

Christian Conference of Asia

**Asia Regional Consultation on
'Upholding Rights and Dignity of Children'**

Jakarta, Indonesia, 16- 20 September 2018

Communiqué

Children are precious gifts of God. Childhood needs special attention and it holds a special place in everyone's life as early childhood is the time that the foundation of life is built. Children need to be physically and mentally healthy, and protected from harm; they should be surrounded by love and care, and helped to blossom into their life with dignity. However, the fact remains that millions of children in today's world have no opportunity to develop and grow to their fullest.

We affirm that children are created in the Image of God; they are our present as well as future. Children are in our midst to reveal God's grand design and plan in our lives. They are signs to the Kingdom of God and heirs of God's new order. Therefore, any discrimination against children is against the will of God, values of God's kingdom and the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The consultation organised by the Christian Conference of Asia and hosted by the *Gereja Protestan di Indonesia Bagian Barat* (GPIB) from 16 to 20 September 2018 had objectives to sensitise the Asian churches to be aware of the rights and dignity of children; to address specific concerns and issues related to the rights and dignity of children; enhance the capacity of Asian churches to be engaged in advocacy on the protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of children; and find ways to build networking of Asian churches and ecumenical organisations to uphold the rights and dignity of children.

The issues raised during the deliberations of the consultation included challenges to child protection in a digitalized world; children in conflict situations; situations of child labour; implementation of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and subsequent guidelines in Asia today; ending violence against children; early childhood development; and trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in Asia. The participants shared stories and experiences from different parts of Asia. Millions of children continue to be victims of the most egregious forms of exploitations such as violence, abuse and neglect. Poverty, sexual exploitation, sale and trafficking of children for sexual exploitation, pornography and forced labour have become serious concerns in several Asian countries. Impoverished children who are forced to live in vulnerable situations continue to face many inhuman and degrading experiences. Ethnic, religious, political and communal conflicts affect millions of Asian children. The impacts of digitalisation in all walks of life affect children negatively despite the many positive gains of technological advancements. Access to basic education, health care and essential factors needed to nurture and develop the talents of the future generation are limited in many situations. These factors continue to affect the protection and security of children, and their right to live with dignity in a secure atmosphere.

The experiences shared by several participants outlined the problems affecting the dignity and rights of children in manifold ways such as an escalation in the number of street children due to increasing poverty, the break-up of traditional patterns of social and economic life, family disruption, and the inability or unwillingness of the government to respond to the well-being of the people; ethnic and communal conflicts, religious violence, high susceptibility to natural hazards and internal displacements; prevalence of trafficking of children for slavery and labour in different forms; sexual exploitation including child prostitution, child pornography in countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia that have become a safe haven for paedophiles to avoid easy detection of their activities.

We shared during workshop sessions about finding ways to build coalitions and networks for effective advocacy on upholding and protecting children's rights and dignity. The current situation in Asia identified common issues and also possible actions to address various contexts. In this situation, it is our firm conviction that sharing of experiences and resources as well as collaboration on addressing emerging issues help churches in Asia to work together for the dignity and rights of children. The participants propose for actions by churches to continue to develop systematic efforts in upholding the dignity and protecting the rights of children.

Call to action

The Asia Regional Consultation

- *Urges* churches and ecumenical councils in Asia to initiate advocacy to influence governments;
- *Requests* CCA to initiate and facilitate an Asian ecumenical network on upholding and protecting dignity and rights of children;
- *Encourages churches in developing policies of* participation of children as an utmost priority, especially through Christian education programmes;
- *Urges churches to be engaged in tactical action with governments, civil society organisations, faith-based networks and seek* professional assistance as well as pool together resources within the churches to deal with juvenile justice system, issues of sexuality, drug abuse, etc.;
- *Recommends* Churches in Asia to develop curriculum for Child Protection training, and initiate pilot projects to understand state legislations of child protection measures and mechanisms;
- *Suggests* churches to initiate training of the trainers for developing and implementing best practices for child protection as well as to form children-friendly organisations and networks with an aim to sensitise churches on issues and international instruments to protect children's rights and dignity;
- *Proposes* churches in Asia to create awareness among parents and children about the negative impacts of digitalised world;
- *Encourages* church initiatives to develop Child-friendly/ Rights-based programmes in local congregations.

We affirm that the desire for life in all its richness and fullness is the most powerful instinct in human beings. As we believe that human dignity is God's claim on human beings, it is not something created by human declarations. Therefore, human dignity requires human rights for its embodiment, protection and blossoming of life in all its fullness. Churches in Asia are called to be engaged in participating in God's mission and prophetic witness of upholding and protecting the dignity and rights of children.