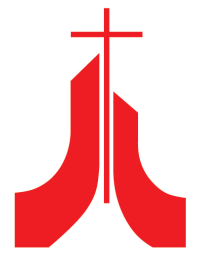




CCA NEWS



Christian Conference of Asia

• CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA • ASIAN ECUMENICAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY • MANADO, INDONESIA •

Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly opens in grand celebrative ceremony



Over 350 young Christians from across Asia converged at Grand Kawanua International Convention Center in Manado, the North Sulawesi provincial capital of Indonesia to open the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA).

At the end of a solemn liturgical celebrative worship in a multicultural Asian context, the AEYA was officially opened when North Sulawesi Governor Olly Dondokambey, Vice Governor Steven Kandouw and Indonesian Foreign Affairs Ministry Director General Cecep Herawan led the striking of the tetengkoran, a traditional Minahasa bamboo bell.

The ecumenical worship service began with a traditional Indonesian welcoming dance when the choir sung indigenous Asian Christian hymns. Prayers alluded to issues of the region; participants from different backgrounds and countries came forward to lead the worship.

In a sermon delivered during the worship, Rev. Dr. Hein Arina, moderator of the host church Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa (GMIM), said: "We as a Church are one strong and powerful institution to be a change; we have the power to bring great in-

fluence towards social change." He said young people must be included in all initiatives of the churches.

GMIM members are hosting the AEYA participants in their homes in and around Manado City during their stay until April 13.

"Light your candles," said Bishop Dr. Willem T. P. Simarmata in his presidential address, and he asked the participants to rally behind the theme, "Lord, send your Light and Truth to lead us."

"The theme is asking the Christian youth worldwide and the global Christian communities to be transformative disciples who are enlightened and justified by the Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ," he said.

The CCA Moderator further said that the times pose various challenges to young people, from falling prey to injustices to being trapped in an "individualistic, consumeristic and hedonistic" culture. He cited cases of religious intolerance, lack of education, poverty, gender-based injustices and environmental issues as opportunities to act.

During an introductory welcome address, Christian Conference of Asia General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara said, "In the midst of complex

realities, all of us are in search of guidance and we need divine guidance amidst the darkness, confusion and often chaotic situations."

The CCA General Secretary stated that "through AEYA, the CCA tries to give a platform for young Asian Christians to come together at the regional level to address some of the most pertinent issues and wider Asian realities; and to evolve ecumenical responses for effective Christian witness."

He noted that the theme of the AEYA, which is a prayer to God almighty, is more pertinent in today's Asian context.

The CCA General Secretary recollected that the AEYA 2018 was the third major Asian ecumenical youth assembly organized by CCA within its 61 years of history; the first such youth event had happened in 1964 in Dumaguete City, the Philippines. The second youth assembly was held in 1984 in New Delhi, India, where Chunakara himself was one of the 200 participants.

"Many ecumenical leaders today are the product of youth and student Christian movements," he noted. "But today what we witness is a general decline of youth and student movements everywhere."

The AEYA, he explained, comes

from CCA's commitment to strengthen the Asian ecumenical movement with active youth participation and ecumenical leadership development for the future.

He further added that CCA's new program thrusts for 2015-2020 give priorities for youth participation at various levels, including long-term youth internships, the training of Young Ambassadors for Peace in Asia, and the Youth Leadership Development and Ecumenical Formation programs at national and sub-regional levels.

Various Asian issues will be tackled in youth-led thematic sessions, panel presentations and Bible studies in the coming days. Participants will also be divided into smaller groups for 10 "Youths in Dialogues" sessions facilitated by the youth leaders selected from among the participants.

During the opening ceremony, prominent Asian ecumenical leader Bishop Dr. Soritua A. E. Nababan, who was the first Youth Secretary of CCA (1963-1968), was felicitated for his services to the Asian and global ecumenical movement. Bishop Nababan was the organizer of the first Asia Youth Assembly held in the Philippines in 1964. **(VAUGHN GEUSEPPE "KOKO" ALVIAR)**

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YOUTH MEMBERS TAKING PART IN THE AEYA

1984

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Opening worship



Photos by Jeba Singh Samuvel

From the opening session...



“The motto in North Sulawesi is: ‘We are all God’s creation,’ and we will base all our activities from today up to the end to God. ”

Olly Dondokambey
Gubernur Sulawesi Utara

“The overall framework and thrust of this Assembly and its theme will be anchored on the essence of this prayer: “Lord, send your Light and Truth to lead us.”

Dr. Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary, CCA



“Sharpen your understanding with social empathy and solidarity so that the world may know that you are the disciples of Christ. ”

Bishop Dr. Willem T.P. Simarmata
Moderator, CCA



“We are so happy we come together here from many countries, cultures and languages gathered for a beautiful fellowship that begins today.”

Rev Dr. Hein Arina
Moderator, GMIM

Fiery presentation sets the stage for panel discussions

Titled “Emerging Issues and Concerns in Asia,” the first panel presentation today stirred attention and serious discussions from among the participants as Ruth Mathen, who belongs to the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India, spoke powerfully about two issues which she felt needed urgent attention.

“There are two main issues I feel strongly about. The first is that rise of religious fundamentalism and extreme nationalism curtails the expressions of faith and identities.”

“The second is about the place and position of women within the church, which places a double burden on those under its ambit,” said 20-year-old Ruth.

Elaborating on her second point, she said the Greco-Ro-

man culture, which early Church fathers in India followed were predisposed to misogyny. She further argued that the tradition organised gender relations by principles of hierarchy and subordination.

“We must recognise those rituals of practices and teachings that are firstly patriarchal, value males over females, and take the male as the norm of ‘human’ and defining women as relative dependent and inferior,” she said.

She also said that “the church was permeated with a deep and ancient mistrust of women and their bodily functions, leading to fear, hatred and violence against women and a mythic blaming of women for all the evils of the world.”

She called for the patriarchal subordination of women in the church to be ‘opposed, resisted and transformed,’ and for

“Patriarchal subordination of women in the church to be ‘opposed, resisted and transformed,’ and for women’s position in the church to be viewed as normative and not marginal.”



women’s position in the church to be viewed as normative and not marginal.

Series of panel presentations

are set to transpire in the next few days of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA), which aims to actively engage

the young people in the most pertinent issues in Asia and their imperatives to the Christian faith. (AJU GEORGE CHRIS)

Youth leaders share perspectives on ‘Emerging Issues and Concerns in Asia’

The Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly’s first panel presentation discussed some of the most pertinent issues and concerns affecting Asian young people where youth leaders shared their own unique perspectives on the issues.

Rev. Jimmy Marcos Immanuel, from the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia, spoke thoroughly about religious intolerance, especially in South Asia. Pointing to some of the recent terror attacks around the world, he said “it not only created deaths, refugees, phys-

ical and economical losses, but also intolerance towards religions and religious identities.”

He also proposed that such religious intolerances were often exploited by local political parties to further their political agendas. He argued that development of technology has made it easier for radical and terrorist groups to spread their messages of hate. Over a period of time, they have moved from fighting with guns and bombs to fighting with words and visualisations.

He quoted a story by Singapore-based newspaper Strait Times to say one of the main

reasons why youth turned to religious intolerance was economic poverty.

“The growth of youth population, simultaneously accompanied by high rate of unemployment, motivated youth to be more intolerant.”

He said youngsters were also psychologically more vulnerable to get influenced by certain ideologies or thoughts. He pushed today’s youth to not become a generation of ‘job seekers’ and instead show their political roles in societies to counter intolerance movements.

Meanwhile, Kim Minji, who currently works as a programme

coordinator for the National Council of Churches in Korea’s (NCCK) Human Rights Centre, beautifully couched how the power of youth could be channelled to make positive changes in society.

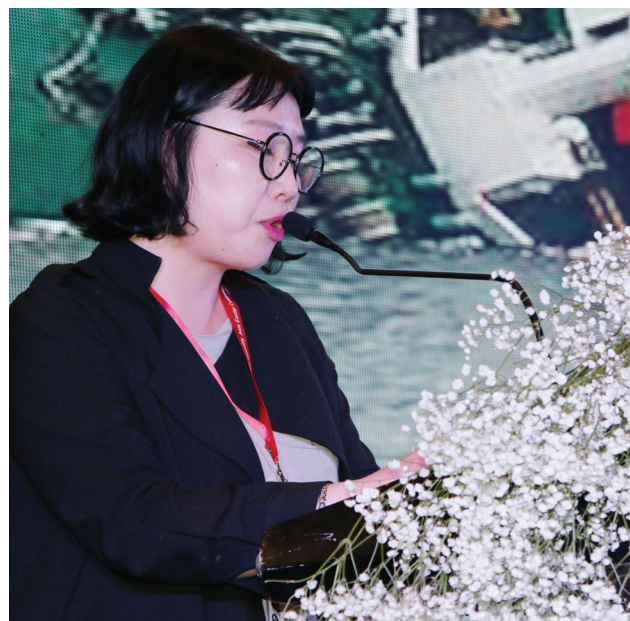
She referred to the stories of South Korean protests, popularly known as the ‘Candlelight Struggle,’ which saw the ouster and later imprisonment of South Korean President Park Geun-Hye.

“What triggered the movement was the sinking of the Sewol Ferry, which resulted in the loss of 304 children’s lives. The former president’s inac-

tion, which led to the huge loss of life, galvanised South Korean society like never before. Millions of people attended 20 candlelight vigils,” she said.

She also spoke about work undertaken by the NCCK in furthering the idea of a peaceful re-unification of North and South Korea. She ended her presentation by challenging the Asian youth to reach out to each other and communicate more.

“Asian youth should try to be interested in each other’s issues and pains and that is the way forward to re-establish the dream of the Asian Ecumenical Movement.” (AJU GEORGE CHRIS)



“Tolerance and dialogue are key to peace and harmony”, says Indonesian government official



Youth in Asia may have suffered much less than their forefathers, but that does not mean that the young generation have been without their own sets of unique problems, observed Cecep Herawan, Director General of Information and Public Diplomacy at the Central Office of Indonesia's Foreign Affairs Ministry.

The youths have much better education compared to previous generations and have not had to suffer severe infant and child mortality rates. The countries they live in have enjoyed decades of peace and the continent overcame an economic slowdown to become a powerhouse of progress.

But despite all this, there were still several challenges ahead of the youth, he said.

“First and foremost, we’re still witnessing an alarming rise in the wave of violent extremism, radicalization and xenophobia. Second, the influx of current migrations all over the globe brings forward issues of pluralism and political identity,” he said.

“The principle of freedom of expressions in many countries has unexpectedly caused

prejudice, intimidation, and discrimination. The increasing use of social media as a platform for disseminating hate speech has also added fuel to acts of violence among different groups,” he added.

The official proceeded to speak about Indonesia, a peaceful nation, and its five guiding principles — the Pancasila — which helped the country build a strong foundation of peace.

“Belief in one Supreme God, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives and finally, social justice for all people of Indonesia — these are the tenets of the Pancasila,” he said.

He said he wished to underline the first principle more than the others.

“It is a recognition that we are human beings and equal before God the Almighty. We are a religious society, yet Indonesia is not a state based on religion. Although our country still has issues to address, tolerance and dialogue are still the key to peace and harmony,” he said.



Young people motivated to fight against HIV and AIDS

A two-day pre-assembly event was organized as part of the Acting Together in Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) program of Christian Conference of Asia aimed at motivating selected young Asians to fight against HIV-AIDS. Said event was held in conjunction with the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) in Manado, North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia.

Twenty young people carefully selected from among the participants of the AEYA attended the said event.

Moving away from the traditional programs of youth conferences, the pre-AEYA event concentrated on team-based activities and informal discussions within the group to encourage young people to be serious about the issues surrounding HIV-AIDS.

Various sessions focused on enabling the participants to be connected with their peer groups at a personal level in order to communicate the message of youth advocacy to combating HIV-AIDS. They were divided into four groups and given the assignment of transforming a bible passage into a movie with their own ‘title’ and a ‘poster.’ Interestingly, the four groups chose to focus on four different aspects of the same story, thus bringing their interest into a high gear during the discussions.

One of the most interesting sessions was

a quiz on HIV-AIDS. The four teams were given a set of eight controversial statements and they had to agree, disagree or partially agree with it and state reasons for their choice. This multi-directional approach promoted thorough discussions among participants, thus leading to a far better understanding of the topics.

Wapangyingla Ao, one of the participants who has an experience in educating people about HIV-AIDS, said the methodology used at the pre-AEYA youth event gave her food for thought.

“All the HIV-AIDS seminars I attended in the past were presentation-oriented sessions. But the highly interactive style of the youth motivation program was fresh and effective,” said Wapangyingla.

Another participant, Amelia Yerikho, who studies International Business Administration at the Sam Ratulangi University in Manado, said she was gaining a much better understanding of HIV-AIDS and its widespread occurrence.

“The first time I heard about HIV-AIDS was in high school, as part of my studies. But the knowledge I had about it was superficial. The youth motivation program gave me a much deeper understanding of the problem” Amelia said.

Participants were expected to share their learnings with other young people at the AEYA event and in their respective organizations.

Getting to know GMIM, the church that made AEYA 2018 possible

You must have heard about “GMIM” a countless times since the few days you’ve been in Manado. Well, you probably want to say it with gratefulness the next time because it made the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly possible!

GMIM is an acronym for *Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa*, or in English, the Evangelical Christian Church in Minahasa. This Christian denomination took up the huge task of hosting the AEYA participants.

“We worked together with the government as a committee to welcome you, and especially to emphasize strongly to young people to participate deeply in Church mission,” GMIM moderator Rev. Dr. Hein Arina told

CCA News.

“By that idea, young people now and in the future can participate in ecumenical gatherings and relationships.”

This is reason they pooled many of their young people to join either as participants or stewards. Member-families also offered their homes for the participants for the duration of the event.

GMIM is comprised of nearly 1,000 churches here and abroad with a concentration in the Minahasa region of Indonesia, which includes Manado and the northern parts of Sulawesi.

Christianity came by way of a handful Dutch missionaries in the 17th and 18th century. It spread through the efforts of the Nether-

lands Missionary Society in 1827, which built schools and trained pastors. In half a century, 80 percent of the Minahasa population was Christian.

GMIM set itself apart from other Protestant churches through declaring autonomy in a 1934 synod in Tomohon. A few years later, it suffered the impact of the Japanese Occupation in the 1940s. The war experience gave them reason to stand on their own, but still maintain ecumenical and interfaith networks.

GMIM’s faithfuls now make up a lion’s share of the Christian community in Indonesia, less than tenth of this predominantly Muslim country. It runs kindergartens, schools and a university. It has hospitals and clinics.

The institution itself believes in the importance of young people in the Church and providing programs for youth, teens and children. Their young people are excited to host their fellow Asian Christians with the Minahasa hospitality.

Sixteen-year-old church leader Timothy Andru Simbuaga, a steward, said: “I’m excited to meet people, youth leaders and pastors because we are one body of Christ anyway.”

Riven Karundeng, another youth leader and AEYA participant said: “Our interactions here can be a lesson for us. We are a majority church in North Sulawesi and we can learn much from the rest of the world.”

“I will definitely learn much of the problems of the youth in Asia,” he said.

Down the memory lane: Bishop Dr. S.A.E Nababan recalls early ecumenical journey

Bishop Soritua AE Nababan enjoys a very long association with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). He is currently the only living participant of the 1957 Prapat Conference, which led to the formation of the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) — the spiritual predecessor of CCA.

Being the first youth secretary of the EACC thus makes him the rightful guest of honor at the opening event of CCA's Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) held at the Grand Kawanua International Convention Centre in Manado, April 7th.

Bishop Nababan, who belongs to the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) church, felt that the AEYA conference was a very important event for Asian young people: "I think the AEYA is being held at a very important time, when youth around Asia are facing several problems. I hope the conference will make delegates more aware of their responsibility today, both nationally and internationally, and inspire them to act more daringly in their own churches and countries."

"It'll also be useful to hold a follow-up programme — a leadership training course — for selected participants of AEYA in the future. It will give them a boost and help mould the youth for better work within their respective churches."

Bishop Nababan, who is also a former president of the World Council of Churches (WCC) who chaired two World Mission Conferences in Bangkok and in Melbourne, took further trip down the memory lane.

Finding his calling

"I was brought up in a very pious family. While I was still in high school, the Indonesian War of Independence (1945 to 1950) broke out. In 1948, I joined the armed forces, the so-called 'student-soldiers' — Tentara Pelajar — against the Dutch colonialists."

"After Indonesia gained independence in 1950, my parents, who were both teachers, asked me to study theology. I obeyed them willingly, without giving too much thought about becoming a pastor. It was during the course of my theological studies that I truly realised my calling — to be a man of God."



The run-up to the 1957 Prapat Conference

"As a 19-year-old, I participated in the Third World Christian Youth Conference in Kottayam, India (December, 1952) and it motivated me to become active in the ecumenical movement."

"The curiosity of young Indonesians was awakened after the organisation of the 1955 Asia-Afrika Conference in Bandung. It was the first large-scale conference of its kind in our country and we wanted to know about other people in Asia. At that time, churches in Indonesia knew only about their counterparts in Europe and the USA. We had no idea about what was happening in neighboring nations like Malaya and India."

"The 1957 Prapat Conference led to the founding of EACC. For me, it was a hope-

ful sign that finally, a new international organisation consisting of Asian churches, would facilitate communications between them. CCA now plays an important role in the lives of Asian churches because together, they are responsible for the spread of the Gospel to billions of people around the continent."

As EACC youth secretary (between 1962-1968)

"The biggest challenge we faced in the early '60s was the lack of youth organisations in member churches. Youth at the time were still considered as children. That they were an entirely independent category — neither children nor adults — was completely ignored."

"We, at the EACC, spent considerable time to help church leaders realize the emergence of youth as a force. I used to frequently refer to my experiences in Indonesia — that our independence was possible only because young people took to arms and fought the modern

Dutch soldiers."

Organising the 1964-65 Asian Christian Youth Assembly (ACYA)

"There were a lot of organisational challenges while preparing for the ACYA in Dumaguete City in The Philippines. I visited different Asian countries to convince national church leaders about the vital need for such a conference."

"Most importantly, the youth leaders in the Philippines, backed by church leaders and the Dumaguete City's bishop of the Roman Catholic Church, convinced the city's Governor to enlarge the local airport in order to accommodate bigger planes to transport delegates from Manila."

"I was able to convince the Governor about the importance of the airport's enlargement for the future development of economy in the province. The airport expansion was complete before the conference started. The Philippines Press at the time hailed the success and noted it was by far the biggest civil air transportation hub in the Philippines."

53 years after ACYA

"Thanks to the world's development and progress, organizing an event like the AEYA is easier now than it was 53 years ago. But the most important thing, for which we are really grateful, is the complete readiness and support of hosting churches."

For example, here in North Sulawesi, the hospitality of the churches and the provincial government is simply amazing. As long as member-churches fully support CCA's programs, the ecumenical movement in Asia will continue to grow." (AJU GEORGE CHRIS)



During the opening ceremony, prominent Asian ecumenical leader Bishop Dr. Soritua A. E. Nababan, who was the first Youth Secretary of CCA (1963-1968), was felicitated for his services to the Asian and global ecumenical movement. Bishop Nababan was the organizer of the first Asia Youth Assembly held in the Philippines in 1964. Dr Nababan told the audience, "Once you're in the ecumenical movement, you will never be the same again. We are marching in the light of God towards the end."



Participants of Asia Youth Assembly - 1984



Participants of AEYA - 2018

