

Preface

This book is about peace and the way of dialogue to achieve it. In the words of Dr. Khalid Nawaz Khan Marwat, one of the keynote speakers, “Religion is a weapon for peace,” and interreligious dialogue is the way to attain “unity and harmony in Asia,” the theme of the 8th ACRP General Assembly.

This book contains the proceedings of the 8th General Assembly of the *Asian Conference of Religions for Peace*, also called *Religions for Peace Asia*, the regional affiliate of *Religions for Peace international*, the world’s largest and most representative multi-religious coalition. The highlight of the assembly report is the 8th ACRP Declaration which summarizes the Assembly’s reading of the pressing situations and challenges in Asia, the key interreligious dialogue principles for cooperation, and the specific recommendations to make Asia closer to “unity and harmony” after five years.

The General Assembly (ACRP-GA) is the supreme governing body of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace. Held every five years, the 2014 8th General Assembly was co-organized by the Korean Conference of Religions for Peace (KCRP). The ACRP-GA reviews the performance and activities of the past five years, initiates new activities and policies, and, sets new directions and goals for the next five years. It has also the task of electing among its prominent leaders new set of executive officials to promote the aspirations of the assembly and implement its concrete recommendations.

The 8th General Assembly was held at a time of increasing tensions in many parts of Asia: the Korean peninsula division, the inter-country territorial disputes and the various armed struggles for independence to name a few. There is also the disheartening condition of the greater majority living in abject poverty. Besides, cities are becoming increasingly uninhabitable due to congestion, poverty, and exorbitant standard of living. Moreover, many Asians continue to suffer the following social problems: violation of human rights, scourge of political and religious extremism, corruption and poor governance. There is also the growing concern of climate change and environmental degradation resulting to catastrophic natural calamities. The issues and concerns of division, destruction, conflict and violence seem endless.

The general assembly is the opening of hearts. The call to responsibility demanded by all religions to respond to these issues is more urgent today than ever. The ACRP 8th Assembly is a concrete expression of a multi-faith cooperation response that harnesses the very rich diverse religions, cultures and traditions of Asia to bring unity and harmony among Asians and peace to the world. This can be done, according to Bishop Boniface Choi Ki-San, when we are convinced that “non-violence is the incomparable value of true peace,” and that through an open heart, we “open the hearts of others in dialogue.” It is only in this way, says Swami Atmapriyananda, following the Hindu tradition, that we “awaken in man’s heart this ‘burning love, selfless’, to make him vibrate in unison with the Cosmic Rhythm.”

The general assembly is a celebration of diversity. The gathering of around 600 hundred religious leaders, women of faith, youth leaders and peace-advocates representing

Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism, from 30 countries is a testament that “unity and harmony” in Asia is a reality. The diverse cultural expressions produced the symphony, which blends the tune of each tradition into an Asian melody; a well-spring of harmony amidst cultural and religious diversity. In the words of Rev. Nichiko Niwano, “diversity is completely natural” and “accepting it is the way to enrich human society.”

The general assembly is a season of hope. Through the special workshop on the Korean Peninsula, ACRP affirms its commitment it made in 1986, during the Seoul 3rd ACRP Assembly, to continue the path of dialogue, reconciliation and cooperation. The seed of hope is also planted in the friendship that has grown deeper through out the years between and among the religionists of Asia. The people-to-people encounter, according to Imam Chen Guangyuan, strengthens unity and harmony at its core. This kind of encounter has formed the ACRP leaders and their members to rise above territorial, religious, ethnic, sectarian, national and political affiliations.

This book then is not simply a compilation of talks presented during the general assembly. This book embodies the very “Unity and Harmony” experienced individually and collectively of the delegates and participants. It is the fruit of a shared-reflection and determination to realize common action. Through this book, ACRP leaders and members are constantly reminded of their commitment to pursue peace amidst danger, risk and whatever sacrifices it may entail.

To the readers, this book will be a good resource of knowledge about ACRP as an interreligious cooperation, its nature, aspirations and activities. It hopes to serve as an inspiration to promote unity and harmony and to genuinely work for peace.

My sincerest gratitude to Dr. Sunggon Kim, former ACRP Secretary General, for entrusting me the work to publish the proceedings of the 8th ACRP general assembly.

In the preparation of this book, I am indebted to Rev. Kim Tae Sung, ACRP Deputy Secretary General, for providing me the materials, logistical support, and assistance for the translations of the Korean talks and speeches to english. I am grateful to Ms. Gasun Han for assisting me in acquiring all the needed documents, and to Rev. Megumi Wada for helping me in the English translations of all Japanese speeches and the collection of pictures of the Women meeting.

My gratitude to Rev. Yoshitaka Hatakeyama, ACRP new Secretary General, Rev. Masamichi Kamiya and Mariko Kawamoto of the Tokyo ACRP office for finding time to read and review the draft manuscript and for their recommendations.

I wish to thank also Mam Michelle San Gabriel and Mam Jay Mangona of the Ecclesiastical Library of the University of Santo Tomas for their invaluable assistance including the use of the library facility as I work in the manuscript, and to James Patrick Jaring for the content-format, cover design and lay-out of the manuscript.

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Manila, May 2015