



Christian Conference of Asia

# *cca*news



## Hope for humanity

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# Hope in a turbulent world



Welcome to the last issue of *CCA News* for 2008.

This issue comes to you during the Christmas season. Christmas is a time of renewal, a time of change and growth. Christmas tells us that Jesus, the Saviour Lord, is still coming. He comes in the life of the church, and he is the final hope for humanity.

Together with the heavenly angels let us sing together:

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours." (Luke 2:14)*

Looking back, 2008 has been a most turbulent year for humanity as the aftermath of the terror attacks in the USA, followed by the oil price surge in the middle of the year, the so-called "hamburger" financial meltdown, economic and political crises, increasing human rights violations, human trafficking and disappearances.

Economic globalization profoundly impacts local communities, cultures and ways of life. While increased private investment and trade may grow markets, our global partners witness the challenges globalization often poses in their communities—wider economic disparity and exploitation. Communities of faith are called to consider what the church can do to ensure that international trade policies better serve the interests of human rights and security, justice and peace and the dignity and integrity of creation.

Climate change and global warming, as demonstrated by unpredictable rain, drought, devastating floods and other natural calamities, is increasingly becoming a problem of the poor in Asia. The so-called "atmospheric brown clouds" are dramatically reducing sunlight and leading to decreased crop yields in many Asian countries.

These problems work against peaceful solutions and hope for reconciliation and unity.

The theme of this issue, "Hope for Humanity", is, on the one hand, to affirm that the birth of Jesus is God's giving hope to humankind. As Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) On the other hand, it is also a call for the church to be the yeast for changing the world, the new reign of God's kingdom.

In this issue, we continue to offer our readers stories, biblical reflections and events of the churches in Asia. We read of the joy and happiness of those whose plans were fulfilled as well as joining in solidarity with churches and friends who have lost their loved ones. We find stories and the sharing of CCA programs, and biblical and theological reflections.

I would like to thank all the writers who contributed to this issue, the editorial team members, friends in the printing shop and the staff in the office, as well as the postal workers, who make *CCA News* possible in your hand as we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ together. Thanks too to churches and ecumenical organizations and individual friends for their strong backup so that we can carry on programs throughout the year. No matter which scenario eventually becomes reality now and in the future, CCA continues to serve God and to follow the path of the cross, to visualize hope for the people in Asia.

We continue with pleasure to receive comments and suggestions from our readers, member churches and councils and ecumenical friends and continue to design our programs to be more responsible to the problems and needs of churches and people in Asia. I realize that you will continue to join us in the ecumenical journey in 2009 and in the years ahead.

On behalf of staff here in the CCA office, I wish you all a blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year. May God's blessings be upon you.

—Prawate Khid-arn

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# Asian Ecumenical Course 2008

Exposure to a wider ecumenical vision

Given the current situation we face,  
We affirm our [wider] ecumenical vision;  
We affirm our role as  
Christian or religious educators,  
ministers or ecumenical workers.  
In view of all these,  
here is what we would like to do  
in our own contexts after the AEC ...

**Being ecumenical means seeing God's household as inclusive of all that God created**

**T**his was the framework of the two-week intensive ecumenical formation program of the Christian Conference of Asia, held at Pondok Remaja Hotel in Salatiga, Indonesia, on 6–18 October 2008. The theme of the Asian Ecumenical Course 2008 was “Challenges and Opportunities for Ecumenical Formation in Christian/Religious Education”.

In this mobile ecumenical formation program, Asia is the “classroom”, which changes year after year depending on where the AEC is hosted. In

the analysis of social realities however, Indonesian realities served as a mirror to the participants’ respective realities and to Asian and global realities.

There is so much brokenness in society and at all levels of life. There is so much distortion of the image of God in people and of the will of God for the world and for all people. A clear indication is the existence of domination systems—with people of certain race, class or caste, sex, ethnicity, religion or ideology dominating over and subjugating others, including over creation.

In view of such a situation, the participants were exposed to a wider ecumenical vision: that of embracing the *oikoumene*—the whole inhabited earth—as God’s household. Being ecumenical means embracing the whole world that God created, loved and entrusted to us—with its many challenges, problems and pain.

Ecumenical vision includes Christian unity, but also the wider unity of humankind regardless of differences in culture, religion or ideology and even the much wider unity that is the intercon-

AEC participants lifting together the candle of ecumenical vision at the closing act





nectedness of humankind and creation. After all, being ecumenical means seeing God's household as inclusive of all that God created.

Recognizing the need to transform the challenges and problems we face into opportunities for ecumenical formation (which echoes the theme of AEC 2008), the group was exposed to a number of educational theories and frameworks that have helped the resource persons in their work of Christian or religious education and/or ecumenical formation.

The group learned that work for transformative education can be enriched by perspectives in wider ecumenism, multiculturalism, pluralism, liberation praxis, gender justice, ecological justice, conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

At the end of the course, participants shared their action plans on how they intended to take back their learning and experiences. These action plans included personal and professional commitments to wider ecumenism, gender justice, ecological justice, transformative education and peace education starting at home and into the church, community and workplaces.

Twenty-three participants from eleven countries in Asia—including a Catholic youth worker from Australia and two evangelical Baptist seminary teachers from Indonesia—completed the course. Other participants came from Hong Kong/China, India, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Now lodged with the Faith, Mission and Unity program area, AEC 2008 was conducted by Hope S. Antone (joint executive staff of CCA-FMU), together with Daniel Nuhamara, dean of theology faculty of Satya Wacana Christian University in Salatiga who also served as dean of AEC 2008.

Other resource persons were Tabita Kartika Christiani, Christian Education professor of Duta Wacana Christian University in Yogyakarta, and Limatula Longkumer, Christian Education professor and vice principal at Jorhat Theological College in Northeast India.

Rev. Liesje Makisanti, executive member of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia and General Secretary of the Protestant Church in Indonesia, shared some realities faced by the ecumenical movement in Indonesia.

Immersion in Indonesian realities included a visit to the Borobudur temple, worshipping with a local church in Salatiga and visiting the Muslim Pesantren (boarding school) and joining them in their celebration of Halal bi Halal.

—Hope S. Antone

## What participants say of AEC

- "The whole activity exceeded my expectations. All topics are relevant and useful but what really impacted me are gender justice and Asian feminist theology, ecology."
- "Participating in the AEC has enlarged my thinking as an Asian ... I can never forget the fact that education can be a source of violence."
- "I want to take back the broadening of ecumenical understanding and its relation to specific concerns."
- "The group discussions were very effective in drawing out ideas, insights and experiences from people who come from different contexts."
- "Immersion was very good opportunity to learn outside the four walls and through personal experiences."



Participants visiting a Muslim boarding school in Salatiga



Small-group discussion following input presentation

# The plight of migrant workers

A challenge for churches

**Globalization is one of the root causes for exporting labour around the world**

**A**n international ecumenical workshop on the rights of migrant workers was held in Lahore, Pakistan, in November, organized by CCA in collaboration with the National Council of Churches in Pakistan. The participants included policy makers, trainers, activists, clergy and theologians. The objectives of the workshop were to:

- initiate responses to the plight of migrant workers at international, regional and national levels,
- work towards enacting legislation to protect migrant workers against policies that violate their basic rights,
- promote policies that will ensure the safety of workers, especially of domestic workers whose rights are not protected under the charter of the ILO.

The workshop was attended by twenty participants representing Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Pakistan.

Victor Azariah, General Secretary of NCC Pakistan gave an overview of the history of Pakistan and the current economic, political and religious conditions. He shared information on the situation of Christians in the country and how they face discrimination at all levels in society.

Aaron Ceradoy, program coordinator of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), based in Hong Kong, talked about the situation of migrants in the region. He gave insights as to how globalization has contributed to the crisis in several countries in Asia and is one of the root causes for exporting labour around the world. It has forced people to leave their families behind to look for work, even in dehumanizing contexts. He also stressed that for many sending countries this is the main economic lifeline that keeps these governments afloat amidst sagging economies. The international economic crisis could have a grave impact on migrant workers. It will make sending countries follow a more aggressive stance to export their human labour and promote a dehumanizing policy



of commodification of migrant labour. In receiving countries migrant labour face low wages, lack of job security, overcharging by recruitment agencies and debt bondage, trafficking, especially of women, and lack of services and protection by sending governments. Advocacy groups are attempting to address the plight of migrant workers—of note is the establishment of the International Migrants Alliance or IMA. The participants discussed what churches and church-backed organizations can do to alleviate the plight of migrant workers.

There were presentations about the plight of migrant workers from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia and the Philippines, and a Korean participant spoke of the situation of undocumented migrant workers in that country and outlined the campaign churches in Korea are carrying out to stop the unnecessary harassment of workers by the government.

Janjinda Pawadee, Thailand, from the Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program (MEPP), gave input on the condition of migrant workers and refugees who come from Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and the southern part of China. She reported on the actions taken by the government of Thailand to implement registration of the thousands of migrant workers that enter Thailand. These registration procedures pose several difficulties to migrant and undocumented workers who have no financial capacity to pay the expenses, and survive in conditions of fear and insecurity. In Thailand there are human rights violations, including the absence of social services such as health and education, a lack of job opportunities, and discriminatory laws against refugees.

Aaron Ceradoy shared concrete experiences on advocacy work done in various countries and how these actions of advocacy which are in support of the efforts of the grassroots migrants have brought successes in terms of changing policies or scrapping policies that are detrimental to the rights of migrant workers.

He said that at the end of the advocacy actions it is important that grassroots migrant workers are empowered to take actions by themselves.

M.P. Joseph from India, who teaches in Taiwan, gave a presentation on globalization and disposable labour from an Asian perspective, how migration can be viewed historically and how that history is being changed by globalization. He talked about the impacts of globalization in sending countries, especially in rural areas. He discussed the “depeasantization” of people in rural areas that eventually leads them to leave their own countries



Lighting candles of commitment during the closing worship

and become migrants. He also discussed how migrant labour as a social force is being used to destroy organized labour and weaken the power of the labour class. Finally, he posed the challenge to churches and to participants of creating an alternative economic framework that will promote justice by integrating migrant workers to the national unions and creating legal frameworks that will protect migrant workers.

### Conclusions and reflections

One of the key issues that surfaced from the workshop was that Asian ecumenical groups should be more sensitive to the migrant issue and to take seriously in their churches and society the rights of migrant workers in order to create a wider impact and dynamism and to empower those who do advocacy at different levels.

—Freddy de Alwis

# Revitalization

Revitalizing the ecumenical movement is revitalizing theology

**The ecumenical context cannot be divorced from the wider social situation of Asia**

A joint CCA and WCC consultation held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 1–3 September 2008 on “Revitalizing the Ecumenical Movement in Asia” opened up space for revitalizing Christian theologies in changing contexts in Asia.

Asia, with its ancient cultures, heritage, diversity and richness—the cradle of a majority of religions in the world—seems to have lost its soul as modernity rejects the traditional, as old customs give way to the new and as ancient philosophies recede to the background and technological advances take over. The Asian turmoil is manifested by poverty, the market economy, globalization, authoritarian regimes, the hegemony of nations over others, which further gives rise to a continuing violation of human rights, the rise of religious fundamentalism, and other forms of oppression with minorities, including women and children as primary victims, not to mention the environment.

Against this background, the participants particularly paid attention to the importance of inter-religious dialogue, solidarity and cooperation, the widening of human rights concerns, especially for

minorities, women and youth, and those affected by HIV and AIDS and other health issues.

The participants expressed concern at the malaise in the ecumenical movement, requiring serious and urgent attention of new paradigms and models of ecumenical work and engagement.

The consultation reaffirmed that the ecumenical context cannot be divorced from the wider social situation of Asia and gave particular attention to the following areas:

- Recapturing spirituality as central to ecumenical initiatives.
- Taking seriously the issue of religious fundamentalism, both within and in other religions.
- The issue of interreligious dialogue and solidarity and the implications of that for our ecumenical work.
- The continuing work of peace, reconciliation and people's security based on justice and active involvement in people's movements and struggles.
- Encouraging ecumenical activity at the local congregational level.
- Continuing concern for human rights, particularly for minorities, women and youth and those with HIV/AIDS.
- A concern for relevant ecumenical leadership development starting with incumbent church leaders and recognizing and encouraging new and emerging youthful members of the ecumenical movement.
- Greater involvement of Christians in those countries that have not been a part of the Asian ecumenical movement, such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, Mongolia, North Korea, Vietnam and others through diplomatic efforts without compromising existing constituents of these bodies.
- Continuing concern for ecological issues in Asia.
- Reclaiming the prophetic witness, loving service and the vision of the reign of God as essentials of ecumenism.
- A platform for intergenerational conversations.

—Prawate Khid-arn



Bishop Duleep de Chickera speaks to the consultation



# Closer collaboration

## Towards deeper ecumenical relationships in Asia

Intradenominational and bilateral relationships tend to weaken the ecumenical movement in Asia and the role of the regional organizations—this was the view expressed by the general secretary of CCA, Dr Prawate Khidarn, at a joint meeting between CCA and ecumenical organization partners from North America. The strengthening of internal denomination mission means a gradual forgetting of the significance of regional ecumenical organizations' role and functions, he said. "Some ecumenical organizations and related specialized ministries tend to be more bilateral than ecumenical. They are creating their own regional and national offices, sending their own people to work in them, bypassing regional ecumenical organizations."

Rev. Dr James Vijayakumar, from North America, emphasized that the joint meeting provided an opportunity for North American organizations to share with CCA the North American context and to explore ways of closer collaboration in the future.

The meeting, held in Chiang Mai on 9–11 October 2008 was the first APF meeting held outside the USA and Canada. It aimed to strengthen closer ecumenical relationships and cooperation in challenging regional realities.

During the meeting, the continuing Christian and Hindu conflict in India was discussed. Rev. Khamphone Kountapanya, a CCA president, encouraged participants to be active partners for peaceful solutions among people of different faiths.

"I bring forward for your prayer and consideration the religious violence that continues between Christian and

Hindu communities in India. The anti-Christian violence that started in Orissa has now spread to other parts of the country. In the state of Orissa itself, over 50,000 Christians have been displaced and are unable to return home for fear of more acts of violence.

"Peace is the central concern of people around the world at this moment of ethical crisis. It has influenced the way people understand themselves as well as one another in their roles as living 'instruments' of God. As members of the body of Christ, we are called to stand up and promote the reunification and reconciliation process between all the parties concerned."

The meeting's recommendations included a call for the APF become a platform for churches and other ecumenical partners in North America to know more about CCA and the ecumenical movement in Asia. Concrete follow-up activities, including a CCA delegation to attend APF meetings and issue-based cooperation, e.g. human rights, climate change, interreligious dialogue, health concerns and poverty alleviation, were recommended.

—Prawate Khid-arn

APF participants in front of CCA office in Chiang Mai



# Ecumenical vision

## Church and seminary consultations

### Ecumenism is the spirit and ethos of Christianity

**T**he Faith, Mission and Unity program area of CCA recently organized two sub-regional consultations on “Churches and Seminaries: Appraising Our Ecumenical Vision for Today’s World”. The South Asian consultation was held at the Schrachi Centre of the Senate of Serampore College in Kolkata, India, on 17–21 November while the Southeast Asian consultation was held at the UCCP Shalom Center in Manila, Philippines, on 25–29 November.

The objectives of the two consultations were to:

- bring together heads of CCA member churches or councils and representatives of their church-related theological institutions in order to revisit our common ecumenical vision,
- appraise and assess our understandings and appropriations of our common ecumenical vision, especially in view of the challenges and realities of today’s context,
- come up with action plans to incorporate and mainstream our common ecumenical vision in our life and work as churches and theological education institutions.

### Ecumenism as a vision

“Ecumenism is the spirit and ethos of Christianity, which goes back to the early church of the New

Testament times and beyond. It is the ecumenical spirit which inspired the early Christians to venture into new situations, to break barriers and overcome divisions which emerged within the early church, and to respond to cries of the people.”

Thus said the Rev. Dr Rienzie Perera, CCA associate general secretary for finance and relations, in his keynote address at the South Asian consultation.

Perera described ecumenism as the movement that led the early church to move from known to unknown territories (or issues) and that is the reason why the early Christians were called “the people who turned the world upside down”. “Ecumenism is a movement led by the Holy Spirit which inspires people and communities to pioneer, to take risks and to launch out into the deep and break new ground. It is a call and a reminder to discern God’s presence in the whole of God’s creation and to participate with God for the transformation of the entire creation which is groaning in travail,” Perera stated.

However, Perera pointed out that while the early stages of the ecumenical movement in Asia was associated with people’s struggle for true democracy, power sharing, distribution of wealth and land, today people tend to be in opposition to such causes. One of the reasons for this, he said, is that the ecumenical movement is no longer under the influence of crucified people but by advocates of theology of glory devoid of the cross.

### Turning back to “The Way”

In his keynote address to the Southeast Asian consultation the Rev. Dr Everett Mendoza, theologian of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), reminded the participants of Jesus’ original challenge: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

The cross was Jesus’ way to God’s righteousness but it represents the fate of anyone who follows a way different and contrary to what is defined by the powers that be, Mendoza added. Following “The Way” (Jesus’ way as was known of the early church) meant rejecting emperor worship, but

### The Kolkata consultation



after Christianity became the imperial religion under Constantine, the unprecedented freedom to propagate the gospel later turned into intolerance of other faiths and a licence to persecute non-Christians. Thus, “A point had been reached when the church gained the world but lost her soul,” Mendoza stressed.

Mendoza however credited the church for having expanded its ministries and opened new frontiers of service across the centuries, especially to the poor, marginalized and victims of social inequalities and injustice. But he warned that the sheer accretion of many forms of services may have weighed down the church to the extent that she can only see the ground but not the way ahead. Thus the church may be just plodding but not oriented to the way of Jesus. The church’s passion and energy should be galvanized for the singular task of helping prepare the world for the rebirth of God’s creation, he said.

### Ecumenical visioning as churches and seminaries

Thirty representatives of churches and seminaries from Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India attended the South Asian consultation while twenty-three participants from Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines attended the Southeast Asian consultation.

Participants shared some of their ongoing efforts at intrachurch ecumenism and the lack, if not complete absence, of interreligious ecumenism. But they affirmed that there is a greater need for wider ecumenism—one that is life-centered not only in terms of human life but of all life, i.e. inclusive of God’s whole creation. Following a workshop on ecumenical visioning of churches and

seminaries, the following was shared by the Indonesian delegation:

“Our dream of a country and world in the future (at least in the coming fifty years) that will be conducive to the full development of human beings and creation consists of:

- a civil society where justice rolls and prosperity is enjoyed by all people,
- a country and world where all people feel and enjoy security, equality and decent jobs,
- a better and recovered environment where the natural resources are used for the welfare of the whole people,
- a country and world where human rights are fully respected and upheld,
- a country and world where all people of different faiths, social status etc. can live together in harmony, where pluralism is fully respected and manifested.”

Each country’s delegation shared their respective church and seminary perspectives on ecumenical vision. This sharing showed a general critique of denominationalism which often hampers the work of ecumenical unity and the sense of coldness or aversion to ecumenism resulting from a change in the church’s class character, i.e. from poor to middle or upper middle class.

The action planning session gave each country delegation a time to discuss ways of working together towards the wider ecumenical vision. This included the sharing of theological faculties among different nations in the subregion, more cooperation among the churches, and more ecumenical leadership formation programs at subregional and local levels.

—Hope S. Antone

**The church’s passion and energy should be galvanized for the singular task of helping prepare the world for the rebirth of God’s creation**

**The Manila consultation**



# Promoting women's human rights

## South Asian Women Leaders Capacity Enhancement Training

**One of the important components in this training was encouraging participants to break the culture of silence and share their stories of violence they faced in their daily life**

In October 2007 CCA organized a women's training workshop in Bangkok, "Challenges Struggles and Strategies—Asian Women Building Communities of Peace". The South Asian women leaders who participated in this meeting claimed that there were many similar issues and problems in their subregion that have escalated violence against women by leaps and bounds. The pervasive culture of gender-based violence in South Asia has eroded women's fundamental rights to life, health, security, bodily integrity, political participation, food, work and shelter. It has severely limited their choices in practically all spheres of life, and explains the uniformly poor gender-related development indices in such crucial sectors as health, nutrition, education, political participation and employment. Deep gender biases have also led to over 50 million fewer women in the population. Girls and women in

South Asia die prematurely through neglect and violence. South Asian women leaders—Gloria Kalpana Sirkar from Bangladesh, Deaconess Swabita Swaraj, president of the All India Council for Christian Women, Ayra Inderyas from Pakistan, Draupadi Rokya, general secretary of YWCA Nepal, and others stated that in such a context there is a dire need for churches to engage in prophetic ministry to address such issues in building communities of peace and promoting women's right to life and dignity as a human right.

Although South Asian churches have done their bit to promote and encourage the prophetic voices of women and youth that have been silenced or undermined, it is often too little and insignificant. Thus, church leaders from the South Asian subregion need the opportunity to meet, share their stories, analyze, discuss and strategize together how they can promote the women's

ecumenical movement for peace and reconciliation. Moreover, there is a crucial need for a training of trainers program among South Asian women church leaders in order to equip them with advocacy skills to promote women's human rights. They have proposed that the CCA South Asian Ecumenical Partnership Program (SAEPP), national Christian councils and local churches should engage in such ecumenical endeavour.



**Women participants mapping human rights challenges in their own countries**



## Capacity Enhancement Training

Hence the South Asia Women Leaders Capacity Enhancement Training, organized by Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Formation program area of CCA in partnership with SAEPP and the Church of North India (CNI) held on 17–22 November in CNI Bhavan, New Delhi, India. Thirty-five women leaders from Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh participated. The theme was the same as the forthcoming CCA Assembly theme: “Called to Prophesy, Heal and Reconcile”.

## Workshops

Along with Bible studies, a panel discussion on “Women’s Movement in South Asia” by Dr Azinun Nahar Islam, a professor at Dhaka University, and Indira Manandar, the training revolved around three workshops.

The first workshop was on “Women’s Human Rights” which focused on why women’s rights to life and dignity are human rights and justice issues, what is the nexus between women’s human rights and gender justice, mapping women’s human rights movements in local regions, and identifying advocacy focuses that churches can engage in. This participatory workshop was facilitated by Mercy Kappen.

The second workshop was on “Advocacy Skills to Promote Women’s Human Rights”. The participants learned the dynamics of women movement building and advocacy skills to promote women’s human rights through role plays. The third workshop was on “Revitalizing Women’s Ecumenical Movement in South Asia” and was facilitated by Moumita Biswas.

## Story telling and breaking the silence

One of the important components in this training was encouraging participants to break the culture of silence and share their stories of violence they faced in their daily life. Story telling is an important tool to encourage women to open up and ventilate suppressed truth.

The women participants gathered in small groups and shared their personal stories of violence they faced at home and sexual abuse that they faced in workplaces and even in the church. Through role plays and skits they were able to ventilate how they faced violence. Resource persons helped the participants to be aware of the laws, strategies and advocacy skills to build inclusive communities of peace.

— Moumita Biswas

# Voices

## The Context of Our Prophetic Calling

An ongoing conflict of more than twenty years in Sri Lanka has affected the entire country. The fighting mainly in the north and the east, with regular suicide bombings in the south over the years have cost over 600,000 lives, and created many widows and orphans. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced and made homeless. Many children have been forced to become child soldiers. People have been disabled, some due to landmine injuries. Damage to property has been enormous. It has created a culture of violence and of suicide bombings. These have, over the years, adversely affected the economic development of the country. In such a context we are called to pause, to listen and to hear the cries, to seek the source of the cries and the pain and reflect on the context of our calling.

—Laksmi Kanthi Rupesinghe, general secretary, YWCA, Sri Lanka

## Member churches ownership

This is a historic gathering where women from six South Asian countries could meet in New Delhi, the capital of India, and especially for our five Pakistani sisters. The Church of North India is happy to host and be a partner in this joint ecumenical endeavour.

—Rev. Dr Enos Das Pradhan, general secretary,  
Church of North India

## Need for follow-up trainings

It is important to follow up on such trainings locally for the multiplying affect in local communities. We, South Asian women, need more solidarity and support.

—Gloaria Kalpona Sirkar, women’s desk secretary,  
National Council of Churches in Bangladesh

## Church and government working together

Human trafficking, especially of girl children, is a major problem in South Asia. Churches need to work together with the governments of different countries. We can network together to eradicate such violence.

—Manju Hemrom, member, National Commission for Women,  
Government of India

## Gender justice school

We should have similar workshops for our male South Asian church leaders. Most of the time gender justice is mistaken as an agenda for women only. I am glad that in 2009 CCA will organize the “Asian School for Ecumenical Formation for Gender Justice” for both male and female participants to build communities of peace.”

—Manju Baroi, president, CCA



# Ecumenical women

## Networking for peace

### Strengthening the women's ecumenical movement and together building inclusive communities of peace

One of the main goals of CCA is to enhance ecumenical networking, relationship and cooperation within Christian communities and with other faiths to build communities of peace. Hence, one of the major focuses of CCA's Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Formation program area also is networking with churches, women's ecumenical organizations and faith-based organizations. This is to strengthen the women's ecumenical movement and, together, build inclusive communities of peace.

### Women of Faith Network in Asia

In order to engage in multireligious cooperation and common action for peace among women leaders across diverse religious traditions in Asia CCA EGY played a crucial role in facilitating the formation of the Women of Faith Network. The journey began in April 2008 when CCA EGY, in partnership with the World Conference of Religions for Peace, the World Fellowship of Buddhists and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists organized the "Summit of Asian Women Religious Leaders" in Bangkok. Again, on 14-16 October

2008 many members of the Women of Faith Network met in Manila during the Women's Assembly of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace. A coordinating committee was formed where Moumita Biswas representing CCA was requested to facilitate the networking of the Women of Faith Network in Asia. The network discussed action-oriented partnerships with governments and civil society organizations to promote advocacy and campaign to overcome violence against women in Asia.

### Promoting the Fellowship of the Least Coin

The Fellowship of the Least Coin is a worldwide ecumenical movement of prayer for peace and reconciliation. Through this movement, Christian women around the world meet and pray with each other and are reminded to live a reconciling and forgiving life with others. Though "least coins" are given with each prayer, it is not a fundraising project, but a movement of prayer, peace and reconciliation. Anyone wishing to join this movement makes a commitment to spend time in prayer whenever she has a strained relationship with an-



Women of Faith Network praying for peace



International  
Committee of the  
Fellowship of the  
Least Coin members

other person and to uphold in prayer others who are victims of jealousy, hatred, violence and injustice. Each time she prays for justice, peace and reconciliation, she sets aside one “least coin” of her currency as a tangible token toward her prayer being answered. These coins are sent regularly to her country’s FLC collection point, where it is forwarded to the FLC Fund. The amount collected by each country is never publicized, only the total sum collected each year is announced. It is important that only the “least coin” of each currency be set aside so that even the poorest women of each country can be a part of this fellowship of love and care.

Every year the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin, comprising women representing different ecumenical organizations meets to share how FLC is being promoted in different regions. Participatory decisions are also taken regarding allocation of project grants for women’s and children’s life-sustaining and just-peace projects. CCA EGY, along with the Asian Church Women’s Conference is responsible for distributing the forms for project grants in Asia and endorsing applications. In 2008 the ICFLC annual meeting was held in Toronto, Canada, hosted by the Women’s Inter-Church Council of Canada. EGY encourages all CCA member churches to support this movement.

### ACWC and EGY Networking

The Asian Church Women’s Conference envisions itself as a full partner with individuals

and organizations that are dedicated to the enabling of women and the whole of human-kind in the struggle towards the creation of a society where there is more meaningful peace, justice and love.

As an organization, ACWC envisions Asian women in unity becoming more capable of discovering themselves and realizing their gifts and potentials, as they contribute more forceful and sustained efforts towards the development of a stronger family and community, rooted in faith and sustained by the Holy Spirit so *shalom* may finally be attained.

As an advocate of women’s rights and welfare, ACWC sees itself working beyond the boundaries of culture and creed, colour and race so that stronger regional networks of women leaders and organizations may emerge that together and in unity recognize in action their role and responsibility in the family, the society and the church.

ACWC and EGY have been working together in networking women’s ecumenical movement in Asia. EGY along with ACWC played a crucial role in expressing solidarity with the Women’s Ecumenical Accompaniment for Vision and Empowerment (WEAVE) project in Cambodia. ACWC also journeyed with CCA in planning for the WEAVE project in Timor-Leste. At present there are also discussions and deliberations between EGY and ACWC how ecumenical organizations can work together in promoting church women’s leadership development in Nepal.

— Moumita Biswas

# A call to confession

Asians call for new paradigm concepts of mission beyond Edinburgh 2010

**Christian mission cannot be a top-down enterprise by missionary societies or church headquarters, but developing and shaping in the midst of struggling people**

**W**hile Edinburgh 2010 is a call to celebration, Asians at a recent international conference in Tainan, Taiwan, called for confession on what has been named as the complicity of mission to colonialism, imperialism and capitalism.

The conference, “Beyond Edinburgh 1910—Asian Reflections on Mission” was hosted by the Formosa Christianity and Culture Research Centre (FCCRC), Tainan Theological College and Seminary (TTCS) and Chang Jung Christian University (CJCU). It was sponsored by the Methodist Theological University (MTU), the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) and the Christian Conference of Asia. It was held at Tainan Theological College and Seminary on 29 September – 3 October.

Several presentations were made at the conference:

- A critical evaluation of the mission concept evolved through Edinburgh 1910 and the missionary movement.
- An analysis of the present Asian context.
- A critical analysis of the development of Asian churches and ecumenical movements.
- Challenges to mission by the multireligious situation of Asia.
- New paradigm concepts of mission.
- Implications of new paradigms for theological education.

C.S. Song, a visiting professor in TTCS and CJCU, asserted that mission is God’s creation (Genesis 1–2) and God’s re-creation (Revelation 21), found in God’s incarnation and God’s dwelling among us (John 1:14). The traditional view of church mission as calling people to believe in the Lord and convert to Christianity is very one-sided and has resulted in a mission bottleneck. If the church is to become God’s partner in re-creation, we must be converted from “The Great Commission” (Matthew 28:19–20) to Jesus’ “Great Commandment” (John 13:34–35), Song said.

Kim Yong Bock, chancellor of the Asia Pacific Graduate School for Integrated Study of Life, claimed that world Christianity is in crisis as it is caught up in the illusion that “world Christendom”

will save the world. Yet, he said, there is a lack of theological perspective with which to deal with the destruction and potential death of all life. He asserted that Jesus’ love movement of all living beings should be recovered and revitalized in order to lay the firm foundation of the mission of love.

Speaking on “doing mission from the underside”, Huang Po Ho, vice president of Chang Jung Christian University in Tainan, critiqued the significance of Edinburgh 1910 as a defining moment of the modern Western missionary movement and the birth of the modern ecumenical movement. “Without denying its contributions, the centennial celebration may be a good occasion to redefine the place of Edinburgh 1910 against the background of world mission from the perspective of the people being represented if not totally absent from the conference,” he said.

“People as subject of mission challenge not only the Christendom concept of church-centred mission, Christ-centred mission or even theocentred mission, but also the dichotomy of gospel and cultures, Christian world and non-Christian world, sacred and profane, sending and receiving etc. Christian mission thus cannot be a top-down enterprise by missionary societies or church headquarters, but developing and shaping in the midst of struggling people,” Huang continued.

In his presentation on “relativism and difference”, Wang Shik Jang, professor of philosophy of religion at Methodist Theological University in Korea, called for deep or genuine pluralism that appreciates the importance of difference among religions without falling into the pitfalls of relativism. With emphasis on differentiation, deep pluralism provides an ideal methodology for establishing a better type of religious pluralism, e.g. since all religions are limited and relative, they have to cooperate with each other, such as through interreligious dialogue, Wang stated.

Speaking on “new paradigm concepts of mission”, Hope S. Antone, joint executive secretary Faith, Mission and Unity of CCA, asked whether the term “mission” should still be used, given its unholy alliance with colonialism, capitalism and even terrorism or whether there is indeed a new wine that demands a new wineskin. Expounding



Should the term "mission" still be used, given its unholy alliance with colonialism, capitalism and even terrorism, or is there indeed a new wine that demands a new wineskin?

and building on Sri Lankan ecumenist Wesley Ariarajah's four shifts in mission thinking, she added two more shifts.

Ariarajah's four shifts are:

- from an exclusive to an inclusive understanding of God's mission as framework of mission,
- from conversion to healing as the goal of mission,
- from majority to minority as the nature of the faith community in mission,
- from mere doctrinal issues to deep spiritual concerns as the content of mission.

Antone added two more necessary shifts:

- from token partnership to genuine solidarity as the spirit behind the methodology or practice of mission,
- from overemphasis of one biblical passage (i.e. the so-called Great Commission) to an emphasis of the total biblical message as basis for mission.

Given the reality today that Asia is producing and sending zealous missionaries who are promoting a narrow concept and practice of mission, Antone

called for a mission moratorium and challenged churches and their seminaries and mission training centres to critically evaluate their curriculums in view of the critiques raised during this conference about narrow mission orientation.

"If we must have them, we should have missionaries who are educators on the integral view of life, healers with a holistic concept of healing, environmentalists to help detoxify and recover the sustainability of the earth, people who are critically conscious of power—not for power *over*, but for power *with* (shared power) and drawing power *within* (empower), and people who are religiously literate since to be Asian is to be interreligious," Antone stated.

In his presentation, Chen Nan Jou, vice president of Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary, highlighted the proposal of both Preman Niles and C.S. Song—that God's creation, rather than redemption, be the framework of mission. It is with this framework that he called for a mission-oriented theological education where the seminary will be a facilitator and the ministers the mission enablers of Christian communities so that the people of God will be empowered to be co-workers of the reign of God.

Group discussions were held to reflect further on some of the topics. In the final plenary session it was suggested that the sentiments and critical reflections made here should be shared with the organizers of the Edinburgh 2010 process.

—Hope S. Antone



# A view from the underside

Tourism in the Philippines: A gift to the poor?

**Tourism in the Philippines owes part of its success to a dark side**

**"T**ourism in the Philippines: A View from the Underside" was a consultation sponsored by the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism and organised in collaboration with Peace for Life with the cooperation of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, CONTAK Philippines and IBON Foundation, held in late October.

Church representatives and those of various sectors, such as labour, environment, culture and arts, rural development, health, indigenous peoples, women and children's rights groups in the Philippines came together to reflect on tourism and its impact on local communities.

"The meeting challenged the view of the Philippines government that tourism is an unmixed blessing, and that the 'bottom line' for the tourism industry was how many dollars tourists put into the economy," said Caesar D'Mello, the executive director of ECOT.

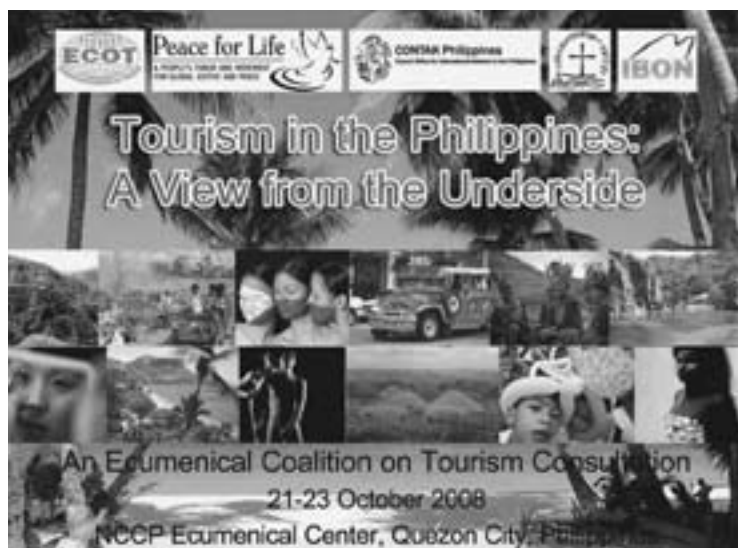
In a concluding statement, the participants stated that "the dire economic and social conditions of the people today are attributed, among other reasons, to decades of development aggression, a part of which

is so-called 'tourism development.' Government strategies on tourism since the introduction of neo-liberal policies have intensified the commercialisation of culture, history and heritage sites, prostitution and human trafficking, child exploitation, the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and land dispossession and livelihood displacement, especially of upland farmers, fishers, indigenous peoples and other national minorities".

In his paper, "A moral economy of tourism", Rev. Everett Mendoza reflected that "it is common knowledge, however, that tourism in this country owes part of its success to a dark side ... The moral balance sheet of tourism in the Philippines appears to be heavy on the negative side."

Participants opposed current tourism practices that were based on globalization policies promoted by multilateral institutions, and critiqued the government's policy directions that:

- offer the country's lands, including cultural and heritage grounds, and other natural resources, for exploitation by big business and TNCs in the guise of promoting economic growth as well as the country's history and culture,
- make national interests subservient to the profit interests of tourism-related industries such as airlines and shipping, big hotels and restaurants, so-called medical tourism hospitals, resorts, escort services, and other commercial tourist destinations,
- prioritize medical tourism thereby tapping the country's best hospitals and medical services/facilities with a tour package for foreign visitors and making health and medical care even more inaccessible to millions of Filipinos, underscoring the government's abandonment of its responsibility to provide basic health services to the people,
- place culture in the service of tourism, which is inimical to the development of national identity and genuine nationalism







- promote so-called traditional and indigenous culture and arts but in the process alienate indigenous peoples from their traditional way of life and their capacity to develop as a people
- develop tourist sites and leisure facilities without regard to and at the expense of the local population and the environment
- lure tourists through images of women and the prospect of inexpensive sexual services due to underdevelopment
- make children more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

The meeting declared its opposition to the Arroyo government's tourism development program, specifically the proposed Tourism Act of 2008 making it a national policy to "foster robust tourism growth" and other legislations in consonance with the General Agreement on Trade in Services and Trade-Related Investment Measures, which liberalise the service industries and give unrestricted entry to tourism-related TNCs.

On a positive note, participants agreed that "tourism can be a good instrument of understanding and solidarity among cultures and people—if we link the population to an ethos of protecting the environment, if we relate the people's history of struggle with their present situation, if we affirm the people's cultural and social life and if we pursue the people's aspirations for justice, human rights, democracy and sovereignty". They challenged the tourism industry to develop "forms of ethical and socially responsible travel and recreation that foster understanding and respect for other cultures and beliefs".

They also "challenged the church, as a shepherd of the people of God, to stand and take action against unethical strategies of national develop-

ment, as easily identified in the Arroyo government's tourism policy ... Voices of the faithful must denounce and oppose tourism as an instrument of oppression and exploitation."

The participants would "promote and practise 'solidarity tourism' that:

- challenges the profit orientation and commercial basis of mass tourism,
- offers opportunity to understand the Philippine context beyond its prevailing commercial image,
- serves as a window to the struggle of people for peace and fullness of life for all,
- offers an opportunity for mutual sharing, learning and participation,
- enables the formation of networks of people and organizations committed to work for justice and peace."

As representatives of their organisations, they looked forward "to a continued cooperation and networking with the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism in the pursuit of ethical and socially-responsible travel and recreation".

—Caesar D'Mello

**The challenge for the tourism industry is to develop forms of ethical and socially responsible travel and recreation that foster understanding and respect for other cultures and beliefs**

For more information on the consultation, and the final statement, contact ECOT at [office@ecotonline.org](mailto:office@ecotonline.org) or Peace for Life at [secretariat@peaceforlife.org](mailto:secretariat@peaceforlife.org). Major papers of the Consultation will be published in the December issue of ECOT's magazine, *Contours*. National councils of churches and related groups interested in organising consultations in their countries are invited to contact ECOT.

# Migrant workers in Thailand

Is the church willing to help?

**Burmese migrant workers experience difficult living conditions when working illegally in Thailand**

"There was no job at home [Myanmar]. I came to Maesod hoping to earn some money to support my family. Now I'm working in a factory and earn 60 baht [US\$1.70] per day. I have an alien worker registration card, bought from someone for 2,000 baht. If I do not have a registration card, the police will arrest me ..."

"When I was in early pregnancy, I had to work for long hours and forced by the factory to work overtime. Now I have to leave the job because I can't work long hours anymore. I'll give birth in two months and I worry how I can raise my baby if I do not have income. I have to rely on my husband's income ..."

"When we came here [Thailand] to work in a factory, we are treated like animals. We want a similar wage as Thai people and do not want to be discriminated ..."

**T**hese are voices of migrant workers from Myanmar shared at a consultation on migrant workers and the role of churches that was held in Maesod, near the Thai-Burma border, on 25–27 August 2008. The consultation was organised by the Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program (MEPP).

These voices reflect the difficult living conditions experienced by Burmese migrant workers while working illegally in Thailand.

Many factories in Maesod hired Burmese migrant workers and paid them less than US\$2 per day.

Simply because they do not have work permits and alien registration cards, their pay is dependent on their employers.

Prejudice and discrimination are very common experiences among Burmese migrant workers who live and work in Thailand whether legally or illegally. They are treated inhumanly and "like animals", as expressed by one migrant participant at the consultation. The prejudice and discrimination are often repeated in the media, which claim that migrant workers steal jobs from the Thai, they bring diseases, they are "illegal" and a danger to national security.

The consultation affirmed that no human beings are illegal.

## The situation of migrant workers

Since the military coup in Myanmar in 1962 and an uprising of students and civilians in 1988, thousands of Burmese have been forced to leave their homes due to immense poverty and political repression. It is estimated (in 2008) that Thailand is home to about two million Burmese migrant workers.

Migrants who are already registered and have work permits are allowed to renew them annually for 3,800 baht (US\$107), of which 600 baht is for a medical check up and 1,300 for health insurance.

However, many Burmese migrants have to rely on middlemen to process their applications, increasing the cost by as much as 50 per cent—representing yet another disincentive to renew their work permits each year. Unscrupulous employers exploit this opportunity to hire irregular migrants who exist on the margins of Thai society, living with the risk of summary deportation and powerless to negotiate their terms and conditions of employment.

The law requires employers to only hire registered workers and to provide them with decent accommodation.

While employers may face small fines for non-compliance, legally registered migrants are now theoretically at greater risk of deportation than before.

A complicated and relatively expensive registration process for migrant workers in Thailand means that many Burmese and their Thai employers still avoid legal registration—leaving employers liable to prosecution and workers uninsured and exposed to potential abuse. If they are picked up by the police at any time without their identity papers, they risk immediate deportation.

For many low-paid Burmese migrant workers who are reluctant to pay an annual registration fee that represents over a month's wages, the entitlement to use the Thai public health services may tip the balance between working legally or illegally in Thailand.

Few legal channels exist for Burmese workers wanting to work in Thailand, so most enter the country illegally. Thailand has not offered irregular migrants the opportunity to register and to regularize their status since 2004.

The Thai authorities are acutely aware of the social, public health and other risks associated with marginalizing some 1.5 million irregular migrants and their families living in Thailand and driving them underground.

Migrant workers have been contributing to Thai society for decades and have been central to the growth of the Thai economy. Now they are being treated inhumanly by the Thai authorities and some Thai employers. Many NGOs demand an end to negative stereotypes of migrant workers to the Thai majority. They also request the Thai Government to be concerned for a free and fair society by promoting humanity and equality.

### The challenge to the churches

During the consultation many churches shared their experiences in helping migrant workers. However, many churches and Christians are still afraid to involve themselves in a risky situation dealing with migrant workers. Even though churches may not be equipped to deal with the legal processes they can help or be involved in other work for migrant workers. It is easy for the church to be concerned about this issue but it takes much more for this to be put into practice. To work on migrant issues, the church has to be committed to the following:

- First, the church has to see all migrant workers as “human beings”. It doesn't matter if they are legal or illegal. The first step to overcoming prejudice and discrimination is to accept that they are human beings.
- Secondly, the church has to teach and preach that we have to “love our neighbours



Migrant workers Tin Sa Aung, six months pregnant, and her husband at the MEPP workshop

as ourselves”. The challenge to all Christians is whether we really love them (migrant workers) as ourselves, or do we love them with conditions?

- Thirdly, will the church be able to suffer with those who are in need like the migrant workers? Will the church be a safe place for migrant workers to seek refuge from the police?

If we Christians are able to overcome this basic challenge, there is “hope” for more migrant workers to seek help from the church in many ways. Churches are recognized as places that provide love, peace and hope to people in need. There are many things that church can do for migrant workers to lift up their hopes and fulfil their dreams.

The question is whether the church is willing to do this.

—Janejinda Pawadee

# Article 9

## Religious leaders say no to war and militarism

**Article 9 is evolving into a global movement in solidarity with the Japanese people in their pursuit of peace and justice**

**N**ever again! The Japanese people have raised their voices in opposition to a reinterpretation of Article 9 in their constitution to allow Japanese military personnel to be deployed as peacekeepers and defence forces overseas. Article 9 embodies the Japanese people's opposition to war and militarism. More specifically, the two clauses in Article 9 of the Japanese constitution is a deterrent to the use of military force in settling international disputes, the maintenance of land, sea and air military personnel and the non-recognition of the state of belligerency.

Article 9 is evolving into a global movement in solidarity with the Japanese people in their pursuit of peace and justice in their country and a platform for peacebuilding in Asia and the rest of the world.

From 30 October to 1 November, peace-loving representatives of Christian, Buddhist and Islamic faiths gathered at the Korean YMCA in Tokyo to yet again join the voices raised in support of Article 9 at a follow-up meeting to the first Interreligious Conference on Article 9, held in November 2007. Stories of communities in Okinawa, other parts of Japan, Korea and Thailand shared of people suffer-



## Article 9 plan of action

1. Letter to the USA Congress and President-elect Barack Obama on Article 9 and its global implication
2. Holding of a second Article 9 interreligious conference in Korea in December 2009
3. The sharing of information through publications and a website
4. Solidarity and exposure visits to Okinawa
5. Promotion of peace education among children and youth
6. Peace marches
7. A mission and vision statement to be adopted at the 2009 Seoul conference
8. Coordination, networking and fundraising
9. Formation of an international working group composed of the following:
  - Pax Christi USA
  - Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)
  - Asia Muslim Action Network (AMAN)
  - Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK)
  - National Christian Council of Japan (NCCJ)
  - National Christian Council of Japan (NCCJ)—Okinawa
  - Nenbutsu Article 9 Group
  - Shinsha-Otani Article 9 Group
  - Buddhist International Cooperation Network
  - Nippon-zan Myohi-ji
  - Risscho Peace Foundation
  - two resource persons

ing under military occupation, of military forces being deployed overseas to counter terrorism and of scars left on people long after wars have ended.

The meeting also affirmed the various ways in which people of faith have responded to ensure that communities are warmed against recent initiatives that contribute to a resurgence of war in the name of peace and security.

Bishop Gabino Zavala, the Roman Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles, echoed the words of Pope Benedict VI: “War is always a defeat for humanity.”

He pointed out how the Iraq war led to a cycle of violence and the need for the USA to step aside and start a reconciliation process. He thanked Japan’s Catholic Council for Justice and Peace for rallying behind Article 9, showing that Americans need to hear perspectives on peace and reconciliation and the extent in which US policies are affecting the rest of the world.

Bishop Zavala underscored the need to actively work for alternatives to war and violence by relying on multilateral peace processes, working for the common good and how non-violence is being about right relationship and justice among people.

Representing the Christian Conference of Asia, Charlie Ocampo gave examples of Christians speaking out critically against the war in Iraq and the occupation of Palestine. He cited the International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel (ICAPPI), celebrating a week of prayer, education, public action and advocacy in June 2008, seeking an active promotion of a just peace and sending a clear signal to policy makers and parishes in many countries about the urgent need for a peace settlement that secures the legitimate rights and future of both Palestinians and Israelis. Other similar initiatives were presented by members of the Buddhist clergy taking place in Okinawa and other regions in Japan.

The follow-up meeting agreed to a plan of action (see above) to help strengthen and sustain the global movement promoting Article 9.

CCA, represented by Charlie Ocampo, Joint Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service, was elected to Article 9’s international working group, while the National Christian Council in Japan will temporarily house the secretariat until a more permanent structure has been established.

—Charlie Ocampo

**The meeting affirmed the various ways in which people of faith have responded to ensure that communities are warmed against recent initiatives that contribute to a resurgence of war in the name of peace and security**



# Promoting peace in Asia

A call for more religious vigilance

ACRP, formulated in 1974, encompasses the entire Asia-Pacific region, from the Middle East to the South Pacific. Assemblies have been held in Singapore (1976), New Delhi (1981), Seoul (1986), Katmandu (1991), Ayutthaya in Thailand (1996), Jogjakarta (2002) and Manila (2008). During the 2008 assembly Cambodia and Iran chapters were admitted as new members

**"**invite political leaders, religious leaders and everyone in this assembly to think about the challenges, to reflect on how we can more effectively tap into our spiritual resources—our faiths, our religions—to promote peace. Let the communities of faith speak out with clear, prophetic and moral voices, calling for an end to the conflict and death bred by the war and social injustice." Thus Prawate Khid-arn, CCA general secretary, addressed the 7th General Assembly of Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP), convened in Manila in the Philippines on 17–21 October 2008. The conference was jointly hosted by ACRP, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the University of Santo Tomas (UST), and around 400 participants, representing fifteen religious groups—Buddhist, Bahá'í, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Jewish, Islamic, Shinto, Sikh, Tao, Zoroastrian and others from twenty-five countries took part in the assembly.

The assembly was held during the financial tsunami that engulfed the world in late 2008, caused by the avarice, greed and ignorance of the financiers in the world's global financial centres.

In his welcome address, Mir Nawaz Khan Marwat, moderator of ACRP, said, "We must demolish distrust and discrimination in Asia today."

The assembly adopted the following strategic recommendations for the coming five years:

- Each national chapter devise and present to the next executive committee meeting in 2010 its action plan for helping to bring

peace and social cohesion to its people and nation state.

- Each national chapter have established in one of its universities a centre for dialogue and these centers for dialogue form an Asian network to work for peace, do research and provide informed to ACRP/WCRP.
- Each national chapter work to establish local interfaith bodies to address local concerns and grievances, especially in areas of high or increasing tensions.
- The appropriate national chapters, in the aftermath of a conflict and in those countries receiving refugees from the conflict, work to have the government establish a therapeutic centre to provide specialist assistance for the recovery of torture and trauma survivors.
- The appropriate national chapters, in the aftermath of a conflict and as a way of healing the past, cooperate to arrange intercountry visits to the actual places of war atrocities in order to hold joint memorial services of healing.
- Each national chapter strongly lobby its government (1) to sign the treaty against cluster bombs and (2) to sign the nonproliferation treaty to abolish all nuclear weapons by 2020.
- Each national chapter encourage its educational authorities to introduce curriculums that aim at education for global and national citizenship.
- ACRP's executive committee establish a finance and marketing committee to raise funds from governments, supragovernmental agencies, international and national banks and all other possible sources in order to increase its funding sources so as to broaden its funding base to support its activities and its community and fact-finding projects.

—Prawate Khid-arn



# Liberating Christ the Liberator!

Rienzie  
Perera

**A**dvent is the season of waiting in hope for Christmas. Christmas is but one among several festivals Christians celebrate. However Christmas is the one most widely celebrated, and the commercial world too has almost taken it over, giving it a twist to use it as a time to flood the markets with toys, clothes and food and to entice people to spend extravagantly to consume or purchase things that they do not need. This image of the festival distorts the meaning of Christmas and paints a wrong picture of Jesus the Christ and communicates a false and a shallow understanding of Christianity. These forms of distortions have gone on for centuries but it is always important to ask: What is the true meaning of Christmas? In order to respond to that question one has to ask a more important question: Who is this Jesus we celebrate during the season of Christmas? In fact this is the question Jesus himself asked his own disciples in Caesarea Philippi: "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29) The disciples of Jesus got it wrong **then** and that is the reason Jesus had to rebuke Peter by saying, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mark 8:33). **Now** we still get it wrong, and that is the reason we have allowed the commercial world to take over the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ and portray a distorted image of Christ that most of us embrace uncritically. Therefore, the task left for us is to redeem this distorted image of Jesus Christ and portray the true Christ as recorded in the Gospel narratives.

## Jesus of the Gospels

It is no accident that God made a deliberate choice to select the stable to be the birthplace of God's only son. The stable is not a place to be decorated or whitewashed. The Gospels record that God in Christ broke into a place where the food, urine and dung of animals gets mixed up. In other words, it is a place of stench, filth and dirt. God's breaking into such a context poses a challenge to the values of dominant cultures and societies and affirms the song that Mary sang after the angel Gabriel announced the message from God. Mary's song was, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden ... He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away." (Luke 1:46ff)

When we allow the world, which is captive to principalities and powers of Mammon, to shape the story of Jesus, we commit sin and allow sin to rule the world and domesticate the liberating story of Jesus the Christ. Therefore, Christmas is the time to redeem the Gospel and Christianity by telling the authentic story and singing the Gospel as Mary sang the Magnificat.

Is it also not a strange and a surprising thing that God bypassed the centres of power (Herod, High Priest etc.) and announced the birth of Jesus to those powerless and vulnerable shepherds who were looking after their sheep? In a sense, God revealed in Jesus the Christ is a God of surprises and a God who shakes the foundations of the high and mighty. God, as revealed in Jesus the Christ, is a God who cannot be domesticated and tamed. On the contrary, he announces his mission by saying: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19) This is the Jesus of the Gospels and this should be the message of the church, not just during the season of Christmas, but throughout the year.

# Jonathan and his armour-bearer

Lessons on ecumenism from 1 Samuel 14:1–14

Dennis Raj



Michael Westhoff

**T**he context of 1 Samuel 14:1–14 is a situation of battle between the Israelites and the Philistines. The previous chapter informs us about the dismal condition of the Israelites who did not have the necessary weapons for war. Why? It was the direct result of calculated political oppression. In 1 Samuel 13:19 we read that the Philistines had banned blacksmiths in Israel, lest they forge military hardware. The condition of the day meant that any Israelite who wanted to have his own farming tools sharpened had to do so for a stipulated price at the mercy of a Philistine blacksmith (13:20, 21). The next verse records that on the day of battle only King Saul and his son Jonathan had swords and spears in their possession.

In 1 Samuel 14 we find Jonathan and his armour-bearer purposely straying away from the main unit of the Israelite regiment. Jonathan chances upon one detachment of the Philistine army and makes

a bold but significant move. Tactically speaking, two coming against twenty men would be deemed a suicide mission but the later outcome proved otherwise (14:14). This initial encounter led the Israelites to a tremendous and overwhelming victory.

What caused Jonathan to have such courage and audacious temerity when the Israelites were both short on courage (13:6, 7) and weapons? We get the answers from the conversation between Jonathan and his armour bearer just before the ensuing encounter in combat.

## A large perspective of God (1 Samuel 14:6)

In verse 6 we read Jonathan saying, “Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or a few.” We understand from the verse that Jonathan viewed his God as someone who was not restricted by the available visible resources. He correctly

understood that God was not limited by his own present limitedness, either in terms of available weaponry or the number of soldiers (in this case, only two!). He was able to recognize that God was much, much bigger and was able to give victory despite the seemingly disadvantageous situation that he was in.

Ecumenism is exactly that. It is viewing God for who God really is. God is beyond the boundaries of our local congregation, beyond our denominational limits and beyond our cultural and historical presuppositions. One cannot be ecumenical if our understanding and perception of God is myopic. God can and will work far above our own mental and faith paradigms that we have set for God within us. Such paradigms may help us to be “in control” but they do not give us the freedom to face and worship the unlimited, infinite God of all creation, seen and unseen.

### Unity and solidarity (1 Samuel 14:7)

In verse 7 we read the unnamed armour-bearer responding to Jonathan’s daring invitation. He stands by Jonathan and says, “Do all that you have in mind ... Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul.” Here we see an armour-bearer who was united in vision and courage with his master. He was even willing to risk death and give his life for the sake of Jonathan. It was not a merely outward “statement of solidarity” but a readiness to spill his own blood to flow along with Jonathan’s. It is not just a military-type allegiance that a soldier shows to his superiors—it is more than that. In the armour-bearer’s own words, a “heart and soul” type of deeper spiritual solidarity.

Ecumenism is all about unity and solidarity. *Oikoumene* basically deciphers as “the household”, i.e. God’s household. It is standing in love and unity with others in the household, Christian or otherwise. It is coming in solidarity with our neighbours, especially the oppressed and downtrodden, as taught by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It means moving beyond our own comfort zones and being willing to stick our neck out to those who are in pain and tears. Statements of solidarity are good, but only as starters. They must not stop there—words should be followed by concrete action, as shown by the armour-bearer.

### Doing only what God wants us to (1 Samuel 14:9, 10)

In verses 9 and 10 we sense Jonathan pausing for a brief moment before proceeding with his plan. Despite the bold courage that he has and the undivid-

ed support of his armour-bearer, we find Jonathan stopping in his tracks to find out God’s will and desire in this matter. We find Jonathan looking for a sign that would tell him that God was indeed in agreement with his daring plan. Subsequently, he discerns a favourable sign from God and then proceeds with the confirmation with an unstoppable faith (verse 12).

Ecumenism is discerning what God wants us to do and doing it for God with God’s strength, just as Jonathan did. So often we go ahead with our plans and programs either because we are so used to doing them or just because we have the resources to do so. Jonathan did not rush in to “accomplish” victory but paused to know God’s wish on the matter. An ecumenist is one who asks, “Is God just interested in my grand plans for my own church or denomination? Or, is God telling me to think differently and be relevant at least to the immediate non-church community in which God has put me and my church in?” Ecumenism is daring to obey God despite our own inclinations to serve ourselves and our own enterprises.

### Summary

The passage not only informs us about Jonathan and his armour-bearer’s conquest in battle but also takes us in to the inner thoughts of two people united in a common cause. In it we see two persons’ theologies, lived out in action. From their theologies we glean lessons on ecumenism. We can see that ecumenism is really about:

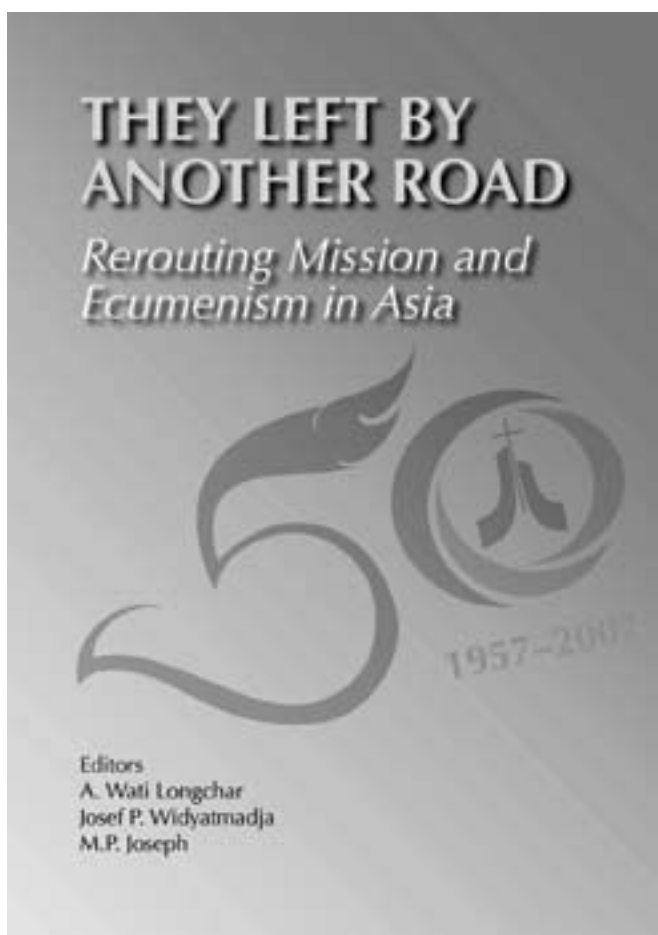
- having a large perspective of God
- focusing on unity and solidarity
- doing what God really wants us to.



Rev. Dennis Raj is a Methodist minister from Malaysia. He shared this biblical reflection at a morning devotion during the Asian Ecumenical Course held in Salatiga, Indonesia, on 6–18 October 2008. He can be reached at [revdenrj@yahoo.com](mailto:revdenrj@yahoo.com) for feedback or comments

# Leaving by the right road

A. Wati Longchar, Josef P. Widyatmadja and M.P. Joseph, eds.  
*They Left by Another Road: Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia*  
(Chiang Mai: Christian Conference of Asia, 2007), 221 pages



This book is a feast of selected articles on mission and ecumenism presented by participants to the study process on “Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia” that took place in three subregions of Asia in 2006. The study process was part of CCA’s attempt to re-ground itself as it celebrated its golden jubilee in 2007. The contributors all declared that CCA’s fiftieth birthday is the time for Christian communities in Asia to affirm collectively their oneness with the people in Asia actively involved in the divine project of pursuing fullness of life for all.

Reading *They Left by Another Road: Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia* demands a pause for that hinting voice saying “we lost track” in our journey. Should I care if the churches in Asia are with the poor and marginalized people regardless of creed and ethnicity in their struggle for life and not just existence? My reading of the book tells me I should. I should even worry if our churches are not journeying with the people in their quest.

Half a century of existence calls for a jubilee decision to reflect deeply on the way to proceed now. The book asks the reader to decide which route to take in doing mission and ecumenism in Asia, that is, the path that the oppressed and struggling peoples of Asia trod in their quest for fullness of life for all.

My reading tells me that in our “participation with others, in God’s work for fullest human life

for all people in just and creative communities”, which we call “mission”, has been practised in Asia ever since. Asia is where Christianity was born, so were the great living religions in the world. Life in its fullness is the central goal of religions, of people’s mission throughout history, as well as of our Christian mission and the ecumenical movement. How can we conceive mission and ecumenism apart from the Asian struggles for life in its fullness, for humanity and the earth?

The challenge of rerouting mission and ecumenism in Asia I suppose will help us even solve the question of how “ecumenical” can the churches be in their ecumenical involvement. All quests for life are divine projects, and all struggles for life can be no other. It is up to us to find out what is God’s project of life with the people, and to participate in that project.

Our problem is that we understand mission largely as “missionary” activity that originated from the West, shaped by an ideology to “organize” the world according to the imperial design of the West. I am



not surprised if our churches cannot see mission as hijacked by the West. (My own Baptist roots are American.)

What becomes of mission and ecumenism in Asia wrecked by globalization, where a consumer culture and Western lifestyle has caused, among others, large-scale migration, the disintegration of families, the spread of HIV and AIDS, the displacement of indigenous peoples, the commodification of labour, the aggressive exploitation of natural resources and degradation of the environment, the breakdown of religious and cultural values and increasing militarization and wars? In most of these cases, the most affected are the women and children.

Our favourite phrase, “mission partnerships”, I now suspect. I fear to know that the ecumenical movement in Asia is getting coopted by the development thinking of globalization. *Oikoumene*, or “God’s household”, almost sounds like “one world”, and so “organized” we should be wary of its imperial tones.

That is why this rerouting is important. We must not lose our bias for “people in pain” around us if we are to remain relevant in Asia. Moreover, we need to articulate in our own words the theologies that spring from the womb of Asia.

Ecumenical initiatives in Asia were born as a challenge to colonial Christianity. This heritage is seen in the wise men who “chose life instead of the imperial order” on their way back home. This is where we take our clue here: Which road to choose? I realized after reading that I have to decide from which point to take my perspective, on whose side to stand, and with whom I journey.

I am glad this book offered concrete action suggestions for Asian churches. The formidable challenge is the call for a complete turnaround, to take the road with the people in their struggle for fullness of Life. This is where CCA’s energies and wealth should be—in the service of the people in Asia.

Forgive the technical lapses of this book, this is a must-read for all who can read and discern in all honesty its message: we need to leave by the right road—to take the route where the poor and the struggling are treading for the fullness of life for all. This is the future of the ecumenical movement in Asia.

—Liza Lamis

*They Left by Another Road* is available from CCA for US\$10. Orders should be sent to [fm@cca.org.hk](mailto:fm@cca.org.hk).

## Stop global warming

On 1–4 December 2008, over 1,000 participants from schools, nongovernmental organizations, governmental units, business firms and religious organizations took part in the annual Thai National Environment Day. The event was organized by the Global Warming Action Network (GWAN). Its activities included seminars on various topics, exhibitions, drama presentations, art competition and community campaigns by small groups.

GWAN is an intersectoral network that aims to increase awareness and knowledge on the causes and impacts of global warming and climate change. Key members of the network include the Regional Environmental Office 1 Chiang Mai of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Regional Energy Coordination Office 10, the Chiang Mai Environmental Provincial Office, the Chiang Mai Municipality, the Christian Conference of Asia, Rak Thai Foundation, YMCA, IMPECT and the Chiang Mai Sacred Heart College. There are over fifty members in the network.

## Reminder

### 13th CCA General Assembly

“Called to Prophecy,  
Reconcile  
and Heal”

14–21 April 2010

Kuala Lumpur,  
Malaysia

## Masters degree programs in Taiwan

Tainan Theological College and Seminary is offering one-year scholarship-supported openings for qualified students from CCA member churches to Master of Theology (MTh) or Master of Religious Studies (MRS) degree programs for the 2009 academic year (commencing September 2009 and ending June 2010).

- Applicants who have completed a university-level degree plus a three-year program of studies leading to a Master of Divinity or Bachelor of Divinity degree are eligible to enter the MTh degree program. Applicants who have completed a university-level degree alone are eligible to enter the MRS degree program.
- The MTh degree takes two years and requires the successful completion of eight courses plus the submission of a thesis paper acceptable to the supervising committee. The first year of the program is spent on campus, during which course work is completed. The second year is spent back at home, during which the student writes the thesis. Those entering the MTh programme in 2009 can anticipate receiving their degrees no sooner than June 2011.
- The MRS degree takes a single year and requires the successful completion of eight courses. Those entering the MRS programme in 2009 can anticipate receiving their degrees in June 2010.
- Tainan Theological College guarantees that it will offer sufficient coursework in any academic year to enable students in the MRS program to complete their coursework in a single academic year, and to enable those in the MTh program to complete their on campus requirements in the same amount of time.
- No scholarship aid is available for a second year in Taiwan. Students electing to remain in Taiwan must have their own funding. Taiwan's government does not allow students in religious studies courses to take employment in Taiwan.
- The number of scholarship-supported positions for applicants from CCA member churches is limited. Applications must carry denominational or diocesan endorsement.
- Application forms or further information are available from the Tainan Theological College and Seminary, 117 Tung-men Road, Section 1, Tainan, Taiwan. Email: bisihua@mail.ttcs.org.tw, fax: 886-6-2346060

## ATESEA vacancy

The Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA) is looking for a new executive director.

### Criteria

1. Asian Christian who is theologically trained (preferably with a doctoral degree)
2. Fundraising ability
3. Good in community building
4. Managerial and administrative experiences and ability
5. Good English communication skills
6. Not more than 57 years of age (at the time of application)
7. Ecumenical experiences

### Documents

1. Application letter
2. Recommendation letters from:
  - a. church authority
  - b. previous or current employer
  - c. colleague or friend (to be sent directly in sealed envelope to the Search Committee, c/o Rev. Dr Huang, Po Ho, Vice President, Chang Jung Christian University, 396 Chang Jung Road, Sec. 1, Kway Jen, Tainan 71101 Taiwan)
3. Copy of degree certificate
4. Personal biography
5. Vision and plans for ATESEA

### Applications

Applications should be received by the Search Committee by the end of February 2009 at the latest. For more information about ATESEA, visit [www.atesea.org](http://www.atesea.org). For further information about the position contact Rev. Dr Huang, Po Ho at the address above.

# Welcome Charlie and Liza

## Charlie Ocampo



Carlos “Charlie” Ocampo joined the Christian Conference of Asia in November as joint executive secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service. He comes as an ecumenical worker from the Uniting Church of Australia.

Before joining CCA, Charlie served as manager for international programs with Church World Service, the aid and development agency of the Australian National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA). He was also board secretary of the Thai-Burma Border Consortium, actively raising funds and advocating refugee rights and better protection for Burmese refugees in camps in Thailand.

Prior to that Charlie was the NCCA refugee advocate and settlement worker, coordinating churches’ efforts in offering emergency accommodation and health care and advocating better settlement policy for refugees and asylum seekers seeking protection in Australia.

Charlie originally hails from the Philippines, where he served as an ecumenical worker of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines until settling in Australia in 1991. He was executive director of the Ecumenical Centre for Development (ECD) in the 1980s. He got involved with CCA through the Urban Rural Mission and Development and Service programs, which provided good perspectives and showed ways of supporting the organisation of rural peasants, urban poor communities, trade unionists, women, youth and students in their respective countries.

“Joining CCA is like coming home for me. I hope that I can assist CCA in continuing to serve

the needs of its members through capacity building programs and pastoral visits and by offering practical support to member churches in critical situations. I would like to see a CCA guided by its past, being a prophetic witness to the present and able to lead the churches in the future. It can do this by listening closely to its members. I look forward to working with a committed ecumenical team with a vision for a just world where there is peace and well being for all of God’s creation.”

## Liza Lamis



Liza B. Lamis has been appointed as consultant for communications of the Christian Conference of Asia. She will join her colleagues at the Chiang Mai office from January 2009.

Liza professes a passion for gender justice, transformative learning, and the unconventional. A member of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches (CPBC) with a broad ecumenical exposure and work experience, she brings to CCA a keen interest to explore creative and relevant ways of communicating the work and witness of CCA to Asia. She started her ecumenical work with the Institute of Religion and Culture and later with the Western Visayas Ecumenical Council in Central Philippines in various capacities. In 2001 she joined NCCP as coordinator of the women’s program. She was national co-coordinator of the Association of Women in Theology in 2004 to 2008, and country coordinator of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in 2005–2008.

Liza’s other passions include teaching women’s studies, exploring nature and cultures other than her own, and tasting various Asian foods. She holds a doctor of ministry in international feminist theologies from San Francisco Theological Seminary, exploring the topic of the sexual abuse of women in the church in her dissertation.

## New CCA staff



# ***An Advent Prayer***

***Hope***

***Peace***

***Joy***

***Love***

We pray for these as we await the Christ every Christmas  
But how can these dawn upon us  
At a time of so much despair, conflict, pain and hate?  
It was also into such a world that the Christ was born—  
Where the longing for hope, peace, joy and love was strong.

The world today bleeds and groans even more—  
With injustice, wars, economic meltdown, ecological crisis  
And what have you ...

Into this world Christ brings hope, peace, joy and love  
Through those who strive to follow his way—  
“Who deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.”

The tree of Christmas and the tree of Calvary  
Together witness to the Christ—God’s anointed one—  
Whose commitment to God’s justice and righteousness  
Demands of his followers no less than costly and risky discipleship.

O God, help us to be faithful followers of Your Way  
That we can be harbingers of your hope, peace, joy and love today.

—Hope S. Antone