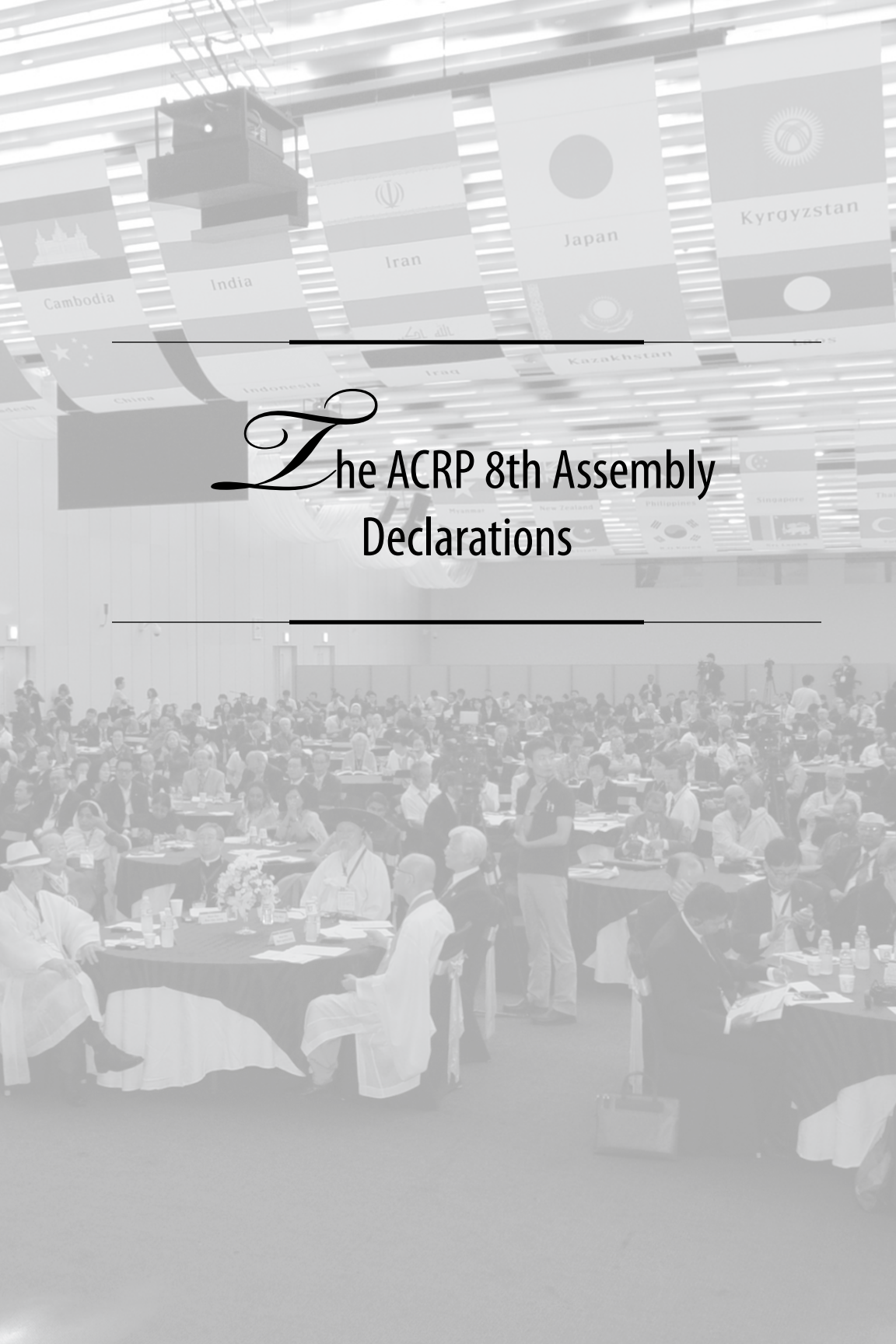


# The ACRP 8th Assembly Declarations

# Asian Conference of Religions for Peace
# The 8th Assembly
# Incheon Declaration

*The Asian Conference of Religions for Peace* (ACRP) is the world's largest regional body of religiously-inspired people working for peace and interreligious harmony based on the tenets of truth, justice and human dignity in their individual countries, in the Asia-Pacific region and across the world. Founded in 1976, it works in tandem with the international body, *Religions for Peace International.*

The Eighth Assembly was held at the Songdo Convensia Centre in Incheon, South Korea from 25 – 28th August, 2014. The Assembly was attended by 15 Asian nations: Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. During the Assembly, the two nations of Malaysia and Myanmar were admitted to membership of ACRP.

The Assembly thanked the government of the Republic of Korea through its Ministry of Culture and Sport for its financial support of the Assembly and its continuing commitment to interreligious dialogue.

ACRP encompasses the Asia-Pacific region where were founded many of the greatest cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritages that highlight the diversity of humanity. On 1st January 2014, the world's population was 7.139 billion people of whom 60 per cent (4.166 billion) were living in Asia led by China and India. Close to half of the world's economic output comes from the Asia Pacific region; hence, peace and development is crucial not only to Asia but to the whole world.

The overall theme for the 8th Assembly was **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 inner attitudes, all grounded in the unity of humanity. Spirituality abounds in Asia. As a gift of the divine, spirituality is a transcendent force making Asia one in its diversity in its many expressions. It is an uplifting force of higher quality within the depths of the human person which makes us fit and worthy channels for great love, compassion and service as witnessed and proclaimed by all religious traditions.

## Call for Peace in Asia

The Assembly was held at a time of increasing tensions across Asia and the Middle East as measured by the Global Peace Index. It called for Asia's political leaders supported by its religious and other civic leaders to work courageously and proactively for peace across Asia and on the Korean peninsula.

The religious and interreligious leaders gathered in the Republic of Korea urged the leaders of the nations of Asia and the Pacific to work strenuously for peace between the nations on

the basis of sincere dialogue and international reconciliation and, where necessary, through international mediation in the pursuit of positive, confidence-building measures. War and conflict is always a defeat of the human spirit, and usually accomplishes very little except for suffering and death. All leaders, political and religious, must work for overcoming the burdens of history through taking history as a mirror and embracing a peaceful future.

As part of this support, ACRP should strive to realize its foundational objectives of revitalizing Asia's religious heritage to promote a creative and critical awareness in the pursuit of peace, justice and human dignity, and of motivating religiously-inspired people to make concerted efforts to promote peace.

As a multireligious organization and a regional member of *Religions for Peace International*, ACRP recognizes and supports the vision of peace of 'welcoming the other' expressed by the Ninth World Assembly in Vienna in November 2013. "Welcoming the other" means respect and acceptance of one another. The Assembly also expressed concern that the level of hate-speech against other social and religious groups and against other nations had significantly increased. All people, minorities and majorities alike, should be ensured of their dignity, personal and communal safety and individual well-being. The mass media, as well as the social media channels, have a special responsibility not to accelerate hatred and hostility.

## Call for Social Cohesion and Interreligious Harmony in Asian Countries

The Assembly noted that many countries had internal conflicts and tensions. These must be resolved through the constant pursuit of justice and equality with the proper treatment of minorities according to the relevant international human rights covenants. It highlighted the Global Peace Index data which suggests that there are eight key indicators of a peaceful nation called 'the eight pillars of peace': (a) a well-functioning government, (b) a sound business environment, (c) an equitable distribution of resources, (d) an acceptance of the human rights of others, (e) good relationships with neighboring nations, (f) free flow of information, (g) high level of human capital, and (h) low levels of corruption.

Religious freedom is foundational to individual aspirations and social cohesion. The Assembly urged the political and religious leaders of Asia to ensure and promote that all persons are able to fully practice their religion as a basic human right, including the rights to educate their children in their own religious tradition and to change and choose their religion in accordance with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

On the basis of the work of its three commissions, the Assembly urged religious leaders to encourage and support their governments to develop appropriate policies and practical programs around the eight pillars of peace, especially in their treatment of vulnerable and at-risk groups, including women and children as well as migrants, refugees and stateless people. In particular, it encourages governments and religious leaders to work strongly against the evils of child labor, child trafficking and child marriage. It also urges governments to treat migrants and refugees according to international law and to sign the international convention on stateless people.

All members of the family of *Religions for Peace Asia* (ACRP) share in the task of developing our national societies and our global society as well as caring for the environment. It was lamented that development was now confined to mass production and mass consumption with little regard for the environment. The failure to conserve, preserve and restore the global environment impacts upon social, economic and religious peace. Nuclear disasters present another extreme danger to the environment.

Women leaders of ACRP pointed to the universality of issues affecting women: the violence against women, gender inequality in policy and practice, the discrimination against girls and women and the need for women's equitable participation in achieving peaceful development within civil societies. They advocated an empowering of women to compete in land, labor and product markets.

Asia is rapidly becoming urbanized with 10 of the world's 21 megacities in Asia. The Assembly urges religious communities to work with governments in making cities more habitable and sustainable where people can live, work, relax and prosper in a fully human way.

The youth leaders of ACRP during their camp suggested that religion can be part of the solution but also part of the problem. They strongly advocated the education of national and local religious leaders about human rights, democracy, interfaith relations and the dangers of normalizing discrimination.

## Reconciling and Unifying the Korean Peninsula

During the Eighth Assembly of *Religions for Peace Asia*, a special workshop on peace on the Korean peninsula was held with the theme of **Reconciling and Unifying the Korean Peninsula**. The Assembly affirmed that the only peaceful solution to division is through dialogue, reconciliation and co-operation. The workshop highlighted the current military impasse across the DMZ, the difficulties of the North-South dialogue, the tragic stories of divided families and attempts to win the peace. It supported the words of the Pope, speaking to an Asia youth gathering during his August visit to Korea, who said that the best hope for reunification of the Korean peninsula lay in brotherly love and a spirit of forgiveness. He said, "You are brothers who speak the same language. When you speak the same language in a family, there is also human hope". The youth leaders of ACRP committed themselves to promoting the message that Korea needs unification, dismissing as false the argument that it would reduce the wealth of the Republic of Korea whilst understanding the pain of Korea's grandparents. The formal statement of the special workshop is presented at the end of this declaration.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made and approved by the Assembly:

1. *ACRP, as a matter of urgency, develop a mission and values statement together with a code of conduct in accordance with human rights and human well-being*
2. *ACRP, through its executive committee, appoint a special working party to examine and make recommendations regarding the numbers and criteria for*

*national representation and measures to ensure the more efficient functioning of the organization*

3. *Religious communities should work strenuously for peace and harmony by preventing the hijacking and manipulation of religion by political leaders and extremist religious leaders*
4. *National chapters work with their educational authorities to ensure that peace education is incorporated at all levels of the curriculum*
5. *ACRP work with religious communities to develop religious leaders highly skilled in and knowledgeable about leadership in multifaith and plural societies and in addressing the personal and social challenges in a rapidly evolving world through professional pre-service and inservice programs*
6. *National chapters supported by ACRP work with governments to establish anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws as a protection for citizens against hate speech*
7. *National chapters supported by ACRP promote public campaigns against all forms of discrimination and violence against women and children, including child labor, child trafficking, child marriage through child protection protocols and female education policies and programs*
8. *Religious leaders and their communities work to support migrants, contract workers, refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people through practical programs to assist in their right treatment before international and national law and their settlement and integration*
9. *National chapters supported by ACRP establish environmental programs of planting at least one tree every year per chapter member to preserve and restore the global environment*
10. *ACRP develop research and educational programs focused on the cities of Asia, the poverty of urban populations and the environmental impacts on cities and the role that religious communities can play in making cities into places where people can live, work, relax and prosper in accord with full human dignity*
11. *In the planning for future Assemblies, young people be involved in the organizing committee*

In its final session, the ACRP Assembly movingly thanked the outgoing secretary-general, Dr. Sunggon Kim, for his dedication and commitment over the past ten years and elected, as his successor, Reverend Yoshitaka Hatakeyama from Japan. Co-Presidents were chosen from Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Philippines.

The Assembly thanked the ACRP Secretariat led by Reverend Teasung Kim and the Korean Conference of Religions for Peace for their work in staging the Assembly and bringing the delegates together as well as for their strong organizational and administrative support of the Assembly. It especially applauded the magnificent traditional, classical and contemporary pop musical and dancing performances given by Korean artists.

In conclusion, the Assembly sent its greetings to the Mayor of Incheon and the people of the city, wishing them well in staging the Asian Games next month in September.

## PEACE DECLARATION OF KOREAN PENINSULA

We, the religious leaders of Asia, are deeply concerned about the state of the armistice on the Korean peninsula ever since the signing of the Korean War Armistice Agreement in July 1953. The war has been continuing for 61 years in a highly unusual and volatile political system, which is not an indication of normalcy by any means.

Until now, the Korean Peninsula's problems have been perceived and discussed in terms of geopolitical paradigms and ideological conflicts. However, we, the religious leaders of Asia, want to pay a special attention to the dichotomy that has long bred antagonism and dominated the way of thinking in regard to the Korean Peninsula situation.

Dichotomous thinking gives birth to antagonistic relations. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea have been intensifying their levels of conflict while militarily maintaining the strong antagonism to each other. The military tension between DPRK and ROK has translated into political internal constraints within each political regime. Regression of human rights and democracy, hereditary succession of power and resurgence of authoritarian regimes have been the results of such military tensions existing on the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, sophistry that defies objective truths and self-centeredness are seriously endangering the society's harmony and human rights, harmonious development, human dignity, values, beliefs and cultural diversity. The dichotomy found in Korea has become internalized as it has continuously defied the truth. If we cannot overcome dichotomy and move on to accepting diversity, Korea's growth and development as a people, in essence, will be always met with strong hostility.

Even greater than the nuclear threat, which endangers Korean people, is the refusal to accept the different ways that lead to peace. Peace and democracy can only blossom on a tree of diversity. Peace, democracy and human values are inseparable; they are intimately related to one another. Peace only blossoms when prosperous coexistence and harmony of different cultures achieve perfect balance. Peace is the minimum requirement of life; peace does not mean a ceasefire; peace is the indomitable will to sustain the security of the everyday life.

ROK and DPRK must fully respect each other, ready for an open dialogue rather than deception. Deep understanding of diversity and friendly respect, innovation and consideration, creativity and humane elements must precede peace in Korea. Above all, an authentic dialogue between the opposing parties in search of an open heart and creative justice must be pursued. Only then, will the future to peace be opened to us. Therefore, we, the religious leaders of Asia, hereby declare that:

1. *ROK and DPRK must engage in an open dialogue without any strings attached.*
2. *ROK and DPRK must agree to turn the current armistice into a peace agreement, putting an end to all possibilities of violence.*
3. *ROK and DPRK must respect diversity and human values.*
4. *4. ROK and DPRK must work together, with peace as their top priority.*