



*P*re-Assembly Meetings Statements
and
Commission Meeting Reports

STATEMENT OF SHARED COMMITMENT

Pre-Assembly Women's Meeting The 8th General Assembly Asian Conference of Religions for Peace

We, the women leaders and Women of Faith participants of the 8th General Assembly of ACRP, gathered in Incheon, Republic of Korea, on 25th August 2014 in the Women's Pre-Assembly Meeting to reflect on the general theme, **"Unity and Harmony in Asia."**

We engaged in a dialogue and conversation on the strategic processes and the agency of women in effecting unity and harmony in Asian societies, particularly the critical roles that women play in influencing the education of children and youth and in building a culture of peace and communal harmony. We also focused on the contribution of women in the peaceful resolution of conflict, respect for human rights and dignity, and in promoting sustainable development and environmental integrity.

We recognize the universality of issues related to women, especially violence against women and gender inequality in policy decisions on governance and in almost all aspects of social life expressed in Asian societies. The linkages between women's rights, gender based discrimination, socio-economic development and peace are becoming increasingly apparent. Hence, women's equitable participation is essential for the peaceful development of civil society, which in turn encourages unity and harmonious relationships within and between societies.

In the light of the foregoing, we, the Women of Faith in this Assembly commit ourselves to collaboratively help:

- Improve women's capacity to participate in dialogue and processes that support peace education and conflict resolution.
- Promote public awareness and campaign against all forms of discrimination and violence against women and children.
- Further support the development of peace education, including the integration of positive cultural norms, values, attitudes and behaviors which respect human rights and dignity
- Promote gender equity in policy decisions including responsibilities for managing, owning accessing and stewarding resources.
- Advocate a gender sensitive approach for empowering women to compete in land, labor and product markets that enable them to make more meaningful and equitable contributions to sustainable development.
- Foster linkages between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and mitigation of nuclear annihilation from a gender perspective

THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH IN ACHIEVING PEACE AND HARMONY IN ASIA

Pre-Assembly Youth's Meeting The 8th General Assembly Asian Conference of Religions for Peace

The deep wound of disunity, as seen in the DMZ in the Korean Peninsula affects all of us. The cries of displaced minorities across Asia due to conflict and discrimination cause us deep sorrow. The visible wounds and the cries push us to fight for a more just and inclusive world. So long as these wounds and cries remain unhealed and unheeded, we cannot hope to have a better future. Therefore we commit to restore hope and build bridges in our home countries.

We, the religious youth of the Religions for Peace Asia and Pacific Interfaith Youth Network convened by the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP), the Religions for Peace regional body in Asia, and the Religions for Peace Korean Youth Network, believe that the best way to overcome the many divisions in our continent is to provide creative solutions to show that peace is possible.

We have heard the stories and aspirations of our Korean friends who seek to build a future without the threat of war. We, the religious youth leaders from 14 countries across Asia, representing the major faith traditions and various international organizations, stand in solidarity with the religious youth leaders of Korea who are working for peace and a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

We support the call made by His Holiness Pope Francis on his visit to Korea, on the importance of removing suspicions and to nurture forgiveness as both Koreas are part of one family. We urge both North and South Korean governments to take steps to enhance mutual understanding and lower tensions.

We call on political, religious and civil-society leaders to adopt a pro-active strategy to build goodwill and understanding with North Korea. We urge senior religious leaders in Republic of Korea to host an annual interfaith prayer for unification and peace. We encourage fellow young Koreans to develop initiatives and educational campaigns that will promote shared understanding such as common history and enable the development of a shared identity.

In recent times, Asia has seen rising tensions over territorial claims or religious identity and we urge the youth to be careful of rising nationalistic rhetoric, which in the past has led to war. We ask that all youth leaders make a stand for peace by working pro-actively to secure a peaceful Asia. As youth, we are capable of acting for peace in our different spheres of influence and we urge everyone to seek creative ways to build mutual understanding.

These days, while burdened by the different crises in different parts of Asia, we have also been inspired by the work of our colleagues. The various projects across our region include

the following: organizing exchange programs between Korea and Japan to build mutual understanding; running trauma healing programs for survivors of natural disaster in the Philippines; delivering education about the world's religions to high school students in Australia; organizing peace dialogue with extremist elements in Pakistan; promoting peace through teaching meditation in Thailand; campaigning against hate crimes against religious minorities in Myanmar; bringing together various religious leaders to plan action to end child marriage in Nepal; providing donations to the poor in Bangladesh; giving young people employment opportunities to counter extremism in Indonesia; and, holding a national youth assembly against violence and terrorism in India. Many young people across Asia, through creative means and driven by purpose, are making a daily difference to build peace and understanding across the region. Though we are few, we are heartened by the fact that we have been able to influence thousands collectively and we are inspired to continue on the path to peace.

Collectively as Religions for Peace Asia and Pacific Interfaith Youth Network, we will use social media to tell the world of these stories of hope and to exchange experiences with one another. We will continue to build interfaith youth networks in Asia for nurturing mutual trust and develop strong and harmonious partnerships in the region.

By unanimous vote by the national chapters at the 2014 Asia Pacific Interfaith Youth Network youth camp, the following people have been elected to the Asia Committee of Religions for Peace:

Mr. Dahnil Anzar Simanjuntac, Moderator (Indonesia)

Mr. Takashi Hashimoto, Acting Vice-Moderator (Japan)

Representative from the Korean Youth Network, Secretary (TBA)

Mrs Huma Ikramullah Khan, Chairperson of Communications (Pakistan)

Ms Nivy Balachandran Chairperson of Partnerships (Australia).

Our work continues and we urge Asian governments, civil societies and religious youth leaders to join us in restoring hope and courageously build bridges for peace and understanding across our region and beyond



“CONSTRUCTING SUSTAINABLE CULTURES OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN A UNITED AND DIVERSE ASIA”

Commission 1 Meeting Report

Chair: Ven. Dao Shuren (*China*)

Co-Chair: Dr Lilian Sison (*Phillipines*)

Rapporteur: Dr. Deepali Bhanot (*India*)

Asia is faced with various conflicts and tensions between and within its nations because of burdens of history, scourge of political and religious extremism and the growing gap between the rich and the poor resulting from 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.

In his paper entitled, ‘Interreligious Dialogue: A way to promote peace and harmony in Asia’, *Dr Kazi Nurul Islam* highlighted the importance of dialogue for interfaith understanding and conflict resolution. Peace and religion are complementary to each other and the virtues of love, compassion, selflessness and truthfulness that are common to all religions have greater power than hatred.

It is the responsibility of the religious people to break the culture of silence and to cooperate with each other for the cause of peace for mankind. In a globalized world, we can no longer ignore each other. Rather we need to engage in mutual understanding through dialogue. Partners need to listen to each other sincerely, sympathetically and respectfully.

Interreligious dialogue is not an end in itself but can result in interreligious cooperation at several levels. Interreligious dialogue is necessary for revision, development, refinement and correct interpretation of different religions. In order to understand others, it is imperative to know oneself first and to be ready to learn from others. Dialogue cannot be one-sided. Participants must be true to the ideals of dialogue with complete sincerity and honesty. The partners must listen to each other with openness and mutual trust. Moreover, in an interreligious dialogue both differences and similarities of religions should be recognized. Religious people need to practice what they preach and need to have the same respect for all religions.

Ven. Xuecheng, speaking on the topic, “Peace Education and Reconciliation,” opined that peace and harmony are basic requirements for a peaceful and stable social order

that brings about the full creative potential of the individuals. The six aspects of peace and harmony include building an international political order with equality and mutual trust; to have a global economic system that seeks to reduce the economical and regional imbalances; to create a global cultural atmosphere of diversity and integration so that friendship is consolidated and historical prejudices are reduced through dialogues; to set up an ecological ethic to resolve environmental crises; to realize scientific and technological progress to promote long-term happiness of mankind and to achieve a healthy and moral state by applying traditional wisdoms.

Profound harmony of global cultures is the top priority of human society. Efforts should be made by every cultural tradition to promote the spirit of tolerance and reconciliation in order to dissolve tensions within society by mutual sincerity. Although various cultural traditions have been nurtured and molded in different living environments, they still share many common ideas based on Universal values. Hence, all cultural traditions should be encouraged in light of their own needs and circumstances. The positive values of one culture contributes to other cultures, the more respect and recognition it can gain from them, the more contributions it can make to the culture of mankind as a whole.

Peace and harmony of all humanity mean peace and harmony among all nations, ethnic groups and religions. Promoting the peace and harmony of the entire mankind is the noble mission and great cause shared by all religions.

The following points emerged during the group discussion:

- Peace education should be an integral part of both formal and informal education system right from the childhood to enable people to be at peace with themselves by overcoming inner conflicts, feeling of alienation and frustration in this material world wherein interpersonal relationships have deteriorated and people feel isolated and lonely.
- In the contemporary world of science and technology, most people do not have a true knowledge of their own religion and that of the others. Hence, peace education should include the human values like love, kindness, justice and forgiveness etc which are common to all religions instead of focusing on outer symbols and rituals. There is a need for practicing religious values without just preaching about them. Elders in the family and religious leaders should serve as role models for transmitting the human values and virtues to the younger generation.
- Religions have been hijacked by political leaders and certain religious leaders who are engage in creating confusion and spreading conflicts. Most conflicts do not start over religious issues but are based on political and economic issues. Yet these appear to assume the form of religious conflicts as conflicting people tend to identify themselves into religious groups. These complex issues are further compounded by the electronic and print media that influence the opinions about these conflicts.
- Interfaith dialogues and theories of conflict resolutions should not remain confined to conferences and seminars alone. Rather, these should be put to practice in conflict areas for restoring peace through mutual understanding and respect for all religious beliefs.

- Peace education should include methods to heal the people who have experienced suffering both physically and mentally during conflicts. During the process of reconciliation and trauma healing, the victims should have a chance to articulate their grievances and the perpetrators should be made to admit their atrocities. This kind of training should be given even to children from their early childhood.
- When we talk about Peace Education, we need to specifically explore what should be the course content of Peace Education, what should be the strategy to teach the content and what materials and methodologies should be used to impart this education. These questions are very important because personal biases or teacher biases can do more harm than benefits.
- ACRP could take up this project of identifying and collecting whatever material is available for the course content for Peace education and get teaching modules prepared, which could be followed by training of trainers and teachers for implementation of the course in the ACRP chapters.



PROMOTING THE OBSERVANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS FOR HUMAN WELL-BEING, ESPECIALLY FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN, MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Commission 2 Statement Report

Chair: Mr. N. Vasudevan (*India*)

Co-chair: Mr. Yi Thon (*Cambodia*)

Rapporteur: Dr. Hayder Abdul Kari (*Iraq*)

Human rights are essential part of the total and holistic peace we seek. It has been a major area of concern of WCRP (RfP) and ACRP from the very beginning.

When ACRP was formed as a regional body in 1976, provision was made in its Constitution for a Standing “Commission on Human Rights.”

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood,” says the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration was adopted by all the nation-states. Yet, the nation-states themselves are serious violators of human rights. No country is free from human rights abuses and violations in one form or another. According to survey reports, Asia is the continent with the most human rights violations.

What are human rights? Human rights mean not only civil and political rights, but also the right to live with all the basic economic, social and cultural rights of life, including religious freedom. They can broadly be categorized as follows:

- Individual (civil) rights: Life, liberty, and security of the person; privacy and freedom of movement; ownership of property; freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice; prohibition of slavery, torture, and cruel or degrading punishment.
- Rule of Law: Equal recognition before the law and equal protection of the law; effective legal remedy for violation of rights; impartial hearing and trial; presumption of innocence; and prohibition of arbitrary arrest.
- Rights of political expression: Freedom of expression, assembly and association; the right to take part in government; and periodic and meaningful elections with universal and equal suffrage.
- Economic and social rights: An adequate standard of living; free choice of employment; protection against unemployment; just and favorable remuneration; the right to form and join trade unions; reasonable limitation of working hours; free elementary education; social security; and the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
- Rights of communities: Self-determination and protection of minority cultures.

What constitutes violation of human rights from the point of view of day-to-day life experience? Violation of human rights ranges from chronic poverty and starvation to denial of freedom to practice one's faith to freedom of expression and assembly. Non-availability or non-accessibility of adequate food to millions of people is also massive violation of human rights. There are daily reports of atrocities and violence against minorities, economically and socially weaker sections like tribals and dalits in most Asian countries. Crime against women and children is also increasing. Then there are the age-old practices of social, gender and racial discrimination.

There are also regular reports of religious minorities being persecuted in most of the countries. If it is attack on Christians in one country one day, it is attack on Hindus or Muslims or Buddhists in another. Sometimes it is sectarian in nature; sometimes it is accusations of blasphemy. Civil war, ethnic tension, religious terrorism are some of the growing ailments of this region, as are the abuse of government power, censorship, and human rights violations by police and other authorities.

Role of ACRP: The Commission on Human Rights has been playing the role of an Advocacy Group. We have been collecting information and news on violations in Member-states and reporting them to the Executive Committee as well as occasionally writing to the respective government authorities and National Human Rights Commissions.

Country Reports: Though we have not been able to evolve an effective mechanism to collect first-hand and specific information on violations from Member countries, one can safely say that there are abuses and violations in all the countries. Such violations include: arrests without warrants, torture, detention without trial, custodial death, persecution of minorities by the State, assault on religious minorities, terrorist acts by religious extremists; desecration and destruction of religious sites and places of worship like churches, temples, gurudwaras, mosques; forced conversion, rape and even murder of women, social discriminations like untouchability; attack and intimidation of journalists and media men and so on. Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs are all victims depending upon who is in minority and in which country. The situation is particularly bad in South and South East Asian countries, irrespective of whether they are theocratic or secular.

There have been regular reports of many incidents of attacks on Christians, Hindus, Dalits, Sikhs, Muslims and other ethnic minorities and their places of worship from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China, Thailand and Philippines. There have also been reports of racial attacks from Australia.

Activities that we can undertake: It is our hope and belief that interfaith organizations like ACRP can play a helpful role to reduce abuses and violations of human rights. They can mobilize public opinion to put pressure on governments and human rights authorities, political parties, religious bodies, etc. by holding demonstrations, vigils, letter-writing campaigns, human rights education, on-line petitions, partnerships with student and civil society groups and so on. They can also visit and talk with the victims, monitor court trials, interview local officials, and publish reports in print, electronic and social media.

In times ahead, we hope the Commission will be able to have a more robust and focused approach to the all-pervasive problem of abuse and violation of human rights in Asia.

PLANNING FOR URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES WHICH ARE ECONOMICALLY DEVELOPING AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE

Commission 3 Statement Report

Chair: Rev. Keiji Kunitomi (*Japan*)

Co-chair: Rev. Hae Sun Jung (*R.O. Korea*)

Rapporteur: Mrs. Huma Ikramullah Kashif (*Pakistan*)

Commission Three on Environment and Development focused on three main issues:

- Role of Religious Communities in working with governments to overcome extreme poverty
- Policies and programs to create cities that are economically and environmentally sustainable for people to live in a truly human way,
- The education of local communities about environmental change and future of planet Earth

The Chair opened the commission meeting with a prayer for peace. This was followed by the address of Professor Alex Bangcola who outlined the history of the Bangsamoro saga which began several hundred years ago. This tussle in Mindanao, Philippines ended with the Peace Agreement between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The speaker suggested a peace dividend for furthering the peace, prosperity and economic advancement of Philippine resulting in peace and stability for the International Community on the same principles of the Bangladeshi Grameen Bank through microfinance.

The second speaker Rev. Minoru Sonoda spoke on the role of the Religious Leaders and Ways to fulfill them. He explained that the term development has now come to mean mass production and mass consumption, which in turn has resulted in destruction of the global environment leading to social devastation. That is why the role of the religious leaders is pivotal in advocating sustainable development along with conservation, preservation and restoration of the global environment in turn impacting the social, economic and religious peace.

The speaker demonstrated his point about tree plantation by showing a documentary entitled “Japan, The Land of Forests” in which a tree planting campaign was done in the Yoshimuto Plateau and Kesen-numa Bay. He elaborated that after the World War II Japan sought economic development and industrialization only which led to many environmental issues like destruction of ecosystem, culture, coastal waters, forestry, agriculture, fisheries etc. Therefore, now a lot of importance is given to environmental preservation and conservation. The dangers and impacts of a nuclear disaster on the environment are also discussed in detail.

The commission has resolved to encourage the ACRP religious leaders and participants to undertake the following:

- To protect the environment and ensure sustainable development for Asia and the world
- To work for promoting and teaching others about the relationship between peace, environment and development,
- To pledge to work for eradicating poverty for maintaining harmony, peace and unity in Asia,
- To advocate development that is environmentally friendly,
- To plant at least one tree in our respective countries as a symbolic gesture to conserve the environment and if possible start a tree plantation campaign



PEACE DECLARATION OF KOREAN PENINSULA WORKSHOP: RECONCILIATION AND UNITY IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Chair: Rev. In-Sung Jung (R.O. Korea)

Co-chair: Dr. Jinheung Byun (R.O. Korea)

Rapporteur: Dr. Hyun Do Park (R.O. Korea)

We, the religious leaders of Asia, are deeply concerned about the state of armistice in 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 with 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 maintaining the strong antagonism to each other militarily. The military tension between DPRK and ROK has spilled over into the political constrains within each political regimes. Regression of human rights and democracy, hereditary succession of power and resurrection of authoritarian regimes have been the results of such military tension existing in 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 internalized as it continuously defied the truth. If we cannot overcome dichotomy and move on to accepting the diversity, Korea's growth and development as people, in essence, will be always met with strong opposition and deterrent.

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 in 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