



### **Report of the General Secretary**

1. It is almost nine months since we met last time as members of the Executive Committee of CCA. Although the provision in the constitution is for the meeting of an Executive Committee once every year, this is probably the first time that we are meeting much ahead of the time frame than the normally stipulated for the frequency of the Executive Committee meeting. However, there are several issues we need to address in this Executive Committee meeting as part of our routine business as well as we need to reflect on the contemporary realities. The role of the executive committee is not only deal with the routine business agenda, but our task is also to address the emerging contexts and their wider implications in the life and witness of churches in Asia and the ecumenical movement. As we are expected to undertake this task as part of our mandate, it is an imperative for us to analyse and reflect on the contemporary situation and evolve ecumenical responses while we move ahead with programmes, activities and plan of actions.

2. The events in our day to day lives are replete with numerous challenges. It is no longer news or novelty in hearing stories about the crises in our world today. The reality is that the crises are spreading far beyond its point of origin. The crisis is not limited in a particular area or aspect, or confined only in a specific geographical region; it is global and it is spreading in many parts of the world, often with multiple effects. René Guénon (1886-1951), French metaphysician and scholar of religions, who was also a critic of modern civilisation, wrote nine decades ago a manifesto and 'call-to-action' in response to the then world crisis, which was known as 'The Crisis of the Modern World'. The reasons for today's global crises may have now surpassed René Guénon's theories of the modern world crisis in 1920's. The world order today is in the worst state since the end of World War II. The crisis in today's world goes beyond the boundaries of nation-states. For example, the war in Syria that has spread to the entire region and has led to large-scale migration crises in other continents. This is what was recently described by Wolfgang Ischinger, the Munich Security Conference chairman, that "today's international relations experience dramatic crisis, the worst since World War II". He said, "The international community needs 'greater solidarity, integration and cooperation'."

3. It has been evident for some time that the contemporary crisis, whether it is of neoliberal globalization, militarization or ecological degradation, has deep roots in the capitalist world-system. One may argue that this is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it was pointed out long time ago by the great moral philosopher and economist Adam Smith, who had critiqued what he called "prodigals and prospectors." It is more evident from recent happenings, such as increasing global conflict and its relationship with economic inequality, climate change, peace and security, that the world is affected with more complex problems. More than at any time in history, the contemporary world is engaged in conflicts and their effects are seen in manifold forms, which create a fragile landscape of peace and security. The biggest threat to security and stability in the world over the next decade is likely to come from various forms of geopolitical tensions. Asia will have to witness or face the direct or indirect impacts of such crises; whether these crises stem out of the crisis in Ukraine, Russia's simmering tensions with Europe, tensions regarding South China Sea, or strained relations between China and Philippines or China and Japan on their respective territorial claims. All these factors are evidences of the strategic power struggles in which the world's biggest powers have again started their engagement. The effects of the spiraling crisis are more and more visible in Asia. The alarming trend is reported every day from some corners of Asia.

4. Although not all these tensions and conflicts are explicitly violent in nature, there are more probabilities for regional spillovers, which might derail global stability in the short and long-term. Often we talk about economic crisis in the world, but we are now facing several other problems in addition to the economic

downturn. It was true that the world was faced with an "*annus horribilis*" in the economic realm about two years ago, the worst in a decade, with high unemployment, corporate failures, and the downturn of the stock market. The geopolitical threats now have topped the risk index, overtaking the financial crisis. Although, the world has not escaped from such a crisis, in addition to that, what is being experienced now is an "*annus horribilis*" in the geo-political arena, especially in terms of conflicts, violence and threats to peace and security.

5. There are various signs of this trend of geopolitical risk. Quarter of a century after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world again faces the risk of major conflicts between states. There are a number of issues and reasons have been identified or pointed out for increasing crisis in the world. There are several problems and concerns that have leapfrogged to the top of the list of crises; increasing role of non-state actors, mounting environmental problems, crisis in the world's water supply, especially when clean drinking water is becoming a rare commodity. Water becomes an economic and political issue as well when people have started fighting for this resource. An estimated four to five billion people in the world suffer from strained access to clean water. In Asia, struggle for access to clean water is a growing problem. The spread of terrorism and violence have become common trends in many countries and regions, in which the role of non-state actors are systematic. The emergence of non-state actors such as Islamic State (IS) over-ran the sovereignty of nation states. They are not only posing threat to Syria or Iraq or in the Middle East. The influence of IS is spreading over to many parts of Asia. Asia is becoming a breeding or multiplying ground for terrorist groups. Militants from many parts of Asia have been recruited by terrorist groups and taken to Syria and Iraq for Islamic State. The recent events, especially the increasing violence and terrorism in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, and the growing influences of IS and other religious extremist groups in Indonesia and several other Asian countries are more alarming. Intelligence reports and analyses give signals that the religious terrorist groups also could trigger use of weapons of mass destruction and engage in large-scale terrorist attacks in the coming years. From Asia, young people from several countries are being recruited to IS, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Cambodia, China, and Brunei. This is an alarming situation and a grave concern on as how they will be used after their return to their home countries or if they are deployed to work in a neighbouring country. A growing concern is that the spread of terrorism orchestrated in the name of Islam remains the most significant immediate threat to regional security in Asia.

6. Religious fundamentalism has emerged as the most serious threat to democratic values, peace and security in most of the Asian countries. In Pakistan, the menace of terrorism, in particular, terrorism of the religious kind, has spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. There are people and groups who extend direct or indirect support to the terrorist activities of the Taliban and its link in the name of religion in Pakistan. Violence has become a norm and religion is routinely used to silence voices of reason and compassion. The society has taken a turn towards the right-wing. In India, attacks by fanatic religious fundamentalists are becoming increasingly common in several parts of the country, especially in areas where minority religious communities live. A systematic campaign spreading reactionary political ideology among the adherents of majority religions and this tendency is patronising communal violence as well as communal polarization. Recent events indicate that violent extremist ideals are expanding throughout the region. In the coming years, these threats will coincide with other incidents that could aggravate the situation for countries in the Asia region. In Asia, religious fundamentalism and extremism find their roots in the backwardness of society. The proponents of religious fanaticism exploit the situations of social deprivation, a low level of consciousness, poverty and ignorance of illiterate or semi-literate people. The growing tendency of propagation of hatred and religious intolerance is becoming a common trend connected with all major religions in Asia - Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hinduism.

7. Religious extremism and violence are not the only threat Asian countries are facing or that require the attention and response of the Churches and the ecumenical movement. While the major environmental problems are affecting the entire world in serious ways, their manifestations are more and more evident in Asia. Increase in air pollution, climate change and global warming, overpopulation, depletion of natural resources, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, water pollution and sanitation facilities, industrialization, spread of toxic pollutants are major threats Asian countries are facing. Several Asian countries face the worst hits of climate change in recent years. The typhoons, floods and droughts are common scenes for several months every year in most Asian countries. Bangladesh is among the most vulnerable to climate change. While flooding and cyclones have always plagued this poverty stricken nation, climate change is increasing their frequency and severity. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is full of climate refugees every Monsoon season.

8. The world today, especially the Western countries, are lamenting the influx of migrants arriving in their countries due to the crises in many parts of the world, especially in the Middle East and in Africa. We hear stories everyday on how the whole European Union is under threat amid differing strategies to deal with the issue of migrations and border controls. The current number of displaced people globally is nonetheless the highest since the aftermath of World War II. The global population of forcibly displaced people today is larger than the entire population of the United Kingdom. Displaced people from different Asian countries also are seeking asylum in different parts of the world. Migration of people from zones affected by religious conflict is not just confined to countries in West Asia or North Africa. South Asian countries have witnessed various instances of mass migrations by persecuted religious minorities. In Pakistan, scores of Ahmadis, Christians and Hindus have left the country for safer shelters. The Christian minority communities in Pakistan live in a state of fear and terror. They are being persecuted, tortured and killed in the name of their faith or because of religious hatred. Every day, at least one Christian in the country is persecuted because of his or her Christian identity. Over 800,000 people have left their homes in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) linking Pakistan and Afghanistan in the wake of an ongoing military operation since last year. Most of these have ended up as internally displaced people (IDPs) and are forced to live in inhumane conditions in refugee camps.

9. Statelessness is another major issue today faced by a sizable number of Asians. Statelessness is the situation when a person does not have the nationality of any country, which restricts their fundamental human, social, and political rights, such as access to education, health care and freedom of movement. The UNHCR estimates that at least 10 million people globally are stateless in 78 countries and Asia alone has more than 1.33 million Rohingyas with 800,000 in Myanmar and 500,000 in Bangladesh, and many others in Indonesia and Malaysia. Asia has about 1.5 million stateless people. Hundreds of thousands of stateless people are believed to be in Nepal, although there is no official figure. Part of the problem derives from laws which prevent women passing their nationality to their children. There is also a stateless population of people who were expelled by Bhutan in the 1990s. More than 500,000 people are stateless in Thailand. Many are from ethnic hill tribes such as the Yao, Hmong and Karen who live in the mountainous border with Myanmar and Laos and have distinct languages and cultures. The government denies them ID cards or access to state services, leaving them vulnerable to trafficking. Tens of thousands of children in the Malaysian state of Sabah in Borneo are stateless. They are the children of Indonesians and Filipinos who have migrated to work, often in palm oil plantations. They have no rights to education or healthcare and many end up as child labourers. Sometimes authorities force them to leave the country and the mass deportations often end up with children stranded without their parents. It is also evident that statelessness is severely underreported in Asia. It is more realistic to project that the true number of stateless persons in Asia is more than double what UNHCR is currently able to account for in its statelessness statistics. It may be far higher if, indeed, there are widespread problems of statelessness in India, Indonesia, and Pakistan.

10. The growing level of unemployment, poverty, farmer and peasant suicides, and the increasing number of women and children who are trafficked for sex slavery are serious situations in various Asian contexts. Gross and systematic violations of human rights, increasing militarisation and other forms of dehumanisation have become a common trend in various Asian countries.

### **Where are we heading to: Challenges in our witness and mission**

11. As the world faces innumerable challenges, and we live in the midst of sense of frustrations and darkness, the question that is being asked is where are we heading to? The presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the USA echoed his concern about the deteriorating or degenerating situation in his home land, the U.S. He recently told at the Anglican Church of Canada's General Synod in his address that the violence in the U.S had its roots in a "spiritual malady". "Our culture, our society, our world is begging us, show us another way". 'Show us another way' is the cry or plea of the people in many parts of the world! We hear this cry in our day to day lives in Asia. We heard the cry of many innocent people who are persecuted and violently attacked and killed recently in violent conflicts and terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand and in India as well as in many other parts of the world – in Paris, Nice, Turkey, Brussels, and the U.S.

12. In recent months, there were several instances of violence and terrorism on Asian soil. The churches and ecumenical movement often come forward to express their solidarity during such instances. Often we are strengthened and supported by the mutual prayers and expression of solidarity by churches and ecumenical movement. In this context, I would like to mention about the solidarity and cooperation being extended by different Asian churches as well as churches around the world. I received a letter from the

Moderator of the United Church of Canada expressing concern about a suicide bombing, which killed several innocent people in Lahore, Pakistan on Easter Sunday this year. The moderator of UCC, the Right Reverend Jordan Cantwell, while expressing UCC's solidarity, stated in the letter that we stand together and commit to respecting and caring for one another, to protecting one another, and to preventing such violence, and offered a prayer that, "The United Church holds in prayer and love all those grieving loved ones killed in the violence, the wounded and all those caring for them. As a church, we mourn the perversion of an expression of religious faith through violence and harm done to innocents in the name of religion. We continue to pray and act for peace in this troubled world, working with all those of like mind. We join with other faith communities across borders and boundaries and forces that seek to divide to oppose violence, terror, oppression and domination. And as church we offer this prayer, from our Song of Faith, seeking to live out God's call for peace and justice: Yet evil does not—cannot— undermine or overcome the love of God... we embrace the present, embodying hope, loving our enemies, caring for the earth, choosing life." This message and prayer was heartening, and it really conveys the true sentiments and solidarity of the brothers and sisters in Christ who are mindful of their sisters and brothers in Christ in Pakistan or elsewhere in Asia. We very much value this kind gesture of solidarity and concern expressed by the leadership of UCC.

### **Programmes since the Executive Committee meeting in October 2015.**

13. We adopted a new programme structure in the last meeting of the Executive Committee held in October 2015. Subsequently the programme committee in its first meeting in the first week of December 2015 gave more pragmatic shape for a strategic programme plan and direction, and prioritised programmes and activities. However, the biggest challenge to implement most of those plans was due to lack of staff members or adequate human resources. In the midst of such deficiencies, still we tried our level best to organise and facilitate several or many programmes and activities from October 2015 to July 2016. During the past nine months, CCA organised 26 programmes or activities. In addition to these programmes, CCA was directly involved in several advocacy initiatives including the participation of three accredited representatives of CCA (Rev. Kim Kyrie, Mr. Sunil Babu Sreshta and Ms. Sunil Ammar) to the United Nation's CSW held in New York in March 2016. Although CCA has the status as an organisation in special consultation with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, this was the first time that CCA sent a delegation to the U.N for a major event with official accreditation in the name of CCA. The other main advocacy initiative during this period was the observance of the Asia Sunday on the theme 'Peace and Reconciliation of the Korean peninsula', and public issues actions through ecumenical responses to emerging Asian issues. It is heartening to specially mention here the contribution of five youth interns CCA has recruited for a one year internship programme in implementing some of these programmes. It is also an encouragement for all of us to know that Asian churches have many young talents. There are many "frozen assets" among the young people in the churches and in the ecumenical movement in Asia. They need to be identified and more young people should be given opportunities by CCA to build up their talents and make them as future leaders in church and ecumenical movement in the coming years.

14. The General Secretary and other staff members have participated in several ecumenical events and programmes during the past nine months in addition to their direct involvement in programme planning and implementations. CCA has been constantly invited to participate in member churches' and councils' special events. These occasions are also opportunities for strengthening ecumenical relations and seeking member churches' and councils' wider participation and collaboration in CCA. The General Secretary participated in the following programmes and events of CCA member churches, councils, as well as CCA's own programmes since October 2015:

150th anniversary of PCT, Taiwan (October, 2015); Programme Committee meeting, Chiang Mai (December 2015); Asian Conference of Ecumenical Sunday School Programme, Chiang Mai (January 2016); Working Group meeting of CCA-Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCA joint programme on Peace, Malaysia (February 2016); Visit to Karen Baptist Bible College at Burmese Refugee Camp and Participation at the Convocation, Maesot, Thailand; Visit to CCT headquarters and participation in the ASEAN Conference (March 2016); Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS)- VII, Kochi, India (April, 2016); Convocation of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary, India (April 2016); NCC India General Assembly (April 2016); Asia Sunday celebrations in South Korea and visits to CCA member churches and council in Korea, (May 2016); Visit to Hong Kong Christian Council and Hong Kong Council of Churches of Christ in China (May 2016); Joint Planning meeting of CCA and APAYMCA on Interfaith Peace Consultation (May 2016); Article 9 International Consultation and CCA member churches and council in Japan, (June 2016).

### **Financial sustainability**

15. Financial sustainability continues to be a major issue before us. We are being informed by the traditional ecumenical partners from the West of their inability to support CCA the same way they generously supported us during the past many years or decades. Although this is not a new signal to us, they are again reminding us that we need to be mindful of their early warnings. This gives us an opportunity to search for new strategies for more concerted efforts in raising resources within Asia and from our member constituencies. As I mentioned in my last report, among the CCA member churches, a large number of them are in a situation to contribute more to CCA. In fact, a sizable number of CCA member churches are already contributing regularly to various other ecumenical and confessional, as well as mission, bodies in the West. It is high time now that there should be more solidarity from Asia to CCA for strengthening our common ecumenical journey. I don't know where the barrier lies. Maybe it is due to our organisational weakness of making any serious attempts or effort to approach our member churches and councils on a regular basis. We need the special attention and support of CCA Executive Committee members, programme committee members and all other advisory board members to generate more financial contributions to CCA.

The Finance Committee, which met during the past three days, came up with certain policy guidelines for fundraising and income generation. This will be presented to you for further discussion and adoption. The Finance Committee also tried to explore various options to increase the income through proper investments of the endowment funds and certain proposals will be brought forward to the consideration of the Executive Committee and further action. With regard to the follow-up of the earlier decision regarding the sale of the property in Chiang Mai, this will also be shared at a later stage.

### **Update on the process of reviewing the current location of CCA headquarters**

16. You might recall that the last General Assembly of CCA, and also the last meeting of the Executive Committee held in Bangkok last year, discussed about the need to review the current location of CCA headquarters. A sub-committee was appointed by the Executive Committee to initiate a discussion and study about various options. However, we have not been able to meet yet due to various reasons. Meanwhile, the General Secretary has initiated a discussion with the leadership of the Church of Christ in Thailand, the current sponsor and host of CCA in Thailand, to seek their advice on this matter. The Indonesian churches and Sri Lankan churches also have informed us that they are willing to discuss more seriously about this matter and explore options for CCA to be located in these countries through the sponsorship of churches in these two countries. It is a long way to go for us before we take any decision in future. A meeting of the sub-committee will be convened soon to discuss on how to move forward.

### **CCA: 60 Years of existence; sustainability in the future.**

17. In our last meeting, I reported about CCA completing 60 years of its existence in 2017. In our Asian culture, the 60th birthday is very significant. In Asian culture, the 60th birthday holds special meaning and is widely celebrated with food, gifts and festivities. In the East Asian culture and tradition, it is believed that when a person reaches the age of 60, he or she has completed a full cycle of life, which calls for a grand celebration. In Korean it is *Hwangab* (Hangu; hanja), in Japanese it is *Kanreki*, and in Chinese it is known as *Jiazi*. The number 60 means accomplishing one big circle and starting another one in one's life as the traditional 60 year calendar cycle. In Indian culture as well as in most South Asian cultures and traditions, it is known as *Shasti Poorthi*, a celebration on completion of 60 years of age. It marks the completion of half the years of one's lifetime. In Hindu tradition, 120 years is considered the life span of a human being. The sixtieth year in one's life is a significant milestone, memorable turning point, a touching reminder, mellowed life that would unfold in the years to come. *Shashti Poorthi* marks the completion of one such cycle. Considering all these Asian traditions, one can imagine how much importance we give for 60 years of a life span. In this context, 60 years is a very important year and milestone in CCA's life, which will be in 2017. We need to reflect and plan on how best we could make it a memorable event. What are the best ways we can contribute to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of CCA as a celebrative occasion? Should we make it as a one bigger event at the end or organise several events that will provide opportunities for CCA member churches and councils to come together to give thanks for the ways God has led this organisation as his instrument to perform the mission of God.

18. CCA is not the sole representative of the Asian ecumenical movement. However, it has been demonstrating a unique and prominent role as the coordinator, facilitator and well-respected regional ecumenical body during the past six decades. CCA has the support of a large member constituency with its membership expanding or covering from Iran in the West to Japan in the East, and Nepal in the North to

New Zealand in the South. That means, the roots are widely spread from one end to the other and it is indeed deeply rooted. As a person who has been privileged to associate with CCA in various ways during the past several years I am fully aware of its deep roots. As a phrase in Charles Dickens' novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, "the Worst of Times and the Best of Times", CCA has faced or experienced the worst and the best times of its history. However, its strength lies with its strong roots in the constituencies.

19. When I am reminded of the strong roots, I often think of the analogy used by Prof. Masao Takenaka, the famous Japanese theologian who was a strong pillar of EACC/CCA for many years. In his book under the title, 'When the Bamboo Bends', he mentioned about the unique characteristics of bamboo in its root system and strength. We know that in spite of wind and storm, the bamboo demonstrates amazing flexibility or elasticity. In winter, it bears heavy snow. Though it bends, does not fall down. It swings at the time of the storm yet when it is over, the bamboo returns back to a straight position. When Takenako describes the symbolism of bamboo, he talks about the practical character of bamboo. I would argue that the special characteristic of bamboo is an apt analogy when it is compared with CCA and its life during the past decades. CCA faced many storms and winds, but it showed amazing capacity to overcome those strong winds and storms. When CCA was expelled from Singapore and, it has been moving around from place to place as a wanderer, when a severe financial crisis affected during latter part of 1990's, it survived all those winds and storms by the grace of God. CCA's roots strengthened its vitality in the midst of the storms. We do not normally see the roots of bamboo as they are hidden from our sight. But, these roots are the source of the vitality of the bamboo as they stretch and grow, putting up new shoots. Its root grows horizontally with amazing strength, stretch steadily and gradually increase the size and strength of the plant. Bamboo grows steadily even when bending under the weight of snow during winter season. It also multiplies. This is what exactly happens in the case of CCA.

20. When CCA was founded only 14 countries and about 36 churches were involved in CCA. It was even known as the 'East Asian Christian Conference', showing its limited geographical jurisdiction, but it has gradually taken roots across Asia. Today, the roots have reached horizontally from Iran in the West to Japan in the East; Nepal in the North to New Zealand in the South. The roots widely spread to new countries such as Iran, Nepal, Bhutan, Laos, Cambodia, and East Timor; all were added subsequently to CCA's wider fellowship. CCA also helped to multiply the ecumenical genus over the years through the establishment of several other specialised ministries in Asia such as the Asia Migrant Centre (AMC), ECPAT, CAW, AHRC, ALRC, and DAGA. Considering all these factors, there is a valid reason for CCA to celebrate its Diamond Jubilee in 2017. I do hope that this Executive Committee will come up with a concrete proposal, and a mandate to initiate the preparation for the 60th anniversary celebrations in 2017. The 60th anniversary is not only a time for looking at the past history, but it should be seen as an opportunity to reflect about the past, looking at the present and envisioning the future.

### **Towards Envisioning Mission and Reshaping the Ecumenical Identity**

21. Mission of the church is not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to greater numbers of people, but the essence of the Gospel is meant to transform the world to higher humanity. While analysing the Christian mission in the third millennium, Jose Cheriampattu said, "Mission is transformation of the world to higher humanity." He said, at Vatican II, that the concept of mission was in transition and the language of mission concept itself was changed; from "missions" in the plural to mission in the singular, from evangelisation to development, to humanisation; from inculturation to liberation, to preferential option for the poor. As far as the Roman Catholic Church, a new thrust in the missiological emphasis was articulated since the Second Vatican Council in 1964. However, earlier to Second Vatican Council, in 1957 itself, at the Prapat founding Conference of CCA, reflected on the theme of "The Common Evangelistic Task", reflected on "the mission and its encounter with the Asian revolution". M.M Thomas in a keynote presentation at Prapat said, "By mission, we mean the mission of the church to witness to as Lord and Redeemer... The Church is involved in the Asian revolution and in part reflects it. But this involvement gives the Church the opportunity to encounter it". Bishop E.C. Sobrepna of the Philippines said at the Prapat Conference, "the Asian churches, in rediscovering the compulsion of witness bearing, are at the same time recapturing the sense of urgency. Asian Christians live and work in situations of rapid social change; they are confronted by ideologies that negate the basic philosophy and practice of Christianity... The struggle becomes deeper and more intense every day". He added that Asian Christians and Churches were called to mission and action even in their numerical weakness. Ever since the Prapat Conference, EACC/CCA has been providing the Asian churches a sense of togetherness and a common responsibility in doing Mission as well as helping churches to discern Christ's presence in Asian history in terms of its socio-religious, economic and political context. Mission in action involves the participation in all forms of struggles

in the world and it cannot be merely interpreted as preaching Gospel for adding numerical numbers or church planting. CCA believes that the purpose of God for the Church in Asia is life together in a common obedience to him for the doing of his will in the world.

22. CCA affirms its conviction that the mission to transform the world is not secondary to the Church but a constitutive of the Gospel proclamation and that it is the rethinking of human existence in the light of the Gospel. It is with this perception and conviction that CCA tries to shape ecumenism as a cardinal principle of mission. N.B. Gladstone Robert, a young pastor of the Church of South India who tried to reformulate and comprehend socio-cultural and religious life of the people of Asia in the broader framework of Mission and Ecumenical Concerns of CCA as part of his doctoral studies, observes, "The significance of ecumenical thoughts which originates from the Asian scenario towards the global level as well to the Asian situation is the kernel of the mission understanding and the contribution of the CCA... It is noteworthy that the ecumenical witness, enhanced by the very formation of CCA, continues to gain its distinct character through challenging the divisive denominationalism, confessional, ecclesiastical and theological differences that had originated in the Western churches and their missions in Asia". While engaged in its ecumenical witness in Asia from the very beginning of the formation, CCA has gained its character of doing mission in Asia together, for which CCA has called "the churches in Asia to be in unity not only across different ecclesial and theological traditions but also beyond the religious, cultural, and political boundaries or barriers." With this conviction, CCA time and again emphasises "God's mission in Asia is for all God's people in Asia".

23. As CCA approaches to the 60th anniversary of its founding, it gives us an opportunity to seriously reflect and discuss about envisioning its mission and reshaping the ecumenical identity in the emerging Asian context. From the very beginning of its existence as a regional ecumenical body, CCA has recognised that ecumenism in Asia has its deep roots in mission of the Asian churches. This was also based on the firm conviction that mission of the churches in unity only can bear the fruits as they are inseparable and the Church is called to participate in God's mission in unity. Mission belongs to the very being of the Church, and through its mission, the Church is expected to transform the treasures of the Gospel. CCA made attempts from time to time to articulate the mission of the Asian churches and the ecumenical movement. Asia Mission Conferences organized by CCA in the past have been an integral component of the life and witness of the Asian churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia. The mission conferences were part of Asian churches' efforts of contextualization of theological thinking and articulation of missiological issues in Asia. CCA has been a catalyst to equip the churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia as a whole to perform mission in the midst of emerging Asian context and realities. CCA assemblies as well as Asia Mission Conferences provided opportunities and impetus to think loudly about the missiological convictions amidst Asia's pluralistic contexts and shape the ecumenical identities. However, it has been a while that CCA made any specific effort to provide another opportunity for Asian churches and all other ecumenical partners in their common faith journey to reflect on the emerging mission contexts in Asia. The last such attempt was in 1994. Now the time has come, especially in the context of CCA's Diamond Jubilee, to provide such an opportunity. In a separate session later, we will be discussing the proposal of the Assembly and the programme committee, and more concrete plans for organising an Asia Mission Conference in 2017.

### **Has the ecumenical movement becomes more divisive and less effective?**

24. It is also important for us at this stage to look at the current situation of the ecumenical movement. The Asian ecumenical movement is not detached from the global ecumenical movement. We believe in one ecumenical movement and the need for affirming and strengthening the value of one ecumenical movement. Changing landscapes of ecumenism, changes in ecclesial landscapes, etc., are certain terminologies repeatedly used in ecumenical circles for almost two decades now. However, the question is how successful we have been in addressing emerging challenges in various contexts thus far. On the one hand, we try to analyse the landscapes and often end up in the same old analysis or end up using exaggerated symbolisms or analogies to illustrate the situations of ecumenical and ecclesiastical structures. However, as time passes, no effective actions are taken to really understand and respond to the challenges in ecumenical or ecclesial perspectives with certain authentic approach or commitment. In the Asian contexts, we can identify various examples for more and more divisiveness which is fragmenting the ecumenical ethos and values of ecumenism. In other words, what we see today is a more visible expression of lack of coherence and coordination of the ecumenical movement in Asia or other parts of the world. This is often initiated by those who are expected to ensure the coherence of one ecumenical movement.

25. As the ecumenical agenda has been changing and moving away from the priorities of ecumenical commitment three or four decades ago, there is no point in simply repeating the same jargon with certain

cosmetic changes or prefixes and suffixes. Whatever may be the issue to be addressed, what we need is a strong and committed ecumenical movement with the full cooperation and support of its member constituencies. In addition to this, what is required is full cooperation and participation with all ecumenical and ecclesiastical partners and actors in our region. We find today a variety of organisations and institutions working on similar areas or concerns – NGOs, INGOs, faith based organisations, governments, multilateral organisations, etc. These groups are loosely connected with institutional churches or ecumenical organisations. In many contexts, collaboration with them is much easier, but often the problem we face is lack of ecumenical cooperation and collaboration among ecumenical partners and mission agencies who are working in the same region with similar agendas where collective ecumenical actions are needed. It is important to demonstrate Christian unity and ecumenical visibility in actions when the same church-based organisations are trying to address similar issues in one region or country with an aim for a common goal. It is in this context that the relevance of a conciliar body like a Regional Ecumenical Organisation (REO) such as CCA has been valued over the years. Dr. Konrad Raiser, former General Secretary of WCC, described the special role of such conciliar bodies - the WCC, REOs and NCCs- and he stated that these ecumenical structures should be seen as the backbone of ecumenical cooperation. While he was leading the WCC, he emphasised the importance of discussions on such issues at the annual meetings between WCC and the REOs, as well as in the periodic meetings of NCCs. The specific roles of the conciliar bodies on local, national, regional and world levels need to be worked out more carefully as their role will not be in implementing programmes and projects but in facilitating, interpreting, connecting and providing the communication flow for the entire multilateral ecumenical configurations. However, what we see today is more polarisation and divisiveness due to lack of clarity and vision in shaping unity of the one ecumenical movement. CCA has always given special importance to relate with NCCs in Asia. The meetings with the General Secretaries of NCCs in Asia have been mutually helpful in strengthening in our common ecumenical bonds and joint ecumenical actions in the past. However, CCA's meetings with NCC General Secretaries have not been taking place for some time now. It is expected that a meeting of CCA and NCCs in Asia will be held in 2017.

### **Called to bear witness to the truth and hope in action.**

26. In this report, I tried to portray a picture of Asian realities in which we are deeply immersed in and also the current state of affairs of CCA in the context of wider ecumenical, ecclesiastical realities as well as missiological convictions. In this context, I would say that it is an imperative for us to see the rays of hope in the midst of darkness and affirm our faith in the presence of the living reality, God. As Christians, we are bound to be strengthened by our faith and to live in hope in order to be a light of life amidst darkness. We are reminded of the assurances of Christ who said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12)." The Gospel tells us that Jesus shares with us the healing power that is a part of God's kingdom with those who were deprived of all strength: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest (Mathew 11:28)." The words of St. Gregory the Theologian, 4th century, remind us that Jesus assumed the worse that "he might give us the better. He came down that we might be lifted up. He was tempted that through him we might conquer. He died that he might save us". From the beginning, Christian communities have regarded the death of Jesus in the light of the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases...he was wounded for our transgressions... (Isaiah 53: 4-5)." This is not to venerate suffering for its own sake or to perceive it as an advantage in itself, but it is to encourage people simply to accept the sufferings imposed upon them by others. It is a reminder for us to be encouraged that Jesus is beside of us with the assurances of the restoration of light at times of darkness in life, restoration of wholeness to every stage of brokenness in life. As Paul writes to Timothy, "For this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:10).

27. The conviction of our ancestors who initiated CCA was based on their firm belief that mission is the core of the ecumenical movement in Asia and ecumenism cannot be a mere fellowship of a few Christians. The new ecumenical venture in Asia came into being out of such a conviction of the Asian churches that the united witness and mission of the churches in Asia is inevitable. Almost six decades later, we are still affirming this conviction and we are still hopeful that ecumenism in Asia will grow and flourish to face the challenges that Asia faces today. We are hopeful of the fact that CCA will be instrumental to bear witness to the truth and face the challenges of the ecumenical witness. We need to be hopeful that the ecumenical witness envisioned by the very foundation of CCA will gain more momentum of doing mission in Asia in unity, beyond narrow ecclesial and theological boundaries. We are hopeful that God's presence and guidance will lead to people-centered mission and ecumenism. This is hope in action to live in God's



presence in the midst of despair. There are many moments of despair we are faced with during our ecumenical journey, but I am hopeful of the fact that CCA, as a privileged instrument in the hands of God assigned to perform His task, will be in a much better position by the grace of God in future to bear witness to the truth. Often, we are not prepared or not confident enough to respond to God's call to be His witnesses. Often, we are not confident enough to bear the witness to the truth. In human history, this has been a perennial problem at every stage in life. An ancient Vedic prayer in Indian tradition echoes the same message and earnest longing to be freed from such despairs in the midst of ignorance and darkness:

"From ignorance, lead me to truth;  
From darkness, lead me to light;  
From death, lead me to immortality."

*("Asato Ma Sat Gamaya, Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya, Mrtyormā amṛtam gamaya")*

While appreciating the bursting buds on a plum tree in the winter, Joseph Hardy Neeshima, founder of the Doshisha University in Japan, once said:

"Truth is just like the winter plum blossom  
It dares to bloom despite snow and wind".

Nasheema wrote these lines about plum blossom at the time of the year when the trees have shed all their leaves. But he saw a bud on the branch of a plum tree- a foretaste of the spring to come. It gave him hope that something was happening despite snow and wind. This is true in our ecumenical context too. Often, it is said that the ecumenical movement is facing a winter, in which everything is frozen and movement is restricted or everything becomes static and we are in the midst of a sense of darkness. But, we are being called to respond to such situations with hope in action and we are called to "bear witness to the truth" and be "the light of life" (John 18:37, John 8:12). We will be able to bear the witness to the truth only in faith of the living reality of the presence of God in our midst. This situation of experiencing the beauty and reality of God's presence in everyday life, in the midst of anxiety or doubts, is narrated in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet among the nations. He thought that he would not be able to perform the task. Jeremiah was doubtful and not confident. He expressed his lack of confidence and doubt. Then, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" He said, "I see a branch of almond tree" (Jer 1:11). The Hebrew words for almond means "to awaken". In this context, Takenaka says, this story is an allegory for the awakening of people to the living reality of God's presence. Let us awake to experience the living reality of God's presence and let us respond to His call to bear witness to the truth and light of life in Asia.

18 July 2016

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