



Christian Conference of Asia

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Labour and Migration

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Labour and migration



Migration is a basic right of human beings; but forced migration is a tragedy of humankind.

Forced labour and migration of people are over-arching themes in the Bible. The Book of Exodus is a vivid account of the Israelite migrant workers in Egypt.

Because of drought, Naomi, a Moabite, goes to another land. Because of famine, Joseph's family eventually migrates to Egypt. Because of the systematic persecution of children, Mary and Joseph and Jesus fled to Egypt.

Migration is a shared experience of people regardless of gender, race, and religion. In every continent, people are being forced to leave their communities as a consequence of the changing needs in both the home countries and the countries of destination.

Political instability and internal conflicts within countries or among ethnic groups, human rights violations, abductions, disappearances, political persecution are some factors that force people to flee and secure their lives in other countries as refugees and asylum seekers.

We acknowledge that in recent decades the economic conditions in countries where migrants come from force them to migrate. Recruitment and placement of migrant workers have become large industries in many countries and remittances from nationals overseas earn billions of dollars in foreign exchange for several countries. Governments are now beginning to see international migration through the prism of opportunity, rather than of fear.

According to the U.N. Population Division, there are now almost 200 million international migrants. Today, one in fifty

people on earth lives outside one's home countries, while an estimated 25 million have been forcibly displaced within their own countries.

International migration has negative aspects like human trafficking. Fifty-four Burmese migrants suffocated in the back of a sealed truck as they were being smuggled to Thailand to become illegal labourers in April 2008. The tragedy is proof of the government's failure to deal with the longstanding problem of illegal foreign labour.

It is a fact that women and children are the most marginalized and exploited when it comes to labour and migration. Because of their "illegal" status, they are left without any protection and support. This situation breeds new forms of slavery.

The churches in Asia are challenged to develop strategic interventions to ensure respect for migrants' rights at every stage of their journey, and to strengthen social cohesion in the receiving countries.

The church must be at the centre of the church's action in favor of migrant workers. Such prophetic suggestion is key to opening new venues for ecumenical accompaniment action. Christians have to turn the Church into "everyone's home" and make it part of their own ministry towards migrants.

The biblical mandate is clear: to welcome the stranger, to treat the foreigner as one of us, to extend kindness to the sojourner. The church must become a "second home" for migrant workers, a place where they are welcomed with open arms in the spirit of hospitality irrespective of religion, race and gender.

Prawate Khid-arn

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Walking alongside migrant workers



Protesting migrant workers in Hong Kong (Photo: Mission for Migrant Workers-HK)

Migration as a spiritual problem

Contemporary migrant workers
Some believe it is God's will that they are able to migrate, failing of course to see that migration is also caused by shrinking economic opportunities back home due to corruption and mismanagement in government. They are one of the most vulnerable sectors in the receiving communities. They suffer various forms of discrimination. They do not enjoy equal rights with the peoples of the receiving countries. More often, their own consular/embassy officials can not protect them. They are therefore easy targets of exploitation - which, lamentably, some also believe to be still God's will.

As things are, migration warps the values both of the migrants, their families and those who exploit them. It reduces human beings to commodities. It distorts

morality and their personal theologies. Migration then ceases to be just an economic solution. It ceases also to be just a political statement. It becomes a spiritual problem.

Divinely-initiated migration

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you (Genesis 12:1).

Abram migrated on the basis of a three-fold divine promise: to possess a land, to become a great nation, to be a blessing to the peoples of the earth. This became the golden thread that runs all throughout patriarchal history (Genesis 12:1-3; 12:7; 15:4-5; 18:17-19; 26:2-5; 28:13-15). Thus God either initiated or approved of their migration.

But God knows pretty well the dangers of migration. In the later part of the history of Israel, God's commandments protecting the strangers/sojourners always end up with a reminder that they, too, were once migrants in the land of Egypt, lest they do to their own migrants what the residents of ancient Egypt did to them (e.g. Leviticus 19:33).

What do we do? Walk an extra mile alongside migrant workers

What is demanded of us?

The God whom our Lord and savior Jesus Christ calls Daddy (Abba) (Mark 14:36) is the God who created humanity in God's image (Genesis 1:27), hence crowning us with glory and honor [Psalms 8:4-5]. Therefore whatever a person is, wherever one is, there the image of God is. God is also the God in search of humanity (Gen. 3:9). God sees the affliction, hears the cries and desires the liberation of the oppressed (Exodus 3:7-8). God is God of grace (Exodus. 34:6-7; Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17, 31; Psalms 103:8; Jeremiah 32:18; John 4:2), who protects the vulnerable: the widows, orphans and strangers/aliens/migrants (Deuteronomy 10:18). God is also God of justice (Isaiah. 30:18) who demands that we do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, came and preached the proximity of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15), a kingdom where the possessed are set free (Luke 11:20), the sick are healed [Luke 6:18], the lame walk, the dumb speak, the blind receive their sight (Matthew 11:5; Luke 4:18;) the sorrowful comforted, the hungry fed (John 6:1-15), sins are forgiven and the dead are raised (John 11:1-44).

In other words, he came that we may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

He also demands that there ust be congruence between worship and action (Matthew 23:23). But more so, he added a new dimension to our understanding of service when he identified himself with those who are in need (Matthew. 25:40). St. James in his letter also expressed

the need for a correspondence between faith and action (2:14-26) and prescribed the essence of pure and undefiled religion: the defense and comfort of the vulnerable (1:27).

Thus the church to be true to the mission of God cannot but walk an extra mile alongside migrant workers.

Ministry alongside migrant workers can never be apolitical. Because through the pastoral care and ministry we provide, through every tear we wipe, we expose exploitation and degradation, we oppose discrimination and we also nurture the innate capacity of the migrant to stand up for their rights. Thus we will ultimately be drawn into their struggles to stand up for their rights and for the recovery of their dignity. We will be labeled as "political", "militant", "leftist" or "red". If because of these we shrink from our responsibility, we let those who benefit from our inaction: the forces of evil/ exploitation, shape our ministry. By default, they become our lords and masters; we become complicit with the migrants' exploitation and degradation.

Fr. Dwight Q de la Torre



Fr. Dwight, as he is often called, is St. John's Cathedral's chaplain to the Filipino community in Hong Kong. A priest of the Philippine Independent Church, he began his chaplaincy in 1994.

Labour and Migration in Mekong

Many people from tribal villages have sold their land and properties in the mountains and moved their families to live and work in the city. The Lahu tribe for example puts money together and purchases a piece of land in the city to live together. In Chiang Mai, there are many Lahu churches whose members have migrated from the same village. In the city they find jobs, or labour in farms and construction sites, or sell garlands. Their children are able to attend a local school even though they may not have Thai citizenship. The Thai government allows all children to enrol in schools regardless of their nationality.

Along the Thai-Burma and Thai-Lao borders, churches have a ministry with migrant workers. One of the difficulties churches face is dealing with legalities. To become an illegal migrant worker in Thailand is not easy especially for

those who come from Burma. There is a constant fear of arrest and deportation. Once arrested and deported, the chance to earn and hope for a better life is gone.

The serious issue that most churches face is the lack of legal knowledge, experience and skills in dealing with migrant workers' issues. The church is also afraid to confront the authorities because the government sees migrant workers as a threat to national security and economy.

Labour migration in Thailand

In addition to the annual migrant registration exercises for migrants who entered the country illegally, in 2003 Thailand signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with Burma, Cambodia and Lao PDR on the regulation of migrant labour. The aim



A Burmese girl selling her wares in Mae Sot market at the Thai-Burma border.



Young girls at the Thai-Burma border. Potential migrant workers in the cities.

of these MOUs is to ensure that the migrant's country of origin provides travel documents to those of its nationals already in Thailand. The MOUs also establish a process whereby new migrants can leave their home country and can migrate to Thailand through legal channels. While the policies have focused on the implementation of the immigration law, both for the registration of migrants and for the arrest and deportation of irregular migrants, there has been little focus on the implementation of labour protection laws, occupational health and safety standards and rights of workers to organize.

Over the past few decades, Thailand has played an important role in international migration in the region and it is currently not only a country of origin, but also of transit as well as of destination. Because of its relatively prosperous and stable economy, Thailand has become a safe haven for hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers and millions of migrant workers from its neighbouring countries. Simultaneously, many Thais continue to look for better opportunities overseas.

Church ministry on migration

The Social Development and Service Unit of the Church of Christ in Thailand (SDSU-CCT) works together with Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program (MEPP) in encouraging churches in Thailand to

work on migration and related issues.

The church can help illegal migrant workers with the registration processes and in securing work permits. Migrant workers also need to be educated about their rights as labourers and as migrants. The church can do various forms of ministry depending on their resources and capacity. Churches can generate resources to support their ministry to migrants. Along with this, they can also build up their legal skills and capacity to accompany the migrants.

Additionally, the church needs to ask why tribal and rural people leave their lands in favour of becoming daily wage workers in the city. In this way, the church would understand the root causes of migration and respond to it accordingly.

Many tribal people who are urban labourers are local church members in the city. The church as a presence of God's hospitality must care for these migrant workers. Churches along the Thai, Burma and Lao borders face the same migrant issues and realities. City and rural churches can really work together to respond to the challenges of internal and cross-border migration.

We must remember that Jesus was once a carpenter. In the ordinary migrant labourer today, we encounter him.

Janejinda Pawadee

Why are you still poor?

Participants at the Ecumenical Enablers' Training in Cambodia raise questions

“Why are you still poor if your faith promises you a better life?” “What is the advantage of believing in Jesus?” “How do we know that when we believe in Jesus we can go to heaven?” “Can a man with two wives become a pastor?”

These were some of the questions raised by the Khmer participants in the Ecumenical Enablers' Training program conducted by the CCA-Faith, Mission and Unity program area in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 21-25 March 2009.

The question “Why are you still poor if your faith promises you a better life?” was often hurled at them by people of another faith in their community. In a context like Cambodia, where the Christian believers constitute a minority, new and young Christian believers feel the need to show the unique value of their new-found faith.

We had an interesting discussion on how Jesus' promise of abundant life (“I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly” - John 10:10b) did not simply mean material wealth but a quality of life that is God-like - a quality of life that is best described by the values of the kingdom or reign of God. Living out the values of a God-like life means not being controlled by anger or worry, not going after fame or power, but living in dignity and hope that life is meant to be better for those who are suffering and hurting.

The question “Can a man with two wives become a pastor” was not a hypothetical question for the Khmer people - for there

was indeed a case of a man who had two wives before he became Christian and is now very active in the church and is hoping to become a pastor. Since we encouraged participants to try finding answers to their own questions, some of the men suggested: “Only after he divorces one of his wives can he become a pastor.” The women disagreed: “He cannot just divorce like that - what will happen to the wife and the children?” Their answers are somewhat revealing of what is more important for men and women.

Asked what the Bible says, few of them were quick to open their Bibles to the following:

- “A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.” - I Timothy 3:12

- “Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.” - I Timothy 3:1-3

- “An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not

given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain." - Titus 1:6-7.

Although we expected the same group of 28 people from the second batch of participants in 2007, only 5 from that batch could return due to schedule conflict and some health problems. Still churches sent new persons to avail of the training. The five returning participants received certificates of completion at the end of the training.

Gauging the educational and exposure levels of the new group of participants, A. Wati Longchar and Hope S. Antone (main resource persons) quickly changed some plans and strategies. We started by asking them the question: "What problems and questions do you usually face in the church or in your ministry?" Taking their questions as springboard, we used more practical input-presentations, workshops, small group discussions, reporting and drama as methods in the training.

The topics at the training were: (a) The Bible and Ministry; (b) How the Bible

Came to Us; (c) The Use and Misuse of the Bible; (d) Jesus' Approaches to the Bible; (e) Contextual Reading of the Bible; (f) Life and Ministry of the Church - which included (a) community or fellowship, (b) liturgy or worship, (c) teaching or education, (d) proclamation or preaching, and (e) service or outreach.

At the end of the training participants were asked to fill in a written evaluation form. During the closing act, some of them shared their feedback including recommendations to continue this kind of training especially for the many Khmer people in the provinces who are hungry for more knowledge and education.

This ecumenical enablers' training program was made possible by the support of the Fund for Theological Education for Southeast Asia through the Ecumenical Theological Education program of the World Council of Churches and Christian Conference of Asia.

Hope S. Antone



Group photo of Khmer participants with resource persons and KCC staff

On Dalit justice

Church leaders meet in a global solidarity conference

Ninety-five representatives from churches in India, Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East met at the Royal River Hotel in Bangkok on March 21 to 24, 2009, to listen to stories of discrimination and “untouchability” from Dalit communities and to let the world know of their untold sufferings on account of caste from birth.

Of the 23.4 million Christians in India, 16 million are Dalits who are daily suffering from more than 140 forms of “untouchability”, forced labour and undignified jobs, exclusion and segregation and impunity. This systemic discrimination is mostly imposed by the majority Hindu population and

in Durban in 2001, Dr. Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation witnessed the 250 Dalit activists went on a hunger strike as the global forum 'looked the other way'. Speaking for Dr. Noko, the Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, LWF Deputy General Secretary emphasized that “no one can be excluded from God's grace”. He went further to say that “Dalit rights are human rights and their theology is for the whole world”.

This Global Conference organized by the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation and hosted by the Christian Conference of Asia is a continuation of the Dalit struggle for



Lighting a candle for rape victims at the Dalit International Solidarity Conference

internalized by the victims, especially among the women.

Observing how the Dalits failed to call attention to the urgency of their cause at the World Conference Against Racism

their basic rights and solidarity support extended by the global ecumenical community to lift the Dalit issue as an issue of faith and a matter of justice before the world and the global church community.



Opening worship at the Dalit International Solidarity Conference

At a group discussion on Multiple Discrimination and Special Characteristics of the Situation of Dalits, Dr. Evangelina Anderson-Rajkumar of Bangalore's United Theological College, spoke for Dalit women and encouraged them to continue narrating their collective historical memory of discrimination and their need for repentance and healing from domination by oppressors and their victimization as an oppressed class.

The Conference also underscored the importance of sustaining international pressure on the Indian government to acknowledge the plight of the scheduled caste and the inhuman practice of "untouchability". Dalits from churches in India welcomed Christians in the Conference to enter the Dalit world theologically, "taking off their sandals on Dalit grounds".

The Conference opening service, led by Charlie Ocampo, CCA's Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service, celebrated the joys and hopes of the Dalit sisters and brothers, and emphasized that Dalits are not a powerless people created by a just and loving God. Symbols of life represented by soil, water and fire (lighted candle) were offered and the drum was played to mark freedom, hope, justice, dignity and love among communities suffering from exclusion on account of their birth and race.

In a Bible Study session on Judges 19:1-30, the Rev. Robina Winbush of the Presbyterian Church USA, emphasized that victims of violence never stop dying. Their stories will not go away for generations until a more fruitful response is found. Lines from "There is a balm in Gilead" were sung throughout the study session, signifying that resistance is a balm in Gilead and that "resistance also means believing in the power of the resurrection".

In a closing act, a Declaration and Call on Justice for Dalits was issued which included a confession by churches of their complicity with caste-based discrimination, acknowledging that caste remains deeply entrenched in the churches today. Participants in the Conference rejected any notion of hierarchies of oppression and looked forward to a caste-free world. The Dalits in the Indian churches will also commit to a Kairos process of accompaniment, drawing inspiration from Dalit theology and invited a world-wide network of friends and supporters to join in.

As the delegates recited at the opening worship, "Today, regardless of where we come from, which church we represent, we all become Dalits. Not only for today and during this Conference, but also for our life until Dalits are liberated, we all become Dalits".

Charlie Ocampo

Ecumenical Enablers' Training begins in Nepal

After conducting a series of Ecumenical Enablers' Training in Cambodia, CCA-FMU started a similar training in Lalitpur, Nepal on 5-11 April 2009. A total of 28 participants participated in the training. They included pastors, youth leaders, and women's committee members of local churches.

The training was aimed to: (a) equip Nepali pastors and Christian leaders with the wider ecumenical vision and tools of Asian contextual theologizing; (b) accompany the work of the young National Council of Churches of Nepal (NCCN); and (c) help dispel negative perceptions of ecumenism and the ecumenical movement which have kept the Christians divided in Nepal.

Resource persons and facilitators were Rev. Dr. V. J. John (from Bishop's College), Rev. Dr. A. Wati Longchar (from Serampore University), and Dr. Hope S. Antone (from CCA-FMU). Program contents were inputs on ecumenism and ecumenical vision, and reading the Bible from various perspectives - health and healing, disability, Dalit, oppressed

people, ecology, consumerism, women/feminist, interfaith, and reading Jesus' parables today.

Practically all the input-presentations were made through reading the Bible in light of the abovementioned perspectives. This way of approaching various life issues with the Bible as the starting point was quite appealing to the participants, many of whom take their Bibles very seriously, and sometimes also literally.

"Did God create the world two times? Why are there two creation stories in Genesis?" "Why is it written in the Bible that God took a rib from man in order to create woman if that is not what it really means?" These were some questions raised during the sessions on reading the Bible from women's perspective. They made our re-reading of Genesis 1-3 very lively and interesting.

Following the input on reading the Bible from Dalit perspective, a few participants shared that in Nepal many Dalits have become well-off and powerful while many of those from the upper castes have become poor and powerless. Unlike in India, there seems to be more fluidity in Nepal because of easy social mobility.

"What is unique about the Christian faith?" "Does becoming a Christian mean turning away from our Nepali culture?" In a context where Christians are a minority and the prevailing ideology is that "to be Nepali is to be Hindu," questions such as these continue to be very important.

In the wake of a strong anti-ecumenism campaign in Nepal, explaining the wider ecumenical vision for Asia was a real challenge. But using a solid biblical



Dr V. J. John teaching in Hindi



Participants with resource persons and NCCN staff.

approach and some biblical foundations for ecumenism helped greatly.

"I have attended a similar training (elsewhere) but I have learned much more from this training. I have also read the Bible many times before but this training gave me a new experience in reading the Bible. I found the presentation on ecumenism based on Genesis 1 impressive and unforgettable - now I will look at creation differently and see myself as part of God's creation and that I should love the whole world that God created. I hope that CCA can continue to support us so we can hold trainings like this in other parts of Nepal." - This was shared by Birbahadur Tamang, a pastor from Chitwan district and BTh second year student in Kathmandu at the closing act of the training.

"Thank you so much for the teaching you have given us about Ecumenism. I was so much blessed from that training. Actually this kind of program is the most important in the Nepali Christian society at this moment. I thank the Lord because God is working through the CCA and NCCN in Nepal in such a vital role. And I hope in the future CCA and NCCN will organize the program which can help the Nepali Church to grow. - This was an email note from Nar Bahadur Pulami,

a graduating student at Maranatha Mission College, Kathmandu.

In their written evaluation, many participants requested holding more of this training in other parts of Nepal. "It will be good for CCA to organise similar trainings in Pokhara (Western Nepal), Chitwan (Central Nepal) and Dhangadhi (Far Western Nepal). We had participants from these regions and they were keen to have such training in their region." Dr. K B Rokaya, NCCN General Secretary, noted the participants' feedback.

Participants however requested holding separate levels of training: (a) a beginner's level for new and young believers and (b) an advanced level for those who have been serving in churches and have had some basic theological training or background.

The Ecumenical Enablers' Training program in Nepal is part of CCA's commitment to accompany its young member council in Nepal. It was made possible with the support of the Fund for Theological Education for Southeast Asia (FTESEA) through the Ecumenical Theological Education program of the World Council of Churches and Christian Conference of Asia.

Hope S. Antone

Chasing an elusive peace

South Asian church leaders say 'yes' to peace

The Ecumenical Christian Centre in Bangalore, India was the venue of yet another significant forum on peace in South Asia when 65 bishops, members of clergy and lay leaders gathered on the theme, "Towards Peace, Security and Reconciliation in South Asia" from March 30th to April 2nd.

In his presentation, Professor Ninan Koshy, former Director for International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, described the geopolitical environment in South Asia as highly volatile and constantly changing. He said that the war on terror has again altered the geopolitics in Asia, largely determined by the strategic goals, interests and pursuits of the US. In the guise of war on terror, US has garnered the support of India and Pakistan and is showing keen interest in the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka. The nuclear tests conducted both in India and Pakistan attracted international attention and intervention in the region and has given a momentum to the arms race that has further destabilized the region.

Professor Koshy underscored that the Christian understanding of peace should be interspersed with justice, not just small intervals between wars. He emphasized that the supporters of "war on terrorism" did not look at the root cause but the Church has the responsibility to look into reasons, the climate in which extremism grows, the discontent of the young and other sections of society and to act accordingly.

Bible studies on peace, reconciliation and security were presented by Fr. Joseph Patharapankal and Dr. K.C. Abraham, respectively. Fr. Patharapankal expounded on peace as shalom which is rooted in well-being, wholeness, soundness and

completeness. Reconciliation is the supreme gift of God through the saving death of Jesus of Nazareth on the cross, the sum and essence of God's work in Christ and the expression of grace in our relationship with one another.

Dr. K.C. Abraham reflected on people's security drawing on the prophets' (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3-4; Jeremiah 7:6-7) critical rejection of militaristic terms for security. He explained the feudalistic, dominating and manipulative power in contrast to the right use of power as shown in the servant model of leadership, deriving peace and security from justice, offered by Jesus Christ.

While the Consultation is going on, news on Sri Lanka has constantly flashed through the media, as the Sri Lankan military has pushed the Tamil militants to a 7-square kilometers of land as the final stage of the 3 decades of war. Sri Lankans in the Consultation pointed to the need for the termination of war and a concerted effort to arrive at a negotiated solution to end the suffering of civilians from poverty, suppression of rights, marginalization and institutionalized violence.

The Sri Lankans called for a cease-fire by both parties to the conflict to allow the safe passage for the 40,000 civilians out of the contested zone and the delivery of basic amenities and services. They also made long-term calls for freedom for Tamils and reunion with families, resolution of the ethnic conflict, and the restoration of democracy and democratic institutions including the media, among others.

Mr. Basil Fernando, Director of the Asian Human Rights Commission, decried the negative impact of militarization on the political, legal, social, moral and ethical values of people. He made a passionate appeal for taking documentation seriously to record all that was happening as history that we can learn and analyze the gift of insight gained for future generations. "The pain felt within us is in itself a motivation to write and record events".

Casestudies on healing and reconciliation were presented by the Rev. Rex Reyes, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines and the Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, President of the Methodist Church and the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka. Pastor Reyes thanked the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia for accompanying the Filipino people in their struggles and search for peace by their accompaniment and solidarity support. Pastor Joseph on the other hand shared positive stories of goodwill interspersed with stories of violence, killings and internal displacement in Sri Lanka.

The Consultation recommended support for pastoral visits, peace education, inter-religious leaders' visit to enlarge inter-religious networks on peace in Sri Lanka, better coordination of humanitarian work through Action by

Churches Together International, active participation in celebrating Asia Sunday in the region, and the promotion of the United Nations Decade for Inter-Religious Dialogue for Peace among all WCC and CCA members.

A Regional Working Group was appointed to follow up, identify priorities and implement recommendations from the Consultation, including Bishop Taranath Sagar, President, National Council of Churches in India; Bishop Samuel Azaraiah, Moderator, Church of Pakistan; The Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, President, Methodist Church of Sri Lanka; Dr. K.B. Rokaya, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Nepal; and the Rev. Dr. Jayasiri Peiris, General Secretary of the National Christian Council in Sri Lanka; Mrs. Susan Jacob, General Committee Member, Christian Conference of Asia; and Mr. Joyantha Adhikari, President, National Council of Churches in Bangladesh. Co-opted members of the Working Group representing the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia, respectively, were Dr. Matthews George Chunakara, Asia Secretary, and Mr. Charlie Ocampo, Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service.

Charlie Ocampo



Consultation participants. Committed to work towards peace, security and reconciliation.

Accompanying people in their pain and misery

Reflection on the anniversary of Cyclone Nargis

The 2nd of May is the Anniversary of Cyclone Nargis the aftermath of which more than 140,000 people perished and affected the lives of more than 1.5 million people. Due to various social, political and economic factors most countries try to conceal the true facts of a catastrophe and keep the information confidential. The situation in Myanmar is no exception.

Cyclone Nargis has brought about devastating consequences to the survivor's in Myanmar. Cyclone Nargis has done extensive damage to the country's progress and has brought about tragic consequences to the socio-economic conditions. The effects of it is felt not by the ruling Junta of the country but by the people. They are the victims of oppression as well as natural disasters. The consequences of the oppression are seen on the faces of people who suffer silently. Therefore, it is not merely physical suffering but emotional as well as psychological. Myanmar is a shame on the entire civilized world and

the impunity the ruling Junta enjoys is a judgment on nations and institutions which speak of democracy, human rights and governance.

For the survivors of Cyclone Nargis, the start of the monsoon rains is yet another reminder of last year's tragic events. Storms and heavy rains in the past few weeks have caused anxiety among the survivors. The team of people who went with me to see the work being done by the people had the opportunity to meet with Rev. Loyea who has spent much of his time with the victims of Nargis praying with them and providing counseling where necessary for some of the survivors in the Bogale area, in the heart of the Myanmar' badly affected Ayeyarwady Delta. During that visit we met a man who is 33 years old and who had lost his wife and the four children. He tells me that before Nargis he had a happy family and income to survive. He says now I have nothing and I do not see the reason to survive. As he related the painful story tears began to roll down his



Rebuilding lives. A woman and child with their pig; a newly built hut.





Stakeholders. Beneficiaries in a project meeting in January, 2009.

eyes. We had no answer to give him but to remain silent. In such situations the answer is silent accompaniment, and that is what we did. I am of the view that churches in Asia should provide spiritual resources, and even tempted to write a book on the God of Silence.

During this encounter an elderly lady approached me and said that this man had tried to commit suicide several times and that they managed to save him from that disaster. Then she began to say that she too lost her husband and two children and she managed to save one child. She went on to say that she is just living for the sake of that child who is a 16 years old girl. After a few minutes Pastor called another girl from the crowd who came forward and related her story with tears in her eyes. She had lost her parents, sister and brother. She went on to say that she has no one to look after her except the community where she lives. She is hoping to join a local Theological College in a few months time. When I leave these places and come back to my office these faces begin to haunt me and even challenge the work I do in the name of ecumenism. The question is: where is God in all this? And is it relevant to talk about amidst people who have lost everything? The challenge for the churches is to be the presence of God in such realities rather

than preach sermons on the being or the existence of God. God exists when we exist for others. Jesus was always a man for others and in that otherness others saw the divine in this human being who came from a humble home in Nazareth. It is our presence with the victims be they Nargis or Orissa which can bring about healing and wholeness. Therefore, the Church is found wherever it tries to accompany people and embody the people's pain.

In this context I want to say that it is easier to help the villages to rebuild their houses, raise livestock and provide people with fishing nets, boats etc. But it is extremely difficult to take away their pain and provide the balm to heal their minds and hearts so that they can be more human.

The response of the MCC is encouraging and they are more than happy for CCA's commitment to be with them and to walk with them. We will be with them with resources as far as we can manage and as an accompanying presence as long as they need us. It is a sad end note that the government has failed to serve the people in the hour of their need, abdicating their responsibilities when people need them most.

Freddy de Alwis

The sixth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS VI)

Exploring new paradigms of mission

Around 120 Asian theologians, educators and guests gathered at Ateneo de Manila University in Iloilo City, Philippines, on 8-14 February for the Sixth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS VI). The congress focused on the theme: "Doing Mission from the Underside: A Challenge to the Understanding of Mission since 1910". In view of the 'Edinburgh 2010 anniversary', this congress was a significant contribution in the form of a critical reflection on the so called Edinburgh process.

The Philippines was chosen as venue by the Continuation Committee, to show Asian theologians' solidarity with the churches and people of the Philippines, where in recent years there has been a spate of extra-judicial killings and disappearances of church workers, peace and human rights activists.

At the congress, representatives from various social backgrounds and communities in Asia shared cries of pain and suffering. This sharing was summarized in the "Iloilo Declaration", that says: "...violations of human dignity and justice by governments in several Asian countries; widespread destruction of our natural environments; conflicts and violence between different religious communities; uses of biotechnology that threaten the meaning and integrity of the lives of those on the underside; oppression of women in our daily lives and our churches; discrimination against socially and economically marginalized groups such as the differently abled, migrant workers, people living with HIV-AIDS, ethnic minorities, indigenous and tribal people, Dalits and other social "outcasts".

While listening to the voices from the



CATS VI participants



Voices from the 'underside'. A workers' rally in Manila. (Photo: ArkibongBayan)

underside, the congress critically reflected on mission that regarded most parts of Asia as an 'object' for Western missionaries. Although the great efforts, the courage and sacrifice of the Western missionaries were recognized, the congress clearly agreed that mission in the past often accompanied more harm rather than help. The triumphalistic attitudes and sense of superiority led to an "emphasis on mere statistical growth of church membership with little respect for the religions and cultures of Asia".

The congress stressed that the growing Christian communities and the strength of the church in some parts of Asia have not sufficiently practiced a truly contextual theology, one that is more responsive to the Asian reality.

As a special event of the congress, a one-day forum on gender justice issues was organized. Women and men gathered in their respective gender groups to discuss the given theme from their respective perspectives as women/men.

Participants and guests were all actively involved in discussions groups, critically reflecting on mission and seeking new paradigms of mission. Along the inputs from the 'underside' during two panel sessions (interfaith; ecology; human rights and dignity; indigenous people; economically deprived; women; people with disability), three theme presentations gifted the congress with more material

of critical thinking and reflection on mission since 1910. The three theme presentations were delivered by: 1) Rev. Dr. M.P. Joseph, Professor at Tainan Theological College Seminary (Critical Historical Review of Mission since 1910); 2) Rev. Dr. Anna May, Myanmar Institute of Theology (Biblical-Theological Reflection on Doing Mission from the Underside); 3) Rev. Dr. Hermen Shastri, General Secretary of Council of Churches in Malaysia (Contemporary Challenges in Doing Mission).

The Congress is a platform for the professional exchange and update of Asian Theologians. This year the presence of younger and emerging theologians along with the established and experienced 'seniors' was very visible.

The Iloilo Declaration was offered at the end of the congress and decision was made to hold the next congress (CATS VII) in Korea.

I pray that the congress will keep the doors open to new and established theologians to carry theological discussions to the future and will keep itself open-minded to critiques and critical reflection and voices from the underside.

Sung Kook Park

"As Asian theologians, we are called to follow the model of Jesus in proclaiming and working for the reign of God. In light of the imperative to take seriously the voices of people from the "underside" as agents of transformation towards peace, justice and wholeness, we are called to explore new paradigms for mission and vocation."

The "Iloilo Declaration", official statement of the CATS VI
(for the full text, see cca.org.hk)

"Suffer the little ones to come unto me"

Camping with children living with HIV

Since 2000, there has been a growing number of children with HIV from vertical transmission (mother-to-child) and AIDS orphans in the local communities served by the Church of Christ in Thailand AIDS Ministry (CAM). In the beginning children with HIV or those living with parents with HIV were rejected by local schools. Through advocacy and mainstreaming of AIDS programs, the situation has improved. Also the availability of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs improved the situation of children living with HIV. Children who tested positive for HIV are now receiving regular antiretroviral drugs from local hospitals that receive a grant from the Global Fund on AIDS, TB and Malaria. The United Nations Joint Program on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) reported that of the 610,000 people living with HIV and AIDS in Thailand at the end of 2007, 14,000 are children. Of those adults living with

HIV and AIDS, 42% are women, mostly housewives infected by their husbands.

There are obviously many who are not recorded in the statistics as some people have not come out with their status. Rev. Sanan Wutti reports that the network of non-governmental organizations caring for orphans reported that 1,050 children with HIV are receiving ARV treatment. Eighteen children ranging from eight to eighteen years old joined the two-day camping on May 6-7, 2009 in Chiang Mai. Two children are Buddhists and the rest are Christians and most are enrolled in public schools. Eight children are receiving ARV twice daily and others are AIDS orphans who are HIV negative and are supported by relatives, mostly grandparents.

Four experts from the Photographers Club in Chiang Mai volunteered to give



A workshop group adept at learning photography.



Camp participants. Dr Senturias is seated in extreme right, front row.

the training. The activity was supported by the Presbyterian Church (USA). Mr. Brett Faucett was sent as a missionary of the Presbyterian Church (US) to work with CAM. Ms. Judy Cook was sent by the Baptist Mission Society of the United Kingdom to also work with CAM. She took along her five-year old foster child on the second day of the training. Both helped in organizing and facilitating the workshop.

The children enjoyed taking photos of people, flowers, trees, and other sceneries on the mountainside resort. The children went swimming after the workshop. In the evening after dinner, they gathered in the hall for games and singing. I also joined the evening activity and was requested to teach a Filipino song for children. I also introduced a group building exercise on massaging each other's back while we were all seated in circle. Then the facilitator from CAM, Ms. Jaruwan Wutti organized a workshop on drawing their dreams for the future.

On the second day, the children finished their drawing. The children were asked to select the pictures they want to write about. The children and the trainers shared their impressions and feelings on the pictures taken. Pictures are a starting point to describe what one is feeling. The children were reminded that in writing their journals they could share what was in their heart and mind and use the photos that they wanted people to know and understand about the subject and allow one's imagination to fly beyond boundaries.

I came out of the session learning the importance of pictures and drawings in building communities. I hope that Churches and other faith-based organizations in Asia will replicate this experience with people living with HIV and AIDS and especially with children and create programs that will show unconditional love in action towards fullness of life for all.

Erlinda N. Senturias

Consultation on Religions for Peace in Southern Thailand

Achieving peace involves all



A common quest for peace. Opening prayers at the consultation.

Peace and harmony can be achieved by fostering mutual understanding and cooperation of various sectors in the community, concluded a successful Consultation on Religions for Peace in Southern Thailand.

Jointly organized by the World Conference of Religions and Peace (WCRP), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Research Centre for Peace Building, Mahidol University, and the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), the Consultation took place in Pattani Province, one of the three provinces where daily bombings and killings remain a nightmare of the people. The conflict and unrest in Southern Thailand has a long history. Since 2004 approximately a thousand people have been killed.

Over 200 Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs representing government, NGOs and community groups, including dignitaries from Cambodia and Indonesia, took part in the event. The Consultation aimed to provide a platform for inter-religious communication among different cultures through reflection and offering

a possibility for further cooperation on local and national level concerning peace building and conflict transformation in Southern Thailand.

Dr. Kyoichi Sugino of WCRP said, this "historic multi-religious seminar becomes another milestone engaging in high-level dialogue to prevent ethnically and religiously motivated violence from arising, and bring people of different faiths and the government to resolve local conflicts".

Prof. Din Syamsudim, President of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia, signified that all religions have the same goal, that is, for peace and people living together as a global family.

Peace building and conflict transformation were investigated in the light of the Holy Scriptures and through small group discussions and personal sharing. Participants affirmed that there is no religious conflict. Religions have no direct relation to the crisis and unrests. It, in many cases, has been used to create fear and mistrust among the

people especially between the Buddhist and Muslim communities. Violence often begins with disputes over economic or political matters between people who happen to be of different religions.

Participants identified various issues related to conflict in the region concerning the role of religions, drug trafficking, local politics, mistrust between people and government officials, education and access to public services.

A Hindu delegate said, "A harmonious society exists when all religions and faiths are in harmony, treat all with equality and all will share peace and cordiality".

Part of the consultation was a visit to the Sai Kao Village where Muslims and Buddhists live peacefully with each other. Despite the separate religious practices in the two religions, people have been given possibilities to work together, help each other and get to know the spirituality of the other religion. Building trust is crucial.

Rev. Dr. Pradit Tagerngransarit, President of Payap University, emphasized that the first step is for each religious community to have in-depth study and to understand its own religious teachings, and respect for the faith and religious practices of other faiths. With this foundation, we can work together cooperatively.

"Government, political parties, or religion alone cannot solve all problems unless they work together. We need to promote more inter-dialogue in the years to come. Religions and religious leaders can play significant roles in bridging people to discuss their differences as well as pursue mutual understanding and sustain a culture of love and care for each other", said Dr. Khid-arn of CCA.

The consultation served as an inspiration and as a starting point for further commitment to building peace and transforming conflicts in Southern Thailand.

Prawate Khid-arn



Buddhists and Muslims live peacefully with each other in Sai Kao village.

A call to renounce war

From bows to ploughshares, from spears to pruning hooks

Thirty Buddhist, Christian and Muslim religious leaders gathered at the Korean YMCA in Tokyo to continue saying no to war and any effort to re-interpret Article 9 to justify the participation of Japanese Self Defense Forces in the U.S.-led war anywhere in the world.

The Rev. Gyouyo Kodama, a respected leader and member of the Buddhist clergy in Japan, led the Article 9 International Working Group in drafting a Statement of its Vision and Mission, which was adopted by the members in attendance.

The Mission Statement states, "in the light of...dangerous developments in Japan, we cannot be passive spectators. Based on our religious teachings, we believe that war is always a crime; and war brings death both to the body of the victims and the soul of the perpetrator.

"We commit ourselves to sincerely practice and actively promote the spirit and the letter of Article 9 at all times and in all places; and to protect the dignity of victims of all forms of violence."

Dave Robinson of Pax Christi USA reported on positive developments in the United States following the election

of President Barack Obama. While the direction of the Obama Administration on specific matters in the Asia/Pacific region is yet unclear, Mr. Robinson believes that the Obama years will certainly bring needed and real change to a whole range of issues domestically and the fundamentals of US foreign policy will prove more enduring and less susceptible to the kind of systemic change that the Article 9 movement seeks.

He claimed that the efforts of the Article 9 Global Working Group have already made crucial contributions to understanding the dynamics of the Bush/Rumsfeld plans for a remilitarized Japan in service to US efforts to dominate the region.

The Working Group also received a communiqué from the Ecumenical Bishops Forum in the Philippines entitled, "From bows to plowshares, from spears to pruning hooks". Signed by 14 Catholic and Protestant bishops, 4 members of the Philippine Congress, and 25 members of clergy and lay leaders, the Communiqué drew attention to the United States' desperate bid to remain as the dominant world power and attempts by the governments in Japan and the Philippines to amend their respective constitutions in



War is not the way to peace. Participants vowed to sincerely practice the spirit of Article 9.

support of the US agenda. In particular, the signatories pointed to the presence of US military bases in Okinawa and elsewhere in Japan and the Visiting Forces Agreement (Balikatan exercises) in the Philippines to carry out the US military agenda.

Plans for a 2009 Article 9 Inter-Religious Conference was announced to be

hosted by the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea to be held in Seoul in December. The agenda of the Conference will include looking at the policy of the newly-elected Japanese government, President Obama's one year in office, progress of the 6-party talks and reports on other conflicts in Asia.

Charlie Ocampo

News flash

WCC meeting in Bethlehem on peace in Palestine and Israel

On the invitation of the World Council of Churches, thirty representatives of churches, action groups and theologians gathered at the Beit Ibrahim (House of Abraham) in Beit Jala, near Bethlehem on 12-14 June 2009. Held under the auspices of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum the meeting discussed and mapped out an advocacy plan designed to put an end to theological and ecclesial justification for the occupation and violations of human rights and international law in Palestine and Israel.

Significant issues discussed by the Forum include a campaign to stop buying products produced in the Israeli settlements, the impact of settlements in East Jerusalem, theological and biblical reflections on a Kairos process and land, the setting up of an ethical tourism network, and a live-link service "Hands across Jerusalem".

Representatives from the Forum met with former US President Jimmy Carter, who emphasized the role of churches in advancing the peace process and formulated the three basic premises of the two-states proposal:

- Israel's right to exist and to live in peace must be recognized by Palestinian and all other neighbors;
- The killing of innocent people by suicide bombs or other acts of violence cannot be condoned; and,
- Palestinians must live in peace and dignity, and permanent Israeli settlements on their land are a major obstacle to this goal.

His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, immediate past Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Bishop Mounib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land welcomed the members of the Forum and led biblical reflections.

Charlie Ocampo

Beyond the Brahmaputra Delta

Building peace together

Subhadra Basumatray, 40, a Bodo woman in Tilapara in Assam, Northeast India, had the courage to denounce rituals conducted by the kavirajs or ojhas or quack doctors in her village. She was severely beaten up and labeled as a witch. Incidents of violence, including killings, have been reported in the Bodo belt during and after the parliamentary elections to the Kokrajhar seat on 2nd May 2009. Panic gripped many violence-affected families, forcing them to seek refuge elsewhere. In Panibari, some villagers, including Bodo women, were beaten up and their houses vandalized. In Haltugaon, even women were brutally attacked.

Ethnic rivalry and violence have become a way of life in the Brahmaputra Delta for the Bodos, the people I belong to. Peace seems to be an illusive dream for us.

The Bodos are usually a peace loving community. There had been large scale and repeated migration of the people of Mongolian origin centuries ago through the mountain passes of the Assam-Myanmar border and the Nepal-Bhutan-Tibet zone. The Bodos are one such indigenous community of Tibetan-Burmese origin who migrated to Assam in the North Eastern part of India many centuries ago. For centuries majority of the Bodos have remained as farmers, cultivators, laborers in tea plantations.

For over 300 years, the British colonizers effectively adapted the divide and rule policy and pitted one ethnic community against the other. Even after independence in 1947 the Indian government neglected the Bodo community and did

not do much to stop the human rights violations committed against the Bodo people.

The Bodo people cried for identity and political rights, and against the exploitation and deprivation by the ruling elite and upper caste Assamese. The Bodos felt the need for protection and preservation of language, literature, culture and tradition and also their land rights. It became the most emotional issue for the community in the 1960's as they were discriminated and undermined.

There was a cry for a separate state of 'Bodoland'. Many separatist groups were formed to fight for a 'sovereign Bodoland' in the areas north of the river Brahmaputra. At present the Bodos are struggling for seats in the parliament so they can voice their opinion in the decision making process.

Violence of any kind is borne disproportionately by women, children and youth. Indian army Jawans reportedly raped Bodo women. Bodo women are victims of witch hunting even today. Lately there has been a sharp rise in the number of women being denounced as witches and sentenced to gory deaths. This trend is all the more alarming because the victims have often been women from Dalit or indigenous communities.

Bodo women striving for peace
However, Bodo women are not just passive recipients of violence. Though they are victims they organize themselves for peace. The All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation organized

a massive peace rally here in protest against violence recently after the brutal killings on 2nd May 2009. It also engages in organizing Bodo women to empower and encourage them to build self-help groups in collaboration with other Non-governmental organizations to discuss and initiate post-conflict resolution.

The churches play an important role in building peace in Assam and in enhancing the capacity of Bodo women and youth to be harbingers of peace. The Young Indigenous/Dalit Women's Internship Program of CCA is one of the many creative opportunities in pursuing peace for my people. A Group Training Program, one of my internship projects,

is in partnership with the Church of North India (CNI), my home church.

Building partnerships, creating opportunities, enhancing leadership and peace building skills mean a lot for the Bodo people in Assam who have either resorted to violence in frustration or are victims of violence themselves.

The Bodo people share the same dream of peace with the churches in Asia and global partners. Together, we can build communities of peace founded on justice. Peace is possible in the Bramhaputra Delta.

Claudia Procula Narzary



Claudia in her traditional Bodo dress. She is currently the Intern for the 2009 CCA Young Indigenous/Dalit Women's Internship Program, She finished her divinity degree from Bishop's College and will be ordained right after her internship. Claudia will be the first Bodo woman to be ordained by the CNI Diocese of Eastern Himalaya, India.

Su

Knowing your rights pays off. Though not always financially.

For nearly three years, Su worked for a woman who never treated her with respect. Although Su's contract was signed by one woman, it was really the woman's aunt and teenage daughter that Su served. Her relationship with the mother and daughter was often strained. Su was underpaid nearly every month, because it was the mother who paid her salary, not the niece who originally signed the contract. The mother often found reasons to yell at Su, even when she had done nothing wrong, and the daughter often followed her mother's example.

But whenever the mother was away, the daughter and the niece were very kind to Su. Relations between Su and her employer worsened and Su began contemplating running away.

One Sunday afternoon, Su was spending her rest day in Victoria Park, where many Indonesian domestic workers go on their rest days. She met a volunteer from the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers, or ATKI, who counselled Su to try to remain in her employer's house to gather more evidence of underpayment,



A workers' protest in Hong Kong. (Photo: Mission for Migrant Workers-HK)

which Su did not know was a violation of their contract. Upon learning that, Su kept record of her salaries. One afternoon, as Su was escorting the mother to leave out of town on business, they began to argue about her salary. The employer told her if she was unhappy, she could just leave. Despite her difficulties, Su was thinking about others beyond herself, her own daughter's education.

But that evening the employer told Su to leave for Indonesia immediately. When Su wanted her full salary and benefits, the mother threatened to "blacklist" Su from ever being employed in Hong Kong again.

Su filed a claim in the Labour Department for three years of underpayment. Unfortunately, because it was the niece who signed the contract, the claim had to be filed against her, instead of the mother. The niece was willing to negotiate but did not have enough money, and she couldn't convince her aunt to do what was right.

"At first, I wouldn't change my mind, but when she started crying, I was able to go down some. I wasn't so angry anymore, because I knew she was trying to help." So even though the day ended with Su only receiving half of her claims, she was fine with it. "We both learned something. I have learned about my rights, and the niece learned about the responsibilities that come with signing a contract for a domestic worker. It's not just a signature, it's a lot of responsibility, and I think the niece learned that."

For Su, knowing her rights helped her to educate others, even her former employer, as well as how to defend herself when her rights are violated.

Mission for Migrant Workers - HK

Let the stones cry out!

During the height of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in the Philippines, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), along with other human rights advocates, took an active role in making interventions to address the wanton violation of human rights.

NCCP took the lead role in the Ecumenical Voice for Peace and Human Rights in the Philippines (The Ecumenical Voice) and the Philippine Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Watch, formations that waged the campaign to highlight extrajudicial killings and other rampant human rights violations in the country before the international community.

The Ecumenical Voice was organized to bring *Let the Stones Cry Out: An Ecumenical Report on Human Rights in the Philippines and a Call to Action*, which was released in March 2007, to North America and Switzerland.

The Ecumenical Voice North American delegation took the report to the U.S. Congress where Marie Hilao-Enriquez, Karapatan (Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights) secretary general and Bp. Eliezer Pascua, United Church of Christ of the Philippines (UCCP) general secretary, testified before the US Congressional Committee on Defense hearing conducted by Sen. Barbara Boxer. They also brought the report to Canada and submitted it to the Parliament.

Around the same time, the Switzerland delegation was in Geneva presenting the report to the World Council of Churches, the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) and various country-missions in the UN. When the UNHRC announced that it will undertake the UPR and the Philippines was among the first countries to be subjected to it, the Philippine UPR Watch was formed.



The Philippine UPR Watch delegation headed by Rev. Rex Reyes, Jr., general secretary of NCCP, went to the First Session of UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on April 7-18, 2008. Two months later, on June 2-18, 2008, the same delegation went to the 8th Session of the Human Rights Council. The 8th session was the occasion for UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary and Arbitrary Executions Prof. Philip Alston to present his report on the Philippines, among others. Alston went on a mission to the Philippines in 2007 to investigate the spate of extrajudicial killings and came up with a report specifically pointing to the military's involvement in these violations.

On Feb. 16, the NCCP launched *Let the Stones Cry Out!*, a book that chronicles the journey to seek justice taken by church workers in the Philippines, their partners and the victims and families of rights abuses.. Copies of the book are available at the NCCP. Orders can be placed at library@nccphilippines.org

Excerpted from: Bulatlat.com

NCC Japan new general secretary



The Rev. Makoto Iijima, 60, was appointed general secretary of the National Christian Council in Japan during its general assembly held in March, 2009. Rev. Makoto considers 'dignity of life' and youth evangelism as the bases of his future work. "The NCCJ can create sites of encounter for children from South Korea, Philippines, Taiwan, China and North Korea," said Rev. Iijima, who was previously the pastor of a Taiwanese congregation in Tokyo belonging to the United Church of Christ in Japan. (ENI)

HIV framework for action

The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) HIV and AIDS Strategy Group released the final version of the EAA HIV Framework for Action for 2009-2012.

This Framework has been thoroughly discussed and approved by the EAA Board of Directors, and is available

online in English at:

<http://www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/docs/13131/download/>

The framework will serve as a guiding document for EAA and its members in response to HIV in the next four years. (EAA HIV and AIDS Strategy Group)

New APAY general secretary

Mr Kohei Yamada from Japan is the new general secretary of the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs (APAY) effective 1 June 2009. He was general secretary of the National Council of YMCAs of Japan since 2004.

Yamada started his YMCA career as director of the Senior Citizen Project of the YMCA of the Greater Baltimore Area, USA in 1977. Later he moved to Tokyo YMCA to work as student counselor of the YMCA College of English. He became general secretary of the Tochigi YMCA in 1986 and was appointed principal of the YMCA College of English in 1996. He also served as principal of the Tokyo YMCA College of Human Care and International School. In 2002, he joined the National Council of YMCAs of Japan as director of Domestic and International Relations.

As an Executive board member of the



National Christian Council in Japan, he has rendered his service as chair of the International Ecumenical Committee, chair of the Japan, Korea and China ecumenical meeting held in Japan in 2007, and committee member of Peace Building and Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution.

Yamada belongs to the Matsugamine Catholic Church in Japan. (Asia Pacific Ecumenical News, 19 May 2009)

Farewell, Rev. Ilagan

CCA wishes to farewell the Rev. Noel Emmanuel Ilagan who completed the CCA-UN/ESCAP project on "Strengthening of Life Skills for Positive Youth Health Behavior", that ended on March 31, 2009. Ilagan continued the project which was started by former consultant Shirley Susan, training youth leaders on organizing and implementing poverty alleviation and development projects in seven Asian countries. Later the project focus shifted to promoting positive health behaviors among disadvantaged youths in the target countries.



Christian relief and development agency.

Rev. Ilagan holds a masters degree in theology from the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, and was ordained by the Lutheran Church in the Philippines in 2005. Prior to CCA, he was commissioned to serve in Cambodia as executive director of an international

Currently, he is on independent management training and consultancy work, most of it helping the churches in the Philippines in the area of effective church leadership and management. Once in a while he gets invited to preach and teach in some local churches.

ACT Alliance to be created

Church-based emergency and development organisations are about to create one of the world's biggest networks. The new body will be called ACT Alliance with a common income of more than US\$2 billion and a staff of 40,000, including volunteers. The new alliance will be formally launched in March 2010 in Malawi.

Holding its meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina in May, the General Assembly of ACT Development decided to unify with the emergency network, ACT International. Both alliances are based in Geneva, bringing together more than 150 agencies, churches and organisations. Through emergency appeals, ACT

International coordinates humanitarian operations all over the world, and has been recently active in hot spots like Sri Lanka, Gaza, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Colombia and India. ACT Development works on long-term development issues and coordinates work in areas such as aid effectiveness, impact assessment and malaria. Members of the alliances come from both the global north and south.

The magic of ACT is the cooperation with churches all over the world. When most infrastructures collapse, there is still a church that operates and works as a unique network. (ACT International)

Asian Ecumenical Course 2009

Theme: Living Together in the Household of God
Towards a Wider Ecumenism
Venue: Schrachi Center, Kolkata, India
Dates: 18 - 31 October 2009

For more information, please contact: fm@cca.org.hk

I labour to make a difference

I labour away from home to make a difference
I choose the discomfort of unfamiliarity
For there is nothing more that can be done
To free a household from the bondage of poverty

I landed on a small rice mill enterprise
The people here speak differently
They spend long hours working hastily
I pray night and day: Oh, God midwife me

Some days I long for familiarities
An association of migrants lightens the way
I become their friend and companion
In this migrant labour journey

I dedicate my labour especially to the "less than"
As I remember on how the world is being run
When greed of the few invents globalized slavery
God midwife me in the struggles for life and
human dignity

Pol Par
(A Filipino migrant worker in South Korea)

(Photo: Mission for Migrant Workers-HK)

