary commission only to Israel. This seems to contradict the great commission in Mt. 28:19 - “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Only after the resurrection is the invitation to discipleship open to all people, men and women, of all nations. The Christian duty is to tell the story of the good news of Jesus to those who have never heard it.

In the early period, Jewish Christians had not understood themselves as members of a separate religion but primarily as a renewal movement within Judaism. However, in the late seventies or early eighties, the situation changed and tension between them escalated and finally divided them. The writer of the gospel according to Matthew helps Christians to develop themselves as the Church of Christ, the “true Israel.” Many quotations from the Old Testament are used to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. This was not only to counter rabbinic claims to the Old Testament but also to convey self-confidence to a community facing a crisis of identity and to embolden them for witness and service.

Some scholars understand the words *ta ethne* as referring to all nations excluding the Jews. But together with other scholars I am

convinced that *panta ta ethne* makes it clear that the Jews are included but not anymore as a specially privileged people. It is clear that for Matthew Jesus is no longer sent only to Israel but, in fact, he becomes the Savior of all humankind.

Some New Testament interpreters think that this passage in Matthew is a later addition to the gospel. But it can be understood as the key to Matthew's understanding of the mission and ministry of Jesus. The intention of the commission according to Matthew is to (a) make disciples, (b) baptize and (c) teach.

**Make disciples** (Greek: *matheteuein*). To make disciple is to make a person to be a student. The Jesus of Matthew sends his followers to help others to be good students to follow what Jesus has done during his life and ministry. The verb *matheteusate* is the principal verb in the commission and the heart of the commissioning. The two participles, ‘baptizing’ and ‘teaching’, are subordinate to ‘make disciples’. The two participles describe the form the disciple-making is to take. It is only in the gospel of Matthew that the word *ekklesia* (church) is used but Matthew does not mean to make disciple is to add new members of existing congregations. To be a disciple is not the same as being a member of a local church and making disciples does not simply mean numerical expansion of a church. Matthew makes a clear link between Jesus and Matthew's community with the command ‘make disciples.’ For Matthew, there is no break, no discontinuity, between the history of Jesus and the era of the church.

**Baptize.** Jesus tells his disciples to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. Although many scholars think that this triadic formula is not part of the original text of Matthew but is a later in-

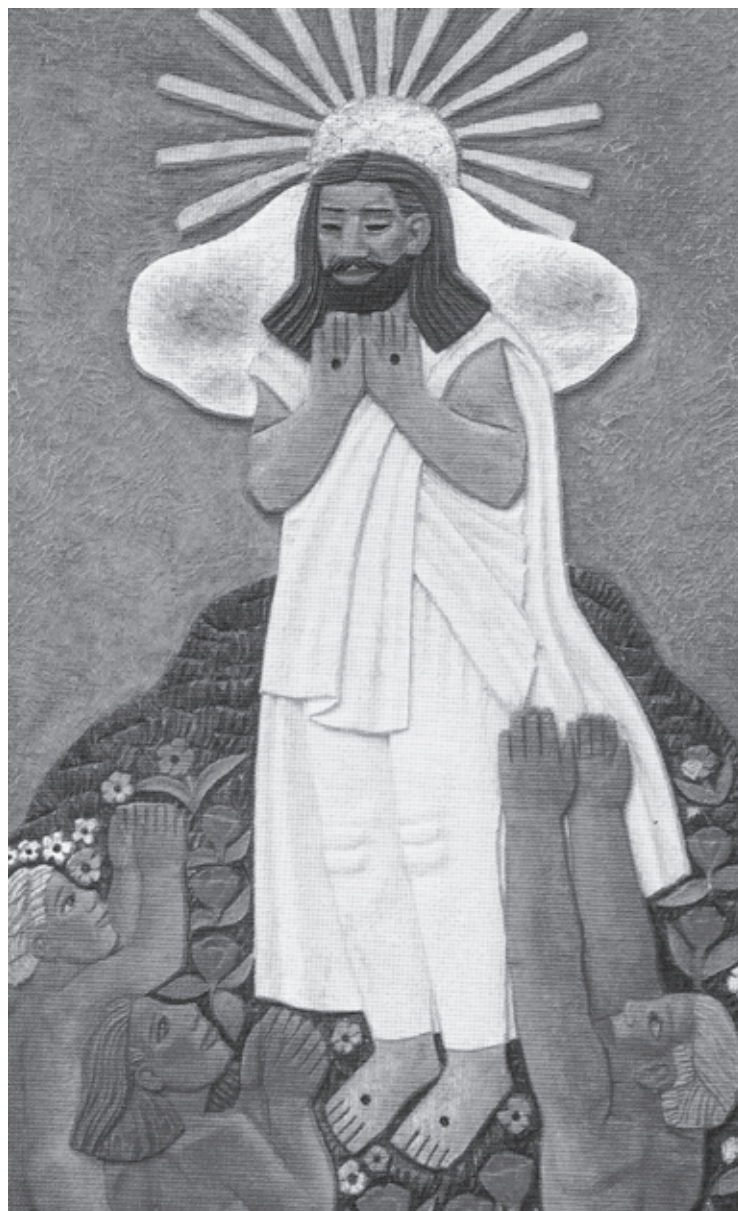


terpolation, it is now generally accepted as authentic. In Matthew's time, the church had not yet worked out the sophisticated and logical doctrines of the Trinity, which were to come later in church history. Nevertheless, baptism follows (or might follow) out of 'making disciples'.

**Teach.** In the commissioning of the disciples in Matthew 10, Jesus sends out the twelve to preach or proclaim (Greek: *kerysso*). But in Matthew 28:19, they are sent to teach the good news (Greek: *didaskein*). They are now to be taking over Jesus' role of teaching. They are not to be teaching abstract ideas but "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (vs. 20). There is a very strong ethical emphasis in this commissioning as there has been in Jesus' teaching throughout this gospel. Jesus' teaching was not to appeal to people's intellect but to their will; it was a call for a concrete decision to follow him and to submit to God's will.

Matthew summarizes Jesus' commandments in Matthew 22:37-39 as the Greatest Commandment. The disciples are as humble tutors helping others to know, to obey, and to live according to God's will. As David J Bosch, author of *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, said, "For Matthew then, being a disciple means living out the teachings of Jesus... It is unthinkable to divorce the Christian life of love and justice from being a disciple. Discipleship involves a commitment to God's reign, to justice and love, and to obedience to the entire will of God... Mission involves, from the beginning and as a matter of course, making new believers sensitive to the needs of others, opening their eyes and hearts to recognize injustice, suffering, oppression, and the plight of those who have fallen by the wayside. It is unjustifiable to regard the 'Great Commission' as being concerned primarily with 'evangelism' and the 'Great Commandment' (Mt. 22:37-40) as referring to 'social involvement.'" Quoting Jacques Matthey, Bosch said, "According to Matthew's 'Great Commission,' it is not possible to make disciples without telling them to practice God's call of justice for the poor. The love commandment, which is the basis for the church's involvement in politics, is an integral part of the mission commandment."

—Robinson Radjagukguk



Bror Hjorth, Sweden, *The Hope* 1940, wooden relief taken from *Christ for All People* 2001

*This is excerpted from the Bible study by the Rev. Dr. Robinson Radjagukguk, Indonesian New Testament scholar who is presently teaching at Silliman University Divinity School in Dumaguete City, Philippines. The Bible study was presented at the Southeast Asian consultation-dialogue on Holistic Mission in Context of Asian Plurality held in Manila, Philippines on 24-29 March 2008. Full text of this Bible study is published in the CTC Bulletin (April - August 2008).*

# Looking at mission differently

There is a need to heed what some call the “spiritual resistance for life” as a way of doing mission

**D**o we have to redefine mission or do we merely need to affirm mission in the way Jesus lived on this earth?” Asked Rev. Fr Rex Resurrection B. Reyes, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) in his keynote address at the Southeast Asian consultation-dialogue on holistic mission in the context of Asian plurality, held in Manila, Philippines on 24-29 March.

“In the countries where we come from, there is a need to heed what some have called the ‘spiritual resistance for life’ as a way of doing mission in our context,” Reyes, an Indigenous Filipino Anglican priest, made the challenge after sharing some of the glaring

socio-economic and political realities facing the Philippines today.

Reyes defines mission as taking seriously the people's issues of peace and justice, uniting amidst our diversity to serve and accompany the people in their struggles for life. It also means reversing the traditional understanding of mission as “bringing people into the church, or conversion or status quo, but rather to encourage the people out of the churches and into the world that the liberating message of the gospel may be cast and sown, in true fidelity to Christ who did not wait for people but sought them out,” Reyes stated.

Rev. Dr Robinson Radjagukguk, a visiting professor of New Testament in the Philippines from Indonesia, led a Bible study of mission by revisiting the great commission in Matthew 28 and the Nazareth Manifesto in Luke 4.

Rev. Dr Cung Lian Hup, academic dean of Myanmar Institute of Theology, gave an input on “Holistic mission in the context of poverty and injustice in Asia” while Rev. Dr Erick Barus, Executive Staff for marturia and interfaith of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, gave an input on “Holistic mission in the context of Asian plurality”.

A panel of representatives from mission-sending churches consisted of Rev. Shin Seung Min, staff for ecumenical relations of PROK, Rev. Kim Kyung In, staff for ecumenism and policy of PCK, and Rev. Dr Chuang Hsiao-Shen, representing the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.

Rev. Son Sung Kyu (PCK), doing natural farming among the poor, including Muslims



Rev. Fr Rex Resurrection B. Reyes, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines



Participants in group discussion at the consultation in the Philippines

in Davao and Rev. Kim Hyun Sook (PROK), doing accompanying work in Iloilo and Bukidnon, shared some alternative ways of doing mission.

Time was also given for participants to share their mission journeys and to visit a number of depressed communities in Manila, i.e. Muslim migrant community, a slum/squatter community, a fishing community, and a garbage community. The visit evoked many feelings, including a questioning of "where is God" in such inhuman situations. The experience challenged some participants to concretize their theology of incarnation and encouraged others to strengthen their mission in holistic aspects. A participant evaluated the experience by saying, "experiential learning is more powerful than classroom discussion."

Participants expressed their willingness to provide reorientation to their local churches, which tend to focus only on traditional evangelism work, and to continue inter-faith dialogue at the grassroots level. They requested that Bible study materials and stories on holistic mission be produced by CCA to help guide the local churches in re-orienting mem-

bers towards more holistic mission.

The consultation was organized by the Faith Mission Unity program of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and attended by thirty-four participants, including eleven women, from Indonesia, East Timor, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, and the Philippines.

Participants were mainly staff of mission and ecumenism programs of the national councils or national churches, professors of mission from church-related theological institutions and representatives of mission-sending churches in Korea and Taiwan.

The consultation is one of two sub-regional consultations held to review, assess and critique the impact of narrow mission orientation and practice in Asia and to equip people and member churches and their related agencies with holistic mission understanding and practice in view of the context of Asian poverty and plurality.

—Hope S. Antone

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Mission means taking seriously people's issues of peace and justice

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# Ending the violence

Multi-religious delegation offers the possibility of mediation for peace in Southern Thailand

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People of faith need to understand their religion in true spirit of peace and tolerance

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In context of continuing violence in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat provinces of Southern Thailand, CCA with World Conference for Religion and Peace (WCRP) and Cross Cultural Foundation (CCF) organised "Religious Leaders' Solidarity Visit to Southern Thailand" on 22 April 2008. Twelve delegates from Buddhist, Muslim and Christian faiths visited Southern Thailand to express solidarity with the victims of violence and support the efforts for conflict resolution. This was aimed at strengthening endeavours of restoring peace through faith actors. Dr Prawate Khid-arn, CCA General Secretary, Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, Assistant General Secretary for WCRP, Mr. Phallop Thaiarry, Honorary General Secretary for World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) and religious leaders from Thailand were part of the delegation.

"Although the Thai government is trying all means to pursue peace in Southern Thailand, the killings of civilians and security forces by armed insurgents is still on the rise and peace has yet not been achieved," said Dr Prawate Khid-arn on his return from the visit. "The delegates met with local religious leaders and civil society actors to discuss ways of enhancing efforts for peacebuilding in the re-

gion," he added.

"The multi-religious delegation intended to express solidarity with religious communities in conflict areas of Southern Thailand, in order to explore the role of religious communities in advancing reconciliation and offering the possibility of interreligious mediation to assist the work of the National Reconciliation Commission," said Rev. Kyoichi Sugino.

The delegates exchanged information and shared concerns with Muslim and Christian leaders at Yala Rajchapat University. The general feeling was that the conflict in Southern Thailand needs to be resolved not only through political means, but through social and cultural exchanges as well.

The Abbots of Changhai and Muang Yala temples emphasised that all religions teach their believers to live with their neighbours in harmony. People of faith need to understand their religion in true spirit of peace and tolerance. "Buddha always taught his disciples to live peacefully with others," said one of the Abbots of Muang Yala Temple.

The delegates also met officials from Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) and the Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre (SBPAC) to learn about government policies and strategies of peacebuilding in the region. "The Thai government is using social, cultural, political and legal means to restore peace in the Southern Thailand," SBPAC Director Pranai Suwaunarat said. The delegates also discussed the situation with Mr. Anand Panyarachun, Chairman of National Reconciliation Commission in Bangkok. The delegation shared the idea of forming an "Interreligious Council" to support peace and harmony in the region.

—Prawate Khid-arn





# Churches as mediators

Peacebuilding and conflict transformation is about people transforming people, transforming themselves and it always begins with "I"

“**T**he church has to be a mediator, when it comes to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. However it needs to challenge its own 'petty conflicts' that arise within its hierarchal structure, to be able to play its required role effectively.” These were the words of Iris Ann Agustin, a young woman from the Philippines, who participated in the Training of Trainers on “Peace Building and Conflict Transformation” organised by Justice, International Affairs and Development Service of CCA on 23-30 April 2008 in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Iris works for CONTAK Philippines, an organisation working with churches on issues of peace, justice and human rights in ecumenical solidarity. She has been actively involved in the ecumenical movement in her home church and participated in the World Council of Churches Leadership Formation Program.

Iris found the training extremely relevant in view of the Philippine churches and their struggles for peace and democracy. She said, “Churches in my country are faced with numerous challenges, and one area is the issue of indigenous people and mining. Many people have been killed as a result of mining activities in the country since 1980s. This situation has aggravated due to Mining Act of 1995 that involves open-pit mining. These indigenous communities face human rights violations, such as displacements, water resource disruptions and violent conflicts. Therefore churches hold a great responsibility to transform these conflicts.” Agustin also mentioned the interreligious aspect of peace process initiated by the Philippine churches. “Churches in the Philippines are working with other religious communities to voice the



Iris Ann Agustin at JID training in Chiang Mai

issue of indigenous communities. Therefore dimension of interreligious cooperation is quite prominent in their efforts,” she said.

While mentioning the role of the Philippine churches in peace process Iris said, “Churches facilitated peace negotiations between the Philippine government and National Democratic Front of the Philippines. The peace process achieved the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL). This became possible due to the significant participation of churches as an independent third party depository. The National Council of Churches asserted to resolve this conflict. At the moment though, the



Participants of CCA-JID Training of Trainers on "Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation" in Chiang Mai

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We as churches need to be more 'open hearted' to the way we resolve conflicts.

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implementation of CARHRIHL is put to halt by the Philippine government and there is no resumption of the peace talks yet.”

When asked about the role of youth in churches for peacebuilding Agustin shared that, “young people have been quite active in the resistance movement against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970's.” However, she added, “Youth need to be more involved in addressing the issues of conflict now. That is why trainings like these help a great deal in equipping young people for resolving conflicts at small and large level. The resource people introduced a positive approach to the way we see and understand conflicts. Youth benefiting from such learning experiences can use the gained skills in transforming conflicts on return to their home churches.”

When asked how she plans to implement the learning from this training, Agustin said, “I would like churches in the Philippines to challenge the ongoing approach they have for conflict transformation. I feel they are learning that with typical and conventional approach, it is no longer possible to resolve the conflicts. Every day there is a growing realisation that the need for newer understanding and creative approach of transforming conflicts into peace is essential.” She added that “we as churches need to be more 'open

hearted' to the way we resolve conflicts. As peacebuilding and conflict transformation is about people transforming people, transforming themselves and it always begins with 'I.'”

One of the most inspiring contents in the training for Iris was the biblical reflections, which she said helped her greatly to understand the issue of conflict and peacebuilding. She said, “Finding theological perspectives to the way we see conflicts and how they should be dealt with is of utmost importance to me. The implication of Christian ethics is a great source of motivation to explore theological aspects on how we build peace in our communities. The biblical reflections in the training were inspiring for all the participants, and we hope to use them in our own churches and communities.”

—Naveen Qayyum

# Asian women religious leaders' summit

A historical landmark in Asian women's faith journey for peace

**C**CA's Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) in collaboration with World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), World Fellowship of Buddhist (WFB) and International Network of Engaged Buddhist (INEB) organised the "Asian Religious Women Leaders' Summit" from 21-23 April 2008 in Bangkok, Thailand. The summit brought together thirty-five women religious leaders and few male leaders from Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Muslim and Taoist communities from China, Singapore, Korea, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines to strengthen the role of women in sustainable development and peace.

Asian women of different faith communities had been working to initiate dialogue of life in building communities of peace. But

this was the first time Asian women religious leaders got together in this summit to form Asian Women's Faith Network to promote peace, harmony and overcome violence against women. This was a landmark in EGY's ministry to bring together women religious leaders in collaboration with partners for the first time to support endeavours for peace-making. This gathering aimed to build on existing women's networks, organisations and ecumenical groups to work towards developing action-oriented partnerships with United Nations, UNIFEM, UNFTA and civil society organisations.

## Why the summit was necessary?

Violence is increasing in today's polarised world. Various forms of violence, including armed conflicts, terrorism, and extremism have escalated, destroying the fabric of soci-

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Women of all faiths need to play pivotal role in averting violence and building just and harmonious societies

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Participants of Asian Religious Women Leaders' Summit in Bangkok



Women of faith praying for peace

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The summit strengthened interreligious cooperation and common action for peace among women leaders across diverse religious traditions

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ety and jeopardizing human security and development. Women and children especially in vulnerable communities are the worst victims of violence. It is in such context that women of all faiths need to play pivotal role in averting violence and building just and harmonious societies. The negative impacts of climate change, tremendous inequalities associated with poverty, health concerns including HIV/AIDS and the escalation of violence and insecurity affect women and children. In this context the need to promote interreligious cooperation on issues of common concern among women has become even greater.

Recognising religious women's unique ability to mobilise grassroots social networks, the summit paved the way for deliberations on how to strengthen interreligious cooperation for peace from a multi-religious perspective. The summit aimed to strengthen interreligious cooperation and common action for peace among women leaders across diverse religious traditions in Asia. It sought to mobilise action by religious women to confront violence in all its forms, including misuse of religion for violence. The summit launched a process of building Asian multi-religious women's leadership body to undertake multi-religious advocacy by enhancing communication and networking among women religious leaders in Asia. It helped to facilitate action-oriented partnerships with

governments, civil society organisations, United Nations, and other governmental and non-governmental organisations.

#### Different faiths, common action plan

Recognising the challenges of feminisation of poverty, poor health, lack of education, gender inequality, violence against women, human trafficking, misinterpretation of religions and lack of political participation by women, the Asian women of faith affirmed to:

- Undertake interreligious advocacy and actions for enhancing communication and networking among women leaders and practitioners from different religions in Asia;
- Promote gender equality and women's empowerment in multi-religious collaboration for peace;
- Initiate actions in networking and communication for peace building, conflict transformation on issues related to gender, poverty, health HIV/AIDS;
- Mobilise action by religious women to confront violence in all forms, including misuse of religions for violence;
- Strengthen capacities of women of faith through training for building peace and promoting justice and harmony in societies.

—Moumita Biswas



# Reconstructing theologies

Developing theological interfaith perspectives towards the discourse of religious resurgence in Indonesia

CCA-FMU co-organised National Theological Workshop on "Doing Theology in Context of Religious Resurgence Today" with Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI) on 10-12 March 2008 in Jakarta, Indonesia. The workshop was attended by twenty-six participants representing member churches of CCI, theological institutes and church organisations. The workshop aimed to criticise, clarify and re-construct theological identity to reflect Christian practice amidst ongoing process of secularisation and globalisation.

The participants pointed out that although secularisation and globalisation are emerging issues, religious resurgence is an aspect that needs immediate attention. The theme

itself reflected the need for this dialogue in Indonesia. Theologians, church representatives and activists contributed and shared their academic insights and experiences. Special attention was paid to bring in young theologians and seminarians while meeting gender balance. This was to introduce ecumenical experience and theological mindset to new generation in multi-cultural and religious contexts of Indonesia.

After the introduction by Rev. Dr Richard Daulay, General Secretary of CCI and Rev. Dr Sungkook Park, Joint Executive Secretary for CCA-FMU, Mr Stephen Suleman from Jakarta Theological Seminary opened the Workshop with a biblical reflection on *Isaac or Ishmael?* While reflecting on *Isaac versus*



Participants of FMU theological workshop in Indonesia

*Ishmael, Sarah versus Hagar*, he made clear that religious landscape of Indonesia is diverse. "Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world and Islam is the religion of majority of our people, while Christianity is a strong minority with some enclaves of Christian majority," said Mr Suleeman. With these reflections, he tried to reconstruct the story of *Isaac and Ishmael*. He pointed out the significance of interpretation of scripture and its sharing with others. The presentation was followed by responses and comments from the participants. The participants included biblical scholars, experts on Quranic exegesis and academics from ecumenical, evangelical and Pentecostal backgrounds.

Prof. Dr Franz Magnis-Suseno gave a presentation on "The Roots of Fundamentalism". This introduced basic theoretical elements towards a deeper understanding of fundamentalism. This was followed by a presentation on "Islamic Fundamentalism in Society and Politics" by Mr Ihsan Ali Fauzi, an Islamic scholar. He shared a critical observation that "Islam" and "fundamentalism" are almost entirely linked in English language usage. This presentation provided clarification about broadly misunderstood Islamic terminology.

Given the term "fundamentalism" is hugely used with a negative connotation, the two presentations on the subject formed the basis for further discussion on religious resurgence in Indonesian context.

Rev. Junifrius Gultom, from Indonesia Pentecostal Churches Fellowship, presented on "Pentecostal Movement and Christian Fundamentalism". He stressed that although the Pentecostal movement has its weakness in developing contextual theology, there is no reason to refer to religious extremism in terms of Pentecostal movement. The strength of Pentecostal movements lies more in spiritual depth and personal devotion to God and experience of God, rather than in social engagement. He made it clear that "evangelisation" is not equal to "Christianisation".

Rev. Dr Martin Sinaga from Jakarta Theological Seminary presented on "Christian Faith in the Public Sphere". He defined religious resurgence as a "critique to secular values", a concept that needs to be understood as a phenomenon of struggle for humans to survive amidst globalisation. *Doing Theology* in the context of religious resurgence is to be seen as an effort to seek answers to social issues. He shared the perspective of many participants that religion has the responsi-

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Although secularisation and globalisation are emerging issues, religious resurgence is an aspect that needs immense attention

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Rev. Dr Zakaria Ngelow presenting in the workshop in Indonesia



Dr Park Sungkook with Dr Richard Daulay in the workshop

bility to respond to social issues. Specifying the social issue in the given reality was his next step. "How can we use Christ's name in social sphere?" This input instigated vital discussion among the participants, such as redefinition of "faith and church", meaning of salvation, and religious response to globalisation.

Rev. Dr Zakaria Ngelow from Rantepo Theological Seminary presented on "Breaking through the Burden of the Past—Renewing our Theology". He reflected on the relationship between Christianity and Islam, which is still much burdened with the legacy of colonial past. He said that while our Muslim brothers and sisters regard the period of colonialism as kind of a punishment, Christians have taken the most benefits out of that period. The context of this tense relationship becomes vulnerable to some radical Islamists for whom political interests come before the religion itself. Some Christian groups are meanwhile giving an elitist impression to the people by using the institutions set up by former colonial powers. He pointed out that the peaceful future and stability of Indonesia is in interfaith harmony. However, the task has to be secular-oriented.

Rev. Dr Anwar Tjen from Indonesia Bible Society gave presentation on "Use and Abuse of the Secret Text in Religious Resurgence To-

day". Beginning with raising some standard questions related to Bible and biblical hermeneutics, he also critiqued the tendency of "overemphasising" Bible as the sacred/secret text.

A general discussion included various reflections on the theme and reports from different areas reflecting participants' concerns about building a peaceful community in the given reality of plurality. In situations where Christians are majority or minority, the difficulties are similar when it comes to interpreting the Bible in appropriate ways. Concrete suggestions were given to strengthen contextual curriculum in theological seminaries and organise practical trainings on conflict transformation and reconciliation.

A strong need was felt at this National Theological Workshop in Indonesia to form a committee on contextual theology, which can meet the needs of Indonesian society. For short and long term activity programs, it was suggested to strengthen the role of recently set-up Theological Committee of the CCI.

—Sungkook PARK

# Theological education for South Asia

In order to discuss the future of theological education in South Asia, the Programme on Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) of the World Council of Churches, together with the CCA, organised the meeting of the Regional Committee on the Solidarity Fund for Theological Education in South Asia in Kathmandu, Nepal on 28-30 April.

Attending the meeting were representatives of National Councils of Churches and theological colleges from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and the president of the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College in India (BTE-SSC).

Participants reviewed and amended the draft "Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the South Asia Endowment Fund for Theological Education" and agreed on new working procedures and accountability structures.

Following the example of India, master development plans for the future of theological education will be worked out respectively by the National Committees for Theological Education in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal in cooperation with their respective NCCs.

The participants shared the concern to enlarge the Solidarity Endowment Fund Network in order to include Bhutan in the near future.

The meeting was held at a time when Nepal's government was in transition from being a Hindu monarchy to a republic, with the Maoist party gaining majority seats in parliament at the recent elections. The Regional Committee heard stories of the struggles of the National Council of Churches in Nepal (NCCN) and the young theological education institutions which served as case studies



Participants of Regional Committee on the Solidarity Fund for "Theological Education in South Asia" in Kathmandu





Rev. Dr Jayasiri Peiris (extreme right), General Secretary of NCC Sri Lanka presenting a case study at the meeting in Nepal

during the meeting.

NCCN played a very significant role in the historic ceasefire talks, in lobbying for human rights, and in preparing the way towards a constitutional assembly, which is now entrusted to work out a new constitution for Nepal.

While Christianity in Nepal has a very short history of some 50-60 years, it is marked at present by enormous growth and zeal. Christianity came to Nepal mainly through social services of mission workers and the Nepalese in diaspora and it spread without concern for denominational labels. However, the opening of the country to foreigners and the coming in of foreign missionaries in the recent past has led to the coming in of denominations and the sprouting of different kinds of theological institutions.

In such a context, NCCN has also played a significant role in bringing the churches of Nepal together and forming regional Christian councils throughout the country. NCCN's vision includes strengthening the social involvement of Christians through interfaith dialogue and interaction between church and society, and the gospel and culture in Nepal.

However, given the anti-ecumenism campaign from the more conservative churches in Nepal which is directed at NCCN and the whole ecumenical movement, there is a need for an ecumenical team visit to help express solidarity with NCCN and to correct wrong

images and perception of the ecumenical movement.

Dr. K B Rokaya, general secretary of NCCN, asked for partner churches in Asia to dialogue with their mission groups that are based in Nepal in order to establish better understanding and more cooperation between them and NCCN so as to have a common witness of the churches in Nepal.

Following the Regional Committee meeting, the Rev. Dr. Dietrich Werner of WCC-E TE and Dr. Hope S. Antone of CCA-FMU and ETE visited the office of the nine-year old NCCN, where they heard more about the work and challenges of the national council. They also visited two theological institutions, namely, Nepal Institute of Theology (NIT) and Nepal Ebeneser Bible College (NEBC). Hope Antone preached at the chapel service of NEBC. There is tremendous need for upgrading and strengthening small institutions of theological education in Nepal which have just begun their work. Hence, creating an additional major fund for support of theological education in Nepal was seen as an urgent need.

The Regional Committee decided to meet again in Bangladesh in early part of 2009.

—Hope S. Antone

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NCCN has played a significant role in bringing the churches of Nepal together  
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# Common concerns

General secretaries of regional ecumenical organisations met in Asia to share, reflect and deliberate

CCA with World Council of Churches (WCC) held the annual meeting for general secretaries of Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REOs) on 10-11 April 2008 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. CCA was the first REO, born in 1957, as the East Asia Christian Conference. Over the next twenty-five years, six more REOs were founded in other regions, except North America.

"This gathering is an occasion to share many different perspectives from diverse contexts. It is an opportunity to be inspired and to see God at work in new ways. This is an opportunity to dream new ways and see God's liberating work in our own contexts," said Rev. Sayam Muangsak, General Secretary of the Church of Christ in Thailand in his welcome speech.

Doug Chial, WCC Programme Executive for the Coordination of Church and Ecumenical Relations facilitated the meeting. He said, "the gathering is a time to update ourselves on current activities of REOs, to seek wisdom on addressing particular issues and finding ways on how to strengthen cooperation among the REOs."

Many global issues were shared in the meeting. Among the most critical issues the negative impact of globalisation was discussed at great length. It was shared by all representatives that the impact of globalisation on the faith communities is huge, and the gap between rich and poor, haves and have-nots, developed and developing countries, urban and rural communities is widening every day.

"The rise in prices of oil and food has devastating effects on the poor and vulnerable



Participants in the REOs meeting



Participants praying with CCA staff before business session

communities. This creates conflicts, security issue for the farmers and a threat to sustainability of the entire social unit. The emphasis on bi-lateral agreements, rather than strengthening the existing support system is weakening people's ability to live a healthy and prosperous life," said Dr Prawate Khid-arn, CCA General Secretary.

In the context of the next G8 meeting in Canada in 2009, the China Christian Council (CCC) has developed common resources to promote Millennium Development Goals. The CCC launched a campaign with a biblical theme, "For such a time as this" (Esther 4.14), which will mobilise member churches, evangelical alliances and other faith communities to work for social justice issues.

Bishop H. Mvume Dandala, General Secretary for All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), emphasised the importance of women and youth issues in the ecumenical movement in Africa. "Among the fruits to highlight, is the increasing cooperation with sub-regional fellowships, which has helped to increase the impact of churches in deepening the desire for a more coherent ecumenical movement," he said.

In European context, the intra and interreligious relations were discussed as one of the ecumenical concerns in reference to the increase in "migrant churches".

"It is a common feature in Europe now, that migrant churches are growing and changing church life in terms of confession, culture and

linguistics. The real question is whether the traditional churches are willing to make room for the migrant churches?" Venerable Colin Williams, General Secretary for Conference of European Churches, raised the question.

Dr Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary of National Council of the Churches of Christ in U.S.A stressed on "stewardship" and the "prophetic voice" of churches amidst global conflict and confrontation. "How do we help the churches understand what it means to be a part of a council of churches? In the US, NCC has never really been a council, but a cooperative agency, a community of communions," he shared.

The meeting concluded with lively discussions and sharing of critical experiences. Following areas were identified for more attention and pro-active initiatives by the REOs: importance of full integration among the regional ecumenical organisations; making ecumenical language coherent and purposeful; interfaith dialogue and churches' response; the creation of common global agenda, mutual accountability, unity and diversity. The group identified common interests in theological discussions on ecumenism, seeking churches to understand what fellowship means - what it means to be a council of churches - as an ongoing challenge for all the regions.

—Prawate Khid-arn

# Youth transformation

Potential of young people is needed for a meaningful contribution to the lives of churches

**T**he National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) recently held its Quadrennial General Assembly from 30 April to 5 May 2008. As part of the event, NCCI Youth department organised a Youth Pre-Assembly on 27-30 April in Shillong, India. This Pre-Assembly is held every four years in conjunction with the General Assembly, bringing together regional youth leaders from diverse backgrounds. The youth leaders discussed the emerging issues faced by Indian youth and streamlined the focus of youth movement in India for the next four years. The Labang Presbyterian Church in Shillong served as the gracious hosts to the participants. They not only shared their space for various Pre-Assembly sessions, but also opened up their homes to the participants, from around India. Much support was also provided by the local church youth, who served as stewards

and helpers during the Pre-Assembly.

"Together in Mission: Empowering Local Congregations" was the theme for this year's Pre-Assembly addressed by Rev. Dr Roger Gaikwad, Principal of Aizawl Theological College in Mizoram in the opening session. Using a metaphorical call to arms, he exhorted the participants to re-examine their accepted ideas on what empowering local congregations truly means. Following this, there was an open forum aimed at highlighting emerging issues and current challenges faced by the Indian church youth community. Consequently the sessions, facilitated by various resource persons, attempted to provide a basic understanding of various issues including gender justice, ecological stewardship, Christian identity in the modern world with a special focus on AIDS and HIV concerns.

While these sessions were informative, the content could have been familiar to the participants. Yet for many this was the first time these facts were being presented to them, and thus they were not fully prepared to discuss the issues in detail. In this respect, the Pre-Assembly was not able to reach its targeted participants, as many of them had more of an insular view of issues affecting the national youth movement. Part of the responsibility lies with the sending churches themselves, who did



Youth from Labang Presbyterian Church, Shillong



not send viable participants nor prepared them in advance to effectively represent their respective regional church youth communities. While there were some well prepared and well-informed participants, they were few in number as compared to the majority of youth that made up the main participant base. Thus only a splintered and non-encompassed view was gleaned from the feedback being provided. As a result, the statement compiled for the main Assembly was merely a rehashing of previous statements drafted four years earlier, with little progress achieved.

This is a worrying situation, as without strong and focused leadership any movement becomes ineffective, and slowly deteriorates into redundancy. The churches in India need to take a firm hand to re-examine the youth leadership in their respective communities. These youth leaders need to be aware of current issues within their communities as well as within the region, and be prepared to boldly face the challenges with creativity and passion, lest they end up disempowering their own communities and become stumbling blocks to other youth leaders who are actually effective in their roles. This may seem harsh, but in light of the responsibility they carry, as well as the crisis faced by the youth movement, it is not unreasonable. All is not lost, however, as there are still viable and vi-



Participants of NCCI Youth Pre-Assembly in India

brant youth leaders within the NCCI Youth movement who are striving to bring change. It is these leaders who hold the key to the future of church youth in India, but they require the support of the churches to bring about this transformation. Only with this partnership will the true potential of the youth movement be unlocked. Only then they can start contributing meaningfully to the lives of churches.

—Adam Row



Paul Lalsangliana, Ruali Mawii and Adam Row (from left to right)

# The spirit of survival

Finding words that can describe the atrocities in Myanmar indeed isn't easy. Cyclone Nargis that swept away more than 100,000 lives left 2.5 million people at grave risk, making one wonder if the country was in need of more tragedies. The clamouring from UN, international organisations and churches did ease out the restrictions posed by Myanmar government in allowing foreign workers in the country. However this is still not enough according to the critics, and there is "much more needed to be done".

In a CCA hosted meeting on 20 May, Rev. Mar Gay Gui, General Secretary of Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) said, "People of Myanmar are going through difficult times and are in need of prayers and help from their brothers and sisters." He shared that many churches from different denominations are working together for the relief work in storm stricken areas and collaborating with ACT International in Myanmar in providing relief to the surviving communities. "To cope with the crisis, Myanmar Christian Coalition for Relief Work has been formed, which is taking measures to deliver aid to the cyclone victims," he said.

Rev. Mar Gay Gui thanked CCA, Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), Payap University, Church World Service (CWS), Thailand Baptist Missionary Fellowship (TBMF), ACT International, churches, ecumenical organisations and friends for their support. He said, "MCC appeals to all the churches to keep Myanmar and its people in prayer, and provide help that is needed by their brothers and sisters going through trying times. We would also like to thank the churches, who had been a constant support in our struggles to get the aid to the victims."

CCA General Secretary Dr Prawate Khid-arn said in a meeting at Asian Human Rights Center (AHRC) in Hong Kong, "I would like to thank sisters and brothers from Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (the Netherlands) and Uniting Church of Canada for their expressions of solidarity with Myanmar. CCA is happy to know that many other member churches and councils, including Council of Churches in Malaysia, the PROK and Presbyterian Church of Korea, Uniting Church in Australia, and the CWS (New Zealand) are making efforts to provide assistance."

A CCA delegation led by Rev. Freddy De Alwis of Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service, vis-



ited Myanmar from 9-11 June 2008. The visit was not only to pray and grieve with the communities of Myanmar, but to assess the situation and make long term action plans for the rehabilitation of cyclone victims. The CCA team met with the representatives of churches and international organisations to formulate an action plan for the future initiatives. CCA plans to hold programs for long term rehabilitation and trauma counselling for the communities. For making a contribution to the relief efforts, CCA can be contacted at [ccagensec@cca.org.hk](mailto:ccagensec@cca.org.hk).

Another shock followed the Myanmar cyclone, as more than 60,000 lives were lost in the earthquake in Sichuan province of China, making more than 436,000 people homeless. However the difference between the two calamities lied in the response from their governments. As UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon on his visit to the affected areas in China said, "The Chinese government, at the early stage of this natural disaster, has invested strenuous effort and demonstrated extraordinary leadership."

CCA received an "Appeal for Assistance to People Affected by Earthquake that Hit China in 2008" from Amity Foundation (AF). CCA is supporting their efforts by appealing to its member churches and ecumenical friends to send contributions to the Amity Foundation to help the devastated communities.

While calamities in Myanmar and China shook the daily course of life for many, the spirit of survival keeps on inspiring those struggling to help the victims. There is an immense need to uphold the survivors in our prayers and help the victims in any way we can.

—Naveen Qayyum

# Migration's impact on churches

The Biblical concept of "welcoming the stranger" is not optional for Christians

A Public Hearing on "Migration and the Changing Ecclesial Landscape" was organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) in Beirut on 15-16 April 2008. Leaders from diverse religious backgrounds got together to address the issue of migrant workers and churches' response.

From CCA, Dr Prawate Khid-arn, General Secretary, Rev. Freddy De Alwis, Joint Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service (JID) and Ms Janejinda Pawadee of Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Programmed participated in the event. The opening session was chaired by His Holiness Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia and Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC General Secretary.

The first session addressed the theme, "Migration a Global Phenomenon: Issues, Concerns and Challenges" chaired by Ms. Doris Peschke, General Secretary of Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe. Mr. James D. Thomson, Director of Policy and Advocacy in Christian World Service presented on "Global Perspective on Migration". Dr Samuel

Kobia presented on "Ecumenism in 21st Century- Changing Ecclesial Contexts: Impact of Migration". Dr Pascal Monin, Professor of International Relations and Political Science at National University of Lebanon spoke about "Mass Exodus of Lebanese to Europe and USA". This was followed by panel discussion and comments from the participants.

The second session was chaired by Dr Prawate Khid-arn and the speakers were Mr. Abdel Mawla El Solh from St. Joseph University Beirut, Dr Boutros Labaki from St. Joseph University in Beirut, and Dr Ray Jureidini from American University in Cairo. This was followed by comments and discussions by the panellists.

On the second day, the theme, "Migration



Rev. Freddy De Alwis at the of Public Hearing on migration in Beirut

Living Together in Diversity: Churches' Response," was addressed. This session was chaired by the Rev. Arlington Trotman, Moderator of Churches' Commissions for Migrants in Europe. The speakers included Ms. Doris Peschke, Dr Prawate Khid-arn and Prof. Paul Tabar.

The second day of the Public Hearing included stories and voices of young students, who shared their future aspiration and fears in the context of migration issue. This session was chaired by Dr Samuel Kobia.

The next session was chaired by Dr Nora Bayrakdarian from Lebanese University and the speakers addressed the theme, "Middle East Peace Process and its Implications on Migration". The session was concluded with a panel discussion. Finally the public statement was read by Dr Samuel Kobia, where he highlighted issues like brain drain and the biblical concept of accepting neighbours and strangers.

### Reflections

In my personal observation, the Public Hearing on migration in Beirut was not so impressive and convincing. Nevertheless, the situation of Lebanese people and young Lebanese Christians, who are migrating to Europe and USA in large numbers is lamentable. They experience a lot of agony and harassment. In this present scenario, especially after September 11, 2001 incident, the tendency towards Middle Eastern Migrants has taken a more aggressive and dogmatic stance.

Eventually this tendency of premeditated "Islamophobia" has been growing in an unprecedented manner in the West and in Europe. After all, for the West and Europe, it does not matter, whether migrants are Christians or Muslims from the Middle East. The tendency is still for the West and Europe to regard them all as terrorists. Even though the Church also at large is lobbying against this particular tendency, another ground reality which has been identified during the Public Hearing was the growing consensus of "Stop Migration", as it would curtail the Christian identity in the whole of Middle East.

However, in the name of solidarity and concern for the struggle of Middle Eastern migrants, there is also a terrible momentum

growing up in the Middle East against the migrant workers' who have been deprived of their "Rights", or "Right to work with Dignity" for mere survival. The irony of the crisis is that Middle Eastern migrants have been experiencing in the West and Europe; in return, Middle East authorities have been reflecting upon the "Asian Migrants". Thus, it is high time for the Middle Eastern countries to take a stock on how they have deprived, mercilessly torched, killed, sexually abused and forfeited payments for their own Asian brothers and sisters.

In fact, the whole biblical concept of "Welcome the Stranger" is not optional for Christians alone. It is a God-given mandate to all God's followers. But surprisingly, the reality differs from the above biblical perspective in the Middle East.

In the Public Hearing, Dr. Prawate Khid-arn, General Secretary of CCA, and Dr. Ray Jureidini from American University in Cairo spoke about the situation of Asian migrant workers. It was unique that both these distinguished speakers from Asia and the West elaborated on this most challenging and current political issues related to the "Migrant Workers". It is observed that amongst the "Migrant Workers in Middle East" more than 82% are from Asia - mainly as domestic workers, of whom 62% are women.

Finally we are very happy to share that in Global Ecumenical Network on Migration (GEM) meeting, all the members agreed to host the next Public Hearing in Asia, under the leadership of CCA-JID. I take this as a privilege and challenge to coordinate and mobilize this event, for the sake of the dignity of migrant workers in Asia.

—Freddy De Alwis

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"Islamophobia" has been growing in an unprecedented manner in the West

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# Commitment for peace

Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

Justice, peace, rights and sustainable development are the most significant aspects of human progress. Like the rest of the world, Asia has been experiencing political unrest, poverty, economic crisis, social upheavals and epidemics. Human rights violations continue across the region. The debate on health and sustainable development is much linked to globalisation and climate change.

In this context, Asian churches are challenged to seek peace and justice. Developing new social, economic and political vision to deal with emerging socio-political issues is another challenge churches are faced with. In Asian history, the ecumenical movement unfolded itself amidst suffering and victimisation of people under colonial, neo-colonial eras and the cold war. Considering sustainability of life as a new context of God's mission, churches need to create reconciling communities.

Asia, a continent with more than half of the world's population, witnessed the systematic violation of human rights and dignity. The denial of basic rights is a manifestation of complex socio-political situation. The negation of fundamental rights, rule of law, flawed justice systems and trends of authoritarianism are rising in the region. This also includes misuse of democratic principles, ethnic conflicts, religious fundamentalism and displacements in the name of economic development.

The internal displacements due to civil war and ethnic conflicts, mass exodus in conflict-ridden areas and intensified militarisation are crucial issues. Abductions, illegal arrests, detentions, imprisonments without trial, extra-judicial killings, torture, disappearances, and fake "encounter" killings are prevailing

in the region. While all these issues are significant for the societies, the most striking common factor among Asian countries is the negation of rule of law, which increases human rights violations.

As a result of the continuing conflicts in Asia, especially in countries like Pakistan, India and the Philippines, many lives have been lost. Therefore the efforts to restore peace and resolve conflicts need to move further. Increasingly more thinkers are noticing the limits of traditional approach in analysing peace and security, solely from a geopolitical framework. It is no longer considered adequate to examine security of a nation-state from its external threats of war and violence. For years, institutions like World Council of Churches and CCA have called for a comprehensive understanding of threats to peace with its external and internal economic dimensions.

Asian history has always been challenging. Confidence building and conflict resolution were never easy tasks. The economic tempest has put adverse effects on the region. It had been rare that, East Asia and the international communities made enough concrete efforts to resolve the crisis. Many South Asian countries started to participate in the nuclear arms race in the past few years. Asia now has many nuclear powers like the West, yet it remains mired in poverty. The contrast between the illusion of newfound greatness and the reality of social and economic conditions is stark indeed.

Peace, justice and people's security are rooted in God's call for abundant life for all - "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). The biblical vision of security is not based on the security of the states, nations or kings. Rather, it calls the

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More thinkers are noticing the limits of traditional approach in analysing peace and security

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states or “kings” to do justice and seek God's shalom (Isaiah 10:1-2). In both Isaiah and Micah, the vision of shalom weaves abundant life inseparably into people's security. This includes gender justice, social, ecological, economic and political progress both nationally and internationally.

“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid... the lion shall eat straw like the ox... the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den... they will not hurt or destroy...” (Isaiah 11:6-9).

“... they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:3-4).

All nations, economic systems and rulers stand under the judgment of the shalom vision, where justice and peace imply the fruits of abundant life. This is a historical vision for all people and generations, encompassing fullness of life. It implies that the sins of the past must be remembered and repented. Women, youth, old and the marginalised, everyone must be full and equal partners in the peace process. Impunity must be replaced by truth, justice and reconciliation.

Reconciliation restores broken and unjust relations between persons, communities and nations. It is in this ministry of reconciliation that churches need to play their required role for peacemaking. However, reconciliation is a difficult and costly process and involves courage and prophetic witness.

In the context of faith, peace, justice and people's security, we seek to realise Isaiah's vision in Asia today:

“For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth... No more shall there be an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime... They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit... They shall not labour in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord- and their descendants as well... They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord” (Isaiah 65:17-25).

Many times peace becomes rhetoric, especially when there is no peace in reality. People are often given false hopes through political promises and development programs that ignore the roots of violence and conflict. These false promises are promoted through economic structures that are the root causes of conflict. Many leaders make peace look unrealistically plausible. Therefore, when these promises of peace collapse and the whitewash runs into the gutter, people ask, “what has become of the peace, assurances of safety, prosperity, the smooth words and plausible arguments; specious pretences, and flattering prophecies?,” and there are no answers.



Tony Waworuntu at one of JID peace trainings in Taiwan

Structures that need to be beautified with whitewash are not built on foundations of justice. Justice is the key word in the realities of conflicts. We do not build peace, rather we build justice, and once justice exists in all our economic, political and social relationships, peace will emerge naturally.

Justpeace is therefore a phenomenon that emerges when injustice is transformed and people have their rights. The concept of peace goes beyond simple treaties or contracts. It is beyond programs that could only provide people a bit of comfort within oppressive systems and structures. The true concept of peace recognises the history, culture and the complexity of conflicts and tries to address them creatively. Justpeace encompasses all aspects of conflict including economic, political, social, cultural, gender and ethnicity-based violence.

To build justpeace, we must have movements that are rooted deeply in the marginalised communities. To be able to make a difference, these movements should not only address the peace issues but should provide means of participation by empowering them, and communicating their values and aspirations to the rest of the world. A movement should not only be a movement of peace, but a movement of transformation, building alternative institutions, systems and structures at the grass-root level.

Suffering does not know boundaries of religions, gender, nationality or ethnicity. In suffering, people come together as they know that their survival depends on unity. As people commit to build justpeace, we too must come together without concerns of religious affiliations, gender, nationality or ethnicity, for this is what is demanded of us. Our coming together with the marginalised regardless of our differences reflects our vision of a future for a global community of justpeace—the reign of God.

—Tony Waworuntu

# Reclaiming mission and ecumenism

This message was delivered at the Quadrennial Assembly of NCC India by Dr Rienzie Perera, CCA Associate General Secretary

**W**e are delighted that you have invited us to be part of this occasion and let us bring greetings to your Quadrennial Assembly. Therefore, on behalf of CCA I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

We recognise the hard work put in by the staff and leadership of National Council of Churches in India to make this event meaningful and a challenge to all of us who come from different parts of the world. Although we are diverse in many ways, there is one thing common among all of us and that is our unity in Jesus Christ. When I speak of unity I am not thinking of uniformity but our unity in diversity. India reflects that unity in diversity in many ways.

We are proud of the fact that in 1940s, amidst many divisions in the world, Indian Christian leaders decided that the way forward for Indian Church is to seek structural unity and witness together. CCA as an ecumenical organisation is proud of that bold step. It is a spiritual leap. The theme of the inaugural Assembly of CCA in 1959 was "Witnessing Together". That too reflects the prophetic stance and witnessing of the Church during that time. We are not saying that by being united those Churches are free from division and conflict. They have their own conflicts. They will have to resolve their conflicts and keep moving ahead as a witnessing community and face challenges together to overcome them and manifest the authentic marks of being the Body of Christ in the Indian context.

Today ecumenism is not taken seriously by many churches. Ecumenism is either delegated to NCCs or to a few individuals in churches. Therefore, the Church as a whole is either lukewarm to ecumenism or seeped in denominationalism. This is a sad reality and a step backwards. There are those in the Church who believe that ecumenism is a liability and to speak about the unity of the Church is old fashioned. However, we believe that

these two matters cannot be traded off if the Church were to be the Church in any given country or context.

Today we live in a broken world and the brokenness of the world is reflected even in our own communities. In the midst of the brokenness of the world the Church is called to witness for unity and to be the presence of a healing community. The Church in any given context will fail to be that community, if it does not have a grasp of what it means to be ecumenical. Ecumenism is not a political agenda of the Church, as some Christians try to interpret it. Ecumenism is a call to the Church to look at the whole inhabited world—the entire planet earth—as God's creation and engage in a transforming mission. Ecumenism calls the Church to transcend narrow forms of denominationalism and parochialism and preach the Gospel to the whole world. The challenge of ecumenism is a call to the churches to work in partnership with all, irrespective of religious or ideological affiliations, and to "preach good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind and to set at liberty those who are oppressed." (Luke 4: 18)

This is the mission manifesto of Jesus the Christ spelt out in Nazareth. Hence, ecumenism should be based on the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ who spelt out that manifesto and called his disciples to re-enact that mission. Therefore, how dare we disregard that call and become lukewarm to that mission thrust, which is central to the Gospel. We hope and believe that the churches in India will re-discover the meaning of ecumenism and renew its calling and mission based on the spirit of ecumenism. To make a commitment to ecumenism is to make a commitment to the Gospel of Jesus the Christ. According to St. Paul, we are called to preach the Gospel in season and out of season. We hope and pray that the churches in India will imitate that call.

## Clement John passes away



Clement John passed away on 2 June 2008 in Minnesota, USA. He was Executive Secretary for International Affairs in CCA from 1983 to 1993, when it was based in Hong Kong.

Clement also served as the first general secretary of Asian Human Rights Commission and the Asian Legal Resource Centre, founded by CCA. He then joined World Council of Churches' International Affairs department in Geneva, as a specialist in human rights and international affairs. He served as the director of Commission of the Churches on International Affairs before he retired from the WCC in 2006.

Clement John was an accomplished lawyer in Pakistan before joining CCA in 1980s. He remained politically active by being part of National Student Federation, the Young Lawyers' Association and the Pakistan People's Party even as he served on the board of directors of the YMCA of Karachi. He later became a founding member of the joint committee for justice and peace of the Karachi dioceses of the Church of Pakistan and the Roman Catholic Church.

Dr Prawate Khid-arn described him as an "ecumenical leader whose passing away is a great loss to the ecumenical movement." "His achievements and contribution to the churches will always be remembered by all

his friends," he added.

His funeral service was held at Our Saviour Lutheran Church on 5 June 2008 in Minnesota. Clement is survived by his wife Violet and children.

## Women's Pre-Assembly

On the occasion of 26th Quadrennial Assembly of National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), All India Council of Christian Women (AICCW), the women's wing of NCCI organised the Women's Pre-Assembly from 27 April - May 2008 at Umlyngka Presbyterian Church in Shillong, Meghalaya.

The theme of Women's Pre-Assembly was "Women in Mission: Empowering Communities". Women delegates from twenty-four member churches of NCCI and women leaders from local churches actively participated in the Pre-Assembly. The Indian church women came out with a strong statement, presented by Deaconess Swabita Swaraj, President of AICCW. The participants emphasised the need for recognising Indian women's contribution in churches' mission and involving them in decision making process of church and society. AICCW action plans for empowering communities in the next four years were also presented. The participants discussed the mission focus of Indian churches in relation to Millennium Development Goals, especially in terms of overcoming violence against women and children in India.



NCCI Women's Pre-Assembly in India



# KCC Assembly in Cambodia

The 3rd General Assembly of Kampuchea Christian Council (KCC) was held on 26-30 March in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on the theme, "Congregations in Communities of Peace". The Assembly was held to formulate programs, envisage new visions and elect new leaders for KCC. The event was more significant than the past assemblies, as new amendments in the KCC constitution were approved. For the next five years Pastor Som Chan Both will serve as president, Pastor Oum Sovy as vice president, Assistant Pastor Nou Kimsan as vice president, Pastor Vin Hay as treasurer, and Pastor Chan Saren as committee member.



## CCA visits Vietnam | ECOT 25th anniversary

CCA General Secretary, Dr Prawate Khidarn, Dr Mathews George, Asia Secretary for the World Council of Churches and Ms Janejinda Pawadee and Rev. Huh Chung Jung of the Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program (MEPP) visited the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECV) in Ho Chi Minh City on 30-31 March 2008. The team attended worship at Chuong Trinh Tho Phuong Church, one of the larger churches in Ho Chi Minh City, with more than 5,000 members. The pastors shared that the congregation has grown immensely in the past few years. At the end of last year, 1,415 new members joined the church.

Rev. Prof Le Vian Thien, the General Secretary for ECV, led the meeting with church representatives. The relations and cooperation between WCC, CCA and the ecumenical partners in Vietnam were discussed. ECV expressed its wish to participate in CCA 13th General Assembly in 2010 as an observer.



A Consultation marked the 25th Anniversary of Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism on 7-8 April 2008 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Twenty-five experienced tourism workers from both the South and North engaged in a wide ranging analysis of modern day tourism, especially the impact of tourism on Third World communities.

The link between tourism and development was explored. Governments of developing countries, with the strong endorsement of the

United Nations World Tourism Organisation, often look at tourism as a godsend for development and poverty alleviation. They provide economic information such as tourist arrivals and revenue earned, but often no social indicators on tourism's impact on people. ECOT was urged to assist in the development of tools to empower communities in assessing how tourism affects them at the grassroots level. A Code of Ethics was also suggested for local communities to equip them to deal with a burgeoning tourism.

Peace, conflict and tourism also engaged the Consultation. If tourism is to exercise its potential in peace building in relation to conflict regions, such as Palestine, it should also involve aspects beyond food and historical sites. Pilgrims and other tourists should be enabled to understand the root causes of the

conflict alongside the culture, history, spirituality and the enjoyable moments. Should tourism be promoted to a country such as Myanmar was also discussed. Other foci at the Consultation included tourism and indigenous peoples, HIV-AIDS and climate change.

The Consultation was also an opportunity for networking with various groups from Asia and beyond. It will guide ECOT's future work. It also saw the launch of 'Transforming Re-Forming Tourism', a book marking the 25th Anniversary of ECOT with valuable insights from writers from around the world. The publication can be obtained by contacting [office@ecotonline.org](mailto:office@ecotonline.org). For further information contact Caesar D'Mello (tel/fax: +66 53 240 026 [caesar@ecotonline.org](mailto:caesar@ecotonline.org)).

## Communication for peace



Forty-one participants of Asia Region-World Association of Christian Communication (AR-WACC) Assembly expressed concern over the trend of mainstream media taking sides with those in power, "instead of upholding the people's voices and aspirations." The Assembly was held on 17-20 May in Chiang Mai gathering participants from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Korea, Pakistan, Philippines and Thailand on the theme, "Communication is peace:

Building viable communities in Asia".

In a statement, Chiang Mai Declaration 2008, the Assembly participants reaffirmed their "prophetic role as Christian communicators" and committed themselves to make the voices of the poor and marginalised heard.

Stating that building communities of peace necessitates a holistic approach, the Asian communicators called for a long and lasting peace based on justice in Asia. Rev Buakab Ronghanam, in her keynote speech, stressed

the importance of creating "a new iconography of peace rooted in justice, to defend the poor, widow, orphans and migrants and to live a life rooted in forgiveness and solidarity or harmony."

Rev Randy Naylor, General Secretary of the Toronto-based global WACC, updated the participants about the work of the global office and the upcoming congress to be held later this year in South Africa.

WACC is an ecumenical organisation, which encourages co-operation between Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic communicators and challenges denominations to see the broadest possible base for their communication activities. It also promotes co-operation between people of other faiths and ideologies.

Ms Maria Theresa Lauron, General Secretary of AR-WACC, in her report said that the theme of the Assembly will also be followed up with a view to begin "a dialogue on how Christian communicators in the region may arrive at a collective understanding of the poverty situation" and to work out strategies to deal with it.

Dr John Henry Anand, president of AR-WACC, referred to the plans for developing poverty reporting standards in Asia. He said that AR-WACC will carry out a systematic analysis of mainstream news media in the region over a period of three years beginning with India, and extending later to Indonesia, Philippines, Myanmar and China.

The participants also expressed deepest sympathy and solidarity with the victims of the recent cyclone in Myanmar and the earthquake in the Sichuan province in China.

The Triennial Assembly elected new office bearers for the next three years. Dr Samuel Meshack from India is the new president. Ms Maria Theresa Lauron was reelected as the general secretary. Rev Judy Chan is the new treasurer. Rev Augustinus Sarwanto from Indonesia was elected vice president. CCA's Communication Consultant Ms Naveen Qayyum from Pakistan and Rev Saw May Min Lwin from Myanmar were elected new executive committee members. The next assembly in 2011 will possibly be held in Indonesia. Source: Philip Mathew Asia Pacific Ecumenical News

## Youth secretaries meeting

The North East Asia (NEA) Co-team held a preparatory meeting from 15-18 May in Seoul, South Korea. The meeting was held to review and evaluate the last North East Asia Peace Consultation (NEAPC) which took place in Taiwan in 2007, as well as to prepare for the next NEAPC in 2009.

As per the decision reached in the Asia Youth Secretaries Meeting 2006, sub-regional co-teams were formed to plan and organise programs focusing on issues within the sub-regional context, to foster better ecumenical partnership and understanding.

The NEA Co-team identified peace related issues as the focus, and consequently a Peace Consultation was planned to be held every two years. The event will address varying themes and ideas shared within the context of their national situations.

The NEAPC 2009, will be held in Japan, and will highlight human rights issues in regard to militarization within the region and a special focus on the Article 9 situation in Japan. Following the various sessions, discussions, and exposure programs, viable action-plans will be formulated by the participants to be carried out in their home countries, as well as on a sub-regional level. Consequently, increased ecumenical awareness and solidarity will be nurtured between the various national youth bodies.



Youth secretaries at NEAPC meeting in Seoul

# The prayer

*We have come together and shared with each other as people of faith,  
committed to peace and reconciliation in our world.*

*We have gathered here because we are people of faith.  
Because we believe, we dare to understand and act.  
We pledge to each other to live in the truth,  
And to uphold the sanctity of life of all beings.*

*In living in and for the truth, may we find spiritual insight;  
And by insight, understanding;  
And by understanding, knowledge;  
And by knowledge, passion for the just;  
And in the passion for the just, the love of it;  
And in the love of it, peace with all of existence.*

*May caring love pervade all;  
May righteousness guide our actions;  
May peace guide our journey;  
May the joy of harmony amidst diversity enrich our lives  
Now as always.*

*This prayer was written by Rev. Dr Hermen Shastri, General Secretary of the Council of Churches in Malaysia for the Closing Act of CCA's Asian Religious Leaders' Conference on "Being Peacemakers in Asia Today", on 15 November 2007.*