



Christian Conference of Asia

cca news



*Upholding the Dignity
of Children*

Volume 47 • Number 1 • April 2012

“Welcoming Jesus, Welcoming the Children...”



“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 18:3).

Once upon a time in my ministry, I encountered quite a disturbing situation. I was invited by a congregation to conduct an annual thanksgiving service which was attended by hundreds of members including children. Many parents had brought their children to be baptized. As the parents stood in line to bring their children to receive baptism, other children spontaneously moved closer to the altar where the baptism was held. Suddenly, I saw a few members of the church council coming and chasing them away, literally pushing them out, saying “Go away!”

After some years the same congregation invited me for the same service. I accepted the invitation gladly with a special note that during the baptism the children shall be invited to come nearby to observe one of the most important rituals that they may have been undergoing when they were smaller. As illustrated above, many times churches exclude children in their ministry and fail to observe Jesus’ appeal to his disciples that *“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”* (Matt. 18:5)

In the midst of the complexity of problems in our world today, the issue of the dignity of children is at stake. UNICEF reports that annually around one to two million children are sold into prostitution and are forced into a life of sexual

slavery in Asia, due to poverty, illiteracy and growing population. 300 million children worldwide are subject to violence, exploitation & abuse. Of the 1.39 million people involved in forced sexual exploitation, 40-50 % are children. [UNICEF *State of the World’s Children (2007)* & WHO *Report on Violence (2002)*]. This is a shocking reality! The churches are called to respond to this concern urgently and to uphold the dignity of children more intentionally, starting with the ways the churches conduct their ministries.

Power corrupts and in the struggle to be in power, one is blind to the needs of the society, in particular to the needs of children, who in reality mirror the future. The health and soundness of the future depends on the environment in which a child is brought up in. In the context of the disciple’s obsession for power, Jesus called a child and put him on his lap and said *“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matt. 18:3). Apparently, the power game continues and it is because of this hunger for power and recognition, that children are neglected, abused, misused by the adults, including their parents.

CCA has planned to initiate a capacity enhancement training program in May 2012 that will serve as a call to the churches in Asia, to resist trafficking and to promote the rights and dignity of children. It is a small way to assist the churches in Asia to welcome and protect children’s life whole heartedly. This issue must be transformed by the power of Easter, so that justice and peace may prevail in the life of the children in Asia. Again Jesus reminded us: *“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continuously see the face of my Father in heaven.”* (Matt. 18:10)

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Official publication of the
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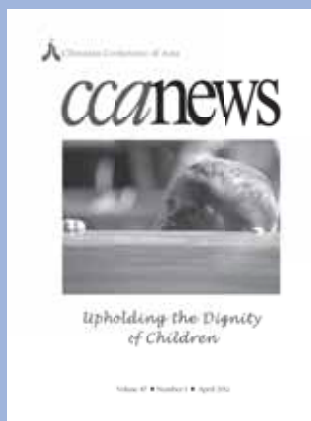
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Cover Photo: Mr. Andy Collins

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The Transforming Power of Easter



As a silent group within the ocean of humanity, children need to be attended to and taken care of with special concern. In the absence of a political power that takes its responsibility towards children seriously, the churches have a greater responsibility to 'uphold the dignity of the children'

Traditionally, Christians understand the resurrection of Christ as a supreme miracle, an event through which God has definitively established the divinity of Christ as well as his divine mission. We read in the Gospels that during his earthly ministry Jesus performed several miracles, such as curing the sick, raising the dead back to life, feeding the hungry and stilling the storm. At last after his crucifixion he rose from the dead, and it is considered as the supreme miracle. But it should be clearly maintained that the resurrection of Jesus does not belong to the category of a miracle. In fact, the Gospels do not present the above-mentioned actions of Christ as miracles, but rather as acts of power or as signs of God's presence in the world. And the resurrection belongs to another category of divine actions.

It is the ultimate act of God definitively entering into the world of matter and giving it a new destiny beyond what it has and what it can be. In fact, the resurrection of Jesus is an anticipated realization of what God has originally planned about this world of matter. Matter, by its very nature, is destined to disintegration and destruction. But in and through the resurrection of Christ, God has definitively established that matter is destined to transformation and

glorification. What has happened in Christ is to be seen not as something which he has received as a reward for his mission, nor is it a mere proof for his divine origin. Rather it is an anticipated guarantee of the ultimate transformation of the entire material creation in the fullness of time (Eph 1:10).

Paul in his letter to the Romans has dwelt on this topic in a language of assurance that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in course of time. In his view the material creation is waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God (Rom 8:18). The material creation was subjected to futility, not by its own choice, but by the plan of God who subjected it with the hope, that it will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God. At the same time, we know that the whole material creation is groaning as if in labor pains until now. And not only the material creation, but we ourselves, who have received the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we are waiting for our adoption as the children of God and the transformation of our bodies (Rom 8:19-23). In this hope we are saved. In fact hope that is seen, is not hope. But we hope for what we do not see and we wait for it with patience. Hence this transformation of the material creation is to be seen as closely associated with the destiny and dignity of the humankind. Created in God's image and likeness, the humankind is destined to greater goals. But these goals are not to be understood in terms of power, authority, domination and independence. Neither the corruptibility of the world and of the 'outward' human person nor the weakness of the 'inward' person will prevent God from fulfilling his plan.

It is God who is in active control of things and not that things would eventually straighten themselves out. God guides them, not with the objective of assuring the petty happiness of the selfish people but with the object of attaining that salvation and glorification which will be the crown of his work. In view of this God has called us, he has justified us, and he is in the process of glorifying us (Rom 8:30).

The annual celebration of Easter is the convergence of this inbuilt hope of humankind and of the material creation as a guarantee of their eschatological

transformation. Hence the message of Easter is a restructuring of our hope and a rejuvenation of our energies towards this hope. The great theologian Teilhard de Chardin, who had his entire theology centered on the hope of resurrection as transformation, had his constant desire to die on an Easter Sunday and he did die on the Easter Sunday in the year 1955. For him life was a pilgrimage towards that goal.

According to him, it is our duty as men and women to proceed as though the limits of our abilities do not exist. Love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfill them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in them. Love is a sacred reserve of energy; it is like the blood of spiritual evolution. Love is the affinity which links and draws together the elements of the world. Love, in fact, is the agent of universal synthesis. We are collaborators and the care-takers of the creation. We have to contribute our share to this creation in whatever way we can.

It means that humankind has the sacred responsibility to guide this creation towards its eschatological goal. Consequently, it depends on humankind how it deals with this creation according to the original plan of God described in Gen 1:26-31. Humankind has to become the real stewards of this creation, responsible persons to whom God has entrusted this creation to take care of and protect it through its ever-present eco-awareness and eco-concerns. Throughout his earthly ministry Jesus tried to make all men and women conscious of their responsibility towards each other and towards the creation. When Jesus pinpointed his entire message to the single concept of metanoia, thereby he meant that all have to undergo a process of metamorphosis, a process of inner transformation and conversion to get ready for that eschatological transformation. It is precisely here that we have to stop for a while and see the meaning and implications of this inner transformation as Jesus wanted it from his followers on the occasion of Easter.

Children as the perfect models of a transformed society

For Jesus the simple and eloquent proof of metanoia as a radical change of mind and perception was to become like children. The words of Jesus to his disciples and to the mothers of the children should have an everlasting impact on all of us: "Let the little children come to me: do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, will never enter it". And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (Mk 10:14-6).

In his community discourse given in Mathew 18:1-35, Jesus begins with a major question raised by one of the disciples about who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, a concern that was top-most in the mind of practically all the disciples. The answer of Jesus was also very clear and spontaneous: "He called a child, whom he put among them and said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me' (Mat 18:1-5). In fact, children are the eternal symbols of the inner quality of belonging to the kingdom of God in so far as they are unsophisticated and simple.

We have to keep in mind the fact that the risen Jesus appeared first to the simple people, such as the women and the two disciples going away from Jerusalem. That is why Jesus on a very specific occasion thanked God the Father for having hidden the mysteries of the kingdom from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to the infants (Mat 11:25-26). To this he added his own simplicity and gentle nature as something to be learned by all: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Mat 11:28-30).

Love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfill them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in them. Love is a sacred reserve of energy; it is like the blood of spiritual evolution. Love is the affinity which links and draws together the elements of the world.

The annual celebration of Easter, in the same way as the celebration of Christmas, is an opportune time for all Christians for a closer reflection on the importance the churches have to give to the cause of the millions of children, who are the greatest treasures of the churches and of the world at large. We have to constantly check and increase our concern and attention towards the children in the context of the widespread atrocities and injustice that are meted out to them under the pretext of commercialism and consumerism.

As we are living in this era of globalization, where men and women are being treated more as commercial goods, there is little chance for the political world to come into the picture in order to defend the cause of humankind as such. This is particularly true about the world of the children, who are to become the citizens of tomorrow. As a silent group within the ocean of humanity, they need to be attended to and taken care of with special concern. In the absence of a political power that takes its responsibility towards children seriously, the churches have a greater responsibility to 'uphold the dignity of the children' by giving a passionate and firm call to ensure the prevention of all forms of atrocities towards them, such as, child labor, all forms of cruelty, malnutrition and pedophilia.

The churches have a grave responsibility to have recourse to all measures in order to preserve the innocence and simplicity of the children, and see to it

that they are not abused and sacrificed on the altar of commercialism and exploitation. It is true that we very much value the children as the perfect models of society because of their sincerity, their innocence, their spirit of dependence, and their simplicity. They are so in so far as they are natural and spontaneous, reacting with their simplicity and straightforwardness.

We have to learn a lot from the children. They are abiding reminders for the adults about the true values of the human community. In fact, the truly human are all to be characterized by such simplicity, interdependence, purity of heart and altruism, which the children always have and exhibit in their day-to-day life and behavior. However there is a view prevailing among the adults that children are incomplete, incompetent, and that they have a lack of knowledge of many things. All the same, children have to be viewed as complete social beings, capable of sustaining their own uniqueness, status and culture. Children must be viewed in their own terms. However, we have to agree with the commonsense assumption that children are 'incomplete' adults and that adulthood is the goal of childhood. Hence we owe a lot of attention and care in training the children and giving them the correct orientation they all deserve from early childhood. It is not a question of an allowance and concession made to them, but rather it is what we owe them as the future goal-setters of an adult community during the course of history.

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Upholding the Dignity of Children

“Recognition of the natural dignity and equal rights of human beings, is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Human rights originate from the natural dignity and worth in all human beings. They are the basic standards that people need, to live in dignity. They exist to make sure that all are treated properly and fairly and are given the freedom to develop to their full potential.

Children’s rights are human rights. They are specifically adapted to the needs of children because they are vulnerable and cannot protect themselves. These rights were recognized with the adoption of the Geneva Declaration in 1924, but became a reality only in November 1989 with the adoption of the ‘International Convention on the Rights of the Child.’ This is the first legally binding text recognizing all aspects of the rights of the child.

The ‘International Convention on the rights of the child’ has 54 Articles and 2 Optional Protocols. To put it briefly, it articulates the fundamental rights of children such as their right to dignity, right to life, survival and development, equality and non-discrimination, right to their best interests being taken care of, and freedom to express their view in all matters affecting them. The economic, social and cultural rights of the children guarantee a decent standard of living, education, health care and development to the maximum extent possible, and protection against exploitation like trafficking and child labor. It also makes provision for legal help for children who break the law, and also to be treated with respect and dignity when they are still under trial. (Articles 2, 3, 6, 12, 22-31).

Significant imperatives calling for putting children first, listening to them, educating every child, fighting HIV and AIDS, putting a stop to harming and exploiting children, protecting children from war; protecting the earth for children and fighting poverty were added by the Global Movement for children.

Reality: Even though all Governments except USA and Somalia have ratified this convention which implies that the rights as detailed in the convention

are made available to children in these regions, the real status of more than half of the world’s children is pathetic and a blight on the conscience of humanity.

Children all over the world find themselves in situations of neglect, abandonment and exploitation. They suffer in many ways as they find themselves on the streets abandoned and alone, or as orphans, refugees of war and natural disasters. Many suffer violence and abuse, and unfortunately some are trapped in the bondage of prostitution and drug abuse. Dire poverty aggravates the situation. Unhygienic conditions, lack of adequate drinking water, high mortality rates, malnutrition, poor health care and illiteracy deny the children their right to a decent standard of living. Poverty results in forced child labor, which is the breeding ground for atrocities, abuse and injustice towards innocent children. They are exploited in many ways and their modesty is outraged without any misgivings. The stories are the same everywhere.

Here are Voices of exploited children that reveal their true status in spite of their guaranteed rights. These are true stories. Names are changed to protect privacy of children.



To be loved and protected



Voices and Stories of children

Poverty burdens children early in life leading to child labour

Child labor, SEZs and unscrupulous employers: Amat's story

My name is Amat. I come from the southern part of Burma. I came with my uncle to work in a special economic zone. Now I work 12 hours day in a shrimp processing plant.

It is freezing in the fish factory... my fingers are numb..... the knives are sharp... Some people have had some really bad accidents. If there is an accident I have to pay my own bills!

I stay with my Uncle. I never see any of the money since the boss pays my uncle directly for my work, but my uncle is always complaining that it is too little. I have never been to school and I never get to play.

Sexual Exploitation: Outraging the Modesty of Children:

Noi's story:

I am Noi. I am 11 years old. I have not seen my father. My mother? She is always in a small room. She drinks a lot with so many uncles who come and go. Last year she sent me to an old Uncle (elderly western man) to get some money that he owed her. But there he said that he wanted me to do something if he was to give me the money. I thought it was wrong but I could not go away without the money. Then my mother sent me again and again to him. He bought me many gifts, like bicycle, mobile phone...

One day my friend took me to a place for street children. There one Aunty came from the child protection office. She was very kind and told us very nice things. She told us that my body is mine and that nobody should touch me in any way that I don't like. She said that God loves me and wants me to be safe. If anybody does anything that I don't like then I can talk to somebody I trust. She told us many stories of how children were saved. Aunty gave me phone numbers also to help me.

So after thinking and thinking and talking with my friends, I called the number of the helpline that was given to me. That old man was arrested. I am now happy in the shelter home. What do I do now? I go to school and learn and am very happy.

Migrant Workers and Stranded children

Harsh Immigration Rules vis-à-vis the right to live with parents, and be taken care of

Arriane Jane's story: Arriane Jane is a baby girl, born to a Filipina couple. They had migrated to Korea but continued to stay and work there illegally even after their VISAs expired. Arriane was sent back to Philippines with a trusted friend even before she was a month old. The parents could not even take her to Philippines themselves as they would not be able to re-enter Korea.

Arriane had to be separated from her parents because of harsh immigration rules. She was brought up by her relatives. She asks her mother when they talk to each other over phone: "Are you really my mother? How long should I wait to see you?"

Arriane is now four years old and is a very smart little girl. She is inquisitive like other ordinary children. Donning her Super Girl costume she asks innocently: "Can I fly to my parents in Korea in my Super girl dress?"

Arriane thinks that her Aunty and Uncle who look after her are her real parents. The parents have mixed feelings of happiness and pain: on one hand they are happy to be able to support the child, but on the other they are pained to have missed out on the joy and delight of seeing their child grow. It is traumatic to both the parents and the child as they always long to live together as a family. (Story from Joanna Moon, Korea)

Right To Education, Health Care, Education and a Life of Dignity

HIV and AIDS

Kamal's story

Kamal is a 13 year old boy in India, who contracted HIV after being sexually abused by the security guard of the residential complex he lives in. His school had expelled him after they came to know of his positive status. Hurt and frustrated, he was helpless till Ms Karuna Roy a well-known Social activist heading the HIV and AIDS department of the Church of North India, lent him a helping hand.

He has come to terms with his HIV positive status, and will be appearing for his High school exams as a private candidate. Efforts are still on to get him an admission in a good school.



Is Life Worth Living In Refugee Camps?

Dreams of a Karen Refugee Child on the Thai-Burma border

*I dream of Hope
I want to go home
I have dreamed of it for so long
Home will be filled with love,
freedom and equality
Home will provide me with protection, security and love
At my home I won't worry about hunger
and my crying and suffering will fade away*

*I will see the smile of the bright sun
and the sun's rays will bring me peace
everybody will be happy at my home
we will celebrate Peace with true justice.*

Children who forgot how to smile Children and armed conflict

Shyamala's story:

Shyamala was born to Tamil parents during the war in Sri Lanka. Her parents worked six days a week on a state sugar plantation. She was born into a world full of violence, insecurity, brutality and scarcity. She did not know what peace meant. When she was seven years old she and her family were evacuated from their house in the plantation fearing attacks. Her family and many other Tamil refugees moved to the eastern coast for safety.

Shyamala recounts the horror of losing her parents: "After being in the Refugee camp for more than a week, my mother went to check on what happened to our home. She never returned. Three days later my father went out in search of her. He too never returned. We were told that they are dead."

When a temporary peace situation was negotiated after 10 years, the first among the social institutions to return to 'normal activity' were the schools. But teachers noted that the only response that they could get for questions posed to the children were either muttering or total silence. Shyamala and scores of children like her had [forgotten how to smile...](#)

My 5 year old son Kumara had a strange look in his eyes....

"My first son who was 19 years old came home for the weekend. An armed group of people came on the pretext of looking for a sword and a pistol, and took him away for questioning. He was mercilessly beaten and tortured. He died after he was brought back. My second son who had come for the funeral was arrested and kept in custody. I received the body of my third son who was killed in Colombo. I ran to tell this to my son who was in jail. When I came back I saw that my house was burning and that the bodies of both my dead sons were thrown into the flames. I had to look for my surviving children, a daughter aged 8 and a son aged 5. I found them hiding in a bush and my daughter was in a trance. In the eyes of my 5 year old son Kumara, I saw an intensity I had never seen before. He ceased to be a child"

The End of Innocence

"For most children the War was the end of innocence. They had to walk past human bodies that were left on burning tires as a lesson and a warning.

The boys were hardened at heart and were smoldering with the desire for revenge.

For them death, violence, sadistic inhuman behavior was normal. They grew up under the shadow of the intimidating presence of the military, suffering intensely and in grim silence, not understanding what this war was for and not realizing that they were losing the best years of their life."



Voices of children from seemingly better situations

Thanksgiving and Commitment

Yeo Hoon Yun from Korea, is one of the fortunate kids to have grown up in the warmth, joy and shelter of a loving family. Having had the best of educations and a happy childhood, this sixteen-year-old, felt extremely moved at the suffering, poverty and emptiness of the world of refugees. This visit transformed him and his outlook on life. Read on...

A Visit that changed my life

By Yeo Hoon Yun

Last month I went to a refugee village in Mae Sot with my family and my missionary friends who work with refugees around Southeast Asia. Mae Sot is a small town in western Thailand that shares a border with Myanmar to the west. It is a trade center and is noted for its large population of migrants and refugees who have crossed the border with their parents from Myanmar because of civil war, poverty, unemployment, or military oppression. However, the problem is that the refugee children are not able to receive proper schooling as there are only 62 schools in the region. There are more than 30,000 refugee children, but hardly 7000 can be educated in these schools. I saw that these schools were dirty and lacked even basic facilities like water, electricity and sanitation due to lack of money. They just had dilapidated shelters on stilts, with thatched roofs. They did not even have walls to divide them into classrooms. I learned that many students in Mae Sot are orphans or are children

who cannot get proper care at home and are on the verge of starvation. But despite such terrible conditions, the children we met there seemed so bright, happy and pure.

A school was being built with the help of donations from kind Korean business men. We were actually going for the school opening ceremony. After the ceremony the migrant workers and their children thanked us a lot. My visit to Mae Sot taught me many things, of which the most important is that I realize now with humility that I am a happy and blessed boy. I have been living a sheltered and comfortable life with my loving parents and relatives. I heard that one billion people in the world are refugees and are always poor and hungry. Even though I am studying in a better environment I am always grumbling. I need to be more modest and thank God for His blessings and should be concerned about others.

Secondly, I need to study hard. Because if I do, I can become an expert and I can teach and do something for the children and for refugees.

Lastly, when I grow up and succeed in my life, I'd like to make many donations. I learnt that 'Even if small things are collected they can be of great effect and make a big difference in the lives of the poor children'.

I hope to visit the area again soon. Mae Sot taught me many things.



Refugee children, Korean missionaries and well-wishers at the inauguration of the school building.

A final note: a haunting dream of three refugee children

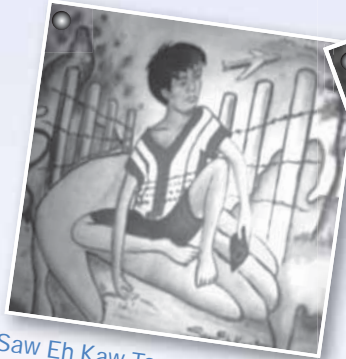
We are a human being

*We are three people from different places,
but we have one dream
We are three people with different lives,
but we have one suffering
We are three people who don't want
Hate, cruelty, power, separation
Jealousy, bribes, killing, war, rape, and torture....*

*We need a HOME,
Our home will be filled with love
Freedom and equality
Our home will give us protection and love
We will see the smile of the bright sun
And the sun's rays will bring us peace
Everybody will be happy
At our home
We will celebrate Peace and true justice.*

*We want to go home ...
We want to go home....
We want to go home.....*

Who am I?



Saw Eh Kaw Taw

barbed wires



Saw Eh Kaw Taw

running away from floods



Saw Ku Paw

Painted by refugee children

With grateful acknowledgement to Ellen Collins, Joanna Moon and Karuna Roy for sharing stories; to Yeo Hoon Yun and Amitha for their contributions; Andy Collins and Janejinda for the photographs. Other sources: "Our Stories and Challenges: The Search for Just Peace in Asia Today" (DAGA); "Suffer the Little Children: War, Peace and Children" (CCA); Universal Declaration of Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Global Movement for Children



Special Focus

National Council of Churches in India

Discern and Live the Gospel

'Discern and Live the Gospel' is the powerful message that went out to the Churches from the delegates of the XXVII Quadrennial Assembly of the National Council of Churches in India. The Assembly that was held in Bangalore from 25-28 April, 2012, brought together delegates from the member churches, Regional Christian Councils, All India Christian Organizations, Related Agencies, Autonomous Bodies, General Secretaries Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit (World Council of Churches); Dr. Henriette Hutabarat Lebang (Christian Conference of Asia); Rev. Ebenezer Joseph (NCC Sri Lanka), Rev. David Das (NCC Bangla Desh), and Rev. Saw Shwe Lin (NCC Myanmar), and other distinguished ecumenical leaders.



From left: Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, Dr. Henrietta Hutabarat Lebang, and other guests

Rt. Rev. Dr. Taranath S. Sagar, President of the NCCI, said that this "Assembly was taking place at a very significant time and space into which we are all called to critically analyze our contexts and creatively engage ourselves and our churches in striving to achieve transformation, the very essence of God's reign here on earth."

Deliberating on the theme "*Gospel in a groaning world*" from a national, regional and global perspective, the delegates called on the Church to 'Hear the groans' of all creation caused by social, cultural, economic, political injustices and ecological injustices, with sensitivity and understanding. They said that the Church should be able to 'Discern God's responses to the groaning'. It has to heed and experience groaning as a vibrant symbolical expression of labour pains leading to birth in a new world. This new world would be possible by

standing in solidarity with the victims of injustice and oppression, be they dalits, tribals, women, children, disabled, climate refugees or war refugees and by accompanying and encouraging them in their struggles against injustice. They urged the churches to 'Respond to the Kairos hour for the Church and Ecumenism' by rising above partisan ideologies, internal rivalry, corruption and litigation within the churches, and live out the Gospel. Integrated strategies and mechanisms at the local level, Inter-faith initiatives, sharing of public space, and resisting anything that adversely affects the poor, displaces humans, desecrates nature, and disrespects the God of all creation, are some of the suggested approaches towards building this new world.

Voices of ecumenical friends

Addressing the Assembly, Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary, WCC, reminded the house that "*The Gospel makes us accountable to one another*"; Rev. Dr. Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, General Secretary CCA called for "*Reviewing and renewing our commitment to ecumenism and called on the member churches of Asia to re-vitalize the ecumenical movement by owning it.*" Regretting the institutional paralysis and ecumenical fatigue that has affected ecumenism, Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, Director, International Affairs, WCC, emphasized that "Ecumenical vision should go beyond the confines of institutional ecumenism and embrace the whole humanity." Bishop Probal Kanto Dutta, Church of North India, said that "it isn't an option but is the church's commitment to share the joy, hope, grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially the poor and the afflicted

Strongly advocating a 'Rejection of cultures that denigrate God's creation' Rev. Dr. Deenabandhu Manchala (Program Executive, WCC) called for 'seeking God-affirming ways of mission.' Panelists Dr. David Selvaraj Founder-Director of 'Visthaar' and Dr. Lalrindiki Ralte spoke on the challenges to the Indian and Asian Churches and the responses to these challenges. Rt. Rev. Duleep De Chickera from Sri Lanka, who led the Bible study, said "God hears with the 'extra ear' the groaning of the vulnerable ones. Nothing can block God from hearing those cries, be it barbed wires, prison or the constitution.

Business as usual

The Business sessions dealt with Constitutional amendments, Reports and elections of new office bearers. Rev. Dr. Roger Gaekwad General Secretary presented the report for the years 2008-11, highlighting ecumenical understandings of mission and the importance of doing mission among and with the marginalized. Resolutions were passed on various public issues including Environment; Nuclear Energy; Security; Communalism; special concerns of Rights of indigenous People; and Social & Sexual Minorities. They also resolved to express their solidarity with the people of Tibet, Sri Lankan Tamils and the Palestinian struggle.

An Assembly to remember

The Assembly was a celebration of people, bringing together an assortment of colours and flavours of thought and expression not only from India, but from Asia and the west. This Assembly had many firsts... for instance, inviting representatives from the LGBTQ communities, people living with HIV and AIDS; and the physically challenged; worship being conducted by youth, women and children; and community Bible study. It will also be remembered for the many books that were released, the workshops and the exhibition stalls.



“Being Inclusive”

A unique experience: children in a groaning world

For the first time in its 98 year-old history, the NCCI, held Pre-assembly conferences for children. These events conducted in Delhi, Hyderabad and Bangalore by the All India Sunday School Association (AISSA) a related Agency of the NCCI, were very well attended and appreciated by the children, parents and the clergy. The focus during these events was on the status of children in general, and provided an exposure through video-presentations on child rights,

street children, child abuse, child labour, HIV affected, the disabled; and the marginalized.

The children were happy to know that Jesus had a special place for them in His heart, and that he showed children as the role models of those who inherit the kingdom of God. They committed themselves to accept their God given dignity irrespective of the condition in which they live; to request their parents to protect their rights in school and at home; to involve in activities that would reduce pain and groans of fellow beings, and to strive towards fullness of life. During the worship led by children, clergy and parents confessed their guilt of neglecting children and being harsh with them. They committed themselves to being kinder, inclusive and sensitive when dealing with children.



Worship led by children

This initiative conceived and implemented by Team AISSA, led by Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph, (Director AISSA), will go down in history as the precursor to a nationwide movement that has made a significant paradigm shift by bringing children their well-being and best interests from the periphery to the center of the community.

98 and still growing:

For the last 98 years the NCCI has been the united expression of the Protestant and Orthodox churches in India representing 14 Million People; 30 Member Churches; 17 Regional Christian Councils; 17 All India Christian Organizations; 7 Related Agencies and 3 Autonomous Bodies.

It is indeed a matter of great pride that in the year 2014, this icon of Christian Unity in India, will be celebrating 100 years of existence in a country that is home to many religions, languages and cultures.

Susan Jacob

Pastoral Letter to the Churches of Christchurch,
Aotearoa, New Zealand

Come and See

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it." (1Corinthians 12:12-13, 26)

To our brothers and sisters in the churches in Aotearoa New Zealand,

Grace and Peace to you,

As an expression of solidarity of your sisters and brothers in the Asian churches we have come for a pastoral visit on the 1st anniversary of the earthquake that struck Christchurch on 22 February 2011. Our visit commenced arriving on Ash Wednesday, observing the silence, as the nation stood still at 12:51pm to remember the tragic and devastating events in 2011.

When the disciples began to follow Jesus - He asked *"what are you looking for?"* This touches on the question of their motivation to follow Jesus. But the disciples' response was: "Where is your place?" Jesus answered, *"Come and see."* They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. (John 1:39) Jesus was in the world where struggles are found. This pastoral visit with the churches found them where Jesus is with the people and communities struggling today.

This visit has taken us to see the people of Christchurch and we remained with them for three days. During this time we had the opportunity to 'come and see': to see a city shaken and broken, to see a people still shaking, to see a church that is questioning, to see turmoil and uncertainty as well as hopes and new opportunities. We saw and heard the heartbreaking stories that have shaped the city during this past year. We also saw and heard the stories of hope in the midst of the brokenness.

We visited local congregations in New Brighton and were inspired to see the local parishes/congregations working together not as 'church in the community' but rather as 'church with the community' to meet the needs of the people.

We saw the new community initiatives to provide a safe space for the people to gather and talk and share their agonies and fears and encourage each other in the face of uncertainty.

We heard how communities valued that the church remained after the government agencies left. This has enabled people without a church background to participate as equal members of a team able to hold those whom others wouldn't normally want to hold. The church is being transformed from struggling to be the church in the community to now being the church with the community.

The significant statement "when the quake happened and the buildings fell away so did some of our thinking as well. Neighbours were able to talk to neighbours." reflects one aspect of the transformation that is taking place post-earthquake. We repeatedly heard of a new hope for the churches beyond the boundaries of denominationalism.

We heard from denominational leaders that the future has new opportunities and the challenge is how to embrace them. We heard the commitment that priorities for the church's future are ministry with the people and maintaining the rich sense of community that is present since the earthquake.

We heard the hope that any rebuilding plans will give consideration to new places of worship that may be shared and new ways to worship as the gathered community. The earthquake has released people to worship in parks, on beaches, schools and in community buildings. The worshipping community is found in the living stones not the crumbled stones.

We saw the resilience and courage of the people who acknowledged that the prayers of the world have supported and carried them as they emerge from the rubble of the earthquake.

We repeatedly heard "we have the opportunity to talk and think differently. We are now a gathered church rather than a geographic church. Our challenge is how to be the church post- earthquake." 'What we can do together is now more important than what we might have done in the past alone or separately.' We clearly

heard openness to greater ecumenical planning and cooperation and encourage the churches to have the courage to embrace new ways of being the church together with the community.

We shared the significance of first anniversaries being a point in time when people and communities begin to embrace the future in a new way. Similarly Ash Wednesday begins the journey to Easter where we embrace the hope of the resurrection and the newness of life. The churches are also embracing the newness of being church in city shaped by the earthquake.

We humbly received the message from the churches in Christchurch to the churches in Asia:

The churches in Christchurch expressed their thanks and appreciation for the pastoral visit; acknowledged that they have been humbled by the prayers and expressions of support from the churches in Asia and around the world. "We are more used to offering support in time of disaster and to receive support from those who we have supported in the past is very humbling. We ask the churches in Asia to call us to account as to how we have used the opportunity for new ways of being the church."

The earthquake not only shook the ground but has shaken the notion of what it means to be the church. The churches in Aotearoa New Zealand are encouraged to continue strengthening the fellowship (koinonia) of the churches; embrace the new opportunities currently before them; to discover new ways of being the witnessing church (martyria); build on the knowledge of the needs of the people in the community to develop further ministries of service (diakonia).

We write to the churches in Asia to continue expressing solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Christchurch, uphold them in prayer and when possible encourage those who are able to visit the beautiful region of Christchurch.

We write to the churches in Aotearoa New Zealand expressing admiration for the churches in Christchurch as they minister with the community meeting the post-earthquake needs of the people and the community. We encourage continued openness and exploration for new ways to be church when gathered, witnessing and serving in a post-earthquake city. We also encourage the churches throughout Aotearoa New Zealand to have eyes to see the new movement of the spirit in the church and ears to hear the call to fresh expressions of being church reflecting both ecumenical and community cooperation.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

(1 Peter 1:3)

Yours in Christ

Rev. Tara Curlewis,
General Secretary
National Council of
Churches
in Australia

Rev. Dr. Henriette
Hutabarat Lebang
General Secretary CCA

As the world pauses : Memories of disaster in Japan

As the world paused to remember Japan's moment of grief, and at a time when the people of Japan themselves were recalling the painful memories, CCA family bowed with deep sorrow to the Japanese people, in reverence to their suffering during the powerful earthquake that unleashed deadly Tsunami waves, triggering the world's worst nuclear crisis, that resulted in widespread destruction and death.

Similar feelings of solidarity and prayer were shared during earthquakes and other calamities that struck Philippines and Indonesia.

The Asian continent has become more and more fragile and is becoming increasingly prone to seismic and volcanic activity. In times like these, we realize the vulnerability and helplessness of human beings.

May God be our refuge and fortress, and may He stretch forth His hands and calm the seas and the storms that rage around us.

Let us be still and know that He is God.

Many faces of Childhood'



Help the little ones to keep smiling



Happy to go to school.



Give me your burdens





Children's Pre-Assembly, NCCI



shall I open pandora's box



Learning life skills



My World

Peace is at the Core of Islam

Pace is at the core of Islam and is invoked in every greeting of 'Salaam' said Ms. Awilya Alonto, Director of the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies, in her comprehensive presentation on 'Islamic perspectives of Peace' at the week-long School of Peace conducted at Davao City, Mindanao. She explained that



in the logic of Islam, 'peace is submission to the will of Allah' and the use of 'force is never a factor'. She emphasized that Jihad embodies individual as well as collective liberation seen as a solution to human wrongdoing.

Twelve Asian participants from Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, India and Sri Lanka and eight leaders from the Christian, Muslim and tribal communities from Mindanao in the Philippines, participated in the School of Peace that was held at the Brokenshire Convention Center in Madapo Hill, Davao City, from 1-4 February 2012, at the invitation of the Christian Conference of Asia and hosted by Initiatives for Peace, Mindanao.

They focused on the conflict situation in Mindanao and on the parallel peace talks between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front and those from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Conflict situations in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Philippines were discussed, followed by workshops to plan effective ways to address border conflicts. Concrete advocacy plans were discussed and presented in the plenary.

Eminent resource people at the School of peace included Bishop Felixberto Calang of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente who presented the current peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front; Congress Representative Luz Ilagan who spoke on the impact of conflict on women and children; Ms. Amira Lidasan on the Bangsamoro situation in Mindanao; Atty. Carlos Zarate on actively advocating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Dr. Erlinda Senturias on ecumenical peace initiatives by the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform; Sister Estela Matutina on advocating for ecological justice; and Sister Noemi Francisco, who did a comprehensive summing up of the process of learning and living peacefully in the community. Inputs on all aspects of peace building were presented in four sessions by Carlos Ocampo,

Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service.

Participants had a taste of the real life struggles of the fisher folk at the pier and the urban poor community in the outskirts of Davao City through exposure programs. Leaders of workers and the urban poor shared their stories of toil and struggle. Even in the midst of their troubles, they were friendly and hospitable and invited the participants to share their evening meal with them. Colourful traditional songs and dances at the opening and closing ceremony and an invitation to them to learn these dances gave them a glimpse of the rich and vibrant local culture.

Mae Fe Ancheta and the staff of Initiatives for Peace, Mindanao played host to the School, and Dr. Rommel Linatoc Executive Secretary for Unity and Ecumenical Relations and Ms. Biyaya Quizon represented the National Council of Churches in the Philippines in the planning and organizing of this event.

Carlos Ocampo

Building HIV & AIDS Competent Churches and Communities

Seminar & Capacity Building Training in Papua

Forty-one participants drawn from churches and organizations, hailed the CCA Capacity Building Training on being “HIV & AIDS Competent Church & Community” as an essential and substantive program that has also served as a wake up call to Churches and Communities to urgently address HIV and AIDS issues. They felt that this was the first time that a comprehensive and integrated program was held in Papua, and it inspired them to be more active and open to work with other faith based organizations, form interfaith networks, and to co-operate rather than be competitive.

Besides valuable inputs through Bible studies, reflections, sharing stories, presentations, group discussions and exposure through field visits, the participants were given valuable training by 11 eminent resource people from leading NGOs and International organizations. The training included awareness on Key affected Population, inputs and skills on working together with Key Affected Population (Injecting Drug users, People Living with HIV/AIDS), Medical Aspect & Treatment of People Living with HIV & AIDS, Comprehensive Approach to PLWHA: Program Collaboration & Service Integration, Building HIV & AIDS Competent Churches, and The Role of Advocacy in HIV and AIDS.

This seminar that was held in D’Green Hotel Papua, Abepura-Jayapura, Papua, from 9-13 February 2012 in collaboration with Indonesia Christian Church (GKI); Tanah Papua AIDS Ministry, included Pastors, HIV/AIDS activists from NGOs, people living with HIV, Churches AIDS Committee, Government AIDS Committee, and faith based organizations. It aimed at increasing awareness and knowledge of participants

regarding HIV/AIDS; to mainstream HIV/AIDS issues in church programs based on the biblical-theological perspective; and to increase the capacity and ability of participants with the technical aspects of building HIV/AIDS Competent Churches.

The support of UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, Papua Provincial AIDS Committee, City of Jayapura-Major, United Evangelical Mission (UEM) & GKI Tanah Papua Synod, both financially and by way of resource books and educative Videos is greatly appreciated.



The participants hoped that CCA and GKI Tanah Papua would initiate and coordinate many more integrated, comprehensive meetings involving all players (FBOs, NGOs, Government Agencies International donors, community) in Papua & West Papua Provinces.

Alphinus Kambodji

Ecumenical Initiatives in Peace and Security: North East concerns



The North East Asia Church Leaders forum, comprising church leaders from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, met at the Christian Guesthouse in Bangkok from 2-3 March, 2012, to discuss the current situation facing the churches in northeast Asia and plan follow up of on-going programs to continue accompanying the churches in responding to their particular situations. Issues on the situation in each country of the North Eastern region highlighting peace and (human) security agenda were identified and discussed. Hopeful signs of future political changes were also welcomed and discussed.

The leaders called for continuing the campaign against the construction of the Naval Base in Jeju Island, Korea, as the construction becomes more certain; arrests and detention of protestors carry on, and the release of a few leaders seen as just a symbolic gesture. A collection of all statements issued on the construction of the naval base, including the statement of the CCA international delegation, titled 'Dossier of Articles - Peace in Asia', was published by NCC Korea.

An important decision, among others that were taken at that meeting, was for The Korean Ecumenical Forum and the Northeast Asia Church Forum to continue to play a role in strengthening international support and solidarity for the Korean reunification in the peninsula. A progress report on JEDRO a program responding

to the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan was presented. The Rev. Kim Young-ju and Rev. Po Kam Cheong were voted to represent NEA Forum in the next JEDRO meeting in Japan.

On the anvil are plans for a consultation among churches in time for the WCC Assembly to be held in Busan to help contextualize the Assembly in Asia and to enable the Asian churches to 'own' the Assembly process; and for holding the fourth 'Article 9' conference in Manila as NCC Philippines had offered to host it. They also discussed ways and means of ecumenical co-operation and co-ordination in Asia through the CCA.

Church leaders present at the meeting were Rev. Hu, Hong-chi (Presbyterian Church in Taiwan), Rev. Po Kam Cheong (Hong Kong Christian Council), Rev. Shin Seung Min (Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, PROK), Rev. Kim Young-Ju (NCC Korea), Rev. Hiroko Ueda (NCC Japan), with Rev. Grace Moon, Ms. Janejinda Pawadee, and Mr. Carlos Ocampo from the CCA staff. The Hong Kong Christian Council will host the next meeting of the Forum from 21-23 February, 2013 in Hong Kong.

Carlos Ocampo

Churches in Solidarity with 'Stateless people' in South Asia

To put it simply, Stateless people are not recognized as nationals by any state under its law, (Art 1, International Law Commission). So they have no nationality or citizenship and are unprotected by national legislation. They are therefore vulnerable in all aspects. Nationality is the legal bond between a state and an individual. It brings both rights and responsibilities for the state and the individual. Even though UNHCR states that it is difficult to give definite statistics because measuring the magnitude of statelessness is complicated, the commission estimates that about 12 million people around the world are stateless.

The disturbing and alarming reality of the plight of stateless people living in refugee camps for more than forty years shocked the Participants of an International consultation on 'Human Rights of Stateless People' organized by the Commission on International Affairs, WCC, and hosted by NCC Bangladesh in Dhaka in December 2011. They visited camps and communities of stateless people in different parts of Bangladesh and Nepal, like the Rohingyas and Biharis in Bangladesh; and Bhutanese and Tibetans in Nepal, which helped them to understand the miserable life situations of stateless people. They also heard about the difficulties of other stateless people in Asia, such as the indigenous people in Northern Thailand, the ethnic Vietnamese and Lao people in Japan.

The participants representing churches, national ecumenical councils, international organizations, CCA and the CCIA at this Consultation, called on the churches to stand in solidarity with the stateless people. They emphasized the need for churches to be sensitized on the problems of stateless people and the role of churches in advocacy on the basis of proper theological perspectives. Dr. Natalie Lin (CCA General Committee member) and Ms. Janejinda Pawadee, (JID Program Assistant), attended the conference on behalf of the CCA.

Referring to God's intervention in providing a homeland to the Israelites and also to the Philistines and the Syrians, and His teachings instructing us to be kind and just to the stranger, they said that these Biblical events should be the motivation for churches to be engaged in their prophetic witness of speaking for the rights of the helpless, the voiceless, the marginalized and stateless people who live in our midst.

Affirming that advocating the protection of the rights of the stateless people is a God-given commission they urged the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia to take necessary actions to address the concerns of the stateless people in Asia.

Janejinda Pawadee



Janejinda and others at the refugee camp

Conciliar Ecumenism and Unity in Christ

“Ecumenism is a quality of life that needs to be articulated in all aspects of a Christian’s life”, said Catholicos Aram I, Head of the Holy See of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church. He was speaking at a Global Consultation of the General Secretaries of the NCCs and REOs organized by the WCC in Beirut, Lebanon from 5-10 February 2012. The consultation focused on the theme “Conciliar Ecumenism”, referring to the Christian councils and associations that pursue church unity at the national, regional or world level.

In any ecumenical movement, councils of churches serve as the most prevalent and significant expressions of engagement of the churches in their common calling to unity and common witness and service. Even though they are different in origin, composition, structures and areas of engagement, councils share together an important vocation of fellowship, engagement in common witness advancing towards visible unity for the churches within a particular place.

It was held on the theological premise that ‘conciliarity’ is an essential nature of the church. In our local Eucharistic communities we are church together-together with its head, Christ, and together with each other as its members. Conciliarity expresses this belonging together in Christ. With regard to oikoumene,

the church is described as a communion (koinonia) of local churches. Conciliarity is a dynamic calling and a commandment from God. He invites us to participate in the reconciliation which Christ offers us through His cross and resurrection. Councils are also a decisive part of the historical development of the Christian church since the time of the Disciples.

The consultation provided an opportunity to build fellowship between councils of churches and strengthen an informal network of leaders; assess the ecumenical movement from the perspective of conciliar ecumenism; examine the role of councils and other forms of conciliar ecumenism within the ecumenical movement; seek a renewed theological understanding of conciliar ecumenism; and use the experience of councils to examine important themes and current issues, including migration and interreligious dialogue. It also provided the space for regional planning for the WCC Assembly in 2013.

The meeting was attended by 43 participants representing 32 different councils of which eight were from CCA region including General Secretary Dr. Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, building on the tradition of the WCC, REOs and NCCs working together to give expression to churches’ desire for unity in Christ.

Henriette Hutabarat Lebang



Is Capitalism Institutionalized Greed?

The AGAPE Reference Group working on the links among poverty, wealth and ecology met in Quito, Ecuador from 7-10 March 2012, hosted by the Latin American Council of Churches. The AGAPE reference group comprising seventeen church representatives from Asia, Latin America, Europe and North America, reflected on the biblical mandate on greed and power relations, heard regional reports from regional ecumenical councils represented in the Reference Group, participated in liturgy, and started planning for the AGAPE Global Forum on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology, to be held in Nanjing, China on June 18-22, 2012, as a culmination of the 7-year process that started at the Porto Alegre WCC Assembly in 2005.

A major focus of the meeting was a report from the Working Group on the Greed Line, chaired by the Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. The report from the Greed Line Working Group defined greed as “an expression of human desire to have more than one’s fair and legitimate share of material goods or power”. It went further, defining what is fair and legitimate as providing the community a sustainable life, living in dignity based on social, cultural and moral norms. It further stated that competitive quest for power represents greed when maximizing profit becomes an end in itself.

WCC’s Poverty, Wealth and Ecology Project continues to deepen the AGAPE process by analyzing and establishing links between poverty, wealth and ecology, linking economy and ecology; advocating for a new international financial architecture; developing wealth or greed lines in counterpart to poverty lines as a guidance for churches and Christians; advancing the concept of ecological debt among churches and the wider ecumenical circle; and strengthening the understanding of the intrinsic connection between economic justice and peace.

Regional consultations on poverty, wealth and ecology were also held in Dares Salaam in 2007 (Africa), Guatemala in 2008 (Latin America), Chiang Mai in 2009 (Asia and Pacific), Budapest in 2012 (Eastern Europe), and Calgary in 2011 (North America).

Complementing and supplementing the regional consultations, study groups on finance and ecological debt helped to shape two ground-breaking statements issued by WCC Central Committee in 2009 on “just finance and an economy of life” as well as on “eco-justice and ecological debt”.

The AGAPE Global Forum in Nanjing will harvest the richness of church viewpoints, experiences, practices and lessons learned from the 7-year process including the 5 regional church consultations, the study groups focusing on international finance, structural greed and ecological debt. A call to action with joint strategies and actions by churches towards building just, caring and sustainable alternatives will be presented and serve as an important contribution to the 2013 WCC Assembly in Busan, South Korea.

A proposal from the WCC was made for a 7-year campaign on economic and ecological justice, marking a continuation of the issues on justice and peace raised at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica in May 2011. The eco-justice ecumenical campaign will encourage and harness actions by churches and ecumenical partners to promote justice for the poorest of the poor and for the earth through theological reflections in congregations and seminaries, case studies, interfaith dialogues, awareness-building campaigns, community-based sustainable economy projects eradicating poverty, spiritual and liturgical resources, and advocacy at various levels for the transformation of financial institutions and UN related agencies.

Dr. Rogate Reuben Mshana, Ms. Athena Peralta, and Ms. Sophie Dhanjal from the World Council of Churches organized the reference group meeting, while the Rev. Franklin Canelos, the Rev. Nilton Giese of the Consejo Latino Americano de las Iglesias (CLAI) hosted the Meeting. CCA’s Carlos Ocampo, Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service represented Asia in the Meeting.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10)

Carlos Ocampo

Dignity of Human beings: Safeguarding Life

An Interfaith workshop on Small Arms and Trade brought together more than 32 participants from 10 countries in the Asia-Pacific region including Sweden, the USA and Canada to address the violence caused by the proliferation of small arms. The Workshop held at the Bangkok Christian Guesthouse from 26-27 March 2012, aimed at promoting collaboration and exchange of experiences between and among representatives from faith communities and faith-based organizations from the Asia-Pacific region as well as to explore the regional relevance of issues related to military expenditure and development, armed violence, human security, and ongoing initiatives for increased arms control such as the Arms Trade Treaty.

Pieter-Jan van Eggermont, the Program Officer of the Human Security and Disarmament Program of the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation (SweFOR), one of the organizers of the Gothenburg Process Workshop in Bangkok, presented the history of the Gothenburg Process since its initiation in 2001, a joint ecumenical undertaking by the three Swedish ecumenical institutions—the Christian Council of Sweden, the Swedish Mission Council and the SweFOR (and later the Life and Peace Institute)—to highlight the “growing transfers of military equipment, primarily to the South and to see that an inclusive dialogue with all the actors involved are developed and maintained.

Case studies of faith-based advocacy initiatives undertaken in India and the Philippines in support of the Arms Trade Treaty were also presented in the

Workshop. Resource persons, revisited their faith traditions from Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. There was also a commitment shared to undertake activities within the resources and capacities of each group, such as prayers, vigils, engaging the media, awareness-raising seminars, and signature campaigns. A final recommendation was the setting up of an email group to continue networking among the participants.

In his welcome address, Carlos Ocampo, from the Christian Conference of Asia, reflected on the Chiang Mai consultation that took place in May 2008 and reiterated the commitment made by the participants to disseminate information on the negative impact of increasing arms trade in Asia and to support civil society organizations and governments promoting a legally binding and effective Arms Trade Treaty. Asian churches, he said, are also being enjoined by the World Council of Churches to participate in the Arms Trade Treaty Campaign which will culminate in July 2012.

From 2004, the Gothenburg process, has been engaging churches, civil society groups, peace organizations, governments, the United Nations as well as manufacturers of small weapons in a dialogue to influence future developments in the arms industry and to continue bringing to people’s consciousness the sacredness of the life and dignity of human beings and the need to safeguard life and human security.

Carlos Ocampo

*“The death toll from small arms dwarfs that of all other weapon systems -- and in most years greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In terms of the carnage they cause, small arms, indeed, could well be described as weapons of mass destruction.”
(Kofi Annan)*

Community Building and Capacity Enhancement Program-CCA Staff

Chiang Mai, 16 - 27 January 2012

The year 2012 began with feelings of great enthusiasm and joy, just as all new-years do. New Staff and their families were welcomed to the CCA family at Chiang Mai. A unique feature at the beginning of the CCA calendar year 2012 was a week-long Capacity enhancement Workshop from 16-20 January, 2012 followed by a retreat which also served as a Community building program.

Staff members of the CCA - altogether 15 including support staff - ushered in the New Year with expressions of faith, hope and optimism on the opening day of the program on Capacity enhancement, which included sessions like Strategic Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation of Programs, Finance and Accounting, In-house Management and an overview of Programs planned for the year 2012. They worked together to develop a more coordinated and integrated program schedule for 2012.

This was followed by a retreat in a resort not far away from Chiang Mai. The retreat, held in a quiet and lovely place, provided a welcome break from office routine, and an opportunity for fellowship, introspection, sharing and team building. This program served as an orientation for new members of staff and at the same time, gave an opportunity to collectively evolve a work culture of mutual support and co-operation. It also was an occasion to reaffirm a common commitment to serve the churches in Asia.

CCA Programs and Activities 2012

The schedule of CCA programs and activities for the year 2012 listing some of the major CCA programs in 2012 as well as the involvement of CCA staff in various programs of member churches and councils, and various ecumenical activities during the year was planned and posted on the CCA Website. This list is tentative and subject to change, because even though it was prepared with much discussion and deliberation, this has been projected very early and further discussions with the hosting church or council may be necessary eventually.

Preserving the dignity of children

Seminar on Child Protection and Child Protection Policy
Chiang Mai, 24 January 2012

A seminar on 'Child Protection Policy' - facilitated by Mr. Alastair Muir, from the office of Child Protection of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), was held for all CCA staff as part of staff Capacity enhancement, in order to create awareness and sensitivity to the increasing incidents of child abuse, a concern that the CCA needs to address in the coming years.



worship at the retreat centre



Child Protection Workshop

In the News in CCA

Unity Octave: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity:

18-25 January 2012

"We will be changed by the Victory of the Lord Jesus Christ". The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Unity Octave) is an occasion for Christians all over the world to unite in prayer. This year the liturgy for Christian Unity was based on I Corinthians 15:51-58. As Christians around the world celebrate the week of Christian Unity, CCA called for working and praying for the unity of Christian communities and for seeking to reconcile all differences with the understanding, compassion and forgiveness that Christ taught us in His redeeming love.

EASYNET: Planning and Strategizing

Manila, 26-28 February 2012

Ms. Sunila Ammar, Executive Secretary, Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY), participated in the Core Committee meeting of EASY NET held at Manila, Philippines from 26-28 February, 2012.

Planning towards "Asian Students and Youth Group (ASYG 2012)" gathered momentum during this meeting. The EASY NET Core Team is well into its detailed planning. This will be shared as and when they are finalized. The core team called for more efforts to be put into fund raising, for reach out programs and networking with all the National Ecumenical groups and other Youth groups.

EASYNET is a network of World Students Christian Federation-Asia Pacific (WSCF-AP), Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCA, IMCS, IYCS, CCA and World YWCA. It is seen as a platform for Asian Youth and provides space for expression, sharing and learning of Christianity in the context of Asian realities; to experience inter-cultural and inter-faith solidarity; and to network with other Youth organizations at the regional and global levels.

International Women's Day

8 March 2012



CCA celebrated International Women's day with a special worship and reflections on the strengths and blessings that women were gifted with and how they used it to their utmost in any situation and in any position they were placed.

Paying tributes to women especially mothers as the person remembered most with affection and emotion, other family members and friends encountered in life, the staff prayed for strength and courage to renew in themselves the image of God and to help them build communities of just peace. The meeting closed with special remembrance and prayers in salutation to the women all over the world in all walks of life, and in celebration of womanhood.

WCC-E TE meeting

Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Geneva,
14-17 March 2012

The WCC-E TE Accompaniment Group met in the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Geneva from 14-17 March, 2012, to discuss regional reports on Theological Education and Ecumenical Formation, allocation of grants, Report to the Central Committee in August 2012, and to the WCC Assembly in Busan Korea in 2013, matters on the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) project, and about the publication of the Asian Resource Book on teaching Ecumenism.

Rev. Grace Moon, Executive Secretary, FMU, shared the CCA programs held with regard to Ecumenical Formation and Theological Education, such as Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS), Asia Ecumenical Course, national based Basic Ecumenical Course, Ecumenical Lectures, and various others.

The Constitutional and Structural Review Committee (CSRC)

Chiang Mai, 27-31 March 2012

Members of the Constitutional and Structural Review Committee, Ms. D V. V. Sriyanganie Fernando, Rev. Terence Corkin, Rev. Prince Devanandan, and Rev. Dr. Henrette Huatabarat Lebang, met at Chiang Mai in March 2012. Rev. Dr. Soritua Nababan and Dr. Mathews George Chunakara were invited to give special inputs on the history of the Constitution and subsequent amendments. The Report of the committee is to be presented to the General Committee in August 2012.

General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church Taiwan

10-13 April 2012

The 57th General Assembly of the PCT was held in Changhua Christian Hospital (CCH), almost a three hour drive from Taipei International Airport, from 10-13 April, 2012. The theme for the Assembly was *"Loving our country -Taiwan; sharing the gospel everywhere"*.

The highlights of the assembly were the General Secretary's report, election of the officers, and next General Secretary, signing of the Covenant between PCT and Basel Church of Malaysia (BCCM), the launching of Bible translation in Hakka language, and reports on the work of various committees. General Secretary-elect, Rev. Lyim Hong-Tiong who is presently holding the post of Associate General Secretary will take over next year.



Highlights of Upcoming Events

Human Rights of Migrant Workers in the Arabian Gulf Region

Alwaye, India 29 April- 2 May 2012

An International Ecumenical Consultation on Human Rights of Migrant Workers in the Arabian Gulf Region is planned to be held, from 29 April- 2 May 2012 in Alwaye, India. This joint WCC- CCA program will discuss and strategize on the situation of migrant workers in the Gulf countries namely, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E.

Sub-regional Mission Conference Jakarta

6-9 May 2012

The churches in Indonesia and Timor Leste will meet from 6-9 May 2012 in Jakarta to reflect on the theme: "Mission in the Pluralistic Context of Indonesia and Timor Leste Today: Promoting Justice and Peace for All." This event will be co-sponsored by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), CCA Faith Mission and Unity Program Cluster and Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI).

Upcoming events.....

Resisting Child trafficking: a Call to Asian Churches

Chiang Mai, Thailand, 21-26 May 2012 (EGY)

This Consultation aims to understand and analyze the status and problems of children especially that of child trafficking and other child rights violations in the Asian context. The workshops would help to identify strategies and plans for future action both at the national and regional level. An important outcome of this consultation is expected to be a draft CCA Child Protection Policy that could ultimately be shared with member churches and councils for adaptation in their own specific contexts. This will be done in collaboration with Act For Peace, NCC Australia; and Child Protection Office, CCT Thailand.

Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS VII),

Seoul, Korea, 30 June-6 July 2012

This program is to be hosted by the Methodist Theological University. The theme for the Conference is: "Embracing and Embodying God's Hospitality Today."

Justice Now: Sowing the seeds of Peace

Dhaka, Bangladesh, July 13-18 2012 (EGY)

EGY plans to have an Ecumenical leadership development Program for ecumenical Youth in Asia. This program aims at encouraging the young to turn to the Bible for Theological perspectives and foundations for promoting peace and co-operation among people and nations.

The General Committee (GC) and Related meetings

Taipei, Taiwan, 18-26 August 2012

CCA General Committee is scheduled to meet from 18-22 August 2012. There will be a Thanksgiving Service in fellowship with the Churches in Taiwan, to celebrate the 55th Anniversary of the CCA on 22 August 2012 afternoon. This will be followed by an Asian Church Leaders Theological Consultation addressing 'Emerging issues in Asia today', The meetings will be hosted by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.

Consultation on Ecology, Economy and Accountability: Asian Churches' Response,

Bangkok, Thailand, 7-12 September 2012

This consultation will serve as a call to Asian Churches to redefine priorities and responsibilities towards the environment; to re-examine the attitude towards development, communities, nature, stewardship, human freedom and accountability to one another and to God's creation.

Asian Muslim-Christian Religious Leaders Conference

October 2012, Jakarta, Indonesia

A conference of Asian Muslim-Christian Religious Leaders is planned to be held in Indonesia in October 2012 initiated by CCA and FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) and will be co-hosted by the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, Indonesian Bishop's Conference, Muhammadiyah and the International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS) in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Hearty welcome to new staff members



Ms. Sunila Ammar, Executive Secretary for Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY), started her ecumenical journey in 2004 as an Intern in the EGY Program Cluster. Sunila is a member of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan. She brings to her post the vast experience she has in her work as Program Co-ordinator at 'Dastak', a half way home for women surviving human rights violations. A Post Graduate in Economics, Sunila has been a strong human rights activist in Lahore, her hometown in Pakistan and hopes to continue with the same sensitivity and concern.

Rev. Jung-Eun Moon (Grace), Executive Secretary for Faith, Mission and Unity (FMU) is an ordained Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Korea. She holds a Masters Degrees in both Theology and Divinity. She has considerable ecumenical experience and involvement at national, regional and global levels with the PCK, NCC Korea, Overseas Co-operation and Communication, Korean Society for Service in Korea, and has also been involved in the various programs of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), Council for World Mission and World Council of Churches.





Dr. Alphinus Kambodji, Consultant for HIV and AIDS, is from the East Java Protestant Church (GKJW) in Indonesia. He has been in the HIV and AIDS Ministry since 1992, almost from the time HIV and AIDS was identified as a problem in Asia. Beginning as a research coordinator with CDC Atlanta, he has worked for many international organizations like Family Health International, Save the Children-USA, and for the United Evangelical Mission for their churches in Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong and China. Since 1996, his efforts in raising awareness and capacity building within his own church, has resulted in it becoming very active and supportive with even a shelter home for PLWHA. On February 8, 2007, he was honored by the Indonesian Government as one of the pioneers in the field of HIV and AIDS work.

Ms. Susan Jacob, Consultant for Communications is a member of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, India. She has an M.Phil. degree in Womens' Studies and is a Postgraduate in English Literature, with a Diploma in Journalism. She has been a free-lance writer, editor of various magazines and a rapporteur for many ecumenical consultations and conferences. She has been a member of the Executive Committee and the General Committee of the CCA for the years 2005 to 2010, and a member of the EGY Program Area Committee from 2000-2005, and brings this experience to the post that she has been appointed to.



Ms. Janejinda Pawadee, Program Assistant for Justice, International Affairs, and Development and Service (JID) is a member of the Church of Christ in Thailand. She is a Lawyer, and is very active in the area of Human Rights advocacy. Jane has a lot of experience in dealing with problems faced by refugee and migrant workers; citizenship and land issues of Tribal People; and women and children issues such as sexual abuse, domestic violence and trafficking. Jane, who has also graduated in Philosophy and Religion, has earlier served the CCA as Program Coordinator of the Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program, MEPP (2007-2010); and was also a member of the CCA-URM Committee (1995-2000). Jane is an honorary Vice Chairperson of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).

We wish everybody the best in the new assignments.

FAREWELL

The CCA bids farewell to Rev. Dr. Rienzie Pereira, Rev. Freddy de Alwis, Dr. Hope Antone, Ms. Moumita Biswas, Rev. Dr. Sung Kook Park, Dr. Liza Lamis and Dr. Erlinda Senturias. We record our grateful thanks and appreciation of their contributions to the life and activities of the CCA and pray that God will continue to guide them and bless them richly.

Visits

We were delighted to receive **Ms. Bern Jagunos**, Asia Secretary of the United Church of Canada at CCA Chiang Mai office on 23 January and appreciate her visit as she was the first visitor of the year 2012.

A 12 member team from Ecumenical partner '*Kerk in Actie*', Netherlands, visited the Christian Conference of Asia, Chiang Mai, on 24 February, 2012. They spent an hour and a half, during which a documentary on CCA was shown, highlighting the Vision, Mission and Goals of the CCA, the programs, information about CCA member churches and councils, and the general structure of the CCA.

Theological Students From Korea

CCA welcomed a delegation of 10 theological students from the Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary (PCTS), Seoul, Korea, led by the Rev. Dr. Han Kook IL and accompanied by Rev. Huh Chung Chu on 30th January 2012. CCA was glad to receive the young people from Korea as this would go a long way in strengthening relationship and also help the young people to appreciate the understanding of an ecumenism that is rooted in the diversity and richness of Asian cultures and traditions.



Staff with Ms. Bern Jagunos



Theological Students From Korea

We thank our ecumenical partners, for their kind gesture of visiting us at our headquarters, and for their genuine interest in getting to know each other better.

Felicitations

[Hearty Congratulations to Rev. Prince Devanandan](#) appointed Secretary, Methodist Mission and Ecumenical Conference, Aotearoa, New Zealand. Rev. Prince Devanandan is member of the General Committee of the CCA.

[Hearty and warm congratulations from the family of the Christian Conference of Asia to Most Rev. Datuk Bolly Lapok, Fourth Archbishop of the Anglican Province of SE Asia.](#)

His pastoral jurisdiction covers the Anglican diocese of Sabah, Kuching, West Malaysia and Singapore which also includes the nine nations of Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Nepal. [14 February 2012](#)

[Felicitations to Payap University on Founder's Day, 16th February 2012](#)

Christian Conference of Asia warmly congratulated the Governing Board members, President, Vice-Presidents, all Faculty members, Staff and Students of the Payap University, on the occasion of Founder's day on 16th February 2012.

[Greetings to the newly elected office bearers of the Myanmar Baptist Convention.](#)

Rev. Dr. Zaw Win, President; Rev. Mahn Than Tan, Vice President; Ms. Hkawn Sen, Vice-President Rev. Yam Kho Pau General Secretary; Rev. Saw Samson, Associate General Secretary; and Rev. Mahn San Thein Tun, Treasurer.

[Greetings to the newly elected Office bearers of the National Council of Churches in India](#)

Rt. Rev. Taranath S. Sagar, President, from the Methodist Church of India, Vice-Presidents Rev. Dr. Mar Atsongchanger from the Nagaland Baptist Church, Mrs. Pearly Jos of Chaldean Syrian Church of the East and Mr. Suman Biswas of the Church of North India and The Rev. Dr. Agustin Jeyakumar of Lutheran Church, Treasurer.

Obituaries

[It is with deep sorrow that we received the news of the passing away of -](#)

[Rev. Kang, Young-sup](#), Chairman of the Central Committee of the Korean Christian Federation (KCF) on 21 January 2012;

[Senior Metropolitan H G Dr. Gheevarghese Mar Osthathios](#) of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India on 16 Feb 2012;

[Rev. Dr. Samson Prabhakar](#), Director, South Asian Theological Research Institute, Bangalore, India on 19 Feb 2012;

[His Holiness Pope Shenouda III](#), spiritual head of the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church on March 17, 2012; and [The Venerable Dr. Hone Kaa](#), Anglican Arch Deacon of Tamaki Makaurau, in Auckland, on 29th March 2012.

May their souls rest in peace.

CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA



*Challenges for Theological Thinking
and
Christian Ministry in India*

Rohan P. Gideon

TITLE: *Child Labor in India: Challenges For Theological Thinking and Christian Ministry in India*

AUTHOR: Rohan P. Gideon

IMPRINT: ISPCK

Published in: 2011

Cover: Paperback, Cover Price: Rs. 135,

Special Price: US \$ 6

No. of pages: 140

A tiny, but a rare kind of book - *Child Labour in India: Challenges for Theological Thinking and Christian Ministry in India* by Rohan P. Gideon is yet another departure from dominant Indian Christian Theology. The contextual theologies emerged as counter theologies against the dominant Brahminical theologies, but the proposed theology in this book - "Theology of child labour" is a counter-theology against the contextual theologies. It is a theology of the marginalised within the marginalised. It seriously counters the contents and methodologies of the adult-centric contextual theologies, especially the Dalit Theology as point of reference.

The book sets off with an assumption that children are the most marginalised section of people in our society, Church and theology. They are not full citizens of the society, nor members of the church until baptism or confirmation, and have no complete image of God in theology. Therefore, the key objective of the book is to challenge the adult-centric theologies and Christian ministries in India and provoke the theologians, and Churches to revisit and rethink their attitude and activities towards children in general, and child labourers in particular.

Indeed, the book calls for a more serious and comprehensive theological reflection and engagement to reconfigure the inherited as well as existing theological mis-conceptions and mis-interpretations about children and their place in the Church and society. To do this, the author suggests inter-generational, conceptual and praxiological method over against the adult-centric methodological framework.

This book is the product of ground searched hard work. It is theologically sound and systematically organised. If anyone is not provoked by this book to rethink his/her adult-centric theological faculty and attitude, he/she will be provoked by nothing else. And if any one does not consider this book as a book of "theology of child labour" or "the theology of child liberation", at least, it is a breaking ground towards such theology. This book will evoke enthusiasm among likeminded scholars for further research in the area, and certainly, it will serve as a source book and one of the theological texts for theological education in India.

*Reviewed by: Rev. Dr. Songram Basumatary
Assistant Professor, Department of Theology and
Ethics, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and
Research Institute, Chennai.*

WAR

They say it's for the good, they say it's for the next born
They say it's for our pride, they say -- bring it on.
They say though it brings cold winds, it won't last that long.
They say it's for peace but they are so wrong.

They- those asinine people, who are not so very immune,
Tend to catch that "WAR" flu that makes them dance to its tunes.
This argus-eyed virus once finds it makes the host run.
Run around spreading the flu until what has to be done has been
done.

In all the commotion certain desperados rise
Saying that by killing others we can preserve our own lives.
Rather if these grownups listen to us kids- no, future leaders,
Like the ancient times again, there would be more peace believers.

They ought to know that it is worthless, absolutely stupid.
They ought to know not to hate, oh please come to earth dear
cupid.
They ought to know to know that they are tearing the wonderful
memories of our childhood

They ought to know our feelings, if only they could.

Poem by Amitha Thomas
13 years
India

