

Unity & Harmony in Asia

The 8th General Assembly
of Asian Councils of Religions for Peace

ACRP and the Aspirations and Themes of the 8th Assembly

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ABOUT ASIAN CONFERENCE OF RELIGIONS FOR PEACE

Mission and Objectives of ACRP

Asia accounts for one third of the world's continents and half of the global population and is the home of many outstanding civilizations, including those of ancient Mesopotamia, and the Indus and Yellow river valley. Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam all originated in Asia. ACRP has the mission of using Asia's spiritual talent to serve as model in showing the rest of the world what it means to live in harmony, and to bring out the best of our human nature.

The aims and aspirations of ACRP are: 1. to re-vitalize Asian religious heritage and to promote a creative and critical awareness of religious people in Asia in pursuit of peace, justice and human dignity; and, 2. to motivate the people of Asia and the Pacific region to make concerted efforts in promoting peace.

Foundation of ACRP

The idea of ACRP started in September 1974 at Louvain, Belgium, among Asian delegates attending the Second Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. The ensuing two years' laborious preparation gave birth to the Organization. With ACRP having been formally formed, Asian religious people now have a visible manifestation of their own fellowship and concern for peace.

General Assemblies of ACRP

The 1st Assembly at Singapore in 1976: The Assembly attracted 400 participants from 17 countries representing 10 religions under the theme "Peace Through Religion." Soon after the first assembly, the Boat People Project was started to help refugees from Indo-China in response to an emergency call and action of the assembly.

The 2nd Assembly at New Delhi in 1981: The Assembly gathered 450 participants from 20 countries representing 10 religions under the theme, "Religion in Action for Peace."

The 3rd Assembly at Seoul in 1986: The Seoul Assembly involved 240 participants from 22 countries representing 10 religions under the theme "Bridge of Peace in Asia." The assembly gave birth to the Center for Peace Education that was established in Seoul in 1987.

The 4th Assembly at Kathmandu in 1991: The theme of this Assembly "Asian Religions Toward The 21st Century." It gathered 300 delegates from 21 countries representing 16 religious groups.

The 5th Assembly at Ayutthaya in 1996: Under the theme “Our Asian Neighborhood,” the Assembly involved more than 270 participants from 25 countries.

The 6th Assembly at Jogjakarta in 2002: This Assembly had for its theme “Asia the Reconciler.” Some 300 delegates from 28 countries participated in the Jogjakarta Assembly.

The 7th Assembly at Manila in 2008: The theme of this Assembly was “Peacemaking in Asia,” with some 500 delegates from 25 countries held at the historic University of Santo Tomas, the oldest University in Asia.

Structure of ACRP

ACRP consists of sixteen (16) chapters in Asia and the Pacific areas: Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand



ACRP PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

(Activity Report 2009-2014)

Executive Committee (EC) Meetings

Anually, members of the ACRP Executive Committee meet to discuss and approve projects, assess previous activities, and resolve advocacy issues and implement dialogue of action programs. More important, EC meetings are venues for policy formulation and key decision making through consensus building to strengthen ACRP roles of peace-making in Asia and to prepare for ACRP Assemblies. EC meetings are also occasions to strengthen the amicable relationship between and among National chapter members.

Religions for Peace India hosted the first EC Meeting after the Manila Assembly. The India EC meeting was held in New Delhi on May 22-24, 2009. The 2010 EC Meeting was organized by the China Conference of Religions for Peace in Beijing on May 10-12, 2010. The following year, the interfaith group in Malaysia hosted the EC Meeting in Selangor on May 23-26, 2011. Korean Conference of Religions for Peace arranged the June 11-15, 2012 Meeting in Korea. And Finally, Indonesia hosted the EC Meeting in Muhammadiyah University Malang on 7-10 of June 2013.

ACRP Co-Presidents Meeting

In preparation for the 8th ACRP General Assembly, the moderator, secretary general and the co-presidents of ACRP met in Korea on October 24-26, 2013 to discuss and finalize the venue for the Assembly, the program and other logistical details.

Multireligious Cooperation for the Tsunami Victims in Japan

In a meeting with WCRP/Japan represented by Rev. Hatakeyama, Rev. Hirota Megumi and Mr. Yoshinori Shinohara with Rev. Kim Tae Sung, ACRP Assistant Secretary General from 15th to 17th of September 2011 in Seoul, R.O. Korea, dialogue of action were finalized to mobilize ACRP to assist the victims of Tsunami in Japan. The dialogue of Action Plan was later implemented by the WCRP Japan in cooperation with the ACRP central secretariat.

This was a follow-up meeting to realize the initial assessment conducted by the ACRP through the Assistant Secretary General in April 11-14, 2011, where together with Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, WCRP Deputy Secretary General, Antee, WCRP relief operation personnel from Finland, Yoshinori Shinohara, Staff of WCRP/Japan, and Kikyo Sukinati, Secretary of the Youth Committee WCRP/Japan visited and conducted assessment to the victims of Sendai City, Ikuonoma City, Iyatae Province and other places affected by earthquake and tsunami.

ACRP project to the Victims of Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines

ACRP and Friends of Peace Korea partnered with Religions for Peace Philippines and the University of Santo Tomas in conducting trauma management and stress debriefing for children and vital facility rehabilitation projects in Batan, a hardly hit coastal town in the province of Aklan. The project assisted children to recover from their trauma due to the typhoon, trained teachers to be able to perform stress debriefing during emergencies, and repaired school buildings and houses of the poor and the marginalized.

Before the implementation, Rev. Kim Taesung, Dr Lilian Sison and other delegates met with Sec. Sonny Coloma of the Office of the President of the Republic of the Philippines in Malacanang to discuss the parameters and areas of cooperation and seek too the support and approval of the government. After which, the team visited Cebu, Samar, Tacloban and Aklan for assessment and establishment of joint cooperation with the locals for the possibility of implementing rehabilitation projects.

Cooperation with Religions for Peace International

ACRP has actively participated in the Executive Committee and Regional Secretary Generals' meetings of Religions for Peace International from 2010-2014. Under the leadership of Dr. Vendley (RPI Secretary General) and Rev. Kyoichi Sugino (Deputy Secretary General), ACRP was able to manifest its communion and cooperation with the various regional conferences of Religions for Peace, namely Africa, Europe, South America and Caribbean. ACRP has continued to enrich the global work of Religions for Peace by sharing its programs and activities and commitment to Religions for Peace International's advocacy and dialogue of action for peace, harmony and unity. ACRP was also represented in the launching of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Religions for Peace and the preparation of the 9th World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Vienna. Rev. Tomokazu Hatakeyama, ACRP Deputy Secretary General, represented Dr. Sunggon Kim ACRP Secretary General in all those meetings held by Religions for Peace International.

Commission Projects

Commission on Environment: Key multireligious Eco-friendly and protection messages bookmarks. Bookmarks were produced and disseminated to the wider public containing sayings and famous passages regarding the protection and care of creation from 10 various religious traditions. The bookmarks were distributed to all EC members, students, peace and care-for-the environment advocates. Rev. Nichiko Niwano, WCRP Japan, is the chairman of this Commission.

Commission on Human Rights: Mr. N. Vasudevan (Religions for Peace India), the chairman of this Commission, has organized consultations on human rights and well-being and did mapping on the human rights issues in Asia and how multireligious cooperation can contribute in promoting human rights and in managing and resolving conflicts due to human rights abuses.

Commission on Reconciliation: Master Xue Cheng (CCRP), the chairman of this Commission, organized a meeting of all the members of the Commission before the EC meeting on May 7, 2013 in Malang, Indonesia. The result of the meeting was presented to the Indonesia EC Meeting.

ACRP Women`s Committee Conference

“The unique attributes of women play a key role in providing alternative framework and strategies in promoting peace and development in our time.” With the theme “Seeding Cultures of Peace and Development,” the Asian Women Forum gathers Women leaders of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace in dialogue with local leaders to reflect on this specific fundamental role last November 24-26, 2011 in Manila.

Dr. Sunggon Kim, ACRP Secretary General, one of the key resource persons, provided key directions and challenges to the ACRP Women Committee regarding its important role in the increasing relevance of ARCP in the region. Rev. Kim Tae Sung, ACRP Assistant Secretary General, was also present to dialogue with the women leaders for strategic planning and logistical needs.

The following chapters of ACRP participated in the forum: Indira Manandhar (Nepal), Dr. Deepali Bhanot (India), Elga Sarapung and Dr. Siti Siyamsiyatun (Indonesia), Rev. Gao Ying (China), Sr. Corinne Han Mi Sook (Korea) and Megumi Hirota and Prof. Naoko Kawada (Japan). Jaqueline Oguega, the global coordinator of Women Program of Religions for Peace New York was the keynote speaker.

ACRP Seoul Peace Education Center Activity

Peace School for Religious Youth. Around 35 religious youth leaders representing the 7 religions of KCRP participated in the workshop education on restorative justice and non-violent communication, and an exposure to the Manchuria area between the borders of DPR Korea and China from May 1 to July 6, 2014.

The Asian Forum on Migrants and Religion brought together religious leaders, peace advocates and peace-building experts to articulate a platform on conflict management on issues affecting migrants and religion at Chereville Paradise Hotel in Yangpyeong-gun, Gyeonggi-do, Korea and DMZ Peace & Cultural center on October 21-27, 2013.



THE 8TH ACRP ASSEMBLY ASPIRATIONS AND OBJECTIVES

N. Vasudevan
Co-President, ACRP

“Unity and Harmony in Asia” is the chosen theme of *The 8th Assembly of Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP)*. They complement each other and capture the prevailing mood in most Asian countries. We believe that based on shared common values, there is an underlying cultural and spiritual unity among the people of Asia. Harmony is one of the basic principles preached and practiced by all the religious traditions of the East from ancient times. Social harmony has now become a part of official policy in many Asian countries.

Spirituality of Asia

Asia is the mainspring and matrix of all great religions in the world. All living faiths of mankind had their origin in Asia: Confucianism and Taoism in China; Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism in India; Shintoism in Japan; Zoroastrianism in Iran; Judaism and Christianity in Palestine; and, Islam in Arabia.

Spirituality, which animates the higher nature of humanity, abounds in Asia. It is a force that makes us ONE in spite of our diversity in the ways of expressing it. It is an uplifting force of higher quality within us, which makes ourselves fit and worthy channels for great love, compassion and service as witnessed and proclaimed by all religions.

Unity in Diversity

Today we are living in a profoundly interdependent and interconnected global village. The whole world is to be seen as one family and that there is a collective responsibility for community and societal issues.

Diversity is a historical and contemporary social reality throughout the world. Beneath the cultural diversity, religious plurality and economic disparity, there is an underlying, special bonding unity among all peoples of Asia. There is a common thread in the ethical and moral teachings of the Vedas, Confucius, Buddha and Lao Tzu. In spite of varying developments, the different peoples of Asia possess a number of common features, which will justify our speaking of an Asian view of the person and an Asian identity. This view is essentially a religious and spiritual one.

In Asia, religions play very important role in the day-to-day life of people. The purpose of religion is to help us to discipline our whole being – body, mind, heart and will. Through prayer, meditation and self-control, we integrate our personalities. The

integrated personalities, whatever religions they may profess, whatever races they may belong to, are members of a single family. All religions are intertwined at the root and meet at the summit.

Oneness of Man

Belief in harmonious coexistence is the only way to rid the world of intolerance and misunderstanding. There are no more closed societies. The new order we seek is not either national or continental. It is neither eastern nor western. It is universal.

A person's basic physical structure, mental make-up, moral needs, and spiritual aspirations are the same the world over. The cycle of birth, growth, childhood and youth, of sickness, of old age and death, of love and friendship, of sorrow and joy, is the same for all men and women. We share a common origin and a common destiny. The human race is one. The necessities of the historical process are making the world into one.

A Shared Heritage

Today the people of Asia should take the initiative to supply a spiritual orientation to the new world based on science and technology. By its material and political devices the West is able to provide a secure framework of order within which different civilizations could mingle, and fruitful intercourse between them can take place by which the spiritual poverty of the world can be overcome. Without a spiritual recovery, the scientific achievements threaten to destroy us. Either the world will blow up in flames or settle down in peace. It depends on the seriousness with which the religionists face the tasks of our age.

Civilizations are no more remote from each other. In this shrinking world we cannot live without others. This is a condition arising out of a series of historical facts and consequences. The many experiments in international cooperation – in education, health, science, culture, labor, food and agriculture, the increasing awareness of common interests among the people of the world, growing interdependence of nations – indicate that we are moving towards an international society, a family of mankind – a “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*” (the whole Earth is a family), as the Vedic sages had envisioned ages ago or “*Shijie datong*” (world grand harmony) as the Chinese would say. India realized the essential oneness of human race and whatever she achieved especially in her spiritual pursuits, was regarded by her as the common property of mankind.

Common Values/Traditions

One of the central features of a culture is its values such as truthfulness, love, compassion, tolerance, kindness, nonviolence, patience, friendship, forgiveness, service, respect, loyalty, justice, self-discipline, cooperation and so on. These values are universally shared among all cultures. Asian values are very much interrelated because of intermingling of all the religions. They all support the view of the individual as being a part of a much larger group of family. Values are the standards by which one may judge the difference

between good and bad, right and wrong. Traditional values are the common thread among individuals in a culture. Although each distinct Asian culture actually has its own set of values, they all share a common core.

Likewise, all the world religions extol the “Golden Rule” of Ethics to treat others as one would like to be treated. The soul within is the soul shared by all. A manifest expression of this is the Eastern way of greeting “Namaste” (joining both palms folded together), which is founded on the principle that one salutes the spark of the divine in the other!

Asia – New Economic Power House

Asia is emerging as the Centre of the New World Order. Scholars predict that global power is likely to shift from the West to the East. This, we hope, will further reinforce and strengthen the unity among Asian nations. Twenty-first century is slated to be the “Asian Century” as the twentieth belonged to the United States of America.

More than 60 per cent of the world population (4.2 billion people) lives in Asia. China and India alone account for more than half of it. Asia is currently undergoing rapid economic growth spearheaded by China and India. Japan is already developed and it is now the fourth largest economy in the world after USA, China and India. Other countries in the region, like South Korea, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore are all growing at a very fast pace.

Today Asia-Pacific accounts for 38 per cent of the world economy. Within Asia over 67 per cent of the GDP comes from three countries – China, India and Japan. It is predicted that Asia will be the main driver of global growth over the next two decades with a newly emerging Asian middle class of nearly 1.5 billion. The gravity and fulcrum of the global economy have now shifted to Asia.

Harmony for Growth

Social harmony is “peaceful coexistence” of people belonging to different and distinct nationalities/races/religions/ethnicities/creed in a given society. Today most societies the world-over are multi-cultural and pluralistic, thanks to large-scale migration and mobility of population from one country to another for various reasons. The very existence and prosperity of a pluralistic society depend very much on social harmony.

The core of all religions is ethical and humanistic. Practicing common values create reciprocity and sharing, and establish a balance in the relationship among people. All religions preach harmony and peace not only with Mother Earth but in the Cosmos, Nature and among human beings and other living and nonliving objects.

Social harmony is an integrative value in a global, information society, which unites in itself love, peace, justice, freedom, equality, brotherhood, cooperation, nonviolence, tolerance humanism and other universal values. Harmony is the top value of oriental culture, thanks again to the teachings of the religions of the East.

For orderly uninterrupted and inclusive economic growth, social harmony is a prerequisite. But there are many conflicts and problems affecting social harmony in Asian societies, in particular the increasing urban-rural wealth gap. To overcome conflicts and urban-rural divide, many countries are adopting “harmony” as a state policy for achieving social and communal peace for faster growth and material wellbeing of their people.

China, for instance, in October 2006 adopted a proposal from then President Hu Jintao to “build a harmonious socialist society” as an important state policy. Both India and Indonesia have “Unity in Diversity” (“*Aneka mein Ekta*” and “*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*”) as their national creed signifying harmony and unity.

A “United Asia”?

There have been several attempts in the past to bring about unity among Asian countries. In 1903 Okakura Kakuzo, well-known Japanese artist and writer and a close friend of both Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda, published a book “*The Ideals of the East*” which became the “manifesto” of Asian Unity. The awe-inspiring book begins by saying -

Asia is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilizations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal, which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce all the great religions of the world, and distinguishing them from those maritime people of the Mediterranean and the Baltic, who love to dwell on the Particular, and to search out the means, not the end, of life.

Poet Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore said the “key aspects that defined Asian civilization were its spirituality and effective social organization.” He believed in the superiority of Asian spiritualism over Western materialism. On a visit to Shanghai, China in 1924, Tagore declared: “The people of China, Japan and India must unite together to demonstrate to the world our Oriental culture and our special qualities, so that the true value and fame of the Asian peoples will be made known.”

Tagore exhorted the Asian people to have a “continental background in mind, a background in which have been coordinated the experiences of the ages, the intellectual and spiritual experiments made in Asia for long generations” and added that “Asia is again waiting for such dreamers to come and carry on the work, not of fighting, not of profit-making, but of establishing bonds of spiritual relationship.”

New Initiatives for Cooperation and Unity

Then there was the Asian Relations Conference organized in New Delhi in 1947 by Jawaharlal Nehru and addressed by Mahatma Gandhi to “assert and foster Asian unity.” The famous Bandung Conference of Asian leaders in Indonesia in 1955 was another

initiative to forge Asian unity and solidarity from which emerged the “*Panch Sheel*” (the Five Principles of Coexistence), the 60th anniversary of which was celebrated by China, India and others recently in Beijing.

Now there are multilateral geo-political organizations like ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), ACD (Asian Cooperation Dialogue). Their common aim is to “accelerate economic growth, social progress, cultural development and promotion of regional peace.” Asian Cooperation Dialogue aims to unite the entire Asian continent.

ACRP for Asian Unity

ACRP is devoted to promote peace, justice and harmony among the people. With the economy of most countries booming and the level of material progress and prosperity being achieved Asia will soon emerge as the Centre of the New World Order.

With that kind of material affluence, people do tend to ignore and move away from their moral/ethical/religious/spiritual moorings, as we have seen in the West in recent times. So, it is important and necessary for us in ACRP, as an interfaith Organization, to emphasize the need to maintain the shared and common religious, cultural and spiritual values while contributing its resources for an equitable, harmonious, compassionate and peaceful life for all the people of Asia.



THE THEMES OF THE 8TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (*Religions for Peace Asia*) is the world's largest regional multi-religious body of religiously-inspired people working for peace and harmony in their own respective countries, in the Asia-Pacific region and across the world. ACRP's headquarter is located in Seoul, Republic of Korea. Working in tandem with its partner and parent, Religions for Peace International with its headquarters in New York. Religions for Peace Asia promotes peace, unity, mutual respect, and Asian progress and development through the dynamism of interreligious dialogue anchored on the diverse Asian religious traditions and heritages based on the tenets of truth, justice and human dignity.

Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (Religions for Peace Asia) encompasses the Asia-Pacific region, stretching from the countries of the Middle East across to East Asia and including the countries of the South Pacific. Within these boundaries east of the Bosphorus contains many of the greatest cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritages as well as the origins of Baha'ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism and many other religions that highlight the diverse cultures of humanity. Furthermore, over half the world's population, including seven of the world's twelve most populous nations led by China and India, lives in these regions.

The member nations are Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. There are also a Women's Committee and a Youth Committee.

The moderator is Professor Dr. M. Din Syamsuddin from Indonesia, head of Muhammadiyah, one of the two major Islamic community organizations with 30+ million members. The Secretary-General is Dr. Sunggon Kim from the Republic of Korea, a member of its parliament.

The Assembly is held every five years. Formed in 1974, Religions for Peace Asia held its First Regional Assembly in 1976 in Singapore. Since then, Assemblies have been held in New Delhi (1981), Seoul (1986), Katmandu (1991), Ayutthaya in Thailand (1996) and in Jogjakarta (2002). The last Assembly was held in Manila from October 17 – 21, 2008 in association with the Philippine chapter of Religions for Peace Asia and the University of San Tomas The Catholic University of the Philippines, Asia's oldest university still in existence.

The 2014 Assembly is being held at Songdo Convensia Centre in Incheon, South Korea in association with the Korean Conference of Religions for Peace (KCRP) from 25 to 29 August 2014. As part of the Assembly, there will be a three-day Youth Camp hosted by ACRP Seoul Peace Education Centre, and a Women's Meet. The Youth Camp will be held at Seoul Youth Hostel, Seoul on 23-25 August and the Women's Meet at Songdo Convensia Centre, Incheon on 25 August.

This is the second time ACRP is holding the Assembly in South Korea. In 1986, the Third Assembly was held in Seoul from 16 to 21 June under the theme “Bridges of Peace in Asia.” That was 33 years after the Korean peninsula was divided into two – South Korea and North Korea – following a three-year long bitter, tragic and crippling war.

At that time, the ACRP Assembly in its Seoul Declaration expressed the hope that a new dawn of peace and reconciliation would emerge soon between the two Koreas. But it was not to be. On the contrary, the situation has only deteriorated further in recent years. We are holding the ACRP Assembly here again after a gap of another 26 years. We hope that the presence of a large number of peace-loving religious leaders from across Asia-Pacific and elsewhere once again in this beautiful country, and their collective prayer will help the peace and reconciliation process not only in the Korean peninsula but also in the entire geo-politically troubled Northeast Asia.

The central theme is:

UNITY and HARMONY in ASIA

The overall theme for the Eighth Assembly is to focus on the **Unity and Harmony in Asia**. Asia, as the birthplace of the world’s major religious traditions, has a special place in building a response around binding authentic values, irrevocable standards of virtuous behavior and deeply seated interior attitudes, all grounded in the unity of humanity. As of January 1st, 2014, the world’s population reached 7.139 billion people and about 60 percent (4.166 billion) of total population lives in Asia. More than one-third of the world’s population is living in the two countries of China and India.

According to the psychologists, there are 4Bs in religion; (i) believing (ii) behaving, (iii) bonding and (iii) bridging. Authentic religion, whilst concerned about self-love and self-care, has genuine interest in the well-being of others, such as someone else’s family, other neighbors, even our enemies. Religion, despite its own faults and many failures, adds to a nation’s social capital and its social cohesion at its best. It does this, firstly, through religious teachings and public statements. Religion teaches us spiritual and moral values such as love, truth, honesty, integrity, compassion, mercy, beauty and hope but against hatred, materialism, narcissism, corruption and crass commercialism. Every nation needs multi-faith spiritualities of individual holiness and social wholeness. Secondly, religion adds to social capital with its schools, universities, hospitals, nursing facilities and its welfare programs for the poor, the homeless, the imprisoned and the ill. In the major religious traditions, six core values have been identified as vital: compassion, love, justice, love for life, tolerance and peace.

During the Assembly, the three Commissions of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace will meet in separate meetings to develop and to discuss policies and programs for unity and harmony within and between the nations of the Asia-Pacific area through religious and interreligious dialogues and activities. A special workshop for the Korean Peninsula will also be conducted to identify action programs that will improve the relationship between the Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea.

COMMISSION ONE: Peace Education and Reconciliation

The theme of Commission One is:

Constructing Sustainable Cultures of Peace and Reconciliation in a United and Diverse Asia

There are still tensions between and within the nations of Asia, often because of burdens of history, disparities between rich and poor, violation of human rights, scourge of political and religious extremism and presence of greed and corruption. Peace education, built upon justice, respect and development, is about empowering the people of Asia including its leaders with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and courage necessary to end violence and injustice to promote a culture of peace and to build a culture of reconciliation. It is possible to construct better social, economic, religious and political relationships between people in overcoming the war and injustices of the past through peace education. Furthermore, it accepts the past but also recognizes that our enemy is our neighbor. It is also about examining our worldviews, which may demean and downgrade the others.

The Commission One meeting focused on three questions:

- (1) How can peace and reconciliation education programs overcome the fractures of Asia's history?*
- (2) How can religious leaders and their communities work together to combat political and religious extremism with practical policies and programs?*
- (3) How can religious communities fight political, judicial and business corruption in building a just, peaceful and harmonious Asia?*

COMMISSION TWO: Human Rights and Well-Being

The theme of Commission Two is:

Promoting the Observance of Human Rights for Human Well-Being, especially of Women, Children, Migrants and Refugees

The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". Human rights are usually defined as moral principles, universal and egalitarian, embedded in the dignity of each human being that set out certain standards of human behavior and are protected as legal rights in national and international law. They are designed to protect and promote human well-being. Within every society, there are particular groups that are in need of human rights protection, including women, children, migrants and refugees. Human rights observance is at the core of a civil, pluralist society where the continuing and vigilant implementation of human rights law brings about accountability, transparency and human well-being.

The workshops of Commission Two focused on three questions:

- (1) *How do religious communities promote human rights in their countries through culturally sensitive approaches?*
- (2) *How do religious leaders and their communities promote the human rights of women and children in their empowerment as free, healthy and educated individuals against men's violence and negative attitudes?*
- (3) *How can the rights of the increasing number of migrants and refugees across Asia and the world and their newly-formed communities be protected and respected?*

COMMISSION THREE: Development and the Environment

The theme of Commission Three is:

Planning for Urban and Rural Communities which are Economically Developing and Environmentally Sustainable

The age of colonization has given way to the age of globalization long ago in which as citizens of the world we share in the task of developing our national societies and our global society as well as caring for the environment. The task is to work together for a shared human security. Part of this task is overcoming poverty, especially extreme poverty. The late and revered Nelson Mandela once said, "Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural". The Millennium Development Goals will end in 2015 but the results have been mixed. Even though so many poor people still left behind especially in Asia, many people were able to escape the poverty trap. Is the UN criterion of \$1.25 a day per person still a reliable measure?

Another aspect of global development and environmental sustainability concerns global cities. Now that more people live in urban than rural areas, cities are becoming increasingly inhabitable because of congestion, overcrowding and poverty as a result of poor planning and corrupt decisions. How can we regenerate our cities to be havens for humanity?

The workshops of Commission Three focused on three questions:

- (1) *How do religious communities work with governments and NGOs in working with people in extreme poverty through participatory policies and development programs in their local community and protecting the environment?*
- (2) *How can political and religious leaders create cities that are economically and environmentally sustainable where people can live, work and relax in a truly human way?*
- (3) *How do religious communities educate their societies and their local communities about climatic and environmental change and its implications for the future of Planet Earth?*

SPECIAL KOREAN PENINSULA WORKSHOP

During the Eighth Assembly of Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (Religions for Peace Asia), a special Workshop on Peace on the Korean peninsula will be held. The theme is:

Reconciliation in Korean Peninsula and East Asia

The two Koreas are officially still at war, albeit with a crossfire armistice that has lasted uneasily for more than 60 years across the 38th parallel. Koreans live in a divided land; they are products of a divided life. The only peaceful solution to division is through dialogue, reconciliation and co-operation on the understanding that my enemy is also my neighbor. The workshop will highlight the current military impasse across the DMZ, the difficulties of the North-South dialogue and the tragic stories of death and retribution, of divided families and of tentative attempts to win the peace.

