



Christian Conference of Asia

cca news



Ecological Justice

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The time is now



“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

The 13th General Assembly in April 2010 marked a decisive moment in CCA's journey. For the first time in its 53-year history, CCA elected a woman chief executive officer. This is a sign of CCA's commitment to men-women partnership. Sharing of power in leadership can be a cause of apprehension. Yet it is also a moment to express our faith as an inclusive community with a variety of gifts entrusted by God. As I begin the challenging task of being CCA General Secretary, I humbly request your prayerful support and cooperation.

The Assembly reflected on the theme, “Called to prophesy, reconcile and heal.” Amidst seemingly booming economies in Asia, we feel the pain of the poor majority and hear the groaning of creation. Community disintegration prevents many people from experiencing peace with justice. It is time for Asian churches to contemplate once again on God's purpose for our presence here and to renew our commitment to promoting the transforming love of God in our region.

The CCA Executive Committee met last 25-27 August and decided on the CCA vision: Life together in common witness to God's love through transforming mission. Drawing from the Assembly mandate, the committee also agreed on its mission: That in the next five years (2011-2015), Christian Conference of Asia will encourage, equip, accompany and share with churches in Asia to engage in prophetic, compassionate,

healing and reconciling ministries for the realization of justice and equality for all.

Calamities hit Asia recently signaling serious ecological concerns. People in Pakistan suffered from massive floods. Severe earthquake that hit Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand and the eruption of Mt. Sinabung in North Sumatera, Indonesia created anxiety and uncertainty for many people. Many small islands are in danger of sinking, due to the rising sea or water level. In this critical time, churches are called to express our commitment to life, justice and love for all. Created in the image of God, human beings are called to be co-workers with God in caring for the whole creation.

The month of September is Time for Creation, a reminder of our responsibility for the whole earth. The World Council of Churches has extended the observance to October 10 to join a global civil society movement (101010) in exploring viable solutions to ecological injustice. Churches in Asia need to unite with the worldwide church and civil society movements to address ecological injustice. We need to express our solidarity with those who suffer through prayer and tangible support. The Assembly set up the 'CCA Emergency Fund' using as seed money the offerings at the daily worship in Kuala Lumpur. We invite members to contribute to this Fund to enable us to respond immediately to emergency situations.

The time is now for ecological justice.

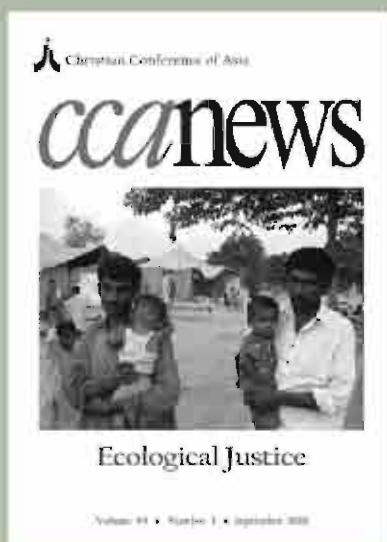
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Cover photo: Pakistan flood survivors,
by Freddy de Alwis.

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The Pakistan flood victims

Has God abandoned them?



The floods did not only wash away the homes and possessions of the poor but also their dignity and self-respect, condemning them into less than human existence.



I struggled with this question during the five-day ecumenical visit with the churches and the victims of the devastating floods that have inundated and rendered victim almost 20 million of the Pakistani population.

I was tasked by CCA to visit and to consult the heads of member churches and the National Council of Churches in Pakistan (NCC Pakistan), on how CCA and the rest of Asia can help respond to the emergency needs of the flood victims, with the objective to consult and to be in solidarity with the churches in Pakistan.

Sunday, August 29th

I arrived in Lahore close to midnight and was nervously aware of potential threats to foreigners in the hands of Taliban militants. I stayed overnight at the Ecumenical Center run by NCC Pakistan and got a good night's rest for the needed strength of body and spirit for the visit around Pakistan's flooded areas.

Monday, August 30th

With Sohail Aktar, NCC Pakistan Associate General Secretary and another NCCP staff, we left for Peshawar from Lahore in the morning, passing through Islamabad on the way. In the City of Mardan, we met with Mr. Adeel Rehmat, Coordinator of the Pakistan Mission Society (PMS) and his father who is a Presbyterian minister along with some local volunteers, Mr. Victor Tou from Japan, Mr. Francis K Horton from the US, and Dr. Martin Killgss, who were around to help PMS in its relief operations. They told us about the phase of their relief work, distributing food and operating medical clinics, which benefitted more than 3,000 families in refugee camps. They needed more doctors and medical supplies and appealed to the churches for more volunteer doctors and nurses to help in the camps.

It is very encouraging to see young people from the Church of Pakistan, a Presbyterian Church, and the Assemblies of God who have offered their time and skills freely to help serve the needs of the flood victims in Mardan's two camps in Charsadh.

To see pregnant and birthing mothers in agony and children desperate for food and in dire health situation is to painfully look at suffering on the face. One is tempted to question where God is in that situation, shaking one's faith at the roots, with the realization that hundreds also die from Taliban bombs and malnutrition and floods may just be a poor second. If God's creation is good, why do people suffer from human greed?

But far beyond the physical damages is the trauma as families saw their houses, livestock and fields completely wiped away by the floods. My thoughts turned to the necessity for CCA to come in solidarity but also with resources to aid the flood victims. Solidarity visits could turn to mere empty words, and faith without action is just dead.

We were so absorbed by the situation we did not realize it was time to break the Ramadan fast at 6:30 that evening. One of the community leaders invited us to join them in breaking the fast. Conscious that the community did not have enough food to share, we sat down to a memorable meal with reluctance inside me. Would I be depriving the victims of their hard-to-come-by food, or was I not used to how they eat, or how would I relate with the poor and the reality of poverty that I was witnessing at the moment?

The hospitality of the poor came staring at me in the eye again, a reminder of Jesus breaking bread with his disciples in the Eucharist and when the 5,000 have been fed. The breaking of bread is at the center of the Christian faith and a source of encouragement and inclusion for many

communities of the poor. That shared meal will remain etched in my memory in the years to come.

Tuesday, August 31st

We left Abbotabad and went back to Peshawar to visit the Peshawar Diocese of the Church of Pakistan. Bishop Humphrey Peters of Peshawar shared the extent of relief work by the Diocese in which 1,140 families belong, most of them displaced and have lost everything they had. Two of the churches in the Diocese were partially damaged. Immediate needs of food and shelter are being met to a certain extent but housing, livelihood and longer-term needs had to be looked into.



The flood aftermath.

Bishop Humphrey also emphasized the good relationship they have shared with Muslim and Hindu religious leaders in Peshawar and how the continuing dialogue paved the way to better understanding and co-existence among the faith communities. Emergencies like the recent floods also gave rise to less preferential treatment outside Islam, which more often denied full access to relief and other donations given through the Pakistani Government.

After lunch we visited some refugee camps and the Agriculture Research

Institute of Peshawar belonging to the Peshawar Diocese, which was partially damaged by the floods. The visit to the Peshawar Diocese made me reflect on the deprivation and suffering of the flood victims and the promise of God's love for the poor. The floods did not only wash away the homes and possessions of the poor but also their dignity and self-respect, condemning them into a less than human existence. To just point out God's love and compassion without

out of the latter's impoverishment in an insecure environment.

We then visited the Basera Camp which is huge and looked well maintained. Those in camp were provided with temporary tents, but the water tanks were mostly empty. People were given dry rations but meager to feed big families. Fever, dog bites and diarrhea were rampant, and medical supplies were not enough.

We left Multan for Lahore the following day. Three bombs exploded in Lahore killing thirty people and injuring hundreds. One member of our team commented that this was a daily occurrence and people have become so used to it and not panic anymore. It is sad what recurrent violence could do to society and its people.

Thursday, September 2nd

We met with the Salvation Army Territorial Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Yousaf Ghulan, Captain MacDonald Chandi, and Major Dennis Gensler at the Salvation



Surviving the floods. Where is God in this situation? (Photo: Shabbir Hussain Imam)

the accompanying resources that would restore life and dignity is akin to blasphemy.

Wednesday, September 1st

From Lahore we left for Multan Province, arriving at the Multan Cathedral in the Multan Diocese of the Church of Pakistan. The Multan Diocese has forty-five churches and is in the process of appointing a bishop. A large number of families were displaced when the River Janab overflowed. The church distributed relief goods and medicines with the help of some medical students. The Dalit community received support, but it was not easy being a minority in the midst of a predominantly Muslim population. This also gave rise to Christian attempts with the help of foreign missionaries to convert Dalits to the Christian faith,



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Children desperate for food and in dire health.

Working for ecological justice

The Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church (India) launched its Ecological Commission on August 6, 2010.

For more information, visit the Commission's website:
<http://www.shlomo.in/>



Army Headquarters in the morning. The Salvation Army has already distributed non-food items and are seeing to the relief and rehabilitation needs of 4,000 families in the area. They have coordinated their relief operations with the Pakistan Government's National Disaster Management Authority.

In the afternoon we reached the Headquarters of the Presbyterian Church and met with the Rev. Dr. Maqsood Kamil and the Rev. Ruban, the Administrative Secretary to the Moderator, who sent his apologies to be at a meeting in Karachi during our visit. The Presbyterian Church is also involved in relief work in Multan Province.

Our final meeting was with the Rt. Rev. Samuel Azariah, Moderator of the Church of Pakistan, who was also elected Member of CCA's General Committee at the last Assembly in Kuala Lumpur. He presented a particular need for developing skills and competence in disaster mitigation and management for churches and ecumenical organizations. In discussions with Mr. Victor Azariah, General Secretary of the NCC Pakistan, we got his support and encouragement for CCA in collaboration with the Church World Service (CWS) to conduct a training workshop, given that CWS has the personnel and skills in this area of work.

My feeling is that God has already abandoned the flood victims. The churches, rather than doing relief and rehabilitation work privately and in isolation, should take this situation to work together and become a witnessing community, going beyond denominational boundaries and working in partnership with the Muslim majority. This may be a daunting task but it is worth trying as we believe in the God of surprises.

Freddy de Alwis

To contribute to the CCA Emergency Fund, please use the following bank details:

Account name:
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Bank: Hang Seng Bank

Branch: Hankow Road (4 Hankow Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR, CHINA)

Account No.: 295 - 4 - 709594

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The Sabbath is for ecological justice



There is a reason for instituting rest - the Sabbath. A flood survivor in Pakistan drying clothes. (Photo: Shabbir Hussain Imam)

In holding their Regional Committee Meeting (RCM) and a pre-RCM meeting of the Women's Regional Committee in Tomohon and Manado, Indonesia, the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region chose a very appropriate theme, "Renewing the Earth: Climate Justice and Equity."

I had the challenging task of leading two Bible studies for the Women's Regional Committee meeting and another Bible study on partnership of women and men for the RCM. I came out having learned so much from a rich exchange with young people with very critical minds. The following is a summary of the Bible studies.

At the outset, I want to say that I prefer "ecological justice" to climate justice because climate change and global warming are mere symptoms of the deeper problem of ecological injustice which human beings have inflicted on creation. So for me it is not so much the climate [which in general refers to weather conditions] that is in need of justice but the ecology itself [the totality

of relations between organisms and their environment].

Ecofeminism is a combination of two words: Ecology + Feminism. Ecology is the branch of biology dealing with the relations and interactions between organisms and their environment, including other organisms; while feminism is the thought or movement toward political, economic and social equality of women and men. What ecofeminism has strongly highlighted is the connection between women's oppression and the exploitation of nature. Just as women are oppressed, raped and violated, nature, which is often associated with women (e.g. Mother Earth, Mother Nature) is also objectified as something that can be exploited, violated and abused.

Like feminism, ecofeminism is not monolithic. There are also different views within ecofeminism. One view sees the link between women and nature as empowering in the sense that with their positions as mothers and homemakers, women are more likely (or even naturally) to be more environmentally aware. The

other view sees the link between women and nature as degrading in the sense that it is even imposed by patriarchy. If there is an inherent connection between women and their likelihood to be environmentally aware, then it follows that men will hopelessly continue to exploit women and nature, seeing both as eternally fertile and for providing life.

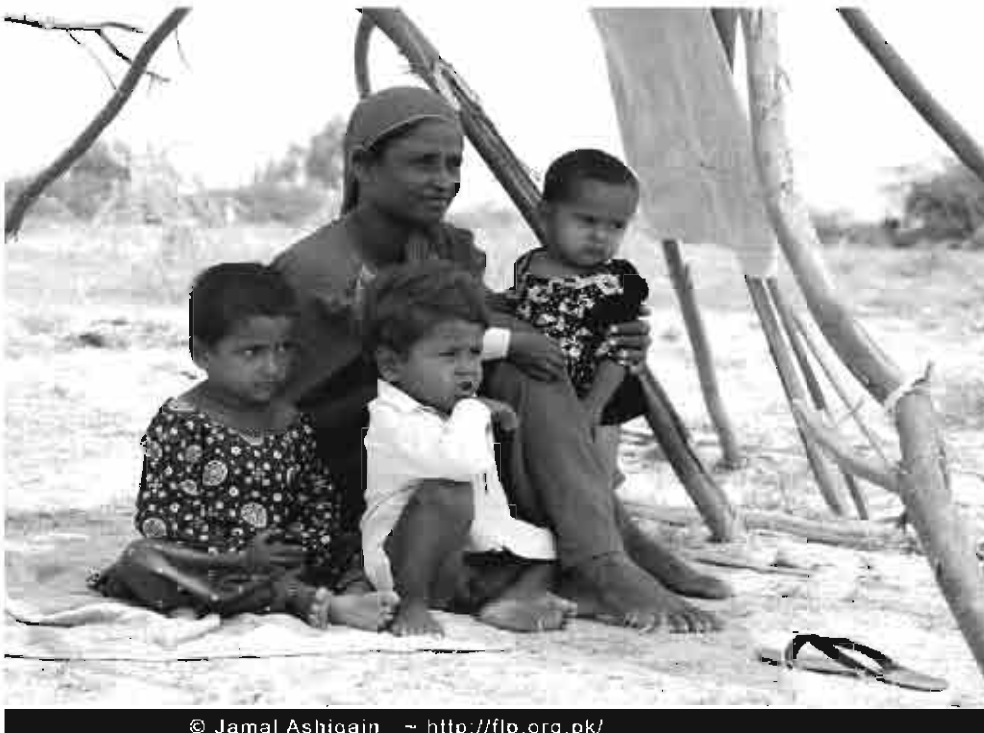
I believe that women and men are created in the image of God. Both women and men are naturally part of nature, consist of nature, and are also close to nature. Therefore both women and men are capable of being caring, life-giving, nurturing and just rather than exploitative and oppressive towards each other and to the rest of creation.

Ecofeminism highlights certain values that are often neglected. One value is Immanence - the sacred is in all aspects of the planet and her people. Another value is Interconnectedness - there is a relationship between all aspects, supported by ecology. Another value is Unity-in-diversity - the need to respect difference and valuing the whole as requiring its different parts. Another

value is the regard of the Earth as our Mother. All these raise many questions for us:

- If earth is sacred, then mining and deforestation are blasphemous.
- If natural resources are our "relatives" then depleting them is not only disrespecting but even stealing from (even raping) one's own kin.
- If nature is self-sufficient, why do we claim to improve it through the production of GM (genetically modified) food/goods?
- If we are only part of creation, why do we claim and act as if we are owners of it?

In the first Bible study, the group revisited the creation stories in Genesis 1-2, which should be remembered as forms of etiology (study of causes, causation or causality). Despite differences in some details, what the creation stories



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Do wives get a Sabbath? Mother and children flood survivors in Pakistan.



Both women and men are capable of being caring and life-giving. Pakistani children survivors of the flood.

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signify is that there is variety in God's creation. While human beings are part of creation, they are blessed with the provision and sustenance from creation and also the special task of tending, caring for, and nurturing creation. God created humankind in God's own image so they will be co-creators with God and co-stewards of God's creation. The original blessing to multiply, fill the earth and subdue (have dominion) should not be understood in its heterosexist, anthropocentric, and androcentric way nor as a license to do anything one likes with creation. If profit, fame and power are not God's purpose of creating, then neither should they be the purpose of our being co-creators with God. The order in creation - from matter, to matter with life, to matter with life and soul - is not God's way of instituting hierarchy in creation and to justify the anthropocentric view that human being is the crowning glory of creation. Neither is it to justify

the androcentric view of the unequal position of the sexes. Rather it should be seen as showing the interdependence or interconnectedness of all that God created.

In the second Bible study, the group revisited the biblical concepts of Sabbath and Jubilee in Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Exodus 23: 10-12; Leviticus 25:1-24. Sabbath, which God instituted right in the story of creation, means rest on the seventh day after the work on creation was finished. Sabbath is therefore a day set apart, a holy or sacred day of rest. Its observance is stipulated in the Ten Commandments: "On that day no one is to work - neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country" (Ex. 20:10). It is strange that wives are not mentioned when the 10th commandment clearly talks about not desiring another man's house, or his wife, or his property - implying that the Commandments were addressed to men. Do wives get a Sabbath?

Sabbath is also for the land. As workers (slaves and laborers), animals, aliens observe the Sabbath, land also gets to rest, not only on the 7th day of the week but also on the 7th year. Jubilee is the 50th year (after counting 7 x 7 years, the 50th year is jubilee) - a time of great rejoicing because it entails the returning to and of one's property and family, no cheating of each other in the transactions involved, and eating only from what the land yields.

Sabbath and Jubilee are very revolutionary ideas - implying radical changes in personal, social, economic, and political arrangements of life. In fact, Jubilee is at the very core of a global campaign to free many countries from huge debts to international creditors (e.g. IMF-WB). Similarly, Jubilee can be at the very core of a global campaign for ecological justice. What does this mean for us today?

First, we need to know the injustices done to ecology in our respective contexts and to repent of our complicity in the crime.

Second, we need to be pro-active in doing something to address these injustices, at personal and communal levels. *Third*, we need to learn more about biodiversity and the danger of invasive exotic species that have overtaken the native species in our respective contexts.

There is another point about observing the Sabbath - not only on the seventh day or the seventh year but also everyday. God gave us the night so our eyes will close and our bodies will rest and re-energize. But our problem today, especially among young people, is that the night does not seem to get dark anymore. This is not good for our bodies. We have a hormone in our body called melatonin which only

works in the dark. As it is released by our pineal gland in the brain when it starts to get dark, it prepares our body for sleep and while we are asleep, it goes around, like a trash collector, cleaning every cell in our body of free radicals and other toxins. Thus, it is a naturally powerful anti-oxidant within our body. So God has a reason for instituting rest - the Sabbath - and it has personal, communal and cosmic dimensions. It is part of our calling to obey the Sabbath. It is also for our own good.

Hope S. Antone

The Women's Regional Committee of the WSCF - AP with Dr Hope Antone, extreme left. (Photo: Sunita Suna)



Work for peace

Support the migrant workers

“I was born in Hong Kong but have never encountered migrant workers, just walking by across from them at the Victoria Park all the time. I even thought they are a problem, as they forcibly occupy the park every Sunday, and I did not understand their problems. During our exposure visit last Sunday, 25th July, the life and struggles of Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers unraveled before my eyes.”

This was how School of Peace participant from Hong Kong, Clara Tam Su Ngor confessed before fifteen other trainees attending the School of Peace for Northeast Asia held at the Tao Fong Shan Centre in Shatin, New Territories in Kowloon, Hong Kong on July 23 to 30, 2010.

Participants and facilitators in the School of Peace.

She went further, “we participants in the School of Peace in Hong Kong witnessed the work of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) and the passion and commitment to fight for migrant workers rights. We wonder what we in Hong Kong churches can do to help alleviate their difficult plight and maybe start opening our churches to them.”

The School of Peace is one of CCA's ongoing programs aimed at training peace workers in the churches in peace building. The week-long curriculum includes theological reflections and Bible Studies on peace, understanding peace in the eyes of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and people of other faiths, the different aspects of peace making, peace keeping and peace building; theories and causes



of conflicts; gender and ethnic factors in violence; conflict management and conflict resolution methods (mediation, conciliation, negotiation and advocacy), and working on a national and regional peace advocacy plan.

Dr. Kung Lap Yan from the Chung Chi College Divinity School of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, in his theological reflection expounded on reconciliation for people and structures based on 2 Corinthians 5:17. Jesus preached the love for enemies, which challenges the Christian understanding and practice of morality in the political sphere of life. He propounded that the political world deals with efficiency and effectiveness, not with moral values, as politics relates to power not morality. He added that churches possess moral and not political capital.

In his biblical reflections on Micah 4 and Isaiah 2, the Rev. Ewing Carroll, a retired missionary of the United Methodist Church, emphasized the role of the message not the messenger in doing justice and in being merciful to the other. The mountain represents God's promise of shelter for people who are lifted up in Yahweh's power. He also said that the search for humanity starts with the self, justice is restorative not retributive, that humility, obedience and justice are fruits of people working in community under the ultimate authority of God. In his reflection on Psalm 85, Pastor Bud Carroll emphasized the correspondence between righteousness and justice and the need for people to learn to listen to each other as they walk on the path of obedience that is just.

Other presenters in the School include Mr. Chan, Ka Wai, a member of the Legislative Council from the Democratic Party who presented another biblical reflection based on the dream of Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 65:17-25). The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights was presented by Mr. Wong Kai Shing, Deputy Director of the Asia Human



Rights Commission (AHRC); Gender-based violence by Ms Cynthia Abdon of the Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM); and religious intolerance and fundamentalism by Mr. Basil Fernando, Director of AHRC.

Participants visualising the 'Empire and its victim'.

The Christian Action, Chung King Mission Service Center, and the APMM hosted the exposure visits on 24th and 25th of July.

The Rev. Po, Kam Cheong, General Secretary, Hong Kong Christian Council played host to the School, and Charlie Ocampo of CCA, the Rev. Shin Seung Min, Executive Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), and the Rev. Hu, Hong-Chi, Ecumenical Officer of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan formed the Organizing Team for the School of Peace.

Charlie Ocampo

A call to Holy Land pilgrims

Work for peace

Christian pilgrims are called to live their faith as they visit the Holy Land, going beyond homage of ancient sites and antiquities, to show concern for the Palestinian people living there whose lives are severely constricted by the Israeli Occupation of their lands.

This heartfelt challenge came from a meeting in May this year in Geneva, of a group of twenty-seven representing fourteen countries, including theologians, tourism thinkers and advocacy organizations, and Palestinian Christian activists and tour organizers.

The meeting asserted that tourism to Palestine is an opportunity for a “pilgrimage of transformation” reflecting a deeper Christian experience that invites pilgrims to a genuine encounter with the Body of Christ by connecting with Palestinian sisters and brothers in faith.

This consultation was organised by the Alternative Tourism Group in Palestine in collaboration with the Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism (ECOT, based in Thailand), the WCC-Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF, Geneva) and Kairos Palestine.

CCA and member churches should consider the Geneva meeting’s challenge seriously. The last CCA Assembly in Kuala Lumpur urged Asian churches to find ways of true solidarity with Palestinian Christians and the wider Palestinian community. It is to be noted that many Asians go to the Holy Land, and churches can influence the direction of such pilgrimages.

“Only by living what Palestinians experience all the time can a visitor recognize the injustices that are their daily bread. With this understanding comes a desire to help end the accumulated injustices in Palestine,” said Rami Kassis, Executive Director of the Alternative Tourism Group.

The meeting asked pilgrims to demonstrate solidarity with Palestinian Christians whose 2,000 year continuous presence in the land has been steadily eroded due to the Occupation.

Pilgrims directed to and using Israeli organized tours can contribute to the problem by ignoring the Palestinian people and their situation, and only hearing and then reinforcing the Israeli narrative, the meeting concluded. “They think they are bringing hope, but they are actually taking away hope from the whole region,” said Rifat Kassis of Kairos Palestine.

Participants expressed grave concern about the



monopoly that Israel exercised over Holy Land tourism, and the crippling restrictions it imposed on Palestinian tour operators, hotels, and guides that limited development of this key sector of the Palestinian economy.

The Israeli Occupation impacts Palestinian life drastically. The "Apartheid Wall" cuts off Palestinians from each other and from East Jerusalem, the traditional centre of Palestinian religious, cultural, and commercial life. Israeli authorities also block West Bank Palestinian Christians, whose families would normally celebrate Easter and other Christian feasts by worshipping in Jerusalem, from entering the city.

The meeting called on:

- Churches to renounce and reject harmful Biblical interpretations and theologies which legitimize the Occupation of Palestine and instead recognize God's preferential option for the poor and take up the Kairos call to "come and see".

- Pilgrims to abide by the Code of Conduct agreed by the Palestinian Initiative for Responsible Tourism, participating in a respectful journey with Palestinians through their land and their history, taking sufficient time to listen, reflect and pray with them, discerning God's presence in the Palestinian people's struggle for justice.

As a sign of hope, the meeting affirmed the slow but growing consciousness among some churches and pilgrims who are seeking an authentic encounter with the Palestinian people, and further called on them to strongly carry their message forward to their constituencies.

'Guidelines for Pilgrimage' will soon be available at ECOT for churches, pilgrims, media and other groups.

Caesar D'Mello

(caesar@ecotonline.org; www.ecotonline.org)



'A Theology of Pilgrimage for Palestine' Consultation participants in Geneva displaying a Palestinian shawl. Michel Nseir (WCC-PIEF) second from left front row; behind Michel, Rami Kassis (Alternative Tourism Group); Riffat Kassis (Kairos Palestine) third from left front row; Caesar D'Mello (ECOT), second from right front row. (Photo: Rev Kim Cain)

Women of Timor Leste

Journey to healing

“We need a women’s resource center in Igreja Protestante Iha Timor Loro Sae (IPTL). We will train church women to be midwives and nurses so that there will be a low mortality rate in our country. We don’t have enough trained midwives and women die during childbirth. We also want to equip our young girls and church leaders with various skills to promote a spirituality that seeks healing and reconciliation among ourselves. We still have wounds raw with pain from the suffering we endured for decades. We have already started micro-credit programs to help women but we need a room and house where we can have activities, programs and projects that aim to empower and develop women in their skills.”

Mrs. Leocadia de Jesus, Chairperson of IPTL’s Women’s Commission expressed this sentiment in July, 2010 when I visited Timor Leste. The Women’s Commission of IPTL was formed in 2008 through the Women’s Accompaniment Ecumenical Vision and Empowerment (WEAVE), a project of CCA’s Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment cluster in collaboration with IPTL.

Timor Leste was colonized by Portugal in 1520, with the western portion controlled by the Netherlands in 1613. In 1949, Netherlands gave up its colonies, and Indonesia was born. East Timor remained under Portugal until 1975. On July 16, 1976, nine days after the democratic Republic of Timor Leste was declared independent, Indonesia invaded and annexed it. Indonesia’s brutal occupation of Timor Leste - remote, and desperately poor - escaped international attention.

During the Indonesian occupation children were stolen from their parents and sent to Indonesia, young girls were raped in front of parents and at gunpoint.

When Suharto left office in 1998, his successor, B.J. Habibbi, announced his willingness to hold a referendum on Timor Leste’s independence. On August 30, 1999, the UN-sponsored referendum on Timor Leste’s independence resulted to 78.5% in favor of seceding from Indonesia.

The UN Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) governed the territory for three years. On May 20, 2002, nationhood was declared. East Timor is one of the world’s poorest. Its capital Dili, descended into chaos in April and May 2006, when Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri fired almost half of the soldiers who were striking, protesting against low wages. Rioting and soon violence spread out causing about 130,000 people to flee their homes to avoid bloodshed. On June 26, Prime Minister Alkatiri resigned and was succeeded by Jose Ramos-Horta, winner of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize. Even today Timor Leste though independent is fraught with wounds of the past, with poverty and corruption as its major problems. However, this island and her sea are rich with mineral resources.

The Igreja Protestante Iha Timor Leste (IPTL). IPTL is a group of Protestant churches located in the different districts of Timor Leste. It has thirteen districts called *Klassis* with one inactive district since the Indonesians left. The latest report says they have 9,882 members of which 4,522 are women. However, it is observed that 90% of those who attend worship are women. IPTL has ordained several women pastors. On the occasion of its 22nd Anniversary in July which I attended, three more women were ordained

I also preached in a Sunday worship where I shared about the Fellowship

of the Least Coin movement - a global women's movement of prayer, healing and reconciliation started by an Indian widow, Shanti Solomon. Through CCA, the women of IPTL were supported by the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC) in their projects.

On July 11, 2010, a grassroots women leaders meeting and seminar was facilitated by CCA with IPTL, where twenty-six women participated. The women shared their stories and faith in the midst of violence to heal one another, and identified their challenges.

Mama Rosa, a church elder in a remote village said, "We are hungry and poor. I worry each day how will I feed my children. Sometimes my sons quarrel with the neighbors. I know why they are violent and so angry.... how can we be good Christians and human beings as well?"

She further said: "There is more violence at home and problems start in the family when we are hungry. I console my

children with words from the Bible to give them hope. I think the 'Son of man, Jesus' also had hunger and thirst like ours. Our country is rich in fruits and vegetables and minerals and oil yet we are hungry. All our food and minerals are exported or robbed by rich countries or by those that occupied us. Now we have freedom but still hungry and poor.

"Our key church leaders get a salary of 50 USD, our pastors and evangelists receive only an honorarium. A sack of rice costs 10 USD. The local currency we use here is USD. Our pastors cannot visit members' homes because they don't have transportation or money to buy vehicles. Our members are spread out in mountainous areas. In such a context how can we revitalize our spirituality?"

The women decided that there should be a journey together in healing between Timor Leste and Indonesia. CCA has an important role to play in linking IPTL women leaders with Indonesian church women to work together in doing transforming mission and to achieve gender justice.

Moumita Biswas



... There should be a journey together in healing between Timor Leste and Indonesia.

The newly ordained ministers of IPTL, from left: Rev. Martha Marvin Kristin Lintjeras, Rev. Wisrahayati, and Rev. Yup Meriana Olla.

Theological Education

It's like planting trees

"He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." [Mt 13:31-32]

I had a rare opportunity being the Chief Guest at the College Day and Convocation of the Theological College of Lanka (TCL) in Pilimatalawa, Sri Lanka on 9 July 2010. That morning I spoke at a seminar with students and alumni of TCL on "The Future of Wider Ecumenism in Asia". In the afternoon I was the speaker at the graduation rites, during which the new principal, the Rev. Dr. Jerome Sahabandhu was also inducted into office. Using the parable of the mustard seed, I shared some reminders for the task of theological education today.

First, Theological Education (TE) is like planting trees for it is a process that begins with many small and insignificant seeds. Although the parable talks about planting a mustard seed, planting trees actually involves disseminating as many seeds as you can and from the seedlings that come out, we choose the best and the healthiest which we will transplant in carefully chosen places. Likewise, in Theological Education, we want to expose our students to as many schools of thought as possible. We impoverish them if we just expose them to one school of thought approved by our denomination or board of trustees.

Second, Theological Education must be contextual. Just as a tree needs to take root in the soil, Theological Education should also be rooted in Asian soil or

context, addressing our realities in Asia, and using our own natural and cultural resources in Asia. The reason why in many Asian countries Christianity is seen as a Western or foreign religion is because it has not become rooted in Asian soil. TE tends to follow a Western paradigm - since many of our theological educators were schooled in Western theological curricula.

Third, Theological Education must be for a clear purpose. In the parable, the tree is described as serving not its own need but becoming a source of shelter or refuge for the birds. Theological Education should not be for self-serving purposes of our own people, the church, but for the wider community. It should be for equipping people to proclaim in word and deed the kingdom of God characterized by God's will of fullness of life for all people and all creatures. For us at the Christian Conference of Asia, this means equipping the people for the ministry of prophesying, reconciling and healing not only for humanity but for all creation.

Fourth, Theological Education must be a cooperative process. Paul says in 1 Cor 3:6-7, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." Just like planting trees, Theological Education is a process that involves many actors or players - the students, the educators, the educational setting, the churches, and the wider community. Learning is not only within the four-walls of the seminary but it is also out there, in the wider community where the struggles for fullness of life happen. So while we try to do the best we can, it is not by our efforts that growth will take place. It is God who gives growth.

The Rev. Dr. Jerome Sahabandhu holds a doctorate in Social Ethics and Theology from the University of Dublin. He succeeded the Rev. Dr. Albert Wilfred Jebanesan who served as principal of TCL since 2005. Jebanesan holds a doctorate from Edinburgh and has been on the faculty of TCL since 1994. He taught various courses such as Mass Media/Communications, Practical Theology and Christian Ministry. He was inducted as President of the Methodist

You all know the most common ready-made answers: "Christ is the answer" and "It is God's will that something happens." Yet there are many new questions for which we cannot just take our theological canned food of ready-made or instant answers: "Can one be a Buddhist-Christian at the same time?" "Can gays and lesbians go to heaven?" "Is it God's will that people die during the tsunami?" "Is it God's will that people kill each other because of their differences



Conference in Sri Lanka on 24 August. To the TCL graduating class of 2010, I have the following reminders:

First, remember that wisdom is not so much in the accumulation of answers but in equipping you to deal with life's questions honestly and courageously. Theological Education is not necessarily to fill you with ready-made answers, which you keep in neatly arranged drawers or computer folders - to readily offer to people around you. Theological education should have equipped you to deal with those questions and to enable others to find answers to life's questions.

in ethnicity or religion?" Such questions require serious theologizing rather than simply giving stereotyped answers or judgmental opinions. Let us equip our people to theologize by themselves instead of offering them instant or canned-food theology as ready-made answers to their questions.

Second, remember that while you may have learned a lot in your Theological Education, there is no end to learning. There will still be a lot to learn as the Holy Spirit will continue to guide you into truth. Learning is a life-long process - it never ends. And sometime down the road

Lighting the oil lamp (L - R): Rev. Dr. Albert W. Jebanesan (outgoing TCL principal), Rev. Kingsley Perera (chair, TCL Board of Governors), Dr. Hope S. Antone (chief guest, TCL College Day) and Ven. Bulumulle Sumanarathana Thero (guest from the Buddhist Sangha)

you may find yourself having to unlearn something that you have learned before, so that you can learn something new.

I faithfully learned about the Bible from my seminary professors. At that time, the key starting point for understanding the Bible was the exodus experience of the Israelites - which was right away applied to our situation in the Philippines. But only much later, after I had left the seminary, and after more exposure to interfaith dialogue, did I realize that the often neglected or forgotten experience of the native people - the Palestinians or Canaanites. Are they outside the plan of God? Are they outside the family or household of God?

The Spirit of God continues to work wonders through us and among us. We receive new revelations (call them insights) all the time. To know the truth so the truth can set us free means we need to be open to the working of the Holy Spirit within us and among us. We must also remember that God is much greater than what our finite and limited minds can fully comprehend. So we should refrain from putting God in our small boxes of theological formulations and pretend that that is all the truth there is about God. We have to learn from the experience and perspective of others - that way our knowledge will be enriched.

Third, remember that you are called and sent out to be the shepherds of the flock. It is your task to guide the flock into green pastures of truth and nourishment - not the other way around. If you learned in the seminary that Moses crossed the Sea of Reeds, will you still preach on Moses crossing the Red Sea? If you have learned in the seminary that Paul's injunctions to women were not meant for all women of all time but for women in a particular time and social context, will you still preach that, therefore, today's women should not lead and should not be ordained into the ministry? Will you be the shepherd who will guide the flock or will you simply be one of the sheep who will willingly follow the flock even to its slaughter? I hope you will be the caring and loving shepherds of your flock, who will guide them to green, safe and healthy nourishment of their minds and bodies.

Fourth, remember not to be conformed to the values of this world - where success in the ministry is often measured by the size of the church building, the number of its new members, or the number of people who have been baptized or converted. Christ's call for us is to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. Therefore, in God's eyes, the impact indicator would not be the quantity of people but the quality of life that is lived in its fullness.

Hope S. Antone

The Board of Governors of the Theological College of Lanka (TCL) appointed the Rev. Dr. Jerome Sahabandhu (B.D., Serampore, M.A., Nijmegen, Ph.D., Dublin), from the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka as the new Principal, effective 1 April 2010. He could be contacted via email - sahabanj@tcd.ie



Addressing world poverty



The AGAPE - PWE reference group members visited the Mayor of Lapy City and the city's social service programs.

On-going efforts by churches and civil society must be sustained to help mitigate the negative impact of wealth creation on poverty, and support initiatives to promote ecological justice. For this important task, Seventeen (17) members of the Poverty, Wealth and Ecology (PWE) Reference Group met at the Suprasl (Orthodox) Academy in an Orthodox Monastery in Bialystok, Poland, on June 23-25, 2010.

Plans for a Poverty, Wealth and Ecology Consultation in Europe have been presented at the meeting, following the Consultations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. Budapest, Hungary will be the venue of the PWE Consultation scheduled to take place on November 8-12, 2010, to tackle issues including the impacts of globalization and the economic crisis in Central and Eastern Europe, poverty in Europe, economy in the service of life, sustainable lifestyles, and threats and challenges of globalization.

Charlie Ocampo, representing the Christian Conference of Asia, reported on possible follow up of the last PWE Consultation in Asia and the Pacific. Strengthening of communication link between CCA

and the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) is seen as a priority, along with strengthening faith-based networks with social movements in Asia and the Pacific, introducing poverty, wealth and ecology themes in seminary and ecumenical formation courses, and in the human rights training and peace courses hosted by CCA.

Mayor Roman Czepe of Lapy City warmly welcomed the Reference Group members, who were also able to visit the defunct railway plant and social service organizations working with the local communities. Dr. Grzegorz Dobrzanski and Urszula Glinska, both faculty members of the Bialystok Technical University facilitated a special session with academics on the impact of current economic system on the environment and on social cohesion.

The meeting was hosted by a team from the Polish Council of Churches led by Lukasz Nazarko, a member of the WCC International Affairs Commission. Members of the Polish Council of Churches include the Orthodox, Lutheran, Polish Catholic, Old Catholic, Marienvich Catholic, Reformed and Baptist Churches.

Charlie Ocampo

The UMC Chiang Mai mission

The United Methodist Church (UMC) mission center in Chiang Mai was dedicated on August 21, 2010. It was also an occasion to welcome the UMC missionaries, Rev Gary and Cindy Moon from the USA who will be developing ministries to the youth and children living with HIV.

The Rev. Jong Sung Kim, Director of Mission Initiatives of the UMC General Board of Global Ministries that supports the Chiang Mai mission, was also present to bless and witness the dedication. The GBGM Kingdom Kids Mission, as the center is called, is located at 29/27 Thung Hotel Road, T. Watkate A. Muang, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Dr. Erlinda Senturias, CCA Consultant on HIV and AIDS, together with Dr Liza Lamis,

Communications Consultant, represented CCA at the dedication. Dr Senturias gave words of greetings and support on behalf of CCA. On August 30, Dr Senturias introduced Gary and Cindy Moon to the AIDS Ministry of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CAM), also based in Chiang Mai.

In connecting the UMC mission and CAM, CCA affirms its vision of 'life together in common witness to God's love through transforming mission'. It is also enfleshing the CCA mission to encourage and accompany the churches in thier ministry of healing and reconciliation for the realization of justice and equality for all.

Liza B. Lamis



Guests at the dedication service. Dr. Senturias, fourth from right, front row; Cindy and Gary Moon, second and third from right, front row; Rev. Jong Sung Kim, second from left, front row. (Photo: Paul Kim)

Mision as mutual transformation

Traditionally, Christian mission is based on Jesus Christ's "Great Commission" as written in Matthew 28:18-20. This commission was interpreted and carried out literally as missionaries were sent out to different peoples in various continents and islands to convert them to Christianity.

Missionaries came to our people in the villages with a strong judgment on our traditions. Their message can be summarized as follows: 'Your life is in darkness, because your religion and cultural traditions originated from the darkness. You shall, therefore, be sent to hell. The only way for you to be saved is to leave your tradition and become Christian.'

The consequences of this approach were the disappearance of cultural heritages of our people, and in other cases, the schizophrenic attitude among indigenous Christians to Christianity and their local traditions. I met an old man from an indigenous religion who criticized Christianity as a religion without local identity because it tends to abandon local people's cultural traditions.

In the last decades there emerged new mission theologies supported by non-exclusive theology of religions and contextual theologies. Non-Christian religions and non-Western traditions are honored and respected, even regarded as ways of God to communicate with the people. In this interfaith era of mutual respect and religious freedom, Christian mission should be done in a different way.

Christian mission is not to reject but to transform, and be transformed by other religious and cultural heritages through dialogue, mutual respect and common concern for life and humanity. Dialogue with pre- or non-Christian traditions mutually enriches the cross-fertilization process. In the concerns for the environment, for example, the church can learn from local traditions on how to preserve water, soil and forest. Also, traditional values of the community provide spaces for Christian norms.

In 1997, hundreds of Muslim scholars and leaders worldwide offered Jesus Christ's 'Great Commandment' of Love (with reference to Mark 12: 29-31) in a document of about 8,600 words called "A Common Word between Us and You", as a basis for world peace:

"The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour." (English, Arabic,



A local church in Rantapeo, Toraja, in traditional tongkonan architecture. The Toraja Church is dynamically in dialogue with Torajan pre/non-Christian religious traditions and with Islam. (Photo: Zakaria Ngelow)

and other versions can be visited at <http://www.acommonword.com>)

The mission approach of mutual transformation should be founded on less exclusive but strong Biblical texts such as Jesus Christ's 'Great Commandment' of Love in Matthew 22:37-40. This paired love commandment is not only a summary of Scriptures, but a radical transformation of religious ethics of 'do not do' to a proactive love attitude. Love correlates to life and life supported by harmony and sustainability makes all creation function.

Based on the Love Commandment, then, our Christian mission will be more engaged on the quality of life rather than on formal and ritualistic religiosity. God's glory will be witnessed in our struggle for justice, peace and for the people's welfare, not just in verbal and ritual expressions of worship. Our vision, then, can be formulated as 'interfaith witness and common struggle to transform our common life and humanity'.

Zakaria J. Ngelow

Pastoral Letter

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA

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10 September 2010

Today as we conclude the month of Ramadan and celebrate Idilfitri and as the world prepares to remember the thousands who died in New York on 11th of September 2001, CCA joins the voices of condemnation from leaders of Christian churches and other religious faiths against plans by members of the Dove World Outreach Center to burn the Quran on the anniversary of the World Trade Center attacks.

We believe as Christians that burning the Qur'an does not reflect the mind of Christ.

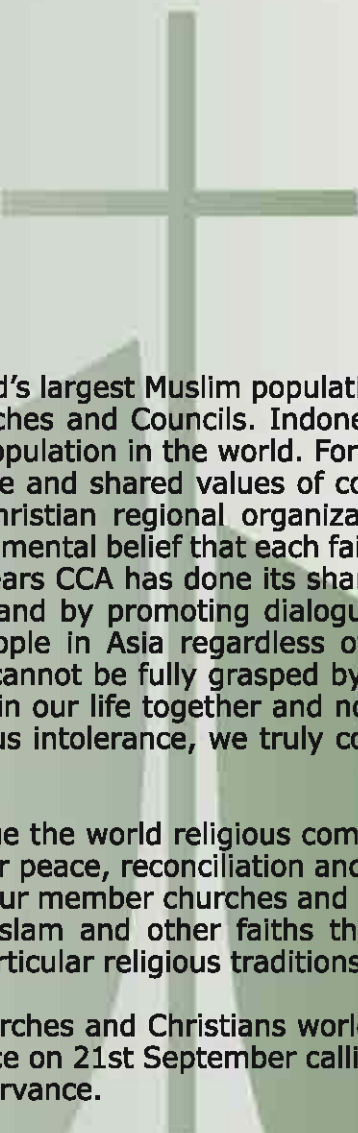
Youth representatives from the Council of Churches in Malaysia handed a memorandum of protest to the officials of the United States Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. The Rev. Sivin Kit, Bangsar Lutheran Church Pastor and Ms Chrisanne Chin, Youth Moderator of the CCM voiced their protest before Jeremy Nathan, US Embassy Deputy Political Counselor. They expressed their protest in the Memorandum and reiterated that the act of burning the Quran does not represent the sentiments of Christians in Malaysia and that they consider the burning of the holy scriptures of any faith as disrespectful, provocative, insulting, harmful and is contrary to the fundamental Christian belief to love our neighbors as ourselves and to be peacemakers. They also expressed their conviction "that any proposed act of banning or burning another faith's holy text is tantamount to a form of hate crime that must be dealt with utmost severity".

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA joined leaders of other faiths in condemning the proposed plans of the Dove World Outreach Center to stage the burning of the Quran to mark 9/11 in the US. In a public Statement, issued on 2nd September, they affirmed –

"As religious leaders in this great country, we have come together in our nation's capital to denounce categorically the derision, misinformation and outright bigotry being directed against America's Muslim community. We bear a sacred responsibility to honor America's varied faith traditions and to promote a culture of mutual respect and the assurance of religious freedom for all."

"The threatened burning of copies of the Holy Qur'an this Saturday is a particularly egregious offense that demands the strongest possible condemnation by all who value civility in public life and seek to honor the sacred memory of those who lost their lives on September 11. As religious leaders, we are appalled by such disrespect for a sacred text that for centuries has shaped many of the great cultures of our world, and that continues to give spiritual comfort to more than a billion Muslims today."

We thank our sisters and brothers in the United States of America for taking the lead in expressing repugnance to this action. We support the sentiments expressed by many other Christian bodies in Asia in denouncing this move.



Asia is home to more than 60% of the world's largest Muslim population, with 670 million living in countries with CCA member churches and Councils. Indonesia, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh have the largest Muslim population in the world. For centuries, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus lived in peace and shared values of community, tolerance and hospitality with each other. As a Christian regional organization, CCA exists to promote that unity, holding on to the fundamental belief that each faith has gifts to share for our mutual enrichment. Through the years CCA has done its share to be a venue for the discovery and sharing of those gifts and by promoting dialogue and collaboration in addressing the issues that concern people in Asia regardless of the religious faith they hold. The diversity of God's creation cannot be fully grasped by the finite mind but can only be fully understood and affirmed in our life together and not at the expense of eliminating any one. As we eschew religious intolerance, we truly commit to giving just and lasting peace a chance.

Even as we issue this denunciation, we urge the world religious communities to observe September 11, 2010 with prayers calling for peace, reconciliation and healing in Asia and the rest of the world. We also call on all our member churches and Councils to continue sharing and learning from adherents of Islam and other faiths their various ways of witnessing to peace and justice in their particular religious traditions.

CCA will also join the World Council of Churches and Christians worldwide in celebration of the International Day of Prayer for Peace on 21st September calling people to prayer, mediation and other forms of spiritual observance.

CCA is an Asian regional ecumenical organization with member churches, Councils and inter-church bodies in Aoteroa/New Zealand, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Hong Kong SAR China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Laos, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Timor Leste.

Yours in Christ,

Henriette Hutabarat Lebang
General Secretary

Rex R.B. Reyes
For the Presidium

Cc.: CCA Presidents and General Committee Members
Member Churches and Councils
Ecumenical Partners

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26 August 2010

We as an ecumenical organization are called by God and placed within the Asian context to share God's love, compassion and accompanying presence with all God's people in Asia. All of us are aware that Asian people are going through all forms of pain and suffering mainly due to human-made causes based on greed and violence.

In the midst of all these the temptation is always to retreat into hopelessness and despair. However, as Christians we believe in a God of surprises who brings hope in the midst of death, suffering and despair. Therefore, we urge all of you to be empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit to be a witnessing and transforming community to the love and power of God at work in your midst.

In its first meeting following the CCA General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur, we members of the CCA Executive Committee collectively reflected and shared insights on the current situation and developments in Asia.

We have heard the churches, the voices from poor communities and victims of violence and the negative impact on globalization, who have called our attention to the following:

- The continuing violence and culture of impunity in the Philippines, Burma and other Asian countries;
- The threats to peace and human security on the Korean peninsula and the nuclear power build up in the region;
- Growing religious intolerance and militancy in Pakistan, Malaysia and other countries in the region;
- Increase in military intervention and the role of military;
- Continuing forced labour and trafficking of women and children;
- US foreign policy and intervention in the region;
- The growing influence of China and India in the region;
- Internal displacement and infringement on rights of ethnic minorities;
- Insurgency, unresolved political tensions, and weakened governance;
- Rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers;
- Impact of natural calamities and disasters on already impoverished populations.

While we address these geopolitical issues, our attention was also called to look at the problems that are met on a daily basis by many people in Asia. These include -

- Growing disillusionment, unemployment and drug problems among our young people;
- Growing incidence of HIV and AIDS among young people and poor communities;
- Increase in suicide rates resulting from desperate economic conditions and a sense

- of hopelessness;
- Dumping of toxic wastes on poor, helpless and defenseless communities by more affluent countries in the region;
 - Impact of exported toxic products and genetically modified food on children and the wider population;
 - The building of dams that do not offer water access and on the other hand the domination of the weaker countries over waterways that restrict water access;
 - The continuing political impasse and unresolved social conflicts in Thailand.

As we reflected further, members of the CCA Executive Committee also raised the question of the capacity and will of our churches to work with people's movements and people of other faiths. Where communities are exploited and oppressed and rights are denied, the churches need to be more prophetic in addressing the powers that oppress in promoting healing and reconciliation in our communities.

The Report of the Public Issues Committee to the CCA Assembly in Kuala Lumpur has also identified these issues and suggested practical courses of action.

We in the CCA commit to do this and we encourage the member churches to take on particular action in response to these situations.

As we commend these Asian realities, we also appeal to the churches and Councils in these situations to respond in concrete and practical ways according to resources available.

We prayerfully and collectively look to the future of the changing mission priorities in Asia and share these with CCA member churches and Councils to inform and strengthen the work and programs of CCA. And let us be good stewards of our limited resources.

Lastly, we commend the program plans in CCA based on the Assembly decisions for your perusal and support towards more focused and effective program implementation and accompaniment.

With the hope that is in us, we are more than conquerors to Him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

Yours faithfully,

Members, CCA Executive Committee

Rev. Rex R.B. Reyes
Mr. Augustine Kamarkar
Rt. Rev. Dr. Philip Marandih
Dr. K.B. Rokaya
Rev. Po, Kam Cheong
Ms Svenja von Dietze
Ms Van Arunrasmey
Ms Natalie (Ming-Chu) Lin
Rev. Dr. Henriette Hutabarat Lebang



Cry justice...

When I can hold you no more
In the comfort of my body
For there is surely a limit
To my carrying capacity.

When I am torn and plundered
From over-exploitation and greed
By a few who are un-satiated
In anger I tremble, the ground I shake.

When only the wretched and I share
The brunt of suffering and despair
And our heavy cries for justice muffled
As if we were by the heavens ignored.

When in unbridled desire and arrogance
There's a claim I can be subdued
Don't be mistaken, never think
That you know me, no, you don't.

Cry justice for me, your only home
Call me Gaia*, the organic, living one
through sacred words YHWH God created
Pronounced good, a blessing and blessed.

Cry justice out loud, hear me
From my many breasts you'll feed
A generous mother, I will be
'Til all you shall return to my belly.

Liza B. Lamis
September 2010

*Greek version of Mother Nature or Earth

*Photographer Jamal Ashiqain sees this flood
survivor in Pakistan as one 'brave old woman'.*