

Statement of Concern over Religious Intolerance and Violence in Asia

The Executive Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) conveys its concern over the problems of intolerance, hatred, and religious fundamentalism, which leads to religious persecution and the commission of acts of violence and heinous crimes that bring about untold suffering to people of all faiths, including religious minorities, in Asia. Innocent victims include civilians in general and minorities, women, and children in particular. Religious intolerance and religious-inspired violence is escalating in Asia. Unfortunately, many governments turn a blind eye to the problem.

Religious intolerance refers to not respecting the basic human right of other people to hold religious beliefs different to one's own. Montesquieu wrote: "Religious wars are not caused by the fact that there is more than one religion, but by the spirit of intolerance... the spread of which can only be regarded as the total eclipse of human reason."

Blind religious fundamentalism is a serious menace to democracy, peace, and security in Asia. Terrorist acts of violence are committed in the name of religion. Sectarian and extremist violence, its direct or indirect connections with religion, and blatant terrorism cause growing alarm in the region, which is a threat to interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence. Religiously-motivated hate speech, oppression, violence, and attacks by the rich and the poor against people and communities based upon their religious identity have increased with impunity in the region, for which reason religious minorities live in fear and insecurity. Blasphemy laws in particular marginalize religious minorities. Freedom of faith comes under mounting pressure.

There are many instances during which terrorism and violence have taken place in Asia, where there is a spate of attacks against innocent civilians, including Christians. Recent trends indicate that in India, Myanmar, Pakistan, and other parts of Asia, fanatic religious fundamentalists spread reactionary political ideology that patronizes communal polarization and violence. Targeted killings of violent extremists have attacked many victims, including Christian minorities. In Bangladesh, a terrorist attack killed 22 persons. In Pakistan, religious-inspired terrorism has spread throughout the country and a suicide bomber killed over 70 people and injured more than 300 in Lahore on Easter Sunday. A Pakistani social media celebrity was a victim recently of honor killing by her own brother. In Myanmar, Rohingyas are faced with discrimination and persecution. In the Philippines, an extremist Muslim group took hostage foreigners, executed a Canadian, kidnapped Indonesian fishermen, killed Philippine soldiers, and engages in firefights with security forces. In Sri Lanka, where a thirty-year civil war has ended, all victims and survivors await justice and a political solution. Lamenting the perversion of faith expressed in atrocities committed in the name of religion, CCA is concerned about the plight of religious minorities in Asia and expresses its profound grief at the loss of life and limbs from these acts of violence. Condemning terrorism in any form as criminal and indefensible, CCA condemns all violent attacks and any religious justification for such violent attacks against civilians, including religious and other minorities. CCA challenges religious leaders and communities to reflect, self-examine, and challenge interpretations that promote violence against people of other faiths.

CCA recognizes the inherent God-given dignity of each and every person from all faiths and cultures; follows the example of Jesus to be instruments of peace and justice in Asia; is encouraged by the churches and the ecumenical movement for their steadfast prophetic advocacy of human rights and peace

Expressing its solidarity and continually praying for all victims of religiously-justified violence in any form, CCA asserts its pledge to nurture life and promote community as well as foster love, compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Encouraging the understanding and use of pacific settlement of disputes as a high priority in its ecumenical witness to counter discrimination and oppression, and to break the cycle of violence, CCA calls on all religious and ethnic groups to support and encourage peace, reconciliation, and religious harmony at all levels of society and appeals to people from different faith traditions to live together and to protect one another amid our multi-cultural and multi-religious reality.

CCA continues to be concerned about violence in Asia and rejects attempts to divide people from different religious traditions. The Executive Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia, meeting in Medan, Sumatra, Indonesia from 18 to 22 July 2016:

-Calls for promotion of interfaith relations, communal harmony, and practical cooperation on matters related to justice, peace, and the welfare of communities;

-Exhorts governments to uphold the rights of minority religious groups and to take necessary measures to provide adequate safety and security mechanisms to protect religious and other minorities, and not to be deterred by the violent acts that religious extremists perpetrate;

-Encourages the churches in Asia in their witness for human rights, justice, and peace through interfaith efforts to promote peace with justice and reconciliation; and,

-Implores the international community to act collectively to take measures to stop terrorist attacks and religious-motivated violence.