



Christian Conference of Asia

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Asia Ecumenical  
Academy

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Heroes of the  
tsunami

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The struggle to  
build peace

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Millennium  
development goals

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National Christian  
Council of Nepal

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# *Peace begins with a mindset change!*



Cover: The CCA Centre in Hong Kong

The global community continues to live in a conflict-ridden and divided world. Churches and the ecumenical movement have been directly challenged by new global realities. Conflict and confrontation, which are rooted in abject poverty, the ill-effects of globalisation and unemployment and concomitant labour unrest, increase ethnic conflicts, the dislocation of people within and across borders, the utter neglect of social services and a disregard for the rights and welfare of women and children. We also witness a lack of understanding and commitment in promoting peace and reconciliation in the global community. Instead, there is terrorism and terrorist revenge, not only against the military and governments, but also against the lives of innocent people.

Money and economic development projects cannot buy peace and conflict resolution. They cannot be bought by bullets or by military force or police action or by emergency acts. Building peace, in the first place, is about having 'inner peace'. Peace must come from a spiritual hunger within each one of us, from a personal mindset change and sincere commitment for *shalom*. It is a matter of understanding of and commitment to freedom and democracy that go beyond one's self-interest—but with God's guidance. The prophet Micah depicted very clearly that an inner spiritual hunger shows itself, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD; to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' (Micah 4:2a)

In view of this of this reality, CCA's 12th General Assembly has mandated for the next five years the churches in Asia to become God's instrument for building communities of peace for all. The churches, as required by divine teaching, have a special role in promoting peace. Peace and peace building will continue to challenge churches and the ecumenical movement in the years to come. Peace in our time can be realistic only when human beings learn how to respect human dignity, human freedom and democracy and share resources and privileges. Peace and peace building is not somewhere else—it is within every one of us. It begins in our homes, our church and our community.

—Prawate Khid-arn

*Peace must come from a spiritual hunger within each one of us,  
from a personal mindset change and sincere commitment for shalom*

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# Commitment to the ecumenical movement

## Ecumenical formation towards building communities of peace for all

Once again at the Crystal Spring Guest House at Chiang Mai, Thailand, CCA held the third Asia Ecumenical Academy on 8–27 August 2005 around the theme ‘Ecumenical Formation towards Building Communities of Peace for All’. Dr Kim Yong Bock, this year’s dean, said during the sharing of expectations, ‘Cora and I are your servants. You are the subjects of the ecumenical movement for fresh start in your localities ... Serving is not to put one’s self down but to make others become subjects. This was what Jesus did.’

And so 22 participants from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Indonesia, the

Philippines, Hong Kong, Korea and Fiji came together with the following objectives:

- To enhance reflection on and commitment to the ecumenical movement.
- To reflect on Asian realities, theological issues, perspectives and approaches to building communities of peace for all.
- To strengthen the network among ecumenical leaders.
- Produce written ecumenical project plans.

As Confucius said, ‘I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.’ And therefore, being subjects, the participants actively engaged in the learning

processes not only in learning to think and learning to do but very much in learning to live as a community and learning to be like Jesus. They shared their personal stories as part of social history. They presented the stories—past, present and future—of the ecumenical movement in their respective countries. They lived with Thai communities (Buddhist, Church of Christ in Thailand ministry with HIV/AIDS, trafficked women and children in the border region, and sustainable agricultural communities). They prepared and presented their exposure reports and reflections in groups using PowerPoint. After long reflection and consultation they delivered their individually written ecumenical projects. They even worked on a group AEA Statement. Shibashi energised us and creative morning prayers and evening prayers strengthened our spirituality. Formed committees served the whole group with a generous spirit, especially for the cultural night, Chiang Mai tour and documentation. We went through three weeks smoothly, living as sisters and brothers in Christ.

Of course, there were times for buying things for our families and communities back home.

It is in the light of the importance of people’s subjectivity and wisdom for life that Dr Kim Yong Bock analysed Asian realities in the context of terror and globalisation. When reflecting on the sharing of life stories, he said, ‘All living beings are self-educating beings and they learn together. That is the promise of God—creativity!’

Dr Pradit Tagerngarsarit, as a general committee member, preached during the opening worship. He said, ‘Begin with our-



Asia Ecumenical Academy, 2005

selves. If we do not have peace, how can we promote this to others?’

Aside from Dr Kim Yong Bock, who was the mainstay theologian and dean during the three weeks, the other resource persons were Dr Prawate Khid-arn, Dr Lee Hong Jung, Mr Ranjan Solomon, Dr Hope Antone, Ms Janejinda Pawadee, Dr U Kyaw Than, Bishop Hilario Gomez Jr, Dr Margaretha Hendriks-Ririmasse and Rev. Kari Lonchar. They challenged, guided and inspired the participants as partners in ecumenical learning as they gave messages and inputs on the theme, the web of life, tourism, framework for theologising, Thai context, the ecumenical movement and case studies of building communities of peace for all in northeast Asia, Indonesia, the Philippines and north-east India.

One of the modules focused on feminist theologising framework. Dr Hope Antone said, ‘Building communities of peace for



Leman Allolingi and Manamohini Nath leading worship



Marieta Erasito of Fiji and Matheus Adadikam of Papua

all implies harmonious and just relationships among the members. Communities, whether you imagine them in terms of ethnic or racial groups or religious or denominational groups, include women and men, old and young people etc.

While we tend to romanticise that in Asia our communities have close family ties, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that the same communities are broken/divided because of sexism, racism, classism and casteism. [These are of course complicated by other issues of colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism etc.] An Asian contextual feminist theologising framework is one tool for us to overcome these divisions and to transform the unequal relationships that contribute to the lack of peace in our region.’

When we closed the AEA, there were 21 participants. (Rev. Tuty Hutabarat of Indonesia went home for her mother’s funeral.) In the midst of the uncertainties and challenges in the ecumenical movement they are the 21 who are to join the past products of the Asia Ecumenical Course and Asia Ecumenical Academy to light the small candles in the dark. Max Ediger’s peace devotion is for all of them:

Imagine ... lighting a candle, a candle that holds the intention of peace.

Imagine ... that the intention of the candle lighting starts with you.

Imagine ... that you and you alone are responsible for keeping the peace flame within yourself. Without you, there is no illumination, without you there is no peace on earth. It is why you are here, to keep the peace illuminated.

Imagine ... all of heaven standing with you as you strike the match, light the flame and hold the intention of peace ... imagine!

—Cora Tabing-Reyes

# The struggle to build peace

Asian religionists affirm religions' role in overcoming violence

**W**hat is the role of religion to overcome violence without violence? During the year of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) Focus on Asia, the Christian Conference of Asia, through its Justice, International Affairs and Development and Service (CCA-JID) program area, organised an interfaith conference to tackle this question.

Held 15–20 August in Cipayung, Indonesia, the conference brought together 39 participants from ten Asian countries coming from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities who are involved in various peace initiatives. The conference sought to explore and address the root causes of the ills in society today.

'We know that religion is often accused of being the source of violent conflict and war, a disruptive force in society, a factor that leads to fanaticism and hatred for others,' participants said in their conference statement. 'As religious believers who are committed to building just, peaceful and harmonious societies, we wanted to take seriously these accusations, to evaluate them and see how much of truth there is in them, but, at the same time, we sought to explore the ways in which our religions might become more effective tools for peacemaking and reconciliation, and for promoting the welfare of all.'

The group recognised that too often religions have been misused for personal or political ends, when in fact their common vision is to build true fellowship and cooperation among peoples, to challenge complacency and dare to be the voice for the voiceless and oppressed.

'In the name of our respective faiths, we renounce militarism, terrorism, and violence against innocent persons as ways to resolve conflicts, promote political agendas or express convictions, just as we denounce

all efforts to impose a global hegemony of economic, military, religious or cultural domination over the peoples of the world,' their statement continued.

Many of the participants were part of a panel of speakers on various topics. During small-group discussions, they shared stories of their experiences of violent conflicts, often orchestrated by forces other than religious, that have torn their once harmonious communities. They also shared stories and experiences of their struggle to build peace again through their own initiatives.

'We believe that all religious leaders, as well as ordinary believers, should challenge the threats to peace and justice by those who are ready to do violent harm to others in order to attain their goals,' the participants affirmed in their statement. 'But in opposing the violent, we must not become what we oppose. Our tools must be those of

education, the exercise of self-critical judgment, grassroots interaction and community organisation, social movements and mass struggles, advocacy, solidarity with victims, development of civil society, and promotion of interreligious cooperation.'

Participants met as country representatives and planned ways to foster more peace-building efforts locally and nationally. They also recommended the following at regional and global level:

- Creating a database on interfaith groups and initiatives.
- Identifying and publicising the plight of neglected and mistreated groups.
- Help young people to address issues of globalisation, poverty, education and health through youth camps, summer programs and interfaith student organisations.
- Develop action programs for non-violent



Margaretha Hendriks, an Indonesian theologian from Ambon (left), with Shabnam (a Muslim from Pakistan) (right) and Hansurlich Gerber (WCC DOV coordinator) (centre)

protest and advocacy.

- Create healing programs for asylum seekers and undocumented migrant workers.
- Set up a mechanism to monitor and expose irresponsible reporting in the media, e.g. the use of derogatory words to describe a religion.
- Promote the sharing of resources among interfaith communities.

Affirming that techniques of peace-building are often expressed in terms of 'interfaith dialogue', the participants said 'by dialogue we mean a way of sincerely living our respective faiths, in full respect for the beliefs and practices of the followers of other religions. Dialogue must not remain at the level of words, but should lead us to efforts of co-operation and solidarity for the good of all. In all things, we are aware that our efforts, if they are to be effective, must arise from the force of love.'

—Hope S. Antone



Muslim, Hindu and Sikh participants from India and Pakistan plan national interfaith programs

## UCCP theological summit

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines organised a theological consultation on 20–24 June 2005 at Shalom Centre in Manila to clarify and articulate the theological position of the church on a number of issues.

With the help of Filipino resource persons, four topics were specifically dealt with. An input on Christology, with emphasis on the life, message, mission and ministry of Jesus was facilitated by Dr Levi Oracion. Ecclesiology, with emphasis on the nature of the church, unity, life and ministry, was facilitated by Bishop Erme Camba.

Two presentations were made on missiology. Dr Oscar Suarez focused on mission and the missionary task of the church while Dr Hope S. Antone focused on mission in relation to pluralism and inclusivity. Dr Everett L. Mendoza dealt with the topic of church and society with focus on the world we live

in. UCCP General Secretary Bishop Elmer Bolocon gave the keynote address at the start of the consultation, calling it an attempt to open the door 'so that we may all go in, and together claim a common space' for an encounter deriving from the variety and diversity of experiences and perspectives. Cofacilitating the consultation were Bishop Erme Camba, chair of the Faith and Order Commission, and Ms Edna Orteza, staff of the national office.

There were 35 participants, including the members of the UCCP Faith and Order Commission, the incumbent bishops of the jurisdictional areas, representatives of UCCP ministerial formation centres, representatives of some other commissions, and some staff of the national office.

The theological consultation is part of a series of processes planned by the Faith and Order Commission of the UCCP.

These are intended to provide order, relevance, coherence and consistency in the theological articulations of the UCCP.

Another ongoing initiative is the writing of commentaries on the various articles of the UCCP Statement of Faith, which will constitute a study material for the local churches.

The theological consultation was characterised by a spirit of openness and dialogue. Participants coming from different theological standpoints felt uninhibited to share their concerns and questions, thereby marking the beginning of understanding and acceptance.

The UCCP is a member of the Christian Conference of Asia. It was established in 1948 when five denominations merged as a united church. Many of its ongoing activities are to lead up to its general assembly in May 2006.

—Hope S. Antone

# Heroes of the tsunami

The rarely told stories of the heroic efforts of the victims to nurture and to heal

Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, rests comfortably on the western coastal region of the country, far enough north to have escaped the brunt of the giant tsunami waves that devastated vast areas of Asia on 26 December last year. I was attending a regional ecumenical meeting on post-tsunami reconstruction and the business-as-usual scenes in Colombo did little to create a sense of urgency. Streets

were crowded, stores appeared to be doing a thriving business and even tourist areas were regaining their life. However, a one-day trip to areas hit hard by the tsunami brought the terrible reality into our experience.

As our bus slowly moved down the road south leading to Galle the destruction quickly became clearly evident. Wreckage littered the land where villages, churches and Buddhist temples once existed in calm harmony.

Groups of people picked through the debris here and there, searching yet for some of their possessions they might still salvage and use, while others sat forlornly in the ruins of their houses and gardens, perhaps unable to find the energy to go on. The bus was eerily silent as we all watched the scenes pass by, imagining to the best of our ability what the people must have felt and experienced as the waves tore through their lives that fateful day.



The train that was knocked down by the tsunami waves while travelling from Colombo to Galle. The train has been placed on a track as a memorial to those who died. It is visited by scores of Sri Lankas and foreigners alike

In the brief period of only twenty minutes, nearly 60,000 lives were taken away and many thousand others traumatised beyond complete healing.

As I watched the scenes of destruction along the road, my eyes were suddenly attracted to a bright-red colour shining amidst the blocks of broken cement, bent rebar, tiles and bricks. A delicate bush growing beside the shattered remains of a once solid house glistened with an abundance of brilliant red flowers. This was the first sign of hope that day. Nature was healing itself.

But our time in Colombo and Galle brought other signs of hope and healing, not only from nature, but also from those we refer to as the human victims of the tsunami. They are the ones we see in our newspapers and on television, weeping pitifully amidst what little is left of their lives. We pity them and our sympathy for them brings tears to our eyes. Yes, they have lost almost everything and their spirits are shattered, but they are also the ones that are nurturing the healing process. They are not just victims, but

also heroes, for they have helped each other survive through this horrific experience. A Sri Lankan pastor summarised it best when he said, 'After the tsunami God's divineness surfaced in people of all faiths.' He was talking about the victims of all faiths, ethnicities, economic classes and nationalities, who, despite the traumatic experience, came together to help each other.

We heard a story from Thailand of local people who had lost their homes, their businesses and family members, spending time consoling foreign tourists before tending to their own pain. They apologised to the tourists that their holidays in Thailand ended in such an abrupt and painful manner. For some of the tourists, these Thai individuals became angels of mercy, holding them up as they struggled to deal with their losses.

From Sri Lanka a story was shared that brought to mind Christ's feeding of the 5,000. A group of indigenous people, looked down on by others as less than human, survived the tsunami waves and then, for three days, fed those who had always discriminated against

them until rescue teams could arrive. They did this despite the fact that they themselves barely had sufficient to eat. Surely this is a reflection of the divineness of God in all its sacrificial compassion.

The stories are many, but rarely told. On television and in the newspapers, we see the heroic efforts of governments and large aid organisations in bringing succour to the survivors. They are praised for their humanitarian efforts, and indeed their efforts have been life-saving and welcomed. But let us also pay attention to the heroic efforts of the victims of this tsunami to nurture and to heal. Like the plant blooming beside the shattered house, these victims truly reflect the divineness of God and can bring to all of us a feeling of hope and spiritual renewal if we but have the ears to hear and the eyes to see.

—Max Ediger

(Adapted and reprinted by permission of 'PeaceSigns', the free on-line magazine of the Peace and Justice Support Network of the Mennonite Church, USA. See [www.peace.MennoLink.org](http://www.peace.MennoLink.org) to join.)

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# *The receding wave*

Failure to listen to the survivors might be more disastrous and inhuman than the tsunami

**I**t is already more than eight months since the 26 December tsunami struck the Indian Ocean, affecting countries such as Indonesia, India, Thailand and Sri Lanka. This natural phenomenon has cost hundreds of thousands of lives and billions of dollars worth of properties and infrastructures have been destroyed. In Sri Lanka alone 103,789 families are affected. According to the latest official figures of the World Health Organisation, 422,040 people are displaced and 30,920 people lost their lives. There are 442 camps serving as evacuation centres for the victims.

The tsunami brought the world together to act collectively in helping the affected coun-

tries and communities. The show of compassion and mission expressed by countries and individuals gives a brighter hope and motivation for the affected communities to be empowered and move forward. However, despite of the collective efforts of countries and individuals there are urgent issues that remain unnoticed or neglected. The people in the affected communities are left with two choices: starvation or rehabilitation, life in abundance or mere survival. Why I say this? Let us examine the other side of rehabilitation process in the affected communities.

Starvation and rehabilitation are the two extremes that people in the affected communities face every day as foreign aid flows

into the country. But how much foreign aid is being used to empower the victims? According to a recent article, "Aid and Tsunami" by Stefania Bianchi, people from across the world responded to the tsunami disaster with tremendous generosity. Approximately \$13 billion was pledged in aid from around the world to rebuild the lives and livelihoods of the survivors. The foreign aid provided the communities with temporary shelter and rehabilitation. However, a greater disaster looms. According to a team that visited the Sri Lanka in July 2005, who spent weeks consulting with people, the aid, instead of providing long-term solutions, reconstruction and rebuilding the affected communi-



A group of tsunami survivors stand beside the road holding signs demanding that the government provide them with promised assistance. Most people are still waiting for the government to announce their policy for rebuilding of homes and businesses destroyed by the tsunami

ties, has become an instrument of further discrimination and a source of corruption. The aid gave birth to the ideas of many non-government organisations who think they have the solution to the problems. These NGOs, together with government organisations, have been facilitating planning and rehabilitation without consulting the people on how the rehabilitation and reconstruction should take place. Thus people have no idea how long they will stay in the temporary shelter that these NGOs and government organisations have given to them. And this is apart from the fact that the NGOs have become instrumental in aggravating religious conflicts between Christians, Muslims and Hindus, because of an absence of genuine consultation and immersion in the life of the people. Many Muslim communities and the middle-class sector chose to starve and work harder on what they had left rather than ask

for rehabilitation, which has meant further exploitation and discrimination.

### **Life in abundance or a mere survival**

The ocean feeds us. How can we be afraid of the ocean? For the Sri Lankan people the ocean is the source of life and livelihood, no matter how powerful it is in terms of taking lives and properties. The recent plan of putting a buffer zone 100–300 meters away from the coastline as a safety measure, will mean uprooting people from where they live. This will create yet another burden and aggravate their misery. The government considers this plan is appropriate, but the community perceives it in another way. The proposal is contradictory to the current situation experienced by the community and is detrimental to the right of the people to land. Along with the rehabilitation come big

tourist businesses grabbing the land which from time immemorial has belonged to the people, long before the destructive tsunami. These tourist businesses demand legal papers or documents to determine whether or not the land belongs to the people. People are not used to this because maybe the land is an ancestral domain, and if they did once have something they now have nothing to show, as it went with the tsunami, including their loved ones.

However, it is not just profit-greedy tourist businesses. The situation is being worsened by tourists and other groups taking advantage of the situation to force the victims to do inhuman things. We believe that sex has become a precondition for women and children to get some relief goods or aid from organisations facilitating the distribution. Children, especially boys, are being sold by their parents to pedophiles or tourists to

augment the family's needs. This information may not be available in any official data or updates released by NGOs or government organisations, but people in tsunami-affected areas know that human trafficking, sexual abuse and prostitution is rampant. The rehabilitation process could be an instrument to extend God's abundant blessings but in reality the community have mere survival.

### **Conflict and more conflict**

The Sri Lankan people are separated, not by economic status, but by conflict resulting from ethnicity and faith differences. Furthermore, the religious and political differences, whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu, are becoming more discriminatory, due to an unjust distribution of aid. People's voices and interests remain unheard. This increases the marginalisation of tribal or ethnic minorities such as Tamils and Muslims, who are the most oppressed sector in Sri Lankan society. Nobody is talking to them or taking care of them.

There are more than 100,000 tsunami refugees, but there are also 600,000 war refugees in Sri Lanka. The latter are the fruit of a political oppression and economic deprivation that the government has failed to

address for more than 15 years. Then as another kind of refugee comes, from a natural phenomenon that has captured all the attention and generosity of the world, neglecting the bigger problem brought by injustice and oppression. Thus more conflict may arise, fuelled not only by unjust distribution of aid, but also by the divisions and conflict between people being kept alive. Instead of seeing that the crises resulting from war and the tsunami are connected and interrelated the authorities separate them. Hence the rehabilitation process not only maintains the old conflicts that divided the people before the tsunami but also could lead to another conflict, because of insensitivity to the situation and misdirection.

### **The people's voice must be heard**

The rehabilitation in tsunami-affected areas in Sri Lanka is a product of the sacrifices, generosity and kindness from people and organisations who continually commit themselves to serve the disempowered victims or survivors. The people of the world are becoming deeply aware of their responsibility to protect the environment as much as in showing concern and compassion to

needy communities. However, the absence of people's participation in the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction, merely relying on the so-called NGO 'expert', can usurp the noble intention of empowering and enabling the victims. NGOs should immerse themselves in the concrete situation of the people and facilitate people's experience and knowledge so that genuine reconstruction can take place.

The neglect of people by the NGOs and human rights violations and discrimination by government organisations will cause more conflicts to arise. The business sector and other groups are taking advantage of the situation, masking their intention in the name of development but in essence nothing but for profit, control and monopoly of what the tsunami has left. Nevertheless, people's aspirations are loud and clear—they need help to get back to sea, not charity, echoing the historical wellbeing of the community. The people's will to live in abundance and peace will never be defeated by a natural catastrophe like the tsunami because they knew that it is part and parcel of their existence. Truly the people in the tsunami affected communities are experiencing insurmountable sufferings and they are longing for help to reclaim



A delegation from the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism meeting with Muslim residents at a village on the northeast of Sri Lanka. They shared their stories of the tsunami and their dreams for rebuilding a peaceful, interfaith and interethnic communities

their dignity, self-reliance and wellbeing. They don't need a daily means of survival that further dehumanises and alienates them from being people created in God's image. What they really need is a seed of hope and genuine concern from groups who are ready to learn, listen and walk with them towards a life in abundance and peace.

There are a lot of lessons that people in

NGOs, governments and churches need to learn from the people of the affected communities and from the environment to address the issues of survival and existence brought by the tsunami. However insensitivity and a failure to listen and be with the people and the environment does not ease the sufferings. Rather it negates the true essence of community, living collectively in maintaining

a sustainable and peaceful environment. It might be true that the receding wave will be more disastrous and inhuman if no-one learns from the situation and what Yahweh said to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 8:11) will be the signs of the time: 'They have treated the wound of my people saying, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace.'

—*Joram H. Calimutan*

# *A call for action*

## Reconstruction and rehabilitation in tsunami-affected areas

This Call for Action was launched on the occasion of the Annual Consultation on the 'State of Indian Tourism: Developing Models of Stewardship' organised by EQUATIONS and a strategy meeting of the Global Tourism Interventions Forum held between July 5th to 12th in Bangalore, India.

**B**efore the peak tourism season begins we, the members/participants of the Global Tourism Interventions Forum (GTIF) (see box), together with several stakeholders from South Asian countries affected have had intensive deliberations on the tsunami and its impacts. GTIF is extremely concerned about the testimonies and findings of its members and partners working and conducting research in tsunami-affected areas in India (including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands), in Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Therefore GTIF, consequent to its 'Call for Action: Solidarity with the Victims of the Tsunami in the Indian Ocean—Solidarity in Tourism?' issued one month after the disaster at the World Social Forum 2005 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, is now launching a follow-up call raising the burning issues of reconstruction and rehabilitation with regard to tourism developments. During the post-tsunami period, the governments of tsunami-affected coun-

tries, governments of 'donor countries' and the international community have launched a plethora of rescue, rehabilitation and reconstruction plans, including the WTO-OMT's Phuket Action Plan, to bring tourists back to countries affected by tsunami.

We would like all governments, intergovernmental agencies, aid organisations, the tourism industry and civil society organisations to review the manner in which the impact of the tsunami has been treated.

Natural disasters reflect imbalance in the relationship between humankind and nature.

The modern development model often ignores this reality. We therefore, on reflection, demand that all protective measures that have been documented using traditional, natural and technological means should be strictly implemented.

To ensure that local needs are addressed, all rehabilitation and reconstruction measures must be designed and implemented by local communities, in accordance with their decisions, conforming to their religions, cultures and lifestyles and using locally available materials, talents and skills.

• Governments must ensure that in the tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction process national guidelines and legislation pertaining to development along the coasts, eg the Coastal Regulation Zone

Notification in India and the Coastal Conservation Act of Sri Lanka, are strictly implemented to protect the environment and livelihood resources of local inhabitants. This includes respecting international conventions and agreements on human rights and sustainable development of the UN and its bodies—such as the declaration of human rights, the conventions on the rights of women and children, the ILO conventions (in particular the core labour rights and the rights of indigenous peoples), as well as the conventions, recommendations and action plans of the Commission on Sustainable Development, Agenda 21 and sustainable tourism principles, and in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity and its guidelines for tourism development.

- Aid should be collected and disbursed through a mechanism that does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, religion, social status, gender, caste or creed. Governments must guarantee that the rehabilitation process will not lead to further displacement of local communities already displaced by the tsunami.
- Apart from material aid it is important for governments and aid organisations to identify gross human rights violations and criminal activities such as rape, human trafficking—especially of children—and

corruption that are taking place during the rehabilitation process and punish the offenders.

- It is evident from ground level inputs/observations that governments have failed to maintain basic standards of relief and rehabilitation. Aid agencies have adopted dual standards in providing temporary structures for affected people that show insensitivity to living conditions, eg by providing tin-sheet huts in hot and humid areas with little or no ventilation. We question the rationale for the low standards adopted by aid agencies in affected developing countries.
- Special teams should be created to deal with the trauma aspects and give comfort to affected populations.
- We have a special concern regarding the care of children orphaned by the tsunami and hope that organisations experienced in this field will take up this call. Communities should be financially supported and trained to keep their children within the community itself rather than give them up for adoption. The compensation money should not be completely used up but should be maintained in a trust till the children come of age, while for teenagers a hostel could be set up.
- In affected areas that have a history of social/political conflicts, the approach of governments should be to address both political refugees and disaster victims equally.
- For a thorough understanding of the long-term socioeconomic and environmental impacts of the tsunami, governments must commission research studies to analyse the trends in labour displacement, human trafficking and other issues, as well as the sustainability of coastal developments. This must be supported with complete transparency of information regarding the use of relief grants and an assessment of how they have helped the situation on the ground. Governments should thereby be supported by the international community, by the UN, 'donor' countries and aid organisations for an efficient monitoring of the long-term impacts of the tsunami.
- In its precautionary and preparedness efforts for future disasters of this nature, governments should not build costly high technology warnings systems alone, but must recognise the significance of traditional, low technology community-based early warning systems and strengthen them.
- In the wake of a natural disaster such as the tsunami and its consequent impacts on local livelihoods, we demand that the tourism industry proves its longstanding claim of pursuing 'tourism as a development activity' and justify their claims of bringing benefits to the local community, conserving local resources and safeguarding labour rights.
- The tourism industry must abide by regional, national and international regulations regarding tourism development and be transparent with their industry partners as well as tourists on the extent to which such tourism stands to benefit the local community at destinations.
- While the tourism industry must not deviate from its core business by assuming an all-important role in the rehabilitation process, it must also acknowledge that corporate responsibility in the wake of such a disaster cannot be limited to donations alone. Corporate responsibility in tourism includes:
  - A focus on ethics in the overall management of the tourism business:
    - Responsibility towards the people who have helped to build the industry and thereby addressing the labour rights and displacement issues surfacing in the post-tsunami period, including the tourism labour force in the informal sector.
    - Consequently, a guarantee of employment for local people dependent on the industry for their livelihoods in the coming tourist season.
    - Social security for small and medium enterprises within the industry.
    - Recognition of the priority use of basic resources like land, water, sanitation and other infrastructures for the livelihood of the local inhabitants.
  - In areas where small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) have been affected,
- it is the responsibility of governments to provide adequate assistance for them to build a sustainable future. SMEs rarely have the competency/ capacity to raise loans and claim insurances.
- Government tourism departments/agencies and the tourism industry are attempting to showcase affected areas as 'safe havens' thereby projecting insensitivity to ground issues. There is need, therefore, to stop such advertisements and instead a true picture be presented to tourists: provide them information to make informed decisions on travel and increase their sensitivity to ground issues.
- Tourists should demand transparency from tour operators on aspects of local community benefit from their tourism activities to enable informed decision-making on their choice of tourism destinations and activities. The tsunami has intensified the need for tourists to be sensitive towards the receiving societies and thereby respect the human and sociocultural rights of local communities.

The Global Tourism Interventions Forum (GTIF) was created in recognition of ongoing debates on tourism development that have taken place in consultations around the globe, the World Social Forum and international forums such as the CSD. The GTIF seeks to support, strengthen and sustain the debate and interventions on tourism issues within a multitude of antiglobalisation and human rights movements, and is committed to change the character of global tourism. In solidarity with local movements, it works together with community representatives, activists and researchers to strengthen the struggle for a tourism that is equitable, people centred, sustainable, ecologically sensible, child friendly and gender just. The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism is the coordinator of GTIF.

# Millennium development goals in Asia

## WCC consultation seeks diakonal responses to MDG

In cooperation with the National Christian Council in Sri Lanka, a WCC consultation brought together 27 Asian church leaders and heads of Christian-based organisations to address current issues in social development and to examine the latest response of the church in Asia to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG), after it was first adopted in New York half a decade ago.

Dr Mathews George Chunnakara, WCC Asia Secretary, said the consultation aimed 'to reflect and sharpen the ideas of the church's development priorities and diakonal mission from an Asia ecumenical perspective and to evolve collective responses to the MDG in Asia'.

### Millennium development goals in Asia

In 2000 the United Nations launched Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as a means to improve the quality of life of the global population. These goals include eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combatting HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development.

Dr Sarthi Acharya of the Institute of Development Studies from India analysed the development and results of the MDG in Asia and mentioned that Asian people have still undergone a lot of suffering due to the conditionality demanded by international agencies and the different levels of commitment of national governments in the region.

The participants expressed disappointment that five years after the MDGs were adopted no significant level of poverty reduction has taken place. The participants also expressed concern regarding the slow process in the provision of development aid.

### Churches' diakonal response

The earthquake and deadly tsunami that killed at least 200,000 people, mostly in Asia, last December has brought the church's diakonal mission into focus. Six months after this natural catastrophe, the pace of rebuilding has been slow and thousands of people remain homeless.

CASA (Church's Auxiliary for Social Action) is the biggest church-related organisation in India. With its expertise especially in responding to emergencies and natural calamities, CASA is actively providing short-



term and long-term solutions to people in affected areas. CASA always works in collaboration with churches and encourages churches to become more active in their ministry. Through its church network, CASA also extends its service with churches in neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and so on.

Mr Sushant Agrawal, director of CASA, shared the concern and involvement of CASA and urged closer cooperation among ecumenical organisations in the region.

Sri Lanka is the country in South Asia most devastated by the tsunami, where almost 40,000 people died. Recently disputes between Tamil Tigers and Sri Lanka's national government held up agreement on Sri Lanka's approach to reconstruction. A deal has been signed and the two camps have agreed to share Sri Lanka's international aid to ensure that Tamil-controlled areas are not overlooked.

Rev. Dr Jayasiri Peiris, the general sec-

retary of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka (NCCSL), shared that the financial contribution of ecumenical partners has distributed necessary materials to the people in need. It also campaigns for long-term sustainable development for the people in affected areas.

Rev. Dr Sint Kimhachandra, general secretary of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) explained the CCT's involvement. Thailand was also hit by the tsunami, and about 6,000 people were killed. When the tsunami hit, CCT immediately organised personnel and resources to support the people in affected areas. He thanked ecumenical organisations and friends for financial support for the work of the CCT. However CCT is a small church with limited experience and human resources. 'We try to do our best, as the church, to extend God's love to the suffering people. We can do what we can do, what resources we have. We will not wait for a big donation,' he said.

## Proposed ecumenical advocacy for development

A new initiative, 'A Proposed Ecumenical Alliance for Development' (PEAD) was lively, extensively and intensively discussed. It was presented for ecumenical discussion by Ms Jill Hockey, PEAD facilitator. Learning from the experience of ACT (Action of Churches Together) and EAA (Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance), a number of comments and questions were made for further clarification.

Reports of the group discussions indicated that the initiative of the PEAD is very impressive. The participants reaffirmed their ecumenical commitment to PEAD.

What is needed is a thorough and participatory discussion to consolidate mutual understanding and cooperation, including a call for wider discussion with member churches, and for slowing the formulation process of the alliance until the 9th WCC General Assembly.

—Prawate Kbid-arn

# Sharing the pain

## Pastoral ecumenical delegation visit to the Philippines

**P**rominent church leaders from the Philippines, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, accompanied by thirteen partners from Australia, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Norway, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and the United States, visited Eastern Visayas, Hacienda Luisita and Mindanao 14–21 July 2005. Together they heard and saw for themselves the degree of human rights violations and demonstrated a strong international solidarity with the victims and families of victims. This pastoral delegation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) visited the Philippines at the invitation of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP).

The delegation was an expression of Christians and churches sharing their pain and support for each other as members of one body. The scripture calls on us to be prophetic and to promote justice and human dignity. The delegation was acutely aware of the fact that the majority of the Filipino people have yet to enjoy life in all its fullness. Poverty, political repression and other human rights violations are the daily plight of the majority of the 85 million Filipinos.

The NCCP, the Filipino churches, human rights organisations and other people's movements have been monitoring the recent spate of killings of church workers, human rights defenders, journalists, justice advocates and others in the Philippines. They

have urgently appealed to the government of the Republic of Philippines (GRP) to put an immediate end to the pattern of killings that, for many Filipinos, are reminiscent of the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship. The WCC wrote on 31 March 2005 to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, calling on her to set up an independent investigation into the atrocities being committed and to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice. CCA wrote to the president on 23 May raising similar concerns.

The pastoral delegation listened to many moving testimonies from the victims themselves and from their families. Members of the clergy of the Philippine Independent Church and the United Church of Christ in the

Philippines have been murdered. Hundreds of others, especially the indigenous communities, have been terrorised, brutalised and maimed by security forces. Large-scale human rights violations, including police and military intimidation, illegal detention and torture of peasants working on the farms of rich landlords are being perpetrated. These patterns of gross and systematic human rights violations were further clarified and confirmed by a wide cross-section of people's movements, human rights organisations, local religious leaders, councillors and members of congress.

Once again, as in the past, churches and church workers serving the poor as Christ commanded, as well as community leaders and organisations, are being labelled as 'subversives'. Once again, counterinsurgency against the New People's Army is being advanced by officialdom as an excuse for atrocities and bombings.

Among the root causes of the current turmoil in the country are the inadequacies of state institutions such as the judiciary, inequitable distribution of resources, which traps many Filipinos in abject poverty, and the monopoly of transnational corporations and other foreign interests in resource exploitation. These shortcomings remain pervasive and the promise of full enjoyment of human rights is still far distant.

At the meetings with the executive secretary of the Office of the President, Mr Eduardo Ermita, and with Commissioner Wilhem

D. Soriano of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, the pastoral delegation expressed serious concern at the deterioration in the observance of human rights. It raised issues regarding the safeguarding of the people's civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, the need for the resumption of peace talks with the NDF, and the lack of the government's response to the reports and recommendations of the Commission on Human Rights.

The key recommendations of the delegation include:

- an immediate and impartial investigation of all recent extrajudicial executions,
- revision of the government's military strategy for resolving the insurgency to insure the safety of non-combatants and to avoid indiscriminate destruction of property,
- resumption of the stalled peace talks between the Government of the Republic of Philippines and the National Democratic Front,
- assertion of civilian control of the military, which must be held accountable for its actions and which must be in accordance with international humanitarian law,
- promotion of agrarian and land rights reform that preserves the integrity of creation and honours the ancestral domain of the indigenous peoples,
- reform of the judicial system to guarantee its independence and integrity,

- repeal of the 1995 Philippine Mining Act,
- cessation of the practice by the government and military of labelling those who work for justice and for the poor as subversives or communists,
- request to the WCC to bring the delegation's concerns to the attention of the appropriate UN instrumentalities and mechanisms,
- continuation of an ecumenical ministry of presence with the victims of human rights violations. This includes information sharing about the situation, education, advocacy for just economic policies and rendering humanitarian assistance.

The report of the pastoral delegation will be circulated widely by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, the Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches. The recommendations of the delegation will be transmitted to these ecumenical bodies and the delegation members' own churches. They will continue to collaborate on all follow-up activities.

In conclusion, the members of the Pastoral Ecumenical Delegation wish to say to the suffering people of the Philippines:

- we admire your persistence, your courage and your hope in the face of grave injustices,
- we are one in Christ with you,
- we will stand with you, we will advocate for you,
- we pray God's peace and justice for you.

# Doing many things

## The Kampuchea Christian Council Women's Desk in action

**A**t the outset, the WEAVE (Women's Ecumenical Accompaniment for Vision and Empowerment) program under the EGY, Women and Youth was meant to be a one-year stint. The needs, goals and objectives were set to be accom-

plished within that period. However, after evaluation, it was extended for two years more. So on 31 December, whatever the development will be, the WEAVE program is planning to exit. The Kampuchea Christian Council needs a breathing space to try to

exist on its own. This does not mean that we have put pressure on their development. It is like a child doing its own under the loving and caring eyes of the mother. They need to be on their own. And we need to put our trust in the capabilities and gifts of their lead-

ers. They will learn from their experiences. We hope that they have learned from what WEAVE have shared.

Anne F. Grizzle, a Methodist psychiatrist, often tell her clients, 'If you have to experience so much pain, let's be sure you gain fruit from it.' Growing is twined with rigorous pain. It needs patience, love and endurance. But we gain from it. For the WEAVE program, the words of Gandhi seems appropriate. 'I did not come this far for nothing.' So after almost three years of weaving life together in ecumenical love, I am sharing excerpts from the report of the Women's Desk secretary, Prak Saravy, during the period January to June 2005.

The Kampuchea Christian Council became a member of CCA in 2000. It had been assisted by CCA in its organisational development and programs. Its programs include the Women's Desk and the Youth Desk. When the CCA EGY WEAVE program sent an ecumenical accompanier, accompanying the Women's Desk was one of her biggest responsibilities. The Youth Desk was included. They had been involved in all the responsibilities of planning, facilitating, translating (written and oral) and visiting projects. The desks are the program implementors and social service arms of the Kampuchea Christian Council.

In 1993, a group of five women gathered to study the Bible and pray together for unity, peace and development of Cambodia. It became the 'Cambodian Christian Women's Association', CCWA, recognised by the govern-

ment on 13 July 1994. In January 2002 the Cambodian Christian Women's Association became a desk of the Kampuchea Christian Council (KCCWD). The desk's purpose is to help alleviate poverty and empower women to discover their capabilities and train and provide capital for small business and agricultural enterprise. This is in line with the CCA theme 'Abundant Life for All', which is further emphasised in the new theme, 'Building Communities of Peace'.

KCCWD's activities are listed below.

### Membership

Today, the Women's Desk serves 494 registered members, which includes the men, from 37 churches in Phnom Penh and the provinces. The annual membership fees are converted into a death benefit for members. The desk gives the beneficiaries an amount according to the policy. They have an outstanding amount of \$253.70.

### Organisational matters

The Women's Committee meets on the first Saturday of the month. They discuss and plan and evaluate activities. Every Saturday, a group of about 20-30 women from the churches in Phnom Penh come to worship and hold Bible Studies. There are four types of offering, each with their own purpose. The voluntary offering is used for visiting women who are sick and have problems and the balance remaining at the end of the year is used for the Christmas Day fellowship.



Participants at the Women's spirituality and ecumenism seminar discuss causes of disunity and how to overcome them

In six months, from the income minus the expenses, we now have \$50.80. The Least Coin offering is sent to the International Fellowship of the Least Coin (IFLC) for its many projects for the needy all over the world. Last May, we sent \$65.60 to FLC. In June, we have \$7.30. The church building offering is intended to help struggling, poor churches that need small repairs. We now have \$149.60. The solidarity offering is for the signature campaign of the Asian Church Women's Conference. We remitted to ACWC \$80 last May.

### Women's Spirituality and Capability Building

On 5 March 2005, the Women's Desk celebrated the 95th International Women's Day at Kirirum National Park. Worship, Bible study, an offering and remembering the women garment factory workers in USA who sparked the international struggle for women's rights were the main activities, after which we swam



(Left) Em Ly signing the signature campaign of ACWC during Saturday fellowship. Seated are Theavy, secretary of the Youth Desk, Ol Bonath, the ACWC scholar, and Chan Mony, the assistant teacher of the primary school. They attend Saturday worship regularly. (Right) Saravy and Dominica distributing money for credit in Por Dos Village

in a cool waterfall. On 28–29 April we had a seminar on ‘Women’s Spirituality and Ecumenism’ at the KCC office. Nineteen men and 39 women attended. During the two days study, they became aware of the unity that is lived by the Kampuchea Christian Council and other churches in the ecumenical movement.

## Solidarity with Society

### Rural/Urban Credits

Since August 2003 the Women’s Desk has been giving small credit projects to the churches in the provinces and the churches in the city for them to start agribusinesses. They also have group savings. We now have 100 families in ten churches who have benefited. At the end of June, money in the bank is \$780.30 and the amount of the money with borrowers is 8,060,000 Riels (\$2,015.00).

### Primary school

On 15 November 2004, the second batch of primary school (Grade 1) started. There were 30 students, 11 girls and 19 boys. This project is funded by the National Council of Churches in Japan Women’s Desk.

### Vocational Training Credit Program

With funds from the World Council of Churches, we have graduated two batches

of students in sewing and weaving. (We are waiting for funds in order to open the third batch.) After graduation, we give credit to the students for their capital (to buy sewing machines/looms). They pay in monthly installments. Borrowed by weaving students amounts to \$370.80 and sewing \$470.00.

### Networking with other NGOs and women’s organisations

The women’s secretary attended the following meetings: Local: 25 March 2005—Out System Education at Cambodia Women’s Development Agency. On the agenda were sharing experiences of work out system education of world organisations and the report of a person who attended a seminar on Cambodia concept violence against children by UNESCO. 26 April 2005—Gender and Development Cambodia on the theme ‘Stop Violence in the Family and Protect the Victims’. 24 June 2005—Out System Education at Cambodia Women’s Development Agency. Outside the country: 1 April 2005—KCC president, Rev. Eang Chhun and the women’s secretary attended the meeting ‘Improve Ecumenism’ given by CCA and the WCC in Bangkok, Thailand. Hosting international partners: 21–25 May 2005—Nine members of the ACWC executive committee met in Cambodia at the Comfort Inn Hotel. The theme was ‘Meeting to Plan for the 13th Asian Church Women’s



Women listening to Bible before praying at Sunday worship

Conference General Assembly’. Before their meeting, the Women’s Committee and KCC’s executive committee welcomed the them. 22 May 2005—The ACWC guests joined worship services at Boeng Tompun Meanchey Church, Tahkmau Church and Prek Talong Church. 24 May 2005—The guests visited the primary school at Prek Ho. They were interested in this program and one of them promised to help. They visited KCC office and had a meeting with the Women’s Committee about the women’s work. 27 May—The ACWC granted support of \$500 to Ms Ol Bonath for her scholarship.

### Supporters of the fund

The World Council of Churches supported capability leadership building and solidarity with society. CCA supports the administration expenses of KCC as a whole. The National Council of Churches in Japan supports the primary school. The Asian Church Women’s Conference gives scholarship support to one woman.

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In the conclusion to her report, Prak Saravy writes, ‘All in all, we would like to thank God who gives us wisdom and strength and uses us to help the poor people who live in Cambodia, especially women and children. We can do many things because our sisters and brothers from home and abroad pray for and support our programs. Finally, please continue to pray for the Kampuchea Christian Council, and the Women’s and Youth Desks. We need your prayers and assistance in order to run the programs to help the people in Cambodia have a better and meaningful life. Let us build communities of peace in this beloved land.

—Dominica Faurillo



The teacher and pupils at the Prek Ho Primary School

# Who are you? What is expected of you?

## A spirituality of caring and compassion in an uncaring world

A reflection from Connie Semy P. Mella, presented at the Theological Teachers' Institute in Chiang Mai, Thailand, 5–11 June 2005.

Let me start by asking these basic questions of life: 'Who are you?' and 'What is expected of you?' We are given different answers to these questions. Science tells us that we are but a mass of atoms that exist in a brief period of time, here today and gone tomorrow. Society tells us that we are human beings whose passions and ambitions must be satisfied.

'Who are you?' and 'What is expected of you?' Somewhere between two timelines—a time in which we were born and a time in which we will die—we need to find answers to these basic questions of life.

I believe that individually we have different answers to these questions but collectively we could answer, 'We are theological educators who have heard and felt the anguish of our people and have come to commit ourselves to take part in the work for the betterment and transformation of the world!'

Our five-day theological institute has been full of learning and insights. Wati Longchar opened our activity up by the re-reading of Joseph's narrative. Using the perspective of the poor and the oppressed, he helped us see the story from a new perspective. By reading the story through the eyes of the oppressed and the marginalised, he challenged us to hear the imperialistic tone of the text. Joseph was presented as a leader who took advantage of the vulnerability of the people in need so as to build the empire of the pharaoh up, which led to the people's enslavement. Wati challenged us to recognise the systems of domination and dictatorship, not only in governments but also even in and among

ourselves.

Donald Messer told us of the influx of AIDS worldwide. He presented details of the staggering number of people infected with HIV/AIDS and how this disease brings pain to the sufferers, their families and the whole community. The suffering brought by this illness is almost too much, being experienced not only by those who are infected with it but also by those who are left behind, the orphans and the 'would-be' orphans. Donald also showed us the scandalous side of HIV/AIDS—that people are dying not just because of the severity of AIDS but also because the antiretroviral drugs that could help lengthen the lives of those who are infected are so expensive that most patients cannot afford to buy them.

Susan Chang, in her presentation, appealed to our emotions and touched our hearts. She showed us the human side of the story, that HIV/AIDS infected people are not only numbers in statistics—they are people who need to be loved and to love. They are human beings with emotions and needs, people created in the image of God. Susan challenged us to carry out our pastoral task seriously by putting these people not only in our hearts but also as a priority in our church ministries. She reminded us that as we tend the wounds of these patients, we are easing up their pains so that these people die not only peacefully but also with dignity.

Sanan Wutti, along with his angels Kung and Luck, demonstrated to us how HIV/AIDS is transmitted among people. Through a game that we played, we realised that none is truly invincible or exempt from AIDS.

Two holy people, Joie Galinato and Tsai Tuu Chieh, were infected along with Anna Marsiana and Sientjie Merentek-Abram.

After the heart-wrenching discussions about HIV/AIDS, we shifted our attention to the topic of religious pluralism. Mark Tamthai laid down a very good foundation by reminding us of the so-called *noumena* and *phenomena*. *Noumena*, according to him, is the reality, as it exists, while *phenomena* pertains to the reality not as it exists but as how people perceive it exists. This shows then the reality of human limitation, as we cannot grasp the totality of the reality. We are limited in our perception and understanding of what reality is. If this is so, then humans should not absolutise the truth. We cannot monopolise the truth of God as if we could box God's revelation in our own set standards. God is beyond human understanding. God can reveal Godself in various ways and means, including to people whom we consider as the 'others', such as Buddhists and Muslims. If we could affirm that, then living harmoniously with each other and with people from other religions could be a reality.

Anna Marsiana affirmed such a notion by saying that in and for the grassroots, religion is not basically the issue. The main issue is the 'stomach'—the lack of food. She pointed out the underlying cause of the problem, involving the three dynamics of society—economics, politics and culture. 'Economic and politics are the main issues rather than religions,' she said.

Ren Ropeta, who himself belongs to a minority group in the Philippines, gave us a very concrete account of social prejudices

against minority groups and how the struggle to address the issue holistically can be carried out. He also pointed out the alarming emerging issue of religious fundamentalism, both in Christianity and in Islam.

As a response to the issues raised, we tried to look for ways as to how theological education could address them. One way, we felt, would be to integrate these issues in our curriculum. Wati Longchar challenged the theological educators to wrestle with immediate life, confronting issues like HIV/AIDS that create misery in the family, community, social and economic life of the people. Then Wati Longchar, Donald Messer and Sientjie Merentek-Abram helped us design such a curriculum. Wati introduced the HIV/AIDS curriculum developed for theological institutions in Africa and Donald introduced a course on 'The Church and Global AIDS', developed for the Iliff School of Theology, Denver, Colorado. Sientjie highlighted the importance of theological curriculum reform in theological education. In addition, participants also shared how HIV/AIDS concerns are taught in their respective schools. We then realised that by using an interdisciplinary approach, HIV/AIDS is more than a health issue—it is an economic, social, ethical, moral and even a faith issue, as it is an explicit manifestation of injustice. This disease is the exact opposite of the will of God, who wants people to live in wholeness and abundance, where people are loved simply for who they are and not for what they have. The culture of isolation, fragmentation and brokenness where people living with HIV/AIDS is experiencing right now is an abomination to the God of love. God wants people to use money and love people and not to love money and use people. It is a sad fact that the opposite is what is happening.

Let me illustrate it this way. There was a boat sailing on the sea. Suddenly, a great storm came. The rain was so heavy, the wind was so strong, and the waves were gigantic that the boat was wrecked beyond measure. It was so devastated that everything it had was thrown out to the sea. By God's grace, however, the passengers aboard the boat survived, clinging to pieces of woods that helped them keep afloat. For several days

they floated on the sea, praying hard for God's intervention, hoping for the coastguard or other ships to arrive.

When they were about to lose their hope, they saw a big ship coming and they shouted out together. Fortunately, the captain saw them. They begged him to accommodate them in his big ship. But the captain looked at them and said, 'OK. You can come up to my ship if you have money to pay for your tickets!'

'There will always be enough for everyone's need, but there will never be enough for everyone's greed.' Mahatma Gandhi's words are really true. As theological educators, we felt that this was our challenge in the present time: 'to develop a spirituality of compassion and care in this uncaring world'. Rabbi Hillel said, 'If I am only for others, then who is for me? If I am only for myself, then who am I?' We are all interwoven in the cosmic fabric. Our Christian faith is being questioned and challenged regarding its contribution to the realisation of the reign of God. God's love is universal. All, regardless of race, colour, gender, faith confessions, economic status and health condition, must experience this love.

As people of faith, this should be our identity: 'And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.'

There was once a teacher who asked her pupils one day what they would like to be when they grew up. The first one said, 'Teacher, I want to be a doctor. I'll be working in a big hospital in the United States of America or in Europe and be the best surgeon there. I will become very, very rich.' The pupils clapped their hands in appreciation.

The second one said, 'Teacher, I want to be an engineer. I will design gigantic buildings surpassing that of the destroyed World Trade Centre. My building will be the tallest, so that every time people look at my building, they will remember me.' The pupils clapped their hands merrily.

The third one answered, 'Teacher, I want to be a lawyer, brilliant and international in calibre. I will handle delicate cases like that of Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein and win all these so that people will know

how brilliant I am.' The students' cheers became louder.

The fourth one said, 'Teacher, I want to be a musician. I will have my own orchestra and we will have a concert tour all over the world.'

The fifth one answered, 'Teacher, I want to be a teacher. But not a mere teacher like anybody else. I will become the president, not of an ATSEA member institution, but the president of Harvard University.'

The sixth child answered, 'Teacher, I want to be a politician. I will become the president not only of my country but also of the United Nations.'

The seventh child answered, 'Teacher, I want to be a pastor. I will become not only a bishop but the president of the councils of bishops.'

The students were very happy, they were clapping their hands merrily.

However, the teacher noticed one child sitting silently in the corner, unmindful of the noise of jubilation. The teacher gained his attention by asking, 'How about you Juan? What would you like to be when you grow up?'

Juan looked at the teacher and said, 'Teacher, I just want to be a good person. I just want to be the person God wants me to be.'

The teacher was puzzled by his answer so she asked, 'What do you mean by that Juan? What do you mean you just want to be a good person?'

Juan answered, 'I just want to be a good person, teacher, so that if ever I became a doctor, I would treat my patients with love and understanding in order to ease their pain, regardless of whether they could pay me or not. If I became an engineer, I would design beautiful and comfortable houses that people could call their own. Homes where people can dwell in safety and harmony, their shelter when it rains, havens where they could live together as a family. If I became a lawyer, I would fight for what is true and just. I would defend the cases of the poor, the weak, the marginalised and the oppressed so that justice will reign and righteousness will prevail. If I became a musician, may every song I sing and the music I compose bring healing and wholeness to every weary soul. If I became

a teacher, I would mould not only the minds of my students but also their hearts so that they would learn to love, respect and uphold the dignity of God's creation. If I became a politician, I would serve the people with righteousness and integrity. I would not rob them of their taxes so that they would not live in poverty in the midst of plenty. If I became

a pastor, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to God. May I be able to concretise the love of Christ to my neighbours so that he could say, "I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me a drink, sick and you took care of me, imprisoned and you visited me," knowing that whatever I did to the least of my

brothers and sisters, I do it to him. You don't understand me teacher, what I am about is not success, what I am about is faithfulness and service. I just want to be a good person, the person God wants me to be.'

Who are you? What is expected of you? Who are we? What is expected of us? The answer is in you ... the answer is in us.

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# Resistance and meditation

## A kenotic compassion for healing and reconciliation in Christ's way

During the holy time between Easter and Pentecost, when the risen Christ prepared his followers for the gift of the Holy Spirit and called them to carry the good news to 'the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8), promising to be with them until 'the end of the age' (Matthew 28:20), the World Council of Churches held the 13th World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, from 9 to 16 May 2005, with the theme 'Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile: Called in Christ to be Reconciling and Healing Communities'. On the shores of the Aegean Sea 600 participants from 105 countries, including a significant number of fully participating delegates from non-WCC member churches—the Roman Catholic Church and some Pentecostal and Evangelical churches and networks—were hosted by the Church of Greece and other churches in Greece. For the first time, a CWME conference took place in a predominantly Orthodox context. During the conference there were more than 50 synaxes. One of them was 'Healing and Reconciliation in the Process of Reunification', coorganised by Korean churches and the EMS. Rev. Dr Lee Hong Jung, as the moderator of the synaxis here gives a short theological reflection on the three presenters, Mr Hong Sung Dam, Ms You Hae Ran, and Bishop Noak.

If someone asks me who I am, my answer is, 'I am my face.' My face reflects my history. My history reflects the multidimensional relationships in which I have, directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously, interacted with others. My face and history are not single dimensional, but multidimensional. It is part of my history, stories of my family and of my people—all interconnected in the web of relationships of life, in which God's history immanently dwells.

The history does not belong to the past, but integrates, like a deep river, the past, the present and the future. Behind my face and history I can sense the living, subtle movements of many masks—the masks of my two grandfathers crying for national independence from Japanese colonialism, the masks of my father struggling against a military regime and US-Japan neoimperialism at the expense of his life, the masks of my stepfather silently lamenting the tragic separation with his family in the North due to the division, and the masks of my mother crying for her children at the expense of her personal life in a patriarchal society. The masks of my wife and three daughters are seeking their dignities resisting and meditating my masks. My masks are struggling in being 'a priest on the road' in the captivity of the institutionalised, bureaucratised and cold-war minded churches—a shadowy and wintry mask re-

sisting life-denying division and globalisation in meditating the Han-ridden masks that have sacrificed themselves for 'the' truth as they have perceived it. While these masks overlap and intermingle, I compassionately hear from the bottom of my heart people crying for healing and reconciliation behind all these masks.

Korean history must go on, as the stories and memories of people struggling for healing and reconciliation cannot be stopped. In the other side of the Korean division are the faces of the Suffering Queen and the Children of the Compassionate God. They are a wounded and broken people who have a perceptual privilege of history to take an initiative for a kenotic process of healing and reconciliation. Their wounded and broken memories are all shared experiences of the Compassionate God, who blesses and calls those suffering people as Children of Peace. In the web of life, one's suffering story and memory cannot be limited within oneself. It becomes a seed of healing and reconciliation, a rotten seed in the soil, emptying itself to bear hundreds and thousands of leaves and fruits of just peace.

Hong Sung Dam, a Korean Minjung artist, tortured by the military regime, had to live out a 'doggy' life in an iron cage, experiencing 'water and food', the very symbols and sources of life, used as weapons of life-denying state violence. But in his kenotic resist-

ance for and meditation on life, the torturing 'water and food' become eucharistic for people who are thirsty for the truth, and hungry for peace. His resistance and meditation, empowered by a 'powerless' power of kenotic compassion both for victims and perpetrators, initiated a life-giving process of healing and reconciliation. Pain-taking meditation on innocent sufferings became a kenotic way of resistance, both against his wounded memories and the memories of the perpetrators, an art of truth and love. Korean 'shamanistic' myths as collective stories, wisdom, and faiths of Korean people empowered his spirit-ridden artistic expression, which overcame a vicious circle of Han. By a kenotic compassion, powerlessness, frustration, anger and enmity were transferred into a source of life and love.

You Hae Ran, an educated North Korean woman, took the risk of 'escaping' from the North, her birthplace, to the South, her asylum, becoming a borderless being-in-between. She has been struggling for a new identity in the South, projecting her faith in Jesus Christ into a seemingly 'faceless' reality of the North, being captured in a pendulum movement between the North and the South with a cold-war mindset. Korean churches, not as people, but as historically and socially constructed institutions in the South, have become another isolated ideological asy-

lum for her. In the cold war, faith tends to be substituted for ideology: only a thin red line exists between the two. The life-giving process of healing and reconciliation always requires taking a risk to cross this thin red line. Our ideological authenticity should be proved by serving people in faith, and our authenticity of faith can be only proved when we take the risk of crossing this thin red line of ideology. A cold war mindset cannot be a place of faith.

Bishop Noak, a former East German, shared his experience of the process of the unification between the Eastern and Western Germany, comparing it with the Korean division situation. The contexts in Germany and Korea are obviously different, and therefore, nobody can be a teacher or director of people in the other context. Authentic intercontextual reflection is only possible when dialogue partners are ready to face the risk of mutual transformation, going beyond their national boundary. Without a kenotic compassion, crossing a boundary is not possible.

Without embracing suffering as 'mine', a transformative dialogue is not possible. In the web of life, our suffering is interconnected with others, and therefore we confess to each other, 'I am part of the root causes of your suffering.' A kenotic compassion can only open eyes to see who I am in your

stories, where I am on your road, and how I am part of yours. The Korean division is a symbolic part of the overall division of human society as a whole: all forms of division in the wounded and broken wholeness in a politically, economically, socially, educationally, culturally, ecologically, psychologically and spiritually divided world.

I resist and meditate on my masks, encountering the masks of Hong Sung Dam, You Hae Ran and Bishop Noak. I am becoming inseparable part of their stories. I feel intuitively a kenotic compassion for my masks behind their struggling masks, initiating my own kenotic process of 'incarnation' to the 'bottom' and of identification with the vulnerable 'others'. Without this process there is no mutual transformation. I am therefore a fundamental locus, where a kenotic process of healing and reconciliation springs out with a 'powerless' power of compassion.

Resistance and mediation with a kenotic compassion is a process of healing and reconciliation in Christ's way, a kenotic process of life in which God 'becomes' us with a kenotic power of love for all.

Note: 'Han' in Korean means a historically accumulated resentment and sorrow of suffering people. 'Kenotic' in Greek means self-emptying, self-giving.

# A 'tsunami of tears and woes'

Addressing human insecurity from a religious youth perspective

Asia and the Pacific is blessed and noted for its diversity of race/ethnicity, language and culture. The area hosts rich and abundant resources, both natural and human.

Its potential is limitless. But at the same time there is uncertainty and a high erosion of human security—chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression, and sudden

and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life.

Ninan Koshy has described our region as a 'colourful mosaic of cultures, languages, ideologies, races and tribes'. One of our most remarkable distinctions, he adds, is religious plurality. Given the differences, our history shows us that we were able to live in tolerance. We have been able to co-exist

with each other, by being able to respect one another, and work and live together without necessarily undermining, or dominating the other. However, according to Hope Antone, of CCA, it is unfortunate that in the present situation 'in many places in Asia, these differences are often the cause of opposition, discrimination, division, discord, and animosity'. Worse, such differences are often

exploited and manipulated by business and colonial powers to forment and insinuate further divisions and violence among our peoples and nations.

We face a 'tsunami of tears and woes'. Un-peace, violence and brokenness is the challenge we in the ecumenical youth movement face today. Hence peace-building must be the central focus of our mission and ministry, not just for Christians, but for other faith communities as well, who constitute the majority of the people in Asia and the Pacific.

### Our recent efforts

The National Council of Churches in the Philippines Youth Desk and the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines through the Youth for a United World of the FOCOLARE Movement conducted a National Youth Prayer Conference for Peace in Manila from 31 January to 1 February 2004. More than 300 church youth leaders assembled in that gathering to discuss greater Christian unity among the youth and to confront the concerns regarding peace. This meaningful event was held during the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. A statement, 'We are praying for peace, and will work for justice' was made to express the outcome of the conference. Ironically, the beginning phrase used to guide the statement was borrowed from an analysis of a Muslim, Sajjad Syed Haider of Malaysia, who said, 'The only way human beings can defeat Satan and obliterate the hatred for each other from human minds is to follow the Lord's commandments by faith and deeds. Let us not pay attention to labels of various religion and sects. Let us embrace each other with love, care and compassion because our deeds are the same and the prescriptions of salvation and ascension to God's kingdom are the same in every religion.' The differences are human made.

At the same time, the prayer conference was a venue for reaffirming our conviction to struggle side by side with the youth of other faith communities in the country, especially the Muslim and non-Muslim tribes called Lumads, to overcome the violence of poverty, discrimination and human rights violations due to the war waged in Mindanao.

At the Asian regional level, through EASY

Net (Ecumenical Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Network), 104 students and youth leaders from 16 countries in Asia and Pacific met 7–14 December 2004 in Cipayung, Indonesia, for the Asian Student and Youth Gathering 2005, gathering with the theme, 'Together in Action for Peace and Reconciliation'. This ecumenical gathering was a splendid opportunity for us to share our common concern, struggles and aspirations as a learning community, enabling each other to light the flame of hope and love within us. We were inspired through our interaction with friends who served as our resources through keynote presentations, thematic workshops (on globalisation and economic justice, peace and human security, education and culture, and interfaith dialogue and ecumenism), synthesis and analysis and faith reflections. We were warned against the false prophets of peace—empire, militarisation, globalisation and fundamentalism—and were called to resist the impact of these false prophets in our society. We were challenged to go to the marginalised, listen and stand with them. We shared the life of the 'least' of God's children through our exposure in the communities of farmers, survivors of the 'May 1998' riot, street children, labourers, interfaith villages and Muslim students. We celebrated our diversity and formed a community, creating further awareness of our interconnectedness. We lived the ecumenical spirit during the ASYG. At the time of the gathering two churches in Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, were bombed and attacked and the victims were undergoing rehabilitation while we are about to conclude the event. That same day, another bombing took place in General Santos City, in Mindanao, Philippines, leaving scores of victims dead and several injured.

On both occasions mentioned, the ecumenical youth leaders agreed that there are two principal attributes of human insecurity among the youth and our peoples:

- The pitiful and failed economic paradigm of monopoly globalisation. In the context of globalisation, the world's wealth and resources have become more unevenly distributed. Globalisation has brought further poverty, widened the digital divide

and produced severe ecological destruction. Globalisation, with the instrument of information and communication technology, provides effective communication, yet also enables the control of the rich and powerful from a distance over the weak and poor. Globalisation has brought about homogenisation of culture, values and market. It has a deep impact on the culture, ecology, education and tradition of many countries, particularly poor ones. People are commodified—even peace is bought or sold.

- The destruction caused by the US-led 'War on Terror'. In multireligious and multicultural Asia Pacific, we see rising intolerance and exclusivism. The current US policy is creating more conflicts in the Asia Pacific region, fanning the flames of religious fundamentalism and extremism. It also intensifies the militarisation of the region, which has tremendous effects on individuals and societies—politically, socially, economically and culturally. Human security and human rights is being wantonly ignored and violated.

Both attributes have created a tremendous and chilling effect and social costs to the spirituality and morality of youth—an increase in suicides, juvenile delinquency, prostitution and human and sexual trafficking of women and children, substance abuse and crimes involving children and teens. By and large, the youth of Asia have been reduced to CCC—cannon-fodder, collateral damage and insatiable consumers.

### Significance for Christians engaging in interfaith and interreligious dialogue vis-à-vis upholding human security

The two events above are mere examples of the many and varying responses made by the ecumenical youth movement regarding violence and promoting shared securities. They not only came up with mere declarations or statements but also with workable and sustained programs and advocacies regarding interfaith and interreligious dialogue and grassroots initiatives within our contexts, for example the Ecumenical Network of Indonesian Students and Youth (ENISY) and

EASY-Net Davao. These must be among our priority concerns given that 'this is also a period where churches and religions are finding one another, where we Christians are finding a new place, mission and involvement in the world'. (Ninan Koshy) We can only possibly contribute in overcoming and preventing religious-ethnic conflict if we can actively engage ourselves in dialogue, joint undertakings and alliances with youth of other faiths.

For us Christians who long for greater unity among our brothers and sisters in the Christian community, we must also be made aware that greater Christian Unity and inter-faith dialogue go together. According to Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, 'Relating to people of other religions helps Christians to understand better and appreciate more their own faith. They come to see how tremendous is the central tenet of that faith, namely that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to be our Brother, Lord and Saviour. The contact with other systems of belief, and the with people who are influenced by these systems, helps us to the roots of their faith that Christians will find the path to unity in diversity.'

### Affirming our unique potentials as youth

- Biblical and theological bases: God has called us and was given the authority to be prophets to the people (see Jeremiah 1:4–10). The gospels tell of a young Jesus being an epitome of breaking down walls of hostilities, prejudices, discrimination and violence perpetuated by the principalities and powers of his time. In 1 Timothy 4:11–16 youth are exhorted to be in active discipleship and to prepare themselves for duty for others. Somen Das, a Methodist and principal of the Bishops College in Calcutta, India, reminded ecumenical youth that the 'God of the Bible calls all people, young and old, women and men, to share in the ministry of liberation and reconciliation. We are asked to submit and obey God's will. It is for young people to use their God-given gifts of body, mind and spirit to promote and enhance life and living. They must promote actively a life determined by freedom, love

and justice ... With innovations and imagination, with intelligence and intuition, young people can engage in this kind of [noble] work.' (*Reclaiming the Cross*)

- Historical and sociological bases: Youth form a vibrant and dynamic sector of society. They are the never-drying well-spring of agents for meaningful change. In the most critical times of history, youth are found fighting at the forefront. In the making of a nation, it is the wisdom and courage of youth that prevails over the cautiousness and conservatism of their elders. It was the revolt of the youth that undermined and helped push out decrepit colonial systems and gave form to new nations. Thus, a generation that is timid and apathetic would only willingly and unwillingly help feed the regimes of injustice and exploited labour, and be cannon fodder for unjust wars.

### Proposed ways of strengthening multireligious cooperation for shared security in Asia

- Continuing joint reflection and struggle on the issues of globalisation and the war on terror and their apparent impact on human security concerns—this will enable youth to share insights and gain from their specific experiences and resources to find better and effective solutions to the many problems in confronting these issues.
- For Christian youth, communion among the peoples cared for by different Christian confessions is an enormous challenge that has to be tackled. Youth can promote communion among churches in practical ways, considering that they are still relatively free from doctrinal baggage and power issues that hinder ecumenical cooperation, remain open to experimentation and are far more accepting of differences. An example of what could be done is to conduct exchanges or deep immersion programs in strengthening interaction among youth.
- Sharing of commitments and resources is a very good way of bringing people together and proper stewardship of scarce

resources—human, logistical, financial and political.

- Churches and church leaders must be challenged further reinvest and support youth initiatives and programs. WCRP, partners and agencies should support grassroots and touch-based inter-faith projects initiated by youth themselves.
- Formation of a regional interfaith youth forum or coalition that promotes more meaningful dialogue and active advocacy on a wide variety of human security issues, such as human rights, HIV/AIDS, environmental destruction, trafficking (human and drugs), education etc.
- Promote and exercise positive political ethics in peacemaking and peace building that are integral dimensions of our vocation. This is an option that we are free to make or not make—getting involved in concrete projects in view of a culture of justice, putting ourselves in the context and actual conflict situations, opposing wars forced on our people and recognising legitimate and just people's struggle for justice and genuine peace.
- Persevere in struggling against the value systems of the dominant society i.e. ideology of greed over need, against walls that we ourselves have set up. i.e. dividing walls of hostility (Ephesians 2) such as laws, commandments and ordinances detrimental to the people's wellbeing, and against our very own apathy, passivity and negligence.

### Conclusion

Overcoming violence is no easy task and the journey towards reclaiming religious tolerance and harmony can only be attained if we can collectively confront root causes—more often economic and political in nature than doctrinal. The prophet Isaiah said, 'If we will both work together for justice, there will be peace and security in the land.'

—Lesley G. Capus

(Lesley Capus is the Youth Desk Coordinator, National Council of Churches in the Philippines, and a former program area committee member on Faith, Mission and Unity of CCA.)

# National Christian Council of Nepal

**T**hough the modern-day church in Nepal is more than five decades old, the Nepali church is still a very much foreign thing to the Nepali people and Jesus Christ is still a foreign god to them, or at the most one of the incarnations of Vishnu, one of the godheads of the Hindu trinity. The church has not been able to fully strike its roots deep into the Nepali soil, into the culture of its people and their way of life, which alienates Christians from the society. Christians form a very small minority and are considered as second-class citizens of this country. Christians are also charged with having no concern and interest in the issues and problems that our society and the nation are facing and concerned only with converting people to Christianity. For these reasons, coupled with the discriminatory provision in the constitution and the existing laws that prohibit religious conversion, the Christian community in Nepal is still not officially recognised and has therefore no formal participation in matters of social and national importance.

One main reason for Christians being treated as second-class citizens of this country and for being charged with various wrongs is because the church in Nepal has not made any efforts to contextualise the gospel, ie to integrate and live the Christian message in the historical, social, cultural and religious context of Nepal. Also, the church could not make any visible and noticeable contribution in any sector of the Nepali society.

The church in Nepal has failed terribly to produce qualified, competent and able Christian leaders to provide expert and effective leadership both in church and society. This has been primarily because of too much emphasis on evangelism and 'full time ministry' in the church and parachurch or-

ganisations. Because of this, many Christian organisations are having great difficulty in finding qualified and competent people to serve as managers and senior staff.

One big problem has been the absence of a national level common body to represent the Christian community to the outside society. If the government of Nepal or other religious communities in Nepal want to have dialogue with the church or want the participation of the Christian community on some social or national issues, there is no definite point of reference to contact. This is equally true in case of other national or international level institutions/organisations who would like to enter into meaningful partnership or dialogue with the Christian community in Nepal. This has greatly hampered the promotion of interfaith cooperation and harmony between the Christian community and other religious communities in Nepal.

It was because of all these needs that the National Council of Churches of Nepal (NCCN) was established in 1999 under the initiative and leadership of Dr K.B. Rokaya and the support of a number of independent churches and their leaders.

## Objectives of NCCN

- To be the national level representative body for the Christian community in Nepal by fostering unity among Christians and encouraging them to fulfil their responsibilities and obligations as members of the community and as citizens of the nation by coming into the national mainstream.
- To study and carry out research on the issue of contextualisation of the gospel in order to help Christians in Nepal to be true Christians and at the same time true Nepalis.



Dr Rokaya addressing a NCCP training program

- To create an environment in which Christians and people of other religious communities can respect each other and work together in areas of common concern and interest.
- To encourage and help development of professionalism among Christian young men and women.
- To encourage the church to be actively involved in issues related to human rights, social justice, peace and reconciliation.

NCCN became more active from the beginning 2003 when Dr K.B. Rokaya assumed the responsibility as its general secretary and Purushotam Lal Nepali Manandhar became the president. A gathering of church leaders was organised in Kathmandu on 7 January 2003 to share about the formation of NCCN and its future vision and activities.

Since the middle of 2003, NCCN has been implementing activities in the areas of leadership capacity building, peace and reconciliation, interfaith cooperation and HIV/AIDS as one of the partners in the South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Program (SAEPP). SAEPP is a joint program of WCC, CCA, the NCCs of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal and more than a dozen ecumenical partners from the North. NCCN has become the pioneer Christian organisation in Nepal to develop networking among churches in the South Asia region breaking the present culture of churches and Christian organisations in Nepal to develop partnership only with churches and organisations in the West and Far East. The activities carried out by NCCN are described in detail in the following sections.

In May 2004 NCCN was formally registered with the government of Nepal under the name Nepal Rastriya Mandali Parisad, which is the Nepali version of the National Council of Churches of Nepal. As an ecumenical organisation, NCCN aims to work in partnership and collaboration with all global ecumenical bodies.

In March 2005, NCCN was invited to attend the 12th General Assembly of CCA, held in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The assembly formally offered membership of CCA to NCCN. Now NCCN has reached to the networking of Asian churches and aims to establish the

relationship with all global ecumenical organisations and peace and justice loving organisations in the world.

### Major activities

Bearing in mind the lack of active and energetic Christian leaders with knowledge of the ecumenical movement, the role of Christians in society, globalisation and its impacts on daily life and society, poverty and its causes, violence and the causes of violence, peace and justice, human rights and the role of Christians etc., NCCN decided to focus on the capacity building of Christian leaders (pastors, youth leaders, women leaders).

Though NCCN started this work actively from the beginning of 2003, it had already organised a youth leaders' empowerment program in Kathmandu by the beginning of 2002, inviting 45 youth leaders from 18 churches of the Kathmandu valley, which was the first formal program in the history of National Council of Churches of Nepal. Indirectly it had already become successful in offering much effort in the contextualisation of the gospel, conflict resolution, peace and justice, human rights and the role of the Christian.

With our full commitment and strong devotion we have become successful in accomplishing the following programs and activities, even with limited staff and financial resources.

### Capacity building training for pastors and church leaders

NCCN successfully organised the first capacity building training program in Godavary Village Resort, Kathmandu, during 24–28 March 2003. Sixty-two church leaders, including seven women, from 27 churches of different parts of Nepal participated in this program in Christ.

### Ecumenical capacity building training program

Respecting the request of Christian leaders in eastern part of Nepal and analysing the need of time, we also organised a similar type of capacity building training program in Dharan in collaboration with Dharan Christian Society from 21–24 October 2003.

In this program 54 church leaders participated from 9 different districts of the eastern part of Nepal, where eminent resource persons D.K.B. Rokaya, Dr Ipe Joseph, Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, the general secretary of NCC Sri Lanka, Rev. Vinod Victor, coordinator of SAEPP, offered their expertise to train the participants on globalisation and its impacts, ecumenism and its necessity in our society, peace and justice, poverty and its causes, women empowerment, HIV/AIDS, inter-religious cooperation, gospel and culture, the role of Christians in nation building etc.

All the participants participated actively in all the sessions and group discussions. There was lively discussion. It could be easily seen that all the participants were enjoying the program. They expressed their commitment to share the matters that they learnt from this program to the people in their churches and organisations.

### Women leaders' capacity building training program

Women occupy about 51 per cent of the total population of Nepal, so they have an important role in all sectors of society. Keeping this in mind, we organised this training program in Kathmandu jointly with Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) during 26–28 October 2003 when 45 women leaders from different churches participated.

It is said that if we empower one man we empower a single man but if we empower one woman we empower the whole family. It is not just a saying but is reality. We organised this program with the aim of empowering women so that they could work to bring change within and outside the church. women's eyes.

### Youth leader's capacity building training program

Youth are the most active and energetic power in society. It is said that youth are the power that can bring revolution in society. But it is unfortunate that in the Christian community the youth are less aware about social realities, social issues and the role of youth for the betterment of society. It is time to make the Christian youth leaders aware of the burning issues of our society, equip them

with biblical insight and to bring out their hidden potential for tackling our problems. So we organised the capacity building training program, inviting 42 potential Christian youth leaders from 17 churches in eight districts of Nepal from 27 to 30 December 2003.

### **Program on role of religious community in peace building process**

It is the responsibility of every citizen to do their best for the betterment of the society where they are living. We Christians are the followers of Christ along with the citizens of our country. We cannot be apart from the events that occur in our country. It is not good for us to expect only from others. In the past Christians have played vital role in social change. At present, our country is passing through the conflict between Maoists and the government. It has already claimed the lives of more than 8,000 people in eight years. Being the disciples of Christ we have a great role to play in this situation for conflict resolution and building peace.

In Mathew 5:9 Jesus clearly said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' We organised a seminar

on 'Role of Religious Community in Peace Building Process', in collaboration with the Dharan Christian Society on 24 October 2003, inviting national level religious leaders, Ananda Acharya of the World Hindu Federation, Dr K.B Rokaya from the Christian community, Mr. Bal Bahadur Rai of Kirat, Mr Khadga Bahadur Moktan from the Buddhist community and Mr Khalid Husein Hak from the Muslim community, who expressed their views on the present situation of conflict based on the insight of their respective faith. Including reporters and observers from outside the country more than 200 people were present in this program.

### **Interreligious workshop on national development issues**

NCCN sponsored a one-day interaction program on national development issues organised by Remote Area Development Nepal in March 2004 where development experts from different religions presented their views on the drawbacks of our development practices and pointed out the areas and issues to be addressed for the real development of the nation.

Briefing the development strategies that we practised and throwing light upon the

present development status of our society, Dr K.B. Rokaya, a development expert, said, 'Our problems are structural. Our social, religious, economic and political structures, which keep the poor always poor, are the main problems. In all our development efforts in the past, we have been treating the symptoms and not the real disease; we have been plucking the leaves but not cutting the root itself.'

### **Ecumenical capacity building**

People are eager and interested to know about the ecumenical movement and join hands with the NCCN's campaign of building the ecumenical capacity of Christian leaders and workers. Many requests have come to organise an ecumenical capacity building training program in different parts of the country.

Respecting the request from the eastern part of Nepal and analysing it as the will of God we organised a four-day ecumenical capacity building training program in Dharan, a beautiful place in the eastern part of Nepal, from 28 to 31 March 2004, when 282 church leaders and workers from 78 churches from 25 districts of Nepal and also from some parts of India participated.



Capacity building training, Dharan

### **Women leaders capacity building training and follow-up program**

Keeping in mind the need of empowering more women leaders for the ecumenical movement and assisting women leaders who are already involved and to reaffirm their commitment towards the ecumenical journey, we organised a one-day capacity building and follow-up program in collaboration with YWCA Nepal on 2 April 2004.

### **Workshop on interreligious cooperation and communal harmony in pluralistic South Asia**

NCC Nepal hosted the South Asian consultation on interreligious cooperation and communal harmony in the pluralistic South Asia, held in Kathmandu from 15 to 19 October 2004.

Leaders from the Hindu, Buddhist, Islam and Christian faiths in the South Asian region participated in the consultation.

### **People's conference**

With the broad objective of bringing out the people's views regarding the present conflict and the overall situation of the country and to suggest the possible way out of the present conflict from the people's side, a two-day people's conference was organised in Kathmandu on the initiative of COCAP, NESAP, and with the involvement of many other professional organisations, NGOs, religious organisations, professional organisations, student organisations, women's organisations and Dalit organisations. CEPJAR coordinated the involvement of the Christian community and NCCN supported CEPJAR to coordinate the conference as one of the organisers.

Twenty-four workshops regarding different issues such as conflict resolution, human rights, women's rights, Dalits and issues of oppressed classes, religion and religious freedom were held separately.

### **Christian leaders' gathering to discuss on the present crisis of the country**

NCCN supported CEPJAR to organise a consultation of Christian leaders to develop

Christian views regarding the present crisis that the country has been facing.

About sixty key Christian leaders were present in the discussion. The meeting discussed on the present crisis that the country is facing, past dialogues between government and the Maoists, demands put forth by the Maoists, the situation of religious freedom in Nepal, the degrading human rights situation and the interest and concern expressed by international human rights organisations and the United Nations for a peaceful resolution of the present conflict in Nepal. After a one-day discussion, the Christian community of Nepal developed its views for a resolution of the present crisis and made its views public by organising a press meet.

### **Participation in peace rally**

In the initiative of civic solidarity for peace and with the involvement of more than 300 organisations, a huge peace rally was organised in Kathmandu.

CEPJAR coordinated the participation of Christian community in the rally. We supported CEPJAR to organise the participation of Christians in the rally. The slogans chanted in the rally were 'Set the agendas of dialogue! Initiate the peace talk!' and 'Long live civic solidarity for peace'. We participated in the rally with the peace verse from Bible and our own banner in the name of Christian Effort for peace, justice and reconciliation.

There was significant involvement of Christians in the rally. As reported by the media the total participation in the rally was more than 200,000. Out of 300 organisations participating the media gave emphasis to the involvement of CEPJAR.

### **Interreligious consultation on peace, justice and religious unity**

NCCN supported CEPJAR to organise a get-together of religious leaders on the occasion of the arrival of four-member team of a London-based human rights organisation, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). In this get-together about 20 leaders representing different religious organisations and communities were present. The meeting focused on how the religious communities of Nepal

can play an effective role on the peace building process.

Welcoming all the participants of the meeting, Dr K.B. Rokaya emphasised the unity among the religious communities and networking with the national and international human rights and religious organisations working for peace and justice. Bhikshu Ananda, executive member of All Nepal Bhikshu Association, requested Mr Martin Dore, the program officer for Nepal of CSW to convince the British government not to supply weapons to the Nepalese government.

Martin Dore urged the religious leaders in Nepal to unite and come up with a single voice to resolve the present conflict. He promised to be in regular contact with the religious organisations working for peace and make all efforts from his side to promote the peace process in Nepal.

In this meeting, Mr Chirendra Satyal, in charge of Catholic media, praised the activities of CEPJAR and said that the Catholic community was willing to support the some of the programs of CEPJAR.

### **Interreligious consultation on conflict resolution**

NCCN organised a one-day consultation program to discuss a possible way out of the crisis faced by the country, inviting high-ranking and influential political leaders, development experts, leaders of civil society, the secretary of the Civic Peace Commission, religious leaders, lawyers and experts of different sectors. Different leaders and experts expressed their views regarding conflict management. All leaders and experts were agreed that the country could hold the crisis no longer and it had to be managed peacefully through dialogue. The meeting decided to suggest a possible resolution and agreed to continue its efforts for peace. Mr Uttam Kumar Pariyar, vice president of NCCN and a member of Royal Council, also participated and had played an important role to organise the consultation.

### **Meeting with church leaders**

Banepa Christian Unity society, which is an association of about two dozen churches

in Banepa (a city situated east of the capital Kathmandu) and the surrounding area invited NCCN to speak at their meeting on 17 March 2005. More than 18 church leaders were present. The leader of the society briefed about the society and its activities. Dr. K.B. Rokaya shared about the situation of the churches in Nepal, the historical background of NCCN and the achievements so far, including its activities and programs. He shared the efforts being made by NCCN through CEPJAR for peace and reconciliation. He also shared his vision for the churches in Nepal and the challenges and opportunities for the Christians in Nepal. Hon. Uttam Kumar Pariyar shared his personal testimony and the significance of the work being done by NCCN. Mr R.C. Acharya also shared his experience in working with CEPJAR and the significant achievements made so far in making the church visible in the Nepalese society.

The possibility of jointly organising a capacity building training program for church leaders from Banepa, Dhulikhel, Dolakha and other surrounding areas was discussed and the church leaders present welcomed the idea and expressed their willingness to organise the program in near future.

### Future plans and activities

Though we still lack financial resources and are in the process of institutional development, we have planned the following programs and activities:

#### HIV/AIDS

The church workers and ordinary Christians in Nepal are not aware of HIV/AIDS and the church is not actively involved in any way to do anything about it. This puts the Christians at great risk, as HIV/AIDS is spreading rapidly in Nepal, according to the recent South Asian meeting on HIV/AIDS held in Kathmandu.

Activities:

- Church workers' workshop.
- Training for Christian youths.
- Poster production and distribution.

#### Capacity building

The ecumenical movement in Nepal is almost non-existent. NCC Nepal is the only ecumenical body. To bring the church in Nepal in the

world ecumenical movement, NCCN will have to make special efforts.

Activities:

- Ecumenical capacity building.
- Training for church workers.
- Ecumenical capacity building training for women.
- Ecumenical capacity building training for youth.
- Church leaders consultation on role of the church in national development.

#### Peace and reconciliation

Nepal faces civil conflicts. There has been a Maoist insurgency for the past seven years, which has claimed the life of more than 8,000 people and caused heavy loss and damage of property. The economy of the country is experiencing negative growth with all sectors of the economy badly affected. There is urgent need for all sections of society to act responsibly and creatively to bring this war to an end.

Activities:

- National level workshops on the constitution and religious freedom in Nepal.
- National level seminars on conflict, peace and justice.
- Advocacy campaigns to encourage Christians to take active part in civil society movements.
- Peace rallies.
- Training for church workers on human rights, peace and justice.

#### Interfaith cooperation

Nepal is a multiethnic, multireligious and multilingual nation. It is also the only Hindu kingdom, where Hinduism is the official religion enjoying special protection and privileges in the 1990 constitution of Nepal. In many parts of the world there have been tensions and conflicts among religious communities. Nepal cannot be an exception from the potential danger of conflicts, tensions and misunderstanding among religions, thereby threatening peace and hampering development. Analysing this reality, NCCN has already established relations with some Hindu and Buddhist organisations who are aiming to work for interreligious harmony and cooperation.

Activities:

- National seminars on interfaith cooperation with mixed participants from major religions.
- Training for church workers on interfaith cooperation/gospel and culture.
- Study on the growth of the church in Nepal and the impact on society.
- Interfaith prayer programs.

#### National development, polity and role of church

Nepal is a country rich in natural resources. Natural beauty is God's gift. People are honest and hardworking. So what has made this country fall behind in every sector of development? Huge loans and development aids from donor agencies has been poured in this land in the name of the poor to provide safe drinking water, quality education and good health services. More than 30,000 NGOs and 100 INGOs have been working for uplifting the marginalised and deprived people. Different kinds of governments came to power and practiced their ideologies and developmental strategies. With the objective of poverty alleviation many plans were made and carried out. We are now implementing the tenth five-year development plan.

Despite all these development activities, education, health services, safe drinking water, access to justice, human rights, peace and even the basic needs of human beings are beyond the reach of majority of the people. This scenario of development practices has urged us to re-think the development strategies and our socio-politico-economic structures. We can't escape from our responsibility just by turning a blind eye to these problems or by blaming others for all these bad things. We read in Acts 17:6 that Christians are the people who can turn the world upside down. Now we don't have time to waste. It is the time to do our best to seek real development where all people have access to the fruit of development so that all can enjoy it.

Activities:

- Workshops on national development and structural issues.
- Training for church leaders and workers on national political issues.

## Council feature

- Discussion programs on development practices in Nepal.
- Consultation programs on role of the church in national development.

### Achievements of NCCN

- More than 700 church leaders throughout the country have participated under capacity building programs.
- NCCN has played an important role in peace building by actively supporting the Christian Efforts for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation (CEPJAR).
- NCCN has mobilised the various religious communities and played a key role in the formation of the Interreligious Peace Committee, which is playing a vital role in

peace building.

- NCCN has pioneered and promoted the ecumenical movement in Nepal and has been acting as the link between the Nepali Christian community and the outside society.
- NCCN has brought the churches in Nepal into contact with the churches in South Asia and as well as the whole of Asia through its involvement in SAEPP, CCA and the WCC.
- An office has been established and key staff recruited and trained.
- NCCN has played significant role in:
  - bringing Christians and churches together for fellowship and discussion on common social, ethical and national issues, including the ongoing conflict, which is

affecting every aspect of the life of the people,

- bringing the leaders, scholars and people of various religious faiths together to foster good-will, understanding, acceptance of each other's existence, respect for one another's faith and belief, harmony, and cooperation on issues of common concern and interest,
- networking with human rights organisations, institutions and the wider civil society to contribute to peace-building process,
- networking and working together with Christians and churches globally to improve the human rights situation in the country and to achieve increased religious freedom.

## Newsbriefs

## Obituaries

### David Lange

David Lange, former prime minister of Aotearoa New Zealand, died in Auckland Saturday, 13 August. His death at the age of 63 was the result of a rare terminal illness, amyloidosis, which struck him three years ago. Lange received international fame when he led his country to become the first, and still the only, country in the world to have a nuclear-free policy. This led to a diplomatic breach with the United States military when that country's ships were not permitted entry to New Zealand ports. Lange's famous defence of his policy in an Oxford Union debate with tele-evangelist Jerry Falwell was broadcast throughout the world. One regrettable result of New Zealand's stand came when the French secret service sent an undercover team to New Zealand to bomb the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland's harbour. This act of terrorism was soon solved and the agents arrested, but France used blackmail to secure their release and

refused to apologise. Lange's strong moral stand on issues of peace and justice was a result of his Methodist upbringing and his admiration for English Methodist preachers, notably Donald Soper, combined with the influence of Mahatma Gandhi on his life. He was a close friend of both Soper and Rajiv Gandhi. A strong supporter of ecumenism, he was, at the time of his death, a member of a Union parish (Presbyterian, Methodist, Disciples of Christ) in Onehunga, Auckland. Shortly before his death he advised the prime minister that he did not want a state funeral, choosing instead a simple family service with close friends at his own church. The service was taken by long-time friend, Rev. Ron O'Grady, a former associate general secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia.

### Lydia Niguidula

Rev. Lydia Niguidula, Christian educator, writer, enabler, feminist theologian and pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, passed away on 2 July. She was the first Filipino to compile and publish a book on Christian worship in the Philippines. Rev. Niguidula facilitated Christian nurture, de-

velopment education and liturgical renewal programs of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, CCA, WCC, the Church of Sweden Mission and the United Evangelical Mission. She had close association with the Association of Women in Theology and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. Niguidula organised and facilitated the worship and liturgy during the 9th general assembly held in Manila in 1990.

### Mangenang Eka Darmaputera

Rev. Dr Mangenang Eka Darmaputera, Indonesian church leader and theologian, died of cancer in Jakarta on 29 June. He was a pastor of the Gereja Kristen Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church). Tony Waworuntu, an Indonesian executive staff member of CCA termed him as a person who was committed to nationalism and ecumenism within the country's Pancasila. He worked for building unity, peace, harmony and tolerance in the Indonesian society. Eka was a program committee member of CCA in the 1980s. He also served as an executive board member of

the Communion of Churches in Indonesia. In 1999, he received the Abraham Kuyper award from Princeton Theological Seminary in the USA for his contributions to theology and public life.

## Rita England

Ms Rita England, teacher, scholar and librarian, passed away on 13 June in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. She was 73. Rita, who began her career as a teacher, made important contributions to theological librarianship in Asia and to the study of Asian Christian theologies. She was the wife of Rev. John England, an executive staff member of the East Asia Christian Conference in the late 1960s and 1970s. She also worked for the EACC before returning to teaching in 1975. Rita and John were on the overseas staff of the Presbyterian and Methodist Joint Board Mission in Hong Kong. During her Hong Kong days, Rita worked as a librarian at the Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre. From 1983 to 1994, she served as the librarian of the Program for Theology and Cultures in Asia.

A celebration of life and pilgrimage in her memory was held on 17 June. The following prayer was included in the celebration. 'Eternal Spirit of hope, of all distant landings and near pathways, of far havens and journeys home, grant us courage in our departures, trust in our travelling, and expectancy in our arrivals; with him whose life-with-others calls us on. May this be so.'

## Bonar Matondang

Rev. Bonar Matondang, Ephorus (Bishop) of Indonesia's Christian Protestant Angkola Church (GKPA), died in a car accident when he was returning home from a meeting in Mandalasena in Indonesia. The car, with four pastors and two staff of GKPA on board, fell off a cliff into a deep valley. The ephorus died, while the others sustained serious injuries. Bishop Bonar was a delegate at the 12th general assembly of the CCA held in Chiang Mai.

## People



## New consultant

Shirley Susan Mark Prabhu has been appointed consultant of the CCA-UN/ESCAP Training for Trainers Program from April 2005 for a period of two years. She will be based in her home town of Bangalore in India. Before taking up this position, Shirley worked in the Hong Kong-based Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism. From 1994 to 2002, she worked in different capacities in Equitable Tourism Options in Bangalore. A graduate and postgraduate in environmental sciences, Shirley's area of interests includes gender issues, children, HIV/AIDS, environmental issues and tourism and development.

## Ecumenical partner

Ad Mook, head of the Department of the Global Ministries of the Uniting Churches in the Netherlands will relinquish his post on 1 October. He will move on to manage a program that focuses on creating facilities for more ownership of the work of Kerkinactie by its constituency, consisting of more than 2500 local congregations. Kerkinactie is the program for missionary and diaconal work of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and ten other ecumenical churches and organisations in the Netherlands. Mook,

well known to many in ecumenical circles in Asia, worked for more than 26 years with numerous partners in many Asian and Pacific countries.

## New office bearers

The tenth triennial assembly of the Manila-based Iglesia Filipina Independiente, held on 8–11 May, has elected Rev. Godofredo J. David as the Obispo Maximo. Rev. Ephraim S. Fajutagana has been elected the general secretary, and Saturnino C. Garvida and Reynaldo Evangelista are the general treasurer and the general auditor respectively.

## AELC

Dr V.E. Christopher has been elected the new president of the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) at its 42nd biennial convention in India. The AELC, the largest Lutheran church, also elected Rev. B.D. Ravindra Babu and M. Raja Kishore as its vice-president and secretary respectively at the convention held in May.

## South Korean church leaders visit Pyongyang

Rev. Kim Dong-Won, moderator, and Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo, general secretary, and five other officers of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) made a solidarity visit to Pyongyang, North Korea on 15–19 July. They held several meetings with the leaders of the Korean Christian Federation (KCF) and jointly articulated the role of the KCF and the PROK for the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. The two churches agreed to explore the possibility of initiating a new joint project, such as a day-care centre in North Korea. They also agreed to consolidate their efforts to relieve the sufferings on the North Korean people who are facing a serious food crisis.

# Ecumenical horticulture



M.J. Joseph

This is my prayer to thee, O Lord, our Father in heaven:  
You are  
The creator of the universe  
The author of flora and fauna  
In your grace, grant me vision to design a garden for you in Asia  
In your wisdom, teach me to plant all kinds of trees there.  
In your garden may all the creation live in harmony.  
May you be the owner of the garden  
May I work with you as a co-worker  
To make the garden beautiful and fruitful.

Let me shout with joy:  
See my garden where the vision of Isaiah is realised.  
'The cow and the bear graze' on the lawn  
The branches of the trees shoot beyond the boundaries of my  
neighbour's walls  
They beckon the birds to nest on them.

May the gardeners speak one language  
May they be busy in sowing, weeding, watering and manuring  
May they sow indigenous seeds!  
May they dine and dance on the lap of the Mother Earth  
May they regard each other as children of the Mother Earth  
May they sing hymns of praise day in and day out:  
Loka samastha sukino bhavantu (Let the whole world be happy and  
prosperous)  
May they hold the banner of  
Satyameva jayate (Let truth alone triumph).

Lord, in a sinful world  
You don't matter  
Money matters!  
Profit matters!  
'How much?' is the call of the call centres!  
There is no cooperation  
There is only competition  
There is exploitation and manipulation,  
There is violence  
There is no search for the alternatives.

All are taught to say, Tina, Tina, Tina!  
I want Lord, that all the 'CCA labourers' in your garden to live with one  
goal  
They have to act like agents of change and channels of grace in the  
plural Asia  
They are to produce attributes of you—love, mercy,  
grace, forgiveness, kindness and goodness  
In times of testing they should act like bamboo roots  
They are to shame the wind that tries to bend the trees!

In my garden,  
May the trees and plants commune with each other  
May all of them know that they are naked  
May they teach us one message:  
'Nakedness of the heart is godly'  
'Conversion of the *ecclesia* is the need of the hour.'

The Divine Voice from above enquired:  
'Where do you want to plant your garden?'  
Lord, I want to plant my garden all over Asia  
The soil where rice is grown in abundance  
Where fish adds taste to the food  
Where the people search for new foundations  
New paths to affirm human rights  
New dimensions and new meaning.  
In the midst of 'high and low cultures'.

Lord, I am unskilled  
Teach me the art of gardening?  
To make the soil more fertile  
To harvest the crops in plenty.

Lord, give me new implements and new seeds  
The old seeds have lost their power of germination  
They give only thirty fold.  
I want to invite all—tribals, dalits,  
Fisherfolks and the adivasis to work in my garden  
I want to respect their rights to live with dignity;  
For the Mother Earth belongs to them!

I want the humans to respect the rights of all living beings  
I want the humans to think of environmental rights  
I want them to allow the rivers to flow as they wish

I want the streams to move with laughter  
I want all creation to say with one voice:  
Your kingdom has come in Asia!  
Oh, there is fullness of life for all!!

I want to make a path through my garden in Asia  
Let it be a highway which you have envisioned for Egypt and Assyria  
Let the path through the Asian garden pass through Pakistan and India,  
North Korea and South Korea, China and Japan  
And all the tsunami-hit countries of south and southeast Asia.

Let them say with one voice:  
We are Asians  
Ours is the land of plurality  
We believe in solidarity and fraternity.

The Divine Voice said:  
The gospel is your aroma  
The people of God in Asia are the poems of God!  
You are called to build oikoumene gardens  
Gardens without walls.  
There shall be only fence in your garden  
For the wall separates; the fence unites.  
Remember,  
You may plant and water  
But it is I who give growth.

This poem is based on Ahn Jae Woong's concept of 'Ecumenical  
Horticulture' for the Asian churches outlined in his report to the 12th  
General Assembly of CCA at Chiang Mai in March–April 2005.  
M.J. Joseph is the director of the Ecumenical Christian Centre,  
Bangalore, India