



WOMEN'S PRE-ASSEMBLY

“We should bring women out so they can go to the public and have a role there.”

Rev. Elga Sarapung,
Newly Appointed Chair (APWoFN)

Tokyo, Japan – With the theme “Women Empowerment for an Inclusive, Healthy, Prosperous, Peaceful Asia,” the Asia Pacific Women of Faith Network (APWoFN) held the Women’s Pre-Meeting of the ACRP 9th General Assembly on October 18, 2021 virtually.



At the business meeting, **Rev. Elga Sarapung** was elected as the new Chair of the Asia Pacific Women of Faith Network (APWoFN) from 2021-2026. **Rev. Elga Sarapung**, a well-known person of dialogue and promoter of peace and social justice, is a member of *Religions for Peace* Indonesia, the Executive Director of INTERFIDEI-Institute for Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia. Co-chair is **Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit**, a professor at the Mahidol University and the Secretary General of *Religions for Peace* Thailand. **Ms. Naoko Kawada**, Vice-President of Women Committee, *Religions for Peace* Japan is the Secretary General.

At the resolution of the Incheon ACRP 8th Assembly, the APWoFN has tirelessly worked on the issue of human trafficking in Asia. Under the leadership of **Dr. Lilian J. Sison**, the APWoFN adopted Human Trafficking or Modern Day slavery as its flagship program because of the realization that human trafficking is a widespread global issue affecting many people specially women and girls at varying levels. Dr. Sison said, “Human trafficking is a heinous crime and complex human criminal behavior with a lot of manifestations like forced labor of women and gender inequality.” The Asian Conference on “Women empowerment against modern day slavery in Manila in 2017, and the 2 Asian virtual summits on the reality of human trafficking and the role of religious leaders in 2021 clearly indicate the achievement of the APWoFN in raising public awareness on the sad reality of human trafficking and the positive actions being implemented by the ACRP women leaders in mitigating modern-day slavery in Asia.

In his opening remarks, **Rev. Nobuhiro Nemoto**, ACRP Secretary General, emphasized the need for collaborative actions. “You don’t finish by talking, but talk with complete actions. Sometimes, your passion and compassion move the [people] around you even before [the] talks. The members of APWoFN should work hand-in-hand to make sure that no one is left behind,” he said.

Building on Rev. Nemoto’s opening remarks, **Ms. Mariko Sato**, Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Tokyo, in her keynote speech stressed that “We are in a world where no one can work in isolation; we need collaboration.”



While UNFPA is addressing the many challenges related to women, she admitted that they cannot do it alone. Of these many challenges, the most prevalent and pressing are related to women's health and well-being. "We cannot address women's health without addressing gender equality," she shared. As part of women empowerment, Sato discussed about the need for bodily autonomy for women. She said that many women all over the world have no autonomy over their own bodies, and this is the main reason for other prevalent issues such as child marriages, maternal deaths, and gender-based violence.



(SP) Mariko Sato / UNFPA



After the keynote speech, the participants were divided to four groups to discuss the following sub-themes: peace education and respect for dignity, protection of human rights and the well-being of the vulnerable, social cohesion and harmony in communities, and regenerative development. During the one-hour break-out sessions, the participants were asked to identify the pressing issues specific to the sub-themes assigned to them, especially on their effects on women. Moreover, they were encouraged to create specific actions to address the said issues.

After all the presentations and discussions of the workshop reports, **Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit**, the Secretary General of *Religions for Peace* Thailand, highlighted the immense energy, dedication and unity, and creativity of the women leaders as key ingredients to advance the goals and aspirations of ACRP. Specifically, she calls for ACRP Women leader to advocate and increase their efforts in educating parents on how to teach their daughters and to shape young women to be leaders.

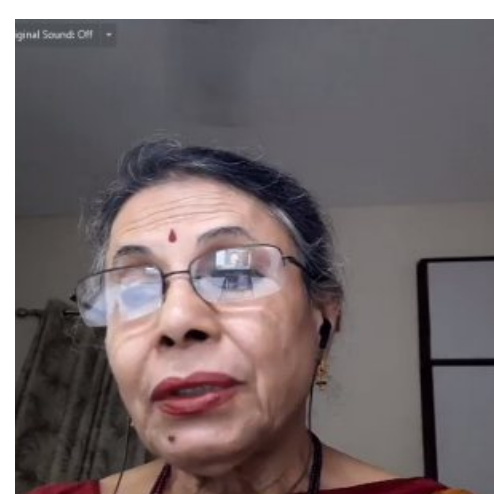
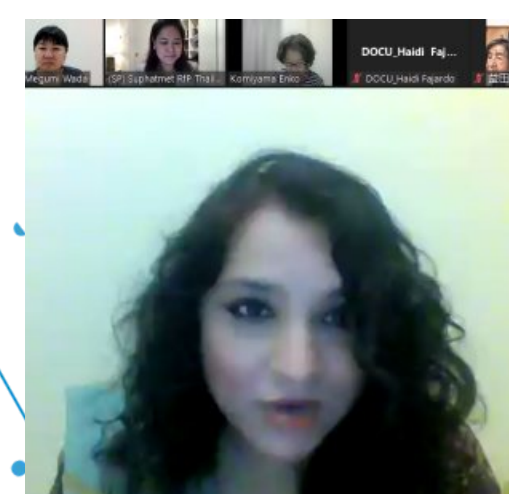
The women meeting concluded with the acceptance speech of **Rev. Elga Sarapung** as the incoming chair of APWoFN. Recognizing the exemplary leadership of her predecessor **Dr. Lilian Sison** with gratitude, and the commendable cooperation of the various ACRP women leaders in the past 5 years, she called on everyone in the assembly to journey with her. "Without helping each other between us Asia Pacific Women of Faith Network members, of course the leadership of this new team will be weak," she said. Finally, she called for the members of APWoFN to work together, give compliments to each other, correct each other, and give positive energy toward one another for the next five years and beyond.

| List of APWoFN in 2021-2026 | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| | Position at affiliation | Religion |
| Japan | Vice-President of Women's Committee | Muslim |
| Religion and Peace | Member of CCRP | Christian |
| Religion and Peace | Member of the Women's Committee | Christian |
| Australia | Secretary | Christian |
| India | Executive Council Member | Hindu |
| Japan | Secretary-General | Hindu |
| Pakistan | Secretary-General | Muslim |
| Bangladesh | Chair of Women's Network | Muslim |
| Dialogue in Indonesia | Executive Director | Christian |
| Myanmar | Secretary-General | Christian |
| Philippines | Deputy Secretary-General | Christian |
| Interreligious Council of Thailand | Secretary-General | Buddhism |



"Let women be women. Let men be men."
Rev. Dr. Manhong Lin
CCRP

"There should be no final decision making without hearing the voice of women."
Ms. Enko Komiyama
RfP Japan





Empowering Women for a Peaceful and Inclusive Asia: APWoFN Commitment for the next five years



The women meeting at the ACRP 9th General Assembly is a review of the past five years, a discernment on the challenges of the present, and a communal envisioning of the future. Women leaders of Asia have come together in this historic meeting to discuss the relevance and role of APWoFN for the next five years.

Through the process of consultation and dialogue, the participants to the women assembly reflected on the following themes: peace education and respect for dignity, protection of human rights and the well-being of the vulnerable, social cohesion and harmony in communities, and regenerative development.

The following areas are considered as the most challenging situations of women and girls in Asia.

Women Inequality. It is still a widespread practice in Asia that women lack equal opportunities in all aspects of social life, such as education, workplace, freedom of religion, roles and functions in the family among others.

Cultural practices. The cultural view that relegates women to domestic work and the dominant patriarchal mentality continue to make life for women difficult and many times subject to violence and abuse. Other cultural practices such as child marriages, and the subservient view on women in the decision-making process have prevented women to attain their full development.

Social injustices. the problem of human trafficking, unfair treatment and violence committed against women continue to dominate the Asian situation of women.

Women and Ecology. it is also observed that climate change has made women more vulnerable and their life more difficult and that they suffer most from its impact.

For the APWoFN, education remains the greatest priority for common action to improve the well-being and promote the protection of women and girls in Asia.

There is a need for the women sector to utilize the social media in campaigning for equality and protection of women.

The APWoFN considers the collaboration with government and civil society organizations as key components in the advocacy for the equal rights for women.

APWoFN commits itself to provide capacity building training to empower women as equal partners in building a just and harmonious society.

With the above key objectives arising from the dialogue meeting of women in this assembly, APWoFN will transform ACRP as an action movement to serve the women and girls of Asia.