



# Christian Conference of Asia

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## Concern regarding the ongoing natural disasters in Asia – Australia, Indonesia, and the Philippines

It is with great distress and concern that the world has received the news of massive natural disasters in different Asian countries in recent days – the Australian bushfires, the Indonesian flash floods, and the volcanic eruptions in the Philippines.

Australia is being ravaged by the worst wildfires seen in decades. Painful stories about the frightening destructions have been reported, in which at least 28 people have died, around 2000 homes destroyed, over 10 million hectares of land burned down, and nearly a billion animals killed. The ongoing fires are worsening and seem to be exacerbated by persistent heat and drought. While state authorities and rescue volunteer groups have been struggling to contain the massive blazes, even with assistance from other countries, the damning factor seems to be the climate crisis which has made the bushfires – an otherwise commonplace annual occurrence – go from bad to worse.

The flash floods that have struck Greater Jakarta, Banten, and West Java in Indonesia on New Year's Day have been creating devastation. Flash floods triggered by heavy rainfall has submerged three districts and six sub-districts. Aside from flooding, the sudden downpour also caused landslides. The rising waters have already claimed 60 lives and displaced 175,000 people. The Indonesian Forum for the Environment has reported that two small islands in South Sumatra have disappeared as a result of rising sea levels driven by climate change, while four other islands are on the brink of vanishing.

Climate change-driven rising sea levels, caused by the warming of the earth and melting of glaciers, particularly threaten archipelagic countries like Indonesia, where millions of people are spread across 17,000 islands and currently live in low-lying coastal areas. A tropical country like Indonesia is more susceptible to the effects of global warming, especially in South Sumatra, where the locals depend excessively on coal, oil, and natural gas, thus contributing to emissions of greenhouse gases.

In the Philippines, Taal, an active volcano in the middle of a lake around 70 km south of its capital city, Manila, has been spewing smoke and ash since January 12, 2020. The government has ordered about half a million people to evacuate from within a 17 km radius of the volcano. The volcano has been continually belching ash, pebbles, and steam columns. While lives have been saved, farmers and fisher folk – those with extremely climate-sensitive occupations – have lost their means of livelihood, as crops and dwellings are shrouded in a cover of ash.

Volcanologists fear that a violent eruption may lead to lava flows into the surrounding lake, the release of toxic gases, and a possible volcanic tsunami or earthquake.

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), as well as the member churches of these ecumenical councils – most of which are also CCA members – have already initiated several efforts towards disaster mitigation. Churches have opened their doors and are providing relief assistance to those who have fled danger zones.

The CCA expresses sympathy to the people in Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines, and appeals to churches and people of goodwill around the world to pray for all affected communities and to donate to the relief efforts of churches and councils in the affected areas. Let us extend compassion, love, care, and hope to the survivors of the bushfires in Australia, the flash floods in Indonesia, and the volcanic eruption in the Philippines. These ongoing natural disasters and their effects remind us of our Christian duty of working together in times of crises and pooling together our efforts and resources not only to help the victims, but also to mitigate such unforeseen happenings.

As such events become more and more commonplace as a consequence of the climate crisis and its worst effects, our prayers must be supplemented with concrete actions. The climate emergency and its subsequent suffering will only intensify if communities and their governments fail to heed the apocalyptic predictions and do not take sufficient measures to mitigate the potentially irreversible damage to the planet. The voices of the Asian churches must rise as a clarion call for people from all walks of life to join together in averting the state of climate emergency that the world is headed towards.

*“Most merciful and compassionate God,  
You are our comfort and strength in times of sudden disaster, crisis, or chaos.  
Surround us now with your grace and peace through storm or earthquake, fire or flood.  
By your Spirit, lift up those who have fallen, sustain those who work to rescue or rebuild,  
and fill us with the hope of your new creation; through You, our rock and redeemer.  
Giver of Life and Love, hear our prayers.” (Author Unknown)*



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