



CCA NEWS

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA | ASIAN ECUMENICAL WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY | 26 November 2019

Women's organisations are urged to strengthen Asian ecumenical movement

'The ecumenical movement and partnership of organisations must be strengthened without any fragmentation or duplication of activities in the same constituencies' was the common concern echoed by the participants of the Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA) during a lively discussion on a panel session that dealt with the role of various ecumenical women's organisations.

In response to presentations by officers of various women's organisations at a panel session on 'Towards Revitalising Ecumenical Movement and Role of Asian Ecumenical Women's Organisations' on the fifth day

Women's Conference (ACWC) talked about how the ACWC has been a space for Asian women ever since it was started six decades ago. The organisation is marked by its work beyond the barriers and binaries of women and men, poor and rich, and racial or cultural differences.

Nirmala Gurung from the World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) delivered a stirring presentation. "We believe that when women rise to leadership, they transform power structures and policies around human rights, gender equality, peace, and justice. When women lead, they are

affect women.

Emma also emphasised the need of accompanying young people on the common ecumenical journey.

Clerisa Varghese from India said that ecumenism is effected into action at individual levels. AEWA, she said, plants the thought; it was up to the participants to actualise it.

Sunila Ammar described the CCA's ecumenical commitment to ensure coherence and coordination of ecumenical movement in Asia through CCA's various women's programmes.



of the AEWA, several participants emphasized the need for more ecumenical collaborations and unified initiatives.

In order to avoid competition among Asian women's organisations, more concerted efforts of collaborations and cooperation among Asian Christian women's organisations need to be ensured by those who are in the leadership of their respective organisations, opined the respondents.

The participants elucidated the need of strengthening the current Asian ecumenical movement by collaborating on all areas of mutual concern, without an overlap or replication of efforts. The way to move forward, they said, was to develop issue-based projects by concentrating limited financial and human resources at common disposal.

Panellists representing various ecumenical organisations shared unique roles and contributions of women's organisations within Asia's ecumenical journey, and unanimously agreed on the pressing need for collaboration and action.

Dr Supaporn Yarnasarn from the Asian Church

empowered to address global agendas of sustainable development," she said.

Dr Liza Lamis from the International Committee for the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC) spoke of her own passion for working with women in transforming themselves, at the same time that they are transforming the world.

Rev Moumita Biswas from the World Day of Prayer (WDP) drew AEWA's attention back to the transformative power of the simple prayer.

Elizabeth Tapia, who was the first women's secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, and who was active in building up the Asian ecumenical women's movement starting from the 1970s, asked if there were common concerns that could be dealt with, and suggested merging 'efforts, resources, and voices' towards a common goal.

Emma Alamin Cantor from the Philippines vehemently argued for the need of networking and collaboration among such ecumenical organisations in today's times, given that the issues which plague the developing world almost always disproportionately

Sunila further added that AEWA is the first Asian ecumenical women's assembly initiated and organized by CCA with participation of women's representatives from various sectors beyond CCA's member constituencies, and there was no such ecumenical initiative in Asia in the past.

By providing this kind of a platform through AEWA, Sunila said that the CCA was demonstrating its commitment to revitalize the Asian ecumenical movement by ensuring a platform for the active participation of all Asian Christian women.

Rev Kyung In Kim from the Presbyterian Church in Korea moderated the session. In her concluding remarks, she said, "An immediate area of attention of all regional ecumenical women's organizations in Asia was strengthening and revitalising the Asian ecumenical movement by utilising all means in a collective manner."

Rev Kim added, "We must concentrate the limited financial and human resources at our disposal, and strengthen our ecumenical partnership in order to strengthen the ecumenical action of Asian Christian women, and avoid further fragmentation of the ecumenical movement." ■

God is the ‘weaver’ who works to restore the integrity of creation



“God is the ‘weaver’ who actively works and continues to create for the restoration of relations and the integrity of all creation,” said Rev Irene Umbu Lolo, a young woman theologian from Indonesia’s far-flung and remote Sumba region.

Addressing the participants of the first-ever major

ecumenical women’s gathering, the Asian Ecumenical Women’s Assembly (AEWA), Rev Irene, in the fourth thematic plenary session on the fifth day spoke on the sub-theme, ‘Be Awake to Restore’.

The fierce woman theologian and lecturer of feminist theology drew parallels between the experiences of women weavers in her native Sumba and the restorative actions of God.

“The patriarchal social and cultural systems put men in primary positions with special rights as owners and leaders, while women are categorised as second-class citizens and their lives are controlled by men. However, Sumba’s women weavers respond to these violences with non-violence, and resist in a conciliatory manner. They have proved that they are problem-solvers and peacemakers,” explained Rev Irene.

In her presentation, Rev Irene elucidated the symbolism and meaning of weaving as a restorative process. “For Sumba, weaving is the process which entails empowering those who are part of it to restore their communities, restore nature, and restore their

own inner peace.” The act of collective creation, she said, was vital to the process of peaceful restoration.

Jiji Johnson from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India, observed that this was a healthy process where socially negative responses were channeled by creative works in socially positive and helpful responses. This sort of creative act resulted in personal healing and collective rehabilitation with beneficial consequences for all involved.

Rev Hyomyong Lim from Korean Methodist Church wondered if the meaning, symbolism, and interpretation of the weavers’ motifs and colours were shared in other places of Asia as well.

Sirirat Pusurinkhum from the Church of Christ in Thailand described her own experiences in the Thai context, and added that weaving was a part of the locals’ lives, which aided in the healing of memories and reparation of histories. This was a phenomenon which occurred not just in one day, but over time; just as in the context of restoration which happens gradually and is facilitated by the active and dynamic working of the Holy Spirit. ■

Collective participation of Asian women in struggle for peace with justice required for reconciliation process

Presenting their respective contexts of struggle for peace with justice and women’s participation in certain Asian situations, four panellists stressed the need for collective engagement in advocacy in the session on ‘Towards Participation and Solidarity in Struggle for Peace with Justice’.

Helen Grace Salatandre Paris from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines stressed on the need for Asian countries to ‘develop own remedies for conflict management and resolution to pursue justice, contain conflict and replace violence and war with peaceful and effective means to address injustices and resolve disputes’. Helen Grace reiterated that solidarity required that people think and act in terms of the obligations as members of a global community, despite differences of race, religion, or nationality.

Rev Hemalatha John from the Church of South India based her presentation on the rereading of the Scripture from a womanist perspective to reveal the role of women and men in violence and peace. “The need of the hour today is the discerning ability of the Wise Woman as in the book of II Samuel. We live in a world filled with war and conflicts; women from every city must take courage to initiate and participate in conversations during antagonizing situations and people”, explained Rev Hemalatha.

Focusing on women in labour migration and the multi-layer struggles of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, Yusmiati Vistamika Wangka, who works among migrant women workers in Hong Kong shed light on the struggles of migrant workers as well as the factors that affect the feminization of migration to Hong Kong.

“I invite churches in Asia to take action against

the injustice that continues to occur among women migrant workers. Labour migration is an Asian reality and a living theology in Asia should also include a theology of solidarity with migrants”, said Yusmiati.

The session was moderated by Arineh Minasian from the Armenian Apostolic Church in Iran (The Prelacy of Armenians in Isfahan and Southern Iran). ■



AEWA pre-event focuses on action plans for HIV and AIDS advocacy across Asia

A three-day workshop on 'Asian Ecumenical Women Responding and Strengthening HIV & AIDS Advocacy' was held from 19 to 21 November 2019 in conjunction with the Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA). 40 women representatives from churches, national and regional ecumenical councils and related organisations attended the workshop at the Presbyterian Bible College.

The women were encouraged to break free from

and many were deeply touched by her story.

She said, "My faith community and family supported and encouraged me after I was diagnosed with HIV; this was crucial in my life as a PLHIV. I encourage you and leaders of religious communities to be sensitive in accepting people affected by HIV."

Presenting on the 'Best Practices in Responding to HIV and AIDS', the Executive Director of Taiwan

They highlighted that in order to respond effectively, creative and innovative ways needed to be devised especially in Asia's pluralistic context. Participants emphasized the need to be sensitive about the issue and create not just a safe space but an enabling environment. They also affirmed that sharing the right information was key in fighting stigma and discrimination associated with HIV and AIDS.

Rachael Shanti Samuel from Malaysia, who



any pre-existing prejudice regarding HIV and AIDS so as to relearn about the issue effectively. The workshop was facilitated by Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia and Jay Roy Lumas Tipayan from CCA, and there were interactive sessions from field experts in Taiwan.

Lourdes Association, Dr Paul Hsu shared with the participants a HIV Community Care Model that could be replicated in other Asian communities. Dr Paul Hsu shared strategies such as Risk Behaviour Redefinition, Universal Precaution, and Gender/Sex Equality to improve the quality of life of People Living with HIV.

Susan Chang, President of The Garden of Mercy foundation inspired and moved the participants with her presentation and life story of initiating and establishing a foundation in 1998, and the many challenges she faced over the years to take care of people affected by HIV & AIDS and rejected by families and communities for their status.

Towards the end of the workshop, participants were asked to prepare action plans and reflect on their learnings to be used in their specific contexts.

explained the situation of her own church's general conservative position and attitude to PLHIV commented, "It is not easy to approach the community with the issues of HIV and AIDS directly. However, after being a part of the workshop and hearing about the work and lives of many people associated with this issue, I am deeply touched and motivated to implement the action plan that I have prepared."

"Hailing from a traditional and conservative background, imparting this knowledge, spreading awareness and working on destigmatising the concern of HIV and AIDS will definitely be a challenge but it is one that I'm more empowered to take up now. I am truly grateful for having been given the opportunity to attend this workshop", said Wanda Christy from Sri Lanka. ■



Prof Nai-Ying Ko from National Cheng Kung University gave a comprehensive presentation on the HIV and AIDS situation in Taiwan and emphasized on "U=U" or "Undetected equals Untransmittable". Prof Ko's presentation specifically emphasised the role of churches in effectively responding to the HIV epidemic via "ABCD" which stands for A – Awareness, B – Breaking Stigma, C – Community and Care, D – drugs like Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP).

The participants also had the opportunity to interact with a Person Living with HIV (PLHIV) who shared her experiences with the group. Hearing from her gave the participants a clearer perspective of the issue



Asia's Diverse Cultural Kaleidoscope



Taiwan



Pakistan



New Zealand



Myanmar



South Korea



Bangladesh



Philippines



Australia



India

Asia's Diverse Cultural Kaleidoscope



AEWA: What we think, what we say



Arineh Minasian

Armenian Apostolic Church in Iran

Coming from the traditional Armenian Orthodox Church, it is rare for me to see women stand at the pulpit and the frontiers of the Church, and do so fearlessly. AEWA has brought me to the presence of a number of strong women who keenly observe the problems and injustices in their societies and want to do something about it; they opened my eyes to the realities of different Asian contexts. I will be returning to Iran with a new vision to raise awareness about and tackle issues that are affecting my country, but particularly in education which is my primary concern. This assembly has renewed my understanding of the path I must take and the role I play in my community, and for that I am immensely grateful.

“Attending the AEWA has been empowering, and I find solidarity in my experience as a minority with my sisters from other Muslim-majority countries. Christian women in Pakistan are still defining and redefining their identity on their own terms, and an assembly like this has helped me articulate issues of dignity, honour, and respect. AEWA has led to personal rejuvenation.”

Lubna Younas

Church of Pakistan



Rev Margie Ivonne De Wanna

Protestant Church

in the Western part of Indonesia

“AEWA has been a space not just to learn, but to listen. This women’s Assembly has been a space for me and my fellow Sumba women to speak up and articulate our daily lived experience. I am very proud of the young women theologians who are emerging from my region and are sounding the clarion call for change while developing their own unique Asian theology and reclaiming it for themselves. I take back with me a rejuvenated spirit to renew my community.”



Bishop Genieve Mary Blackwell

Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, Australia

“It has been almost overwhelming to hear such different stories and experiences over the course of the past few days. What we have in common as women cuts through a lot of our perceived differences, and this commonality is much more shared than we realise. It was quite promising to see the younger generation of women pick up on a lot of the cultural heritage that has been passed on to them. Voices that are often silenced finally found a place where they were welcomed to speak up, and there is power in articulation, there is power in the story.”

“In my many years of my work with church and society, I have never experienced an ecumenical women’s event as large as this. Though I initially did not fully understand the value this assembly, towards the end of it I find myself more informed and aware of the issues dealt with during the past five days. What I particularly appreciate are the responses of the Asian women gathered here to such problems. I have shared especially engaging conversations with my sisters from Myanmar, and this has prompted me to incite and spur my fellow church and social workers in Taiwan into action. The assembly has been rejuvenating.”

Susan Chang

Presbyterian Church in Taiwan



Rev Juliana Temperaja

Protestant Church in East Timor (IPTL)

“This is my first time attending an ecumenical event of this scale. I have realised that we women possess strength and power in expression. We have the capacity, we have the expertise, and we have His breath in us. I earnestly believe women possess a much higher perception of human suffering, and given our historic colonial baggage, we have experienced much of it ourselves. I particularly admire the CCA’s initiatives of bringing together an interfaith panel, as it provided an opportunity for me to hear from faith-groups I do not usually interact with.”



AEWA Local Host Committee in Taiwan



*Everything captured, monitored and implemented meticulously
Carys Humphreys*



Former CCA Staff attending AEWA 2019



Rev Abus Takisvilainan, Vice Moderator of PCT



CCA Staff members at AEWA

'Creation and Spirituality'

By Hanna Cheriyan Varghese



This captivating image is the pictorial depiction symbolising the Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly's theme, 'Arise, Be Awake to Reconcile, Renew, and Restore the Creation'.

This image is the original painting by the prolific artist, the late Hanna Cheriyan Varghese (Malaysia) in 1995 for the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). Although she passed away in 2009, her prophetic vision still lives on.

Hanna Cheriyan Varghese reflected: "All creative work, be it the spoken word, the written word, or the sung word, are essentials in praise and worship, meditation, education, inculturation, and evangelism. This also includes art and pictures, which is universal seeing."

The title of this painting, 'Creation and Spirituality', depicts the Woman in a fluid movement captured in one frame. The Woman is initially crouched, but is drawn to the light and stretches up. This slow and gradual movement happens deliberately and resolutely.

This movement is motivated by the Holy Spirit, who guides the rising. It shows the Woman in total surrender to the Spirit, but paradoxically, she is also

in the process of reclaiming Her identity as a Child of God; her trust in God's plan is evident every step of the way until the final arising. The background also symbolises God's creation. Her movement, although, does not seem quite finished, it bears the subsequent implication of her enabling the entire creation out of its current complacency into divine action. In the process of awakening and arising, the Woman is now called to her responsibility of reconciling, renewing, and restoring the creation. ■



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