



By: Bruce Van Voorhis

An outpouring of Asian colors through cultural performances – from music, dance and liturgy – characterized the opening worship of the 14th Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) on Thursday night, May 21st.

Indonesia’s minister of religious affairs, Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, graced the event and officially opened the general assembly encouraging the delegates that he was proud that Indonesia is hosting the assembly.

In his speech, he underlined the issue of terrorism that afflicts Asia and the world and affirmed the important role of the church in peace-building: “In dealing with terrorism, we need to build peace in the world based on justice and equality. Justice and peace cannot be understood separately. Otherwise, they will be a mere slogan.”

“Terrorism must be dealt with together. We should not fix

a problem by creating another problem.”

Saifuddin discredited the perception that religion and terrorism are linked: “Religion does not teach terrorism. Instead, religion teaches how to build a better society for the future.”

He also emphasized the importance of interreligious and intercultural dialogue: “With dialogue, we can understand that religion is not the problem. There is no religious conflict. There is only personal conflict, there is only political conflict and there is only economic conflict. We need to be careful so that our religious life is not affected by these other factors.”

The event also remembered and celebrated the 58 years of the life and history of CCA and its prophetic witness in Asia as readings recalled all of the CCA assemblies, from Parapat in 1957 to Kuala Lumpur in 2010. A handful of those who attended the past assemblies are present in the



on-going assembly and shared in the responsorial reading.

A moving drama reflecting the tears and pleas of Asia's suffering people accompanied the responsive reading that lifted up issues confronting the region and the world such as: the widening financial disparities that ignore the poor and leave them further behind, development without a human face, spending on greater military might at the expense of education and health and the plight of refugees.

The Rev. Willem T. P. Simarmata, ephorus of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) served as speaker for the event. In his message, he highlighted the challenges facing Asia today: "There is a need for justice in our beloved continent of Asia. Despite the efforts of all of our

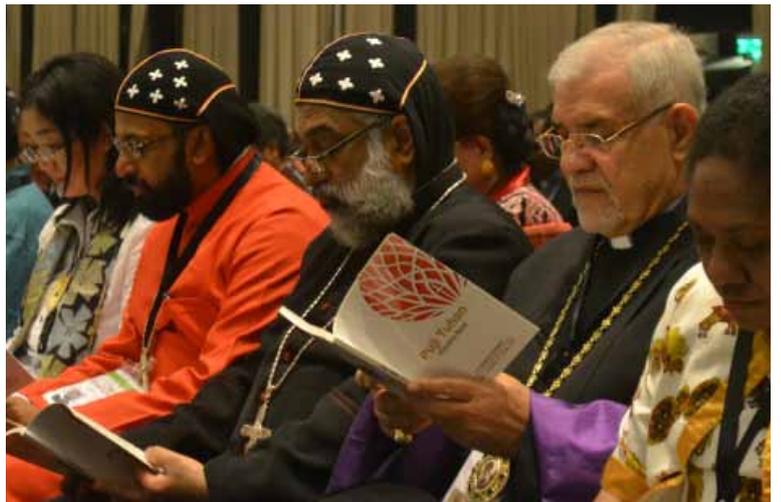
predecessors, we see the spirit of separation. We seem to be having a growing intolerance in Asia."

"Living together is impossible, if there is no spirit of sharing with each other. We need to think of others."

"We need to be good stewards of the Oikos (the house of God). We have to be accountable to God. We need to manage the natural resources that have been entrusted to us."

The event was capped off with a powerful prayer accompanied by the orchestra, and an intergenerational blessing by a child, youth and adult that sent the delegates out into the world to be faithful witnesses of God's love.





Young People Share their Realities and Visions to the Church



By Ismael Fisco, Jr.

In the assembly represented mostly by the elder leaders of the church, it brings a fresh wind to hear young people share their stories of struggles and aspirations for the church. Not only because they are often marginalized but because the church owes its future to the younger generation.

Several youth delegates shared in a group interview the important issues and social realities in their local communities and how they envision the church to address these. Some of these issues were also raised during the Pre-Youth Assembly and they hope to bring it to the CCA Assembly.

Nina Nayoan from the World Student Christian Federation, a partner organization of CCA, raised the issue of migrant workers: “The issue of migrant workers is becoming an issue of the whole Asia. This includes the issue of women as migrant workers. It is a big problem than human being is viewed as capital and commodity to bring income to the state”.

Nayoan also said that “it is important for the church to implement empowerment programs for our migrant workers and to address the root causes of poverty that compels our locals to work abroad.”

For Hiu-Tung Jessica Tso, a youth delegate from the Hong Kong Christian Council, the issue of LGBT is also relevant to the young people: “It is very hard to discuss this issue

because majority of churches see this as evil. But I think the ultimate goal is not for everybody to agree but at least to provide a platform to discuss this issue openly.”

On the other hand, Simi Thambi, a youth delegate from Marthoma Syrian Church of India, stressed that the Caste system remains a big issue in India that causes not only discrimination but also serious human rights violations.

A “More-Socially Relevant” Church

“It is important for the church to redefine its theological context and provide a space for young people to strengthen their theological understanding. But beyond that, it is important for the church to translate its theological understanding to concrete actions”, said Nayoan.

Jessica Tso believes that “It is time to examine the point where CCA (really) stands on. To reaffirm its historical organization, it’s being a movement not just as an institution.”

For Thambi: “I envision CCA as a moving body, not a dead fish. A transparent body where everyone knows what is being done. I hope this Assembly will not only deal with elections but how we could reach out to societies and be more relevant.”

Around 160 young people coming from various member churches of the Christian Conference of Asia are present in the assembly as delegates, observers, performers and stewards.

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Human, Not Commodity: A Reflection on the Situation of Migrant Workers



By Surya Samudera Giamsjah

The practice of slavery has been in the long course of history and abolishing it is still a continuing struggle. Over the years, it has taken a new form and we see it in the faces of thousands of migrant workers who fall prey to many issues of abuse and human rights violation.

The premise of human dignity starts from our theological understanding that human was created in the image and likeness of God. Thus any form of acts that degrade human values is contrary to the understanding of our Christian faith.

Human beings are not company's commodities for gaining profit. Therefore, every attitude and action that puts human beings as a commodity is unacceptable to the Church. Yet we see how systems and structures breed a culture of abuse and violence to our migrant workers.

We have heard about names of countless men and women who experience abuse in their workplace abroad. We have heard stories such a story of a woman domestic helper who doesn't get a salary and experiences physical abuse from her employer.

Shouldn't the church be at the forefront of upholding justice for the migrant workers? Aren't all humans, both men and women, members of the household of God who should live in dignity? Must we not – as a church – take an active role in becoming steward in protecting the sanctity of life?

It is but imperative that the church takes an active step in protecting the migrant workers and affirming the dignity of life for all.

(Nina Nayoan is the administrator of World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)-Asia Pacific based in Hong Kong)

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Thanksgiving and Lamentations: A Closer Look at the Opening Worship Liturgy



Inspired by the theme “Living Together in the Household of God”, or in Indonesia language “Kebersamaan Hidup dalam Rumah Tangga Allah”, the opening worship of CCA general assembly became a celebration of the gift of diversity of Asia.

Rev. Dr. Ester Pudjo Widhiasih, the designer of the liturgy, explained that the liturgy intended to highlight two important meanings.

First, the people of faith in Asia were invited to come with a grateful heart to God. It was a thanksgiving where churches called to thank God who empowers churches in Asia despite many challenges. Thus, the liturgy is an expression of church's gratefulness to be called to the mission of God.

The liturgy is also about lamentation reflecting our faith in the face of many problems and issues in the society. We lament the disharmony that exists in living together. We lament the absence of justice and peace in structures and systems in our society that degrades life.

It is also an invitation to the churches in Asia to open their eyes, ears, and hearts to see, hear and feel the suffering of the poor and marginalized. It is an affirmation of solidarity with the poor by expressing compassion and taking part in building a new earth and a new heaven.

ev. Kadarmento also explained the elements used in the worship: “The bamboos and twigs are symbolic. We didn't use plastic or metal materials to show our indigenous identity and simplicity (ugahari) that must become a way of life of churches in Asia. It brings about a feeling of being home and upholding

By Surya Samudra Giamsjah



our being one people and one family as Asians.”

She explained that one of the important concerns of churches in Asia today is greed and abuse of power that exploits our natural resources. She said that the theology of ecology must be integrated so that the worship would become a call for all participants of the CCA general assembly and to all churches in Asia to take part in affirming the dignity of life.

“Both liturgy and interior are mutual synergy to bring participants to lament and be grateful to God, and to be more sensitive to the calling of the living God. It is a call for the whole household of God to take part in working for peace and justice.”

U Kyaw Than Looks Back to the Glorious Life and History of CCA



Rev. U Kyaw Than, D.D. FDCS & Jupiter Sitorus

As a living witness of the history of CCA, U Kyaw Than feels that the 14th general assembly is really a coming home event as Indonesia plays a significant role in the roots of CCA. Than was elected as the first General Secretary of the then-East Asia Christian Conference during its assembly in Parapat. Now that he can still participate in the 14th general assembly, he considers it as a blessing.

At 91 years old, Than said that he can really feel the spirit of being together in the household of God. Than noted that CCA is growing faster and stronger. He praised the great and dynamic progress of CCA since its birthdate specially the presence of women leaders;

he also acknowledged the leadership of young people who rose up to the responsibility for CCA. He said that the three sub-regions of CCA has been strategically practical in expanding and strengthening the leadership in the regions.

He said that Indonesia has always been active in CCA. Being big in Asia, Indonesian churches could be a strong influence in promoting “living together in the household of God” in reflection to the theme of CCA.

He finally thanked the HKBP for serving as the Local Arrangement Committee that helped in organizing the event.

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Stewards: “Beyond Living Together, It’s Serving Others”



By Ismael Fisco, Jr.

They stand in the side lines of busy assembly assisting delegates with their every need and making sure that everything is in place. They don’t have “super powers” but they are oozing with energy and their enthusiasm is just encouraging.

They are the 40 stewards from different countries who came to Jakarta to render their services. Three of them spared some time from their busy schedule to share about the experience.

“I’m really excited to be here. I praise God for the opportunity to come here and meet all the stewards. It is my first time to join a big program such as this, and it’s great to learn more about the ecumenical movement,” said Sovannarong Keom, a youth leader from the Methodist Church in Cambodia.

“It is also great to live with the village for three nights (during the pre-assembly); in a community where Muslims and Christians live together without conflict,” noting that unity is possible in a diverse community like CCA. Back home, Keom also works with young people through the Cambodia Christian Council supporting its HIV and development programs.

For Aleshia Lawson, a youth from the Anglican Church in New Zealand: “I like being in Indonesia, although it’s really tiring and busy but it’s pretty fun. It is great to see a great number of churches in the ecumenical movement,

see people from different countries and to see churches from my own country, too.”

The youth stewards shared that beyond the fun of coming together, being a steward provides an opportunity to serve others which they believe is a calling from God.

“We have to be ready for the calling of God to serve. Our being Christians should reflect to the way we act,” said Keom.

Julio Da Costa, a youth steward from Presbyterian Church in East Timor, also shared an account of his experience: “People always contact us and we have to be always ready to serve. We have to give our best.”

“In East Timor, many churches don’t really know anything about CCA. I hope CCA can reach out to more churches and invite them to become part of the ecumenical movement.”

They also appreciate the fact that CCA recognizes the role of the young people: “But I hope CCA would keep going (in terms of recognizing the youth). To encourage more opportunities for young people to be involved and get exposed, and to have more programs for the youth,” quipped Lawson.

These young people look forward to sharing their experiences to their youth group when they go back to their home countries.