



Christian Conference of Asia

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30 July 2021

CCA's Statement on World Day against Trafficking in Persons 'Victims' Voices Lead the Way'

Trafficking in persons, or human trafficking, which is nothing but a terrible form of modern-day slavery, continues to remain one of the most grievous assaults on fundamental human rights and human dignity. Every year, thousands of women, children, and men fall into the lure of traffickers—through coercion, abduction, fraud or deception, and abuse of power—in their own countries or abroad. Almost every country in the world is affected by human trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit, or destination for victims. Human trafficking dehumanises people and corrupts their identity as being made in the image of God, turning them instead into commodities and objects.

Given the scale of human suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a legitimate fear and concern regarding the rise in extreme, absolute, and unrelenting poverty, which is expected to push those who are susceptible to trafficking into even more vulnerability. As the COVID-19 crisis continues to cast a long shadow over global recovery and rehabilitation, with many millions of women, men, and children in the world out of work or school and without social support or protection, traffickers may be able to expand their operations with impunity and exploit the powerlessness of the disadvantaged. Thus, urgent and targeted action is required to stop human trafficking.

The theme of this year's World Day against Trafficking in Persons (30 July 2021) is 'Victims' Voices Lead the Way', placing great importance on listening to and learning from survivors of human trafficking. The theme calls us to empower survivors as key actors in the fight against human trafficking. Survivors play crucial roles in designing different measures to prevent the heinous crime, identifying networks and perpetrators, rescuing other victims, and supporting meaningful rehabilitation.

Given the complex and mostly invisible nature of human trafficking, most victims have been met with misunderstanding or ignorance when they have attempted to get help; at times even facing victimisation or punishment for crimes that their traffickers forced them to commit. They may also face traumatic legal proceedings, which force them to recount the horrific experiences they have undergone, and may also face stigmatisation or receive inadequate support. Thus, learning from victims' experiences and turning their suggestions into concrete actions will lead to a more victim-centred and effective approach in combating human trafficking.

On the occasion of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) calls upon its member churches and councils in Asia to maximise their efforts and strengthen responses against human trafficking in society by bringing visibility to this crime, shedding light on trafficking patterns and flows, and mitigating factors that make people vulnerable to being trafficked.

By leveraging international relationships and networks, the CCA encourages Asian churches to collaborate and develop solutions capable of addressing root causes and risk factors, protecting the impoverished and marginalised, and better supporting victims. Such systemic solutions can benefit from cross-border partnerships with the support of other stakeholders in the fight against trafficking—such as civil society organisations and businesses that can address supply chain integrity and support fair-trade practices to stop trafficking, bonded labour, illegal recruiting, and exploitation. Additionally, Asian churches can contribute to the ongoing efforts of addressing poverty, underdevelopment, and lack of opportunities, all of which economically disempower people and make them vulnerable to trafficking. By tackling structural inequalities and advocating for empowerment, churches must continue to provide hope and strive for an inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Churches must also continue to honour and amplify the voices of survivors as part of effective and comprehensive anti-trafficking strategies that advance prosecution, protection, and prevention efforts. The responses of churches to trafficking must be survivor-led and trauma-informed. Churches can also partner with survivor-led organisations and advocate on behalf of survivors for stronger legislation against trafficking. Survivors possess first-hand knowledge of all that is needed to improve anti-trafficking responses, and thus it is vital to listen to the lived experiences of survivors for stronger action against trafficking.

Reiterating this year's theme of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, let us too clear the way for the leadership of survivors through whom God can work despite their tragedies in the fight against trafficking. Let us hear the cries of our fellow beings who continue to be oppressed and exploited because of human trafficking; let the Asian churches continue to pray for the protection and deliverance of all victims of trafficking around the world, while also answering God's call for justice and true compassion in our work.

Mathews George Chunakara
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