



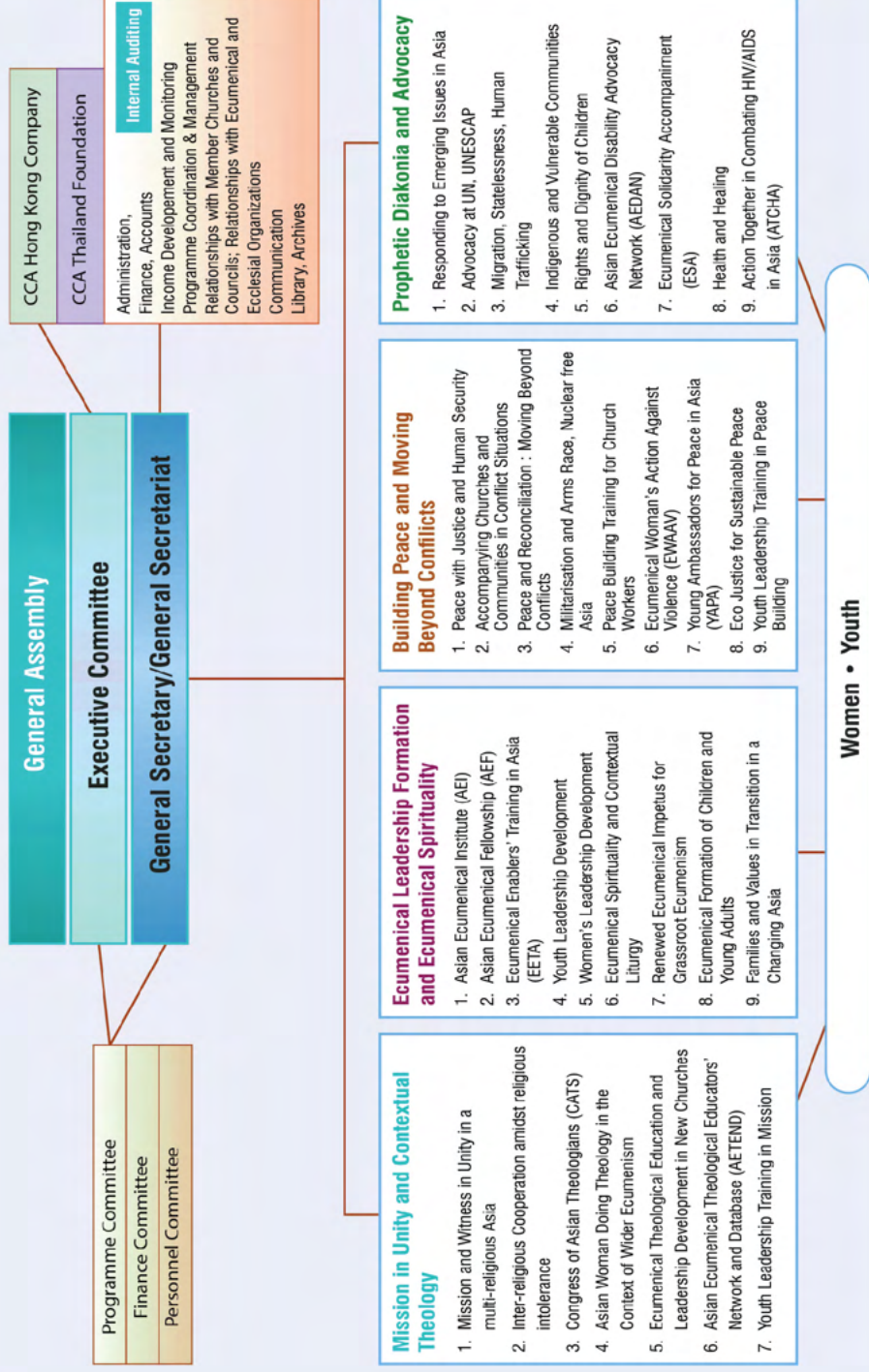
Christian Conference of Asia



REPORT OF PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES 2022

'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

CCA Programme Structure 2015-2023



FOREWORD

God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony

It has been over two years since the COVID-19 outbreak caused untold miseries and sufferings in the world. The church and the ecumenical movement continue to struggle to cope with the pandemic's aftermath. During the pandemic-induced lockdowns in Asia, the CCA endeavoured to implement its programmes and activities and communicate with the member constituencies through alternative online modes. In 2022, the CCA resumed the much-preferred in-person mode of functioning characterised by face-to-face interactions, ecumenical fellowship, and solidarity, thus marking a transition from online engagement.

In 2022, CCA continues with the Strategic Programme Plan that was put in place in 2016. The CCA continues with the five-year Strategic Programme Plan, the mandate of which has been extended to eight years due to the postponed General Assembly. By 2022, 90 percent of all planned programmes and activities for the post-Jakarta period have been successfully implemented, in addition to new programmes based on emerging issues, with the final year before the General Assembly serving as an ideal opportunity to review the progress of the Strategic Programme Plan's implementation.

'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony' was the thematic focus that became the thrust of 2022's programmes and activities. While this is a prayer, it also reflects our gratitude to God. Although the pandemic's challenges that brought the world to a standstill seemed insurmountable, it is only with hope in God and with God's immense grace that we can now say the worst of the pandemic has been overcome. The Asian churches' dynamic adaptation and responses to the crises caused by the pandemic, and their accompaniment of the suffering people, is also a testament to hope in God and God's grace. Although we cannot fully say that we have been liberated from all those difficulties we faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope that God's grace will harmoniously sustain the entire creation in these times of heightened geopolitical tensions and complex crises in several Asian countries.

I take this time also to acknowledge and recognise the valued support and partnership of CCA's member constituencies and ecumenical partners during these challenging times. The CCA has tried its level best in humble efforts to accompany its constituencies throughout the pandemic. Despite practical difficulties and limitations as well as their own reduced levels of functioning during the pandemic, member constituencies enthusiastically participated in the CCA's online programmes, and we hope for such continued interest and engagement in the post-pandemic era. In the same way, CCA appreciates the constant presence, accompaniment, and support of the ecumenical partners during these times of difficulties.

The accompanying report outlines how the CCA has tried to fulfill and live up to the promise and scope of the work mandated by the Strategic Programme Plan, made possible by the generosity and support of member constituencies and ecumenical partners.

God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony.

Yours along the journey,



Dr Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary

CONTENTS

General Secretariat	4
Coordination of Administration and Programmes	4
Liaison with Governing Board and Advisory Committees	4
CCA Executive Committee Meeting	4
CCA Finance Committee Meeting	5
Church and Ecumenical Relations	6
Relations with Member Churches and Councils	6
CCA General Secretary's Visit to South Korea and Tribute to Korean Ecumenical Leaders	6
CCA General Secretary's Visit to the Philippines	7
Felicitation of Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang, WCC Asia President	11
Relations with Ecumenical Partners	12
Relations with the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland	12
The 11 th Assembly of the World Council of Churches	12
Relations with Mission21, Evangelisches Mission Weltweit, and Kerk in Actie-ICCO	13
Relations with the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin	13
Communications	14
Youth Internships and Training	14
Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology	15
Human Rights in Asia and Advocacy at the United Nations (UN)	16
Biblical–Theological Bases of Human Dignity and Human Rights (Institute on Human Rights)	16
Health and Healing: Churches' Response to Health, Healing, and Wholeness in Changing Contexts in Asia	19
Asia Regional Consultation on 'Health, Healing, and Wholeness of Life: Churches' Mission in Asia Today'	19
Theological Education and Leadership Development in New Churches	24
Scholarships and Exchange for Theological Education	24
Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Ecumenical Spirituality	25
Asian Ecumenical Institute	26
Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI)–2022	26
Ecumenical Enablers' Training in Asia (EETA)	29
Ecumenical Enablers' Training in Timor Leste	29
Ecumenical Spirituality and Nurturing of Contextual Liturgical Traditions	31
Asia Sunday–2022	31

Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts	33
Churches in Action for Moving Beyond Conflict and Reconciliation	34
Ecumenical Pastoral Solidarity Visit to Sri Lanka	34
Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence (EWAAV)	36
Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence in Timor Leste	36
Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence in Sri Lanka	38
Young Ambassadors for Peace in Asia (YAPA)	40
Young Ambassadors for Peace in Asia (YAPA)–2022	40
Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy	44
Emerging Issues in Asia: Regional and Global Advocacy	45
Asia Regional Consultation on 'Towards Theological Education on Good Governance and Integrity Leadership'	53
Statelessness and Human Trafficking	57
Asia Regional Consultation on 'The Effects of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons'	57
Asia Regional Consultation on 'Diakonal Ministry of the Church in Developing Effective Responses to Combat Human Trafficking in Asia'	60
Upholding the Rights and Dignity of Children	63
National Consultation on 'Upholding Dignity and Rights of Children in a 'New Normal' Era'	63
Ecumenical Solidarity Accompaniment and Diakonia in Asia	65
Asia Regional Consultation on 'Ecumenical Diakonia, Church's Response to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia'	65
Action Together in Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) ..	72
Capacity-Building	73
Southeast Asia Sub-Regional Consultation on 'Southeast Asian Churches' Engagement with HIV and AIDS: Working Towards Informed Responses'	73
Advocacy	76
Regional Consultation on 'Towards an Effective Advocacy on HIV and AIDS for Upholding Dignity of Gender and Sexual Minorities'	76
National Consultation on 'Strengthening the Voices of the Youth in the Philippines for HIV Advocacy'	78
Appendices	81
CCA Programmes and Activities in 2022	81
Report of the CCA General Secretary to the Executive Committee Meeting–2022	83
CCA Executive Committee Members 2015–2022	94
CCA Programme Committee Members 2015–2022	95
CCA Finance Committee Members 2015–2022	95
CCA Staff Members—2022	96

GENERAL SECRETARIAT (GS)

Coordination of Administration and Programmes

The General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia is charged with the responsibility of the overall coordination and supervision of all programmes implemented by the four programmatic areas. In this task, the General Secretary provides leadership in the coordination, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all of the CCA's programmes and activities in 2022.

The programmes in 2022, which at the start of the year were implemented through online modes, transitioned to physical in-person meetings halfway through the year with the relaxation of COVID-19 movement restrictions on international travel. The total number of programmes held in 2022 thus numbered seventeen and included online and

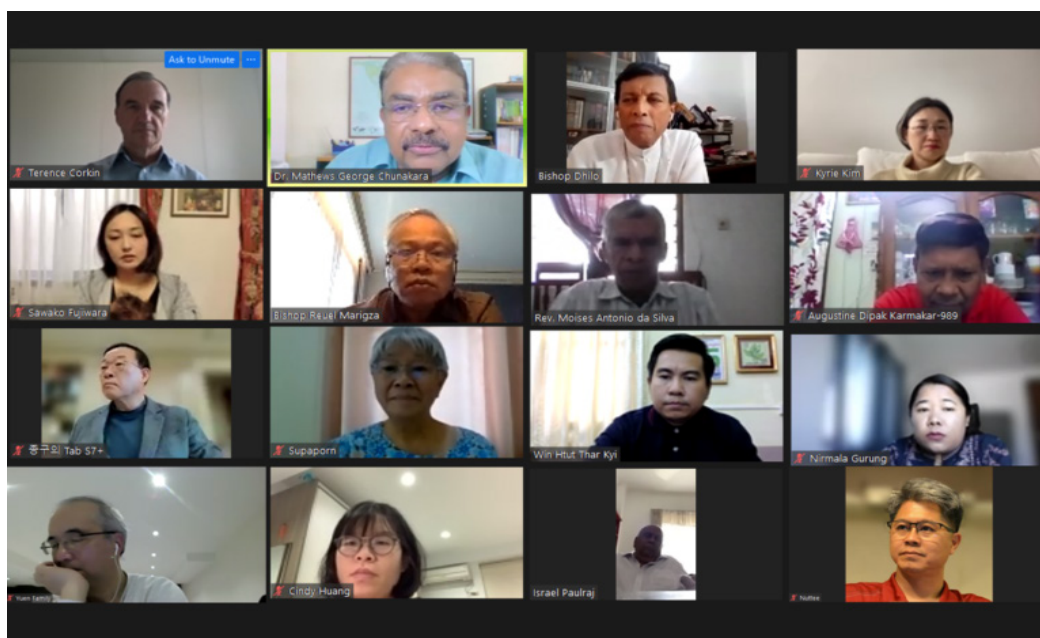
in-person programmes. Information regarding the programmes was communicated through the CCA's digital communication pathways and online presence through its website and social media channels.

One of the main responsibilities of the General Secretary is strengthening relationships with member churches and councils, liaising with the governing board and advisory bodies, and building relationships with governments and intergovernmental organisations. The General Secretary continued all the regular tasks of maintaining and strengthening relations through online modes and was even able to make in-person visits due to the relaxation of COVID-19 international transactions.

Liaison with Governing Board and Advisory Committees

CCA Executive Committee Meeting

2 December 2022 | Online



CCA Executive Committee's online meeting in 2022



The Late Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata, former CCA Moderator

The Executive Committee of CCA met online on 2 December 2022.

The Executive Committee took the decision unanimously about the new dates and venue of the next Assembly. Kottayam, a historic city in the southern Indian state of Kerala, was chosen as the venue for the 15th General Assembly of the CCA, scheduled to take place from 27 September to 4 October 2023.

About 500 participants from across Asia are expected to gather for the General Assembly and will reflect on the theme, 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation'.

The CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, reported to the Executive Committee that the heads of five CCA member churches in India's southern state of Kerala and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) had welcomed the suggestion of the CCA Assembly being held in Kottayam. They offered their wholehearted support to the plan of organising the General Assembly in the historic multi-religious city, where Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam have lived together in harmony for centuries.

The CCA General Secretary added that the next step of the preparations for the Assembly would begin in consultation with the NCCI and with CCA member churches that have their parishes in Kerala. Kottayam will also be the venue for pre-Assembly events for women and youth.

A special 'in Memoriam' prayer was offered for Asian prominent leaders, including the late Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata from the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) in Indonesia, who had been elected as the CCA Moderator at the 14th General Assembly in Jakarta, Indonesia, and who faithfully served in that position till his untimely demise on 17 June 2022.

To fill the vacancy of the posts of CCA Moderator, and also of the CCA Vice Moderator Rev. Diana Tana from New Zealand who relinquished the position, the Executive Committee appointed the Executive Committee members Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey from the Church of Ceylon in Sri Lanka as the Acting Moderator and Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines as the Acting Vice Moderator till the next General Assembly in 2023.

The Executive Committee also heard reports of the various programmes and activities that were held across the past year, including in-person programmes from August 2022 as the COVID-19 pandemic subsided in Asia.

CCA Finance Committee Meeting *2 December 2022 | Online*

The Finance Committee of the CCA met in conjunction with the online Executive Committee meeting, on 2 December 2022. The meeting was attended by Augustine Dipak Karmakar,

CCA Treasurer, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary, and Finance Committee members Israel Paulraj (Church of Ceylon), Nuttee Kunlacharnpises (Church of Christ in Thailand), and Patrick Yuen (Hong Kong Council of Churches of Christ in China).

The Finance Committee reviewed the current financial situation of the CCA and the budget for the year 2022. They approved the framework budget for the year 2023. The Committee also received the Report of the Investment Committee in Hong Kong.

Church and Ecumenical Relations

Relations with Member Churches and Councils

The General Secretary and other staff members joined and participated in several programmes and activities as well as special events of member

churches, councils, related ecumenical organisations, and regional and global ecumenical organisations.

CCA General Secretary's Visit

to South Korea and Tribute to Korean Ecumenical Leaders

17 October 2022 | Seoul, South Korea



Dr Mathews George Chunakara presenting mementos to three former CCA General Secretaries, Dr Sang Jung Park, Dr Ahn Jae Woong, and Prof. Dr Park Kyung Seo at a special function organised the National Council of Churches in Korea

There was a special function to welcome the CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara, organised by the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCK) in collaboration with the CCA

member churches on 17 October 2022 in Seoul, South Korea.

The CCA General Secretary conveyed the message of CCA's ongoing commitment

to peace and reconciliation between the divided Koreas and appreciated the commitment of CCA's member churches in Korea to collaborate with CCA to strengthen the Asian ecumenical movement. He shared information about the 15th General Assembly of CCA to be held in 2023.

Rev. Dr Lee Hong Jung, NCKK General Secretary, expressed appreciation for the solidarity and accompaniment with the Korean churches that had been extended by CCA during the past several decades, and especially for CCA's commitment to advocating for peace and reconciliation in the Korean peninsula.

Rev. Kim Jong-Gu, CCA Executive Committee member, in his speech, appreciated the role of the CCA General Secretary, especially in the manifold programmes and activities CCA carried out under his leadership ever since the beginning of the new programme phase initiated after the last General Assembly. He added that despite the pandemic and other constraints, CCA had achieved a lot in terms of inspiring and motivating its member churches through various programmes.

During the reception, there was a special event to recognise and honour Dr Sang Jung Park, the fourth CCA General Secretary (1985–1990) and Dr Ahn Jae Woong, the seventh CCA General Secretary (2000–2005), and also Prof. Dr Park Kyung Seo, the former Asia Secretary of World Council of Churches (WCC) (1982–1999).

In recognition of their decades-long commitment to the Asian and global ecumenical movement, and their leadership within the Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches (WCC), two former General Secretaries of CCA, Dr Sang Jung Park and Dr Ahn Jae Woong, and a former Asia Secretary of WCC, Prof. Dr Park Kyung Seo, were honoured by the CCA.

While appreciating all three for their unique roles, commitments, and significant contributions to the Asian and global ecumenical movement over the past several decades, the CCA General Secretary expressed grateful appreciation for their time-honoured service and dedication.

CCA General Secretary's Visit to the Philippines

21–25 November 2022 | Manila, the Philippines



The CCA General Secretary meets the leaders of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, Quezon City

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara visited the member churches and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines from 21–25 November 2022.

The CCA General Secretary held discussions with various church and ecumenical leaders in the country on several crucial issues on the life and witness of the churches and common concerns on human rights violations prevailing in the country, and also discussed the impact of the post-pandemic normal for the church and the ecumenical movement in Asia in the months and years to come.

During the first visit to the Philippines, the CCA General Secretary met with the officers and senior staff members of the National

Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and also had meetings separately with the leaders of the member churches in the Philippines, namely, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, the United Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, the Episcopal Church in the Philippines, and Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo.

The CCA General Secretary shared information on how the churches and national ecumenical councils in different Asian countries are coping with the post-COVID-19 situation and details about the forthcoming 15th General Assembly of CCA and related regional ecumenical events scheduled for the pre-Assembly period.

A list of other meetings attended by the CCA General Secretary and other CCA staff members is as below:



CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara meets the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste, José Maria Vasconcelos; also present were church leaders of the Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosa'e

- The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara and other CCA staff members attended the online WCC Asia Pre-Assembly meeting on 23 August 2022.
- The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara received recognition from the Prime Minister

of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste, José Maria Vasconcelos, for the ecumenical family, particularly the CCA and the World Council of Churches (WCC) for the work of solidarity and accompaniment extended to the people of Timor Leste over the years in their struggle for the right to self-



CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunkara addresses the Global Christian Forum Asia Regional Consultation in Seoul, South Korea

determination. This recognition was conferred on 22 September 2022, during an hour-long meeting at the Prime Minister's official residence in Dili, Timor Leste. Leaders from the Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosa'e (IPTL) Rev. Moises A. da Silva, Rev. Martinho Faria, and Rev. Juliana Temparaja accompanied the CCA General Secretary.

- The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara and CCA Programme

staff Rev. Jung Eun (Grace) Moon attended the Global Christian Forum's Asia Regional Consultation in Seoul, South Korea from 14–17 October 2022.

- The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara attended the Biennial General Assembly and extended congratulations to the newly elected leaders of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) on 21 October 2022 at the Payap University Campus in Chiang Mai, Thailand.



CCA General Secretary with the new leadership of the Church of Christ in Thailand

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'



A delegation of the Presbyterian Church in Korea visits the CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai

- The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara and CCA Programme Coordinators Rev. Jung Eun Moon and Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia received a delegation of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK) headed by its newly elected Moderator, Rev. Dr Soon Chang Lee, who paid a visit to the headquarters of the (CCA) on 27 October 2022.



CCA General Secretary attends the opening of the 6th Asian Christian Life-Giving Agricultural Forum

- The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara attended the opening of the 6th Asian Christian Life-Giving Agricultural Forum which was held on 22 November 2022 at the University of the Philippines, Los Banos, Laguna and delivered a keynote address entitled 'Sustainability of Food Security is for Safeguarding the Right to Food and Right to Life'.



CCA General Secretary felicitates and honours former CCA President and nonagenarian The Rt. Revd. Bishop Kenneth M. Fernando, from the Church of Ceylon

- The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara felicitated and honoured former CCA President and nonagenarian The Rt. Revd. Bishop Kenneth M. Fernando from the Church of Ceylon. Bishop Kenneth Fernando served as a President of the CCA from 1995–2000. Also present was Ms Chitra Fernando, the wife of Bishop Fernando, who herself had served as the President of the CCA from 1977–1981. The special felicitation was held at the headquarters of the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 7 December 2022.

Felicitations of Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang, WCC Asia President

1 December 2022 | Chiang Mai, Thailand

The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara felicitated Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang from the Gereja Toraja in Indonesia. Rev. Dr Hutabarat-Lebang was selected as the

Asia President of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at its General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. Rev. Dr Hutabarat-Lebang is also the former CCA General Secretary, serving from 2010–2015.

The felicitations were conducted during the CCA's Christmas Worship Programme on 1 December 2022 at the CCA Headquarters. In attendance were participants of the CCA's Asia Regional Consultation on 'Towards Theological Education on Good Governance and Integrity Leadership' as well as members of the CCA Thai Foundation and other well-wishers in Chiang Mai.

During the felicitations, the CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara expressed his admiration and appreciation for the vital role that Rev. Dr Hutabarat-Lebang has played in the ecumenical movement in Asia and the world. Noting her illustrious service spanning decades in the ecumenical movement, Dr Chunakara wished Rev. Hutabarat-Lebang well in her new position as the WCC Asia President.

Relations with Ecumenical Partners

Relations with the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland

24 February 2022 | Chiang Mai, Thailand

Representatives from the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), Rev. Frank

Kopania, the Executive Director for Global Ministries, Rev. Ute Hedrich, Executive Secretary for the Middle and Far East, Australia, and Pacific, and Rev. Carsten Körber visited the CCA Office in Chiang Mai on 24 February 2022 for a meeting



EKD representatives visit the CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai

with CCA staff. Information regarding ongoing and planned programmes and programmatic directions was shared.

The 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches

31 August–8 September 2022 | Karlsruhe, Germany

The 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) took place from 31

August–8 September 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany.

The Assembly is the highest governing body of the World Council of Churches and normally meets every eight years, when the entire fellowship of WCC's member churches comes together in one place for prayer and celebration. It is a unique opportunity for the churches to deepen their commitment to visible unity and common witness, which makes the WCC



CCA Staff at the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany

Assembly the most diverse Christian gathering of its size in the world.

CCA programme staff members attended the WCC Assembly in different capacities : CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara and Ruth Mathen as voting delegates of their respective churches; Rev. Grace Moon as a co-opted staff for Just Community of Women and Men Pre-Assembly; Klein Emperado as a co-opted staff for Communications; Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia as a resource person for Ecumenical Conversation on 'Continuum of Care: Role of Church Health Institutions and Church Communities in Asia'; Arceli Bile as a resource person for Workshop on 'Child Rights Protection in Asia: Challenges and Opportunities for Churches'; Chalvin Tehuayo as a resource person for Workshop on 'Ending Statelessness to Uphold Every Human's Equal Dignity'; Abel Joshua Abey and Yuliana Magdalena Benu as Assembly Stewards; Yodinge Kithminee Chamathka Kularatne, John Paul Devakumar, and Sha Mgwe La Ah Tha Pa as Assembly participants.

CCA conducted two workshops at the WCC Assembly: one on 'Child Rights Protection in Asia' and the other on 'Ending Statelessness to Uphold Every Human's Equal Dignity'.

Relations with Mission21, Evangelisches Mission Weltweit, and Kerk in Actie-ICCO

5, 6, 7 August 2022 | Karlsruhe, Germany

Meetings with partners based in Europe were arranged during the World Council of Churches General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. The General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara and CCA staff Rev. Grace Moon and Arceli Bile met with Evangelisches Mission Weltweit (EMW) and Kerk in Actie-ICCO on 5 and 6 September respectively. Mission21 organised a thanksgiving dinner meeting with their partners on 7 September 2022.

The meetings included sharing of updates from both CCA and the partners and discussions on sustaining and further strengthening ecumenical partnerships. The meetings also served as an opportune time to thank all partners for the steadfast support of the CCA.

Relations with the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC)

11, 13, 15 October 2022 | Online



Annual ICFLC meeting online, attended by Rev. Jung Eun (Grace) Moon from CCA

The annual ICFLC meeting was held virtually on 11, 13, and 15 October 2022 attended by twelve delegates of the ICFLC's constituency member organisations and partner organisations. The main agenda of the meeting was to discuss the allocation of block grants to the members, screening the project grants and scholarship grants, and electing new leadership of Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC). The FLC, initiated in 1956, and linked to CCA during its initial years, is now a worldwide ecumenical fellowship of prayer of Christian women for justice, peace, and reconciliation. Rev. Jung Eun Moon (Grace) is attending to the FLC on behalf of CCA.

Communications

The CCA continues to make strong use of its electronic and social media channels to communicate ongoing programmes, updates, and developments, and also to

interact with the member constituencies, the ecumenical world, civil society, and other international bodies. This year, the CCA revived new strategies on Facebook and also started a new Instagram page as a means of connecting with the younger generations from the member constituencies. Communications staff have been regularly putting out publications and updating the CCA website with news releases which are then distributed via email using MailChimp. The Communications staff are based at the CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai and work in close conjunction with the programme staff. The CCA website will be going in for an upgrade, and all General Assembly-related registrations and communications are expected to take place on a new integrated sub-site connected to the main website.

Youth Internships and Training

The CCA strives to nurture new lines of ecumenical leadership through its training and internship programmes, which develop potentials and build

capacities of youth from the CCA's member churches. The internship programme is a year-long residential programme at the CCA's headquarters,



CCA Youth Interns–2022; from L-R: John Paul Devakumar, Yodinge Kithminee Chamathka Kularatne, Yuliana Magdalena Benu, Sha Mgwe La Ah Tha Pa, Abel Joshua Abey

where the interns undergo intensive practical guidelines and are immersed in the programmatic and communications work of the CCA, working alongside the CCA staff. After a gap of two years, the 2022 batch of

interns were Abel Joshua Abey (India), Kithminee Chamathka Kularatne (Sri Lanka), Sha Mgwe La Ah Tha Pa (Myanmar), Yuliana Magdalena Benu (Indonesia), and John Paul Devakumar (India).



MISSION IN UNITY AND CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

OBJECTIVES

- To promote awareness of emerging issues in Asia and to strengthen the Church's mission and witness in contemporary post-colonial contexts and multi-religious contexts of Asia;
- To assist member churches and councils of CCA in engaging in mission and enhancing their roles in contemporary Asian social, political, economic, religious, and ecological issues for unity;
- To bring positive and constructive transformation in the light of revitalising and nurturing the unity of churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia;
- To develop relevant contextual theological undergirding for mission and witness while addressing emerging issues in Asia;
- To strengthen collaboration and cooperation among churches and various ecumenical actors in Asia and from other parts of the world that are engaged in mission and witness in Asia;
- To engage in interreligious harmony, making peace a theological paradigm, focusing on the peaceful coexistence of all Asian people;
- To initiate, facilitate, and strengthen ecumenical theological initiatives in Asia.

Human Rights in Asia and Advocacy at the United Nations (UN)

Biblical–Theological Bases of Human Dignity and Human Rights (Institute on Human Rights)

5–11 December 2022 | Colombo, Sri Lanka

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) organised a week-long Institute on Human Rights (IHR), an intensive training programme on 'Biblical–Theological Bases of Human Dignity and Human Rights (Institute on Human Rights)' from 4–11 December 2022 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The training programme was held at the headquarters of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Twenty-seven young church workers and pastors specially invited from the CCA's member churches from ten Asian countries attended the programme.



Participants of the CCA's Institute on Human Rights–2022

The purpose of the CCA in organising the Institute on Human Rights was to contribute to shaping Biblical and theological undergirding on human rights, realising the fact that it is only with full awareness, understanding, and respect for human rights can we hope to develop a culture where they are respected and reinforced rather than violated.

The CCA has been historically at the forefront of the defence of human rights in Asia in various ways and has addressed human rights issues in Asia over the past decades. The IHR was yet another expression of the CCA's commitment to strengthening the capacities of the younger generations in human rights advocacy and defence through human rights education. The modules and sessions addressed learning about human rights (what they

are, and how they are safeguarded and protected), and learning for human rights (by developing skills and attitudes for participants to implement, promote, and defend human rights values in their own lives and work). Such human rights training for young people benefits not only society, but young people themselves, who increasingly face processes of social exclusion, of religious, ethnic, and national differences, and of the advantages and disadvantages of globalisation, particularly in the Asian context.

Renowned human rights defenders and activists shared their expertise as resource persons for the Training of Trainers. They included The Rt. Rev. Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah (Jaffna Diocese of Church of South India), Basil Fernando (Asian Human Rights Commission), Prof. Dr Faizan

Mustafa (Aligarh Muslim University), Jennifer Philpot-Nissen (World Council of Churches), Pia Oberoi (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, United Nations), Sri Lankan civil society leaders Ruki Fernando, Mangala Shankar, Marisa de Silva, and Devinda Kodagoda, and the CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the CCA General Secretary, led three sessions on 'Human Rights and Human Dignity in Tradition and Modernity', 'Human Dignity: The Guiding Principle of Human Rights', and 'Human Rights Advocacy in the Ecumenical Agenda'.

In the first two sessions by Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the participants received a detailed and comprehensive historical analysis and an account of the evolution of the fundamental ideas and principles related to human dignity and human rights, as well as their emergence in different contexts—eastern and western, religious and secular. The third session expounded on the various involvements and initiatives that sprung within the ecumenical movement to campaign for human dignity and human rights issues around the world.

The sessions on 'Human Dignity and Human Rights: Biblical Perspectives' and 'Human Dignity and Human Rights: Theological Perspectives' were addressed by Bishop Dr Daniel Thiagarajah from the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India in Sri Lanka. Bishop Thiagarajah challenged pre-existing notions that the participants held and proposed new ways of conceptualising human rights and human dignity from the faith perspective.

His inspiring presentation on 'Being the Church that Promotes and Defends Human Rights' on 10 December, World Human Rights Day, was the concluding presentation. He called upon the young people present to examine and live out their Christian vocation of love and service towards the most marginalised and disenfranchised.

Basil Fernando, from the Asian Human Rights Commission in Hong Kong, led the sessions on 'Rule of Law and Human Rights in Asia' and 'Human Rights and the Role of Judiciary in Protecting Human Rights'. Through these sessions, the veteran human rights activists from Sri Lanka highlighted also the attempts to undermine the independence of different judiciaries and shared information on the court processes of human rights laws and cases.

Well-known Indian academician Prof. Dr Faizan Mustafa from Aligarh Muslim University in India covered issues related to the 'Right to Freedom of Religion and Belief and Human Rights in Asia' and 'Right to Freedom of Expression in an Age of Misinformation and Hate Speech'. Prof. Mustafa touched upon the complex and overlapping rights of freedom of religion and belief as well as freedom of expression in an increasingly polarised world, amid the heightened presence of religio-nationalistic and ethno-nationalistic political groups in many Asian countries.

In a session focusing on 'The United Nations and Human Rights Advocacy', Jennifer Philpot-Nissen from the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, Switzerland, took the participants through the different United Nations review mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review, different treaty bodies, and special procedure mechanisms, and shared concrete steps and pathways that the participants could take to raise and amplify local human rights issues at the global level.

Pia Oberoi, a Senior Adviser at the OHCHR Asia Pacific Office in Bangkok, delivered a presentation on 'The Human Rights of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless People', which was a reality being faced by many of the participants' home communities. Ms Oberoi's session covered legal human rights sources and areas of international law relevant to migration and mobility, the human rights obligations of states, the right to due process, and the Global Compact on Safe and Orderly Migration.

Ruki Fernando, a human rights defender, led the session on 'International Bill of

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

Human Rights', and Mangala Shankar, a senior lawyer, led the session on 'The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women', both of which were foundational sessions for the training course. The two Sri Lankan leaders who have decades of experience in human rights advocacy and defence, comprehensively shared the evolution of key human rights documents, their specific articles, and their application in today's societies.

Marisa de Silva and Devinda Kodagoda, civil society leaders of the 2022 Sri Lanka's 'Aragalaya' protest movement, spoke about 'Improving the Effectiveness of Civil Society in Protection of Human Rights'. The two activists shared their deeply personal experiences of being part of the Galle Face protest movement in Colombo against rampant corruption and the twin political-financial crises. They candidly shared the movement's successes and shortcomings as well as lessons for other civil society movements in Asia.

All sessions included opportunities for exploration and dialogue between the

speakers and the participants.

Bible studies led by Rev. Dr Abraham Mathew of the National Council of Churches in India and John Paul Devakumar from the CCA provided in-depth Christian social ethical perspectives on human rights and human dignity.

Each day of the training ended with experiential workshops and activities that recapitulated and summarised the learnings of the day as well as explored applications of the topics that were discussed. The workshops were led by CCA staff, Ruth Mathen and John Paul Devakumar.

The IHR, initiated by the CCA, enabled a select group of young social activists and human rights defenders to develop wider perspectives on human rights, deepen biblical-theological understandings of human rights, analyse current Asian developments and challenges to human rights, and developed the participants' competencies to apply and translate their learnings as human rights defenders in their local contexts and congregations.



Students of the IHR-2022 in different activities and workshops

Health and Healing: Churches' Response to Health, Healing, and Wholeness in Changing Contexts in Asia

Asia Regional Consultation on 'Health, Healing, and Wholeness of Life: Churches' Mission in Asia Today'

10–12 October 2022 | Chiang Mai, Thailand

The Asia Regional Consultation on 'Health, Healing, and Wholeness of Life: Churches' Mission in Asia Today' was held from 10–12 October 2022, on the campus of Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand. About sixty participants including medical professionals, pastoral care providers, and leaders of churches, ecumenical councils,

and health-related organisations as well as institutions from across Asia, attended the Consultation.

Many Asian churches have pioneered their health ministry by establishing Christian hospitals and serving people and communities by providing health care over



Participants of the CCA's International Consultation on 'Faith, Health, and Healing: Christian Response in Asia Today'

the decades. In many countries in Asia, Christian hospitals provide specialised services to the poor and the needy in society as part of their diaconal ministry. Although mission hospitals have not been able to cover the entire population, they have been an essential element of the healthcare sector in most regions of the world, particularly in Asia. The majority of Christian healthcare institutions in Asia were once located in rural areas where the impoverished lived. People could also benefit from the spiritual dimension of healthcare provided by health workers and their spiritual co-workers. Their love,

dedication, faith, and trust determined whether Christian healthcare providers made a difference.

In today's times, however, there is greater commercialisation in church-related medical institutions. Commercialism has affected Christian medical services in different parts of Asia, and this goes against Christian values. In the context of an emerging trend of declining health and healing services, and with commercialisation affecting the original purpose and mission of churches in the

health ministry, it was important for the CCA to motivate the churches in Asia to equip their mission hospitals to initiate health and healing mission centres in every Christian hospital in Asia with facilities to provide care for the aged and for people affected with mental health issues, in addition to setting up centres for family counselling. The main purpose

of the CCA's Asia Regional Consultation was to understand how churches and faith communities in Asia could play a pivotal role in complementing the work of the government to offer services related to health and humanitarian aid with their resources, to ultimately ensure the realisation of health as a fundamental right of all human beings.



Worship at the International Consultation on 'Health, Healing, and Wholeness of Life'

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary, in his keynote address focusing on 'Right to Health, Right to Life: Role of the Church in Developing Effective Health and Healing Ministry in Asia' said that the right to health extends beyond certain assumptions or notions that include a wide range of factors that can help to lead a healthy life. He emphasised the role of churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia to be creative agents of the health and healing ministry, which is much more significant in today's Asian situations. Vast populations in developing as well as developed countries in Asia require substantial care for their bodies and minds today.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara further mentioned that there has been a marked decline in the ministry of health

and healing services provided by Asian churches. The growing commercialisation in healthcare sectors distorts the original purpose of providing healthcare services to the poor and needy. This trend has affected the sustainability of the mission of the churches in health and healing ministry in several Asian countries. He also stressed the need to consider the initiation of innovative programmes for motivating churches in Asia to equip their hospitals to take the health and healing mission much more seriously.

Dr Chunakara also mentioned the theology of health, healing, and wholeness of life, which reminds us of the value of spirituality that sustains our option for the poor, opens us to participate in alleviating the sufferings of all those who are around us, and calls for carrying out



Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, CCA Staff, presents the CCA's ongoing programmatic involvements in Health and Healing

the task of accompanying the process. He further emphasised the need for churches and church-related healthcare institutions to develop new and innovative approaches that will make a concerted effort to accompany churches in Asia that are actively engaged in support of Christian health ministries. He reminded the participants of Jesus' compassionate response, which healed broken bodies and minds and broken community ties, and pointed out that Jesus calls on churches to attend to the bodies, minds, and community ties of all God's children. Even though the Church in Asia is a minority community, we cannot use this as an excuse for inaction or inefficiency in carrying out its health ministry. The healing ministry is about the proclamation of the good news of health, wholeness, and salvation. It affirms Jesus Christ as the great healer and acknowledges a mandate given to all churches and every Christian to preach, teach, and heal.

Rev. T. Arul Dhas, head of the chaplaincy team at the Christian Medical College Vellore, India, in his theological reflection, said that one way of transcending suffering was accepting suffering. The process of

sharing and listening promotes healing, allowing us to move from suffering to healed and healthy relationships. He also mentioned that pain could be a part of the healing process. With many years of experience in pastoral care and counselling in healthcare institutions and communities, he mentioned the Holy Eucharist and hospital services as channels that the church has used as an instrument of healing, even for those who are not Christian. Rev. Dhas pointed out that Jesus' pain at the Last Supper could be visualised as "Jesus transforming the pain into a healed experience" as he broke bread and shared wine with the apostles.

Dr Alexander K. Ginting of the Persekutuan Gereja-gereja Indonesia (PGI) Health Foundation in Indonesia explained how church-related institutions collaborated with the Indonesian government to provide services to people. In advance of the possibility of emerging pandemics, he urged churches to prepare for biological and natural disasters.

Dr Sunita Abraham of the Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI) discussed the benefits and drawbacks of commercialising the Christian health



Drafting Committee of the Communique from the Consultation on 'Health, Healing, and Wholeness of Life: Churches' Mission in Asia'

ministry. She cited a study conducted in India that highlighted one of the consequences of the commercialisation of healthcare institutions in India being the compromising of mission goals by Christian mission hospitals, through the prioritisation of financial liabilities over social responsibility.

Dr Regowo from the Indonesian Christian Association for Health Services (ICAHS) presented the experiences of the way ICAHS has been providing holistic care services to the community since 1983. ICAHS, also known in Indonesia as PELKESI, comprises seventy-five Christian hospitals, twenty health education facilities, and several Christian healthcare and medical professionals. He encouraged Asian churches to develop holistic health care services, beyond the idea of establishing a hospital or clinic, and to develop programmes that provide health education and health monitoring for congregations and the surrounding communities. Instead of charity, Dr Regowo advised churches to promote volunteerism and the growth of social entrepreneurship schemes.

Participants discussed 'Church and Healing Ministry' in small groups. From the discussions there emerged ideas for ways

in which the church could be an agent of healing in the areas of focus, namely, pandemics (COVID-19), communicable diseases (HIV, tuberculosis, malaria), non-communicable diseases (chronic illness), disability, sexual and reproductive health, and environmental health.

During the session titled 'Models of Christian Witness in Health and Healing Ministry: Continuum of Care', Dr Wang Wen-Fu of Changhua Christian Hospital under the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) shared the church's ministry to the elderly who were vulnerable to dementia. The PCT, which is also known as "friendly churches to the elderly", provided not only pastoral care and visitation, but also classes for the elderly in arts, music, gardening, exercise, and mental gymnastics. The programme's tagline, "Church Medical Care, Grace for the Elderly!" encouraged church members and leaders to "build a kind of friendly church calling on people to become caregivers for those challenged by dementia".

Rev. Paoina Bara Pa of the Evangelical Church from West Timor, Indonesia spoke about her work with traditional medicine in the community, describing it as "the oldest form of treatment in human history

that has enriched the development of modern culture in the field of health today". She explained that traditional medicine preserved relationships with God, nature, and people of various faiths. Faith, health, and healing, according to Rev. Bara Pa, were an intergenerational heritage derived from teachings, ways of life, and experience. 'Rukunu' herbal oil was a traditional heritage from ancestors as local wisdom for healing and was part of women's wisdom and experience as traditional healers, she continued.

Arshintia from the Yayasan Kristen untuk Kesehatan Umum (YAKKUM), also known as the Christian Foundation for Public Health in Indonesia, a church-based health advocacy organisation founded in 1950, presented its community-based mental health rehabilitation programme that included people with psychosocial disabilities, caregivers, villagers, and the primary health care centres. She highlighted efforts to persuade legislators at all levels to adopt mental health policies. She also mentioned the 'Speak Your Mind' programme, which encouraged students to express their concerns to prevent the worsening of mental health problems and suicide rates in their community.

Dr R.L. Sanghluna of the Presbyterian Church in India spoke about the mission of the Synod Hospital in Durtland, Mizoram, India, in providing the best care to patients regardless of religion or economic status. The health facility, founded in 1928 by Welsh missionaries, served patients with chronic incurable diseases, HIV and AIDS patients, and substance abuse patients. He concluded his presentation with a call to church leaders and Christian medical practitioners to welcome the rejected, to be compassionate, and to be servant-like in the ways of Jesus.

Rev. Kyung Hee Chang from the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK) shared

aspects of spirituality and healing in hospice care. She spoke of the necessity of alleviating pain and suffering through active listening, prayer, and counselling, and going beyond to care also for the family of the one who is suffering. Assessment of outcomes in hospice care is not to be done in terms of profit but must consider the quality of living and dying. Rev. Chang also shared her own testimony as a cancer survivor.

Dr Mwai Makoka and Dr Manoj Kurian from the World Council of Churches (WCC) spoke extensively on health campaigns in the ecumenical movement. After providing a brief history of the emergence of such projects in the ecumenical movement, the two executives of the WCC shared the work of churches in the health ministry in other parts of the world. They affirmed the necessity of collective advocacy through the ecumenical movement, which served as a platform for sharing and a network of support. He mentioned that medical institutions and churches on national, and more particularly local levels, have travelled too often in separate directions. This lack of collaboration is not new but existed even fifty years ago.

Dr Makoka further shared promotive approaches that required community involvement and community-based activities, and contributed to disease eradication, in contrast to curative approaches that responded to perceived needs and created a willingness to pay. Churches, rooted in communities, were better positioned to do promotive activities for health. Such interventions, however, were meaningful only if sustained over a set period, rather than mere day-long camps or drives that superficially engaged with health.

Dr Manoj Kurian, who heads the WCC's Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), put forth a multi-pronged approach to health

and emphasised the necessity of churches' intersectional action on the challenges of food scarcity, the climate emergency, HIV and AIDS, economic inequalities, and other systemic issues that maintain states of ill-health and disease. Using the parable of the Good Samaritan, the WCC executives explained that although churches and church health care institutions preferred to view themselves as the good Samaritan, the actual role they played was that of the innkeeper—who was paid to provide the services, who did not inflate bills because the benefactor could pay, and who was reliable, professional, and trustworthy.

Lively discussions on the need for creative enhancement of churches' capacities to respond to health issues ensued, with a recognition of their oft-scarce and limited resources. The participants affirmed that churches were to 'start where they were' with the resources that they had and be reinvigorated in their calling to serve 'the least, the last, and the lost'.

The participants, hailing from medical, para-medical, and pastoral professions, as well as from different denominations and countries, collectively endorsed and adopted the landmark Declaration at the end of the three-day Conference.

The Declaration suggests twelve points of action for Asian churches and Christian healthcare institutions. Key points include eliminating financial barriers to health care for the poor, ensuring greater commitments to the development of human resources through church-supported medical and

para-medical educational institutions, and ensuring governance, transparency, and accountability in the management of health ministries' assets and finances. The declaration also calls on churches and Christian healthcare institutions to provide accurate and reliable health information to congregations, combat misinformation, and empower local pastors with knowledge of health, thus allowing them to provide holistic care in partnership with health workers.

The Declaration asked churches and Christian healthcare institutions to recognise and adapt to changing paradigms caused due to the climate emergency, the post-pandemic context, emerging conflicts, and other mega-trends, and to 'shape a world where everyone participates in the health and healing experience and no neighbourhood is left behind'. Grounded in faith and theology, the Declaration affirmed the unique, relevant, and specific role of the Church that is 'called to witness and participate creatively in the divine ministry of healing, restoring wholeness in broken human lives with compassion, being one with our Lord in His self-emptying and unconditional love'.

The three-day international Conference organised by the Christian Conference of Asia was a platform that brought together about thirty experts from twenty-seven different organisations to discern the direction of Asian churches' health and healing services and ministries.

Theological Education and Leadership Development in New Churches

Scholarships and Exchange for Theological Education

The CCA scholarship is for theological students from countries where there is a lack of theological education facilities and to equip pastors and young leaders for a holistic ministry by creating opportunities

for furthering their theological study or for joining short-term academic courses.

With CCA's scholarship support, Rev. John G. Mathew from Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church completed his doctoral course at Yonsei University, Korea in February 2022.



ECUMENICAL LEADERSHIP FORMATION AND ECUMENICAL SPIRITUALITY

OBJECTIVES

- To accompany the ecumenical formation of a new generation of leadership in churches and ecumenical councils in Asia;
- To enhance the capacity of human resources committed to the renewal of ecumenical spirituality and a deeper understanding of Christian traditions;
- To provide an ecumenical platform for sharing spiritual life among member churches and national councils in Asia.

Asian Ecumenical Institute

Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI)–2022

19 September–14 October 2022 | Chiang Mai, Thailand



Students of CCAs Asian Ecumenical Institute–2022

The Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI) is an ecumenical formation and leadership development training programme conducted annually by the CCA for young Asian Christians. The month-long residential programme, in which students undertake lessons at the CCA headquarters and reside in close fellowship, is a key programme of the CCA.

The AEI provides greater clarity and commitment to ecumenism and increases

awareness of emerging realities and issues in Asia with biblical-theological undergirding, thus enabling the participants to respond effectively and contextually to the emerging concerns in Asia from a wider ecumenical perspective. It enhances the capacity of the attendees to respond effectively to contemporary ecumenical challenges, equips prospective church and ecumenical leaders with theological, socio-political, and practical skills and wider ecumenical vision, and



Worship during the AEI–2022

tools of analysis to comprehend Asian and international realities and ecumenical trends, along with developing leadership skills.

The 2022 edition of the Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI) was held in person from 19 September to 14 October 2022 at the CCA headquarters in Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Twenty-four students from different Asian countries attended the AEI-2022.

The theme of AEI-2022 was 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented changes in almost every aspect of life. It changed the way humans worked, learnt, and interacted with others, leading to a more virtual existence with great strides in technological advancement. However, it has also widened inequality among the people while pushing millions of people to extreme poverty.

Being created in the image of God, humans are called to be better stewards in the household of God to live in harmony with one another. The God of hope wants the entire creation to live in harmony, even amid human brokenness. The God of hope sustains the whole creation to be reconciled, healed, and live in harmony. This provided the context for the theme of AEI-2022, 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'.

For four weeks, internationally acclaimed ecumenists, theologians, academics, and social activists from various ecclesial traditions who have worked in the worldwide ecumenical movement shared theological reflections and thematic presentations on missiology, biblical hermeneutics and intersectional theologies, gender justice and inclusivity, eco-theology and stewardship of God's creation, ecumenism, interfaith dialogue, and post-humanism and its implications for the church.



Resource persons of AEI-2022

A team of prominent theologians and ecumenists with professional expertise at the international level were the main resource persons. Resource persons of AEI-2022 included Dr Mathews George Chunakara (General Secretary of CCA), Prof. Dr Wesley Ariarajah (Emeritus Professor of Drew University, USA), Prof. Dr Chammah J. Kaunda (Professor of Yonsei University, South Korea), Darlene Marquez-Caramanzana (General Board of Global Ministries of the UMC), Rev. Prof. Dr Dietrich Werner (former Director of Theological Education Programme of WCC and Honorary Professor of Intercultural Theology at the University of Applied Science in Hermannsburg), Rev. Dr Ira D. Mangililo (Theology Lecturer at Artha Wacana Christian University Kupang, Indonesia), Rev. Dr Jayasiri Peiris (former Principal of Lanka Theological College in Sri Lanka), Rev. Prof. Dr Mothy Varkey (Professor, Mar Thoma Theological Seminary in India), Brahm Press (Executive Director of MAP Foundation, Thailand), as well as CCA staff members. CCA Programme Coordinator Rev. Grace Moon was the Academic Dean of the AEI.

"The ecumenical movement gives you a broader fellowship and mutual solidarity in working together for the unity of all God's people and the entire creation. The Asian Ecumenical Institute, organised annually by the Christian Conference

of Asia, is a unique opportunity and platform for prospective Asian ecumenists to be trained and to learn about mutual interactions and Asia's manifold cultural contexts," said the General Secretary of the CCA, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, to the participants of the AEI-2022 during the closing ceremony on 12 October 2022.

"The CCA continues to provide this platform for young people to live together as a community, participate in activities, and learn together," the CCA General Secretary added, recalling that the AEI has been a good platform and opportunity because those who have graduated from the programme have gone on to become church leaders, members of ecumenical councils, CCA staff, and theological educators.

The students delivered presentations on a variety of topics, including gender justice, indigenous spiritualities, the digital revolution with its advantages and disadvantages to the mission and ministry of the church, the plight of persons with disabilities and the call for full inclusion in society; social injustices in their respective communities amid the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence against women and children, Muslim-Christian harmony and promotion of interfaith harmony, and the Eastern church's ethos concerning ecology.



Visit of the AEI-2022 students to the Sikh Gurudwara in Chiang Mai

Aside from classroom sessions, AEI-2022 participants were involved in field visits to the Sikh Gurudwara and Buddhist temple in Chiang Mai for interreligious interactions.

The AEI equipped the participants with the necessary tools and theological anchoring

to combat the issues faced in their local contexts, contributing greatly to their ecumenical formation. The participants have established peer-to-peer networks to learn, share, and collaborate meaningfully in living harmoniously with God's creation.

Ecumenical Enablers' Training in Asia (EETA)

Ecumenical Enablers' Training in Timor Leste

21–22 September 2022 | Dili, Timor Leste



Participants of the CCA's National Ecumenical Enablers' Training in Timor Leste

Throughout its history, the CCA has been a platform for member churches coming from different traditions and a great variety of ecclesiological backgrounds to dialogue together and seek visible unity. Ecumenical formation and theological education are essential for responsiveness to God's call for unity, requiring the involvement of the people of God within the ecclesial structures and the discipline appropriate, at every level, to realise the unity in diversity of all God's people.

The Ecumenical Enablers' Training in Asia (EETA) enables the CCA to reach out to a wider section of people in their local contexts, thereby enabling increased participation and direct nurture of ecumenism in local contexts. EETA aims to introduce to participants the ecumenical vision, mission, and witness of promoting

unity among the churches and peoples of Asia. It helps to train pastors and evangelists at grassroots levels, and also helps young people build strong national networks of churches for mission and evangelism, and to share a sense of ownership of the ecumenical movement in Asia.

An EETA programme was organised by the CCA for enabling the pastors and church workers in Timor Leste and was held on 21 and 22 September at the headquarters of the Synod of the Igreja Protestante iha Timor Loro Sa'e (IPTL) in Dili, Timor Leste. About thirty participants attended the training, including representatives from different denominations across the country. This capacity-building training aimed at reaching more church workers and equipping them with a basic

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

understanding of ecumenism and the ecumenical movement.

Timor Leste is the youngest nation in Asia, and the majority of Christians belong to the Roman Catholic Church. The IPTL is the CCA's only member church in the country. Despite being a minority church, the IPTL has been witnessing the gospel and playing an important role in the quest for justice and reconciliation in the country. Given the limited access to seminaries and Bible training schools, pastors and churches lack proper leadership and ecumenical formation. Most of the IPTL's pastors and evangelists do not have opportunities to undergo systematic theological education, also given the volatile socioeconomic and political situation in the country over the years. Members of Protestant churches are also vulnerable targets of aggressive evangelism promoted by proponents of freelance missionary evangelism from outside of Timor Leste.

Thus the CCA identified the urgent need to accompany its member church in Timor Leste, its pastors, evangelists, and lay leaders, especially those serving in remote areas, and to train them in Asian ecumenical and contextual theologising. The 2022 EETA programme in Timor Leste was a continuation of the CCA's ongoing commitment to and accompaniment with

its member church and built on the gains made in past years to further develop theological and ecumenical acumen, while also encouraging ministries from the perspective of ecumenism and Asian contextual theologising.

In conjunction with the CCA's 2022 programme theme, 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony', the training mainly focused on the discussion of living in harmony with God's creation and sustaining harmony with God's creation in the oikos. It aimed to equip participants towards active ecumenical engagement in the community, peacebuilding, servant leadership, and prophetic witness towards sustaining God's creation in harmony. It also offered spaces for discussing and reflecting upon being responsive and responsible co-workers of God to witness the good news in the midst of challenging contemporary realities.

There were sessions on key themes such as 'A More Visible Church', 'Encouraging Young People', 'A Pluralistic Environment', and 'A Mission with Meaning and Purpose'.

Chalvin Tehuayo, CCA programme staff, led the first session on 'Oikoumene and Ecumenical Movement'.

Rosiana Indah Purnomo of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) facilitated



Sessions at the EETA National Programme in Timor Leste

three sessions on the theme 'Participating in God's Mission: Our Understanding', 'Reading the Bible in Our Context', and 'Christian Leadership: Stewardship, Servanthood and Accountability'. Ms Purnomo reminded participants, "The mission belongs to God and churches are called to participate in God's mission, which is to bring life to all creation. From an ecumenical perspective, the Church is the household for all creation and is the witness of the resurrected Christ to all inhabitants. Therefore, the mission is a movement: a dynamic force to work together to do God's mission." She concluded the session with a reflective question on "whether the church in Timor Leste is involved in facilitating an ecumenical movement or in building an ecumenical monument, the former being dynamic and the latter being static and unresponsive to the groaning of creation".

In 'Reading the Bible in Our Context', the participants were divided into four focus group discussions and given four Bible passages to reflect upon and try to link with the current struggle or situation in Timor Leste. The sharing from the participants was mostly on the efforts to deepen the identity of the Timorese as a people and also of the church and on ways of bringing into fruition the messianic message of the church. Since the majority of the congregation are farmers, it is important for the church leaders to also be

concerned about agriculture development and to engage with this issue through their sermons and their diaconal ministry.

Ms Purnomo then spoke about 'Christian Leadership' which sees Christ as a model of leadership, based on which one is called to be a servant, called to be responsible and to become a steward for all creation in this *oikos*. In the Timor Leste context, pastors and church leaders need to observe, be aware of the issues in the community, participate, act, become models for the congregation, and replicate leadership.

Levy Vasconcelos Pinto, the coordinator of the Theological Learning Centre of the IPTL, led a session on 'Church in Accompaniment with People and Community'. Mr Vasconcelos Pinto spoke about the church's responsibility of being aware of the crisis in our surroundings, and also of the ecological crisis and human rights violations in Timor Leste and how the local church could get involved in the efforts to overcome them.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of CCA, who spoke at the closing session, encouraged the participants to reflect on how those who belong to the Church in Timor Leste could develop their theology based on their experiences of the long struggle for the right to self-determination—searching for, and establishing, their indigenous identity as an indigenous church in Timor Leste.

Ecumenical Spirituality and Nurturing of Contextual Liturgical Traditions

Asia Sunday–2022

21 August 2022

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)'s Asia Sunday in 2022 was observed on the theme 'Christ's Love Reconciles and Unites'.

Although Asia Sunday is annually observed on the Sunday before Pentecost, Asia Sunday in 2022 was organised in the run-up to the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the theme of

which is 'Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity'.

The Asia Sunday–2022 was a clarion call to the member churches and councils of the CCA to *metanoia*, or a complete spiritual transformation, empowering member churches to be more self-giving and self-emptying in their ministry of reconciliation and unity.



Asia Sunday–2022 prayer service at the CCA Headquarters

With a focus on reconciliation and unity in the Asian context, the special liturgy contained prayers of intercession for the people of Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Philippines that were coping with challenging and uncertain times.

“O Lord of hope and love, hear the prayers of your people in need of healing, reconciliation, and unity. Let your mercy and love flow to your people suffering from poverty and indifference. Let your justice and peace flow like a river... Our reconciling and uniting God, you revealed to us your compassionate love through the liberating work of Jesus. Through the cross of Christ, we affirm your compassion that transforms the world, amid adversities, divisions, wars, turmoil, and crises...” (quoted from the Asia Sunday–2022 liturgy)

The staff members stationed at the CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai, Thailand, organised a special observance of Asia Sunday–2022, which was held on the morning of Monday, 22 August 2022. The special liturgical service was especially marked by the sound of indigenous musical instruments, the singing of hymns from the Sound the Bamboo Hymnal (CCA Hymnal), and the reciting of heartfelt petitions and supplications.

The CCA urged its member churches and councils to pray not solely for the CCA’s mission and ministry with Asian churches, but also for the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches which was to be held from 31 August–8 September in Karlsruhe, Germany and had its focus on the theme of ‘Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity’.



BUILDING PEACE AND MOVING BEYOND CONFLICTS

OBJECTIVES

- To analyse the contexts of conflicts and develop methodologies for churches' participation in peacebuilding;
- To assist churches in their initiatives to respond to conflict situations and raise awareness through interreligious platforms that contribute to the task of fostering and sustaining peaceful societies.

Churches in Action for Moving Beyond Conflict and Reconciliation

Ecumenical Pastoral Solidarity Visit to Sri Lanka

3–7 August 2022 | Colombo, Sri Lanka



The Ecumenical Pastoral Solidarity Team, headed by CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara, meets with Hindu leaders in Sri Lanka

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) organised an ecumenical pastoral solidarity visit to Sri Lanka from 3–7 August 2022. The ecumenical solidarity team expressed alarm over the deep economic crisis that led to unprecedented political turbulence and social upheaval in Sri Lanka. The team members observed that there was a dire need for immediate international intervention to help the crippled nation.

A four-member ecumenical pastoral solidarity team led by the CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara met with the church and ecumenical leaders in Sri Lanka, members of parliament, opposition political party leaders, civil society movement leaders, trade unionists, former cabinet ministers, representatives of plantation workers, interreligious groups, and leaders of minority religious communities as well as representatives of the Aragalaya movement who have been at the forefront of the people's struggle. The other

members of the team were Petra Oon, a lawyer (Malaysia), Dr Angelito Meneses, a Professor of Social Development (Philippines), and Rev. Jung Eun Moon, an ordained minister (South Korea) and CCA Programme Coordinator.

During the five-day visit, the team participated in intensive visits and meetings and learnt about the ongoing crises and the subsequent deprivation of basic amenities and dignity of the Sri Lankan people.

The CCA's solidarity team summarised the feelings of the people they met during their visits and meetings and concluded that Sri Lanka is currently facing its worst economic and political crises. The Sri Lankan rupee had weakened in value to about 360 to the US dollar, making all imports even more prohibitive. The situation has had profound and reverberating impacts on the daily lives of Sri Lankans. The World Food Programme Market Monitor reported that

over 80 percent of households were eating less preferred, cheaper food, and limiting portion sizes due to the rising prices of food and the reduced purchasing power. This crisis, marked by high inflation, hikes in essential commodity prices, growing hunger and malnutrition, fuel crisis, a dearth of medicines, and deterioration of law and order, has also had a serious impact on human rights.

Economic mismanagement by successive governments weakened Sri Lanka's public finances. Economists say that the crisis stems from domestic factors such as years of mismanagement, money creation, and especially corruption. The crisis was accelerated by deep tax cuts promised by the former President in 2019 in the election campaign, which wiped out part of the state's revenues. The government's decision to ban all chemical fertilisers in 2021, a move that triggered a fall in the critical rice crop and forced Sri Lankans to rely even more heavily on imports, led to further depletion of foreign reserves. Tourism incomes and foreign workers' remittances, an important engine of economic growth, sputtered because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A prudent examination of the situation reveals that it is not just one singular crisis, but a collection of crises that are all interconnected politically and economically.

The economic chaos was followed by an explosion of political unrest as well as by the anger and anguish of people from all walks of life, as demonstrated in their struggle, now known as Aragalaya, the Sinhalese word for 'struggle'. Aragalaya is being used widely to describe the daily gathering of people at Colombo's Galle Face and it began with the demand that the corrupt government under the leadership of the ruling Rajapaksa family resign and make way for a new dispensation.

The people's movement and their regular gathering marked 100 days on 17 July, initially forcing Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa to step down on 9 May, and subsequently causing his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country on 15 July. The President was chased from his office by protesters, who then occupied the presidential residence. Subsequently, a new President was elected by the Parliament.

Given the longstanding disputes and tensions between the Sri Lankan government and humanitarian organisations, the government had tightened oversight and regulation of the humanitarian sector since 2006. This includes more stringent registration procedures, financial reporting requirements, and visa restrictions for humanitarian responders. The government had made an effort to regulate the distribution of aid in the past, whether in reaction to violent conflict or natural catastrophes. Thus, even during the socioeconomic crisis of 2022, the humanitarian suffering of the people has been neglected by the government which has been hesitant to look into it sincerely.

In a meeting with the Sri Lankan church leaders at the end of the visit, the CCA General Secretary said, "The pastoral team visit was an expression of the solidarity of Asian churches with the people and the churches and ecumenical organisations in Sri Lanka that are deeply concerned about the worsening situation; the message taken by the team will also be shared in wider international ecumenical platforms, and especially so during the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC)."

"Sri Lanka, once considered a success story with its high levels of education and standard of living, has today become a



The Ecumenical Pastoral Solidarity Team with Sri Lankan leaders

nation of a large number of impoverished masses struggling to live with dignity and to overcome the economic crisis and political instability. It is still unclear to what degree the socioeconomic and political crisis has impacted the Sri Lankan

people. Sri Lanka's economic collapse needs immediate global attention and rich countries must come to rescue the worst affected from the ongoing crisis in Sri Lanka to avoid another human tragedy," added Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence (EWAAV)

Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence in Timor Leste

20–21 September 2022 | Dili, Timor Leste



Participants of the EWAAV National Programme in Timor Leste

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) organised a two-day national training programme with a focus on overcoming gender-based violence as part of its Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence (EWAAV) in collaboration with the Igreja Protestante iha Timor Loro Sa'e (IPTL). This was aimed at fostering and promoting a culture of resistance, aimed at preventing violence against women.

The CCA initiated a network of women from CCA member churches and various ecumenical organisations in Asia named the 'Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence' through a Regional Consultation on 'Women Building Peace and Transforming the World' held in 2016. The CCA believes that women and girls around the world are striving for a violence-free world and are playing a vital role in building peaceful communities and societies. While aiming at sensitising and mobilising Asian Christian women to engage in ecumenical action, it is also imperative that there be an expansion in the capacities of women in the church for participation in peacebuilding and prevention of violence against women in Asia, hence advocacy and ecumenical action to overcome violence against women is the main focus of EWAAV.

After a two-year gap since the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020, this was the first in-person national Consultation organised by CCA held on 20 and 21 September 2022 with thirty-five participants from different parts of Timor Leste.

In Timor Leste, gender-based violence is the largest category of crimes reported to police, with at least 59 percent of women experiencing intimate partner violence at least once in their lifetime. However, this figure only represents a fraction of real cases, as most instances of domestic violence are dealt with informally and never reported to law enforcement. Timor Leste ranks 128th out of 187 countries on the UN Gender Inequality Index (GII).

Traditional Timorese society and cultural practices, along with trauma associated with conflict and violence and the patterns of the nation's history, place women in Timor Leste at risk of experiencing gender inequality and gender-based violence. Timorese women continue to experience high levels of violence despite the country's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 2003, and other legislations which aim to protect women from gender-based violence.



Participants of the EWAAV National Programme in Timor Leste engage in activity-based learning

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the occurrence of gender-based violence and contributed to triggers of violence, such as financial stressors, close confinement of families, and isolation from support networks.

The objectives of the EWAAV programme included developing and promoting a culture of peace and non-violence with justice, gaining information about gendered perspectives in conflict and the reasons for violence against women, creating awareness about national, regional, and international policies, treaties, and mechanisms to prevent violence against women, developing action plans and implementing through networking and collaboration, and fully realising women's equality and rights through faith-based advocacy.

The training covered topics such as 'Women's Rights to Full Life', 'Understanding Gender and Gender-Based Violence', 'Gender-Based Violence Challenges in Timor Leste', and 'Women as Equal Partners in God's Mission'.

The session on 'Women's Rights to the Fullness of Life' was led by Dr Hellen Hill, visiting Professor at Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e. As a person who has been

involved in Timor Leste for decades, Dr Hill illustrated stories of Timorese women's contribution to self-determination and struggle, viewing it through the lens of the story of Maria and Martha as good models of discipleship for diaconal ministry.

Berta Antonieta Tilman-Pereira, a Timorese activist who works for a women's organisation, led the session on ending gender-based violence. She facilitated interactive games to demonstrate the various opportunities for women and men in Timor Leste to exercise their rights.

Arceli Pepito Bile of CCA led the Bible study concerning 'Women as Equal Partners in God's Mission'. She mentioned at least three institutions that can contribute to women's subordination but also serve as a place to address family issues, church/religious institutions, and mass media, including social media.

At the end of the programme, participants developed a programme action plan and were challenged to share the training output through networking and collaboration with churches and civil society organisations, and in this way advocate for the full realisation of women's rights.

Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence in Sri Lanka

11–15 November 2022 | Colombo, Sri Lanka



Participants of the EWAAV South Asia Sub-Regional Programme in Sri Lanka

The Christian Conference of Asia organised a South Asia sub-regional EWAAV Consultation with a focus on ecumenical women's advocacy on violence against women and girls. It provided rich experiences for participants to understand the current situation in different countries, as opined by the participants, who represented churches and ecumenical councils from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

About twenty-five women from South Asian countries attended the Consultation as part of CCA's ongoing advocacy capacity-building programme of the Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence (EWAAV), which was held at the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, Colombo, Sri Lanka, from 11 to 15 November 2022.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated key risk factors for violence against women and girls. In South Asia, over 40 percent of women have experienced violence at the hands of their intimate partners. The increase in gender-based violence was fuelled by economic and food insecurity and confined living conditions due to lockdowns, and social isolation measures. Sexual abuse and harassment, both online and offline, also increased. In several South Asian countries, the roles and opportunities for all individuals are determined by socially and culturally created gender norms, which also have an impact on health risk behaviours, social and structural factors influencing health, and access to and quality of health and social services. As a result, over time, damaging and restrictive gender norms, attitudes, and expectations have led to disparities in women's health and well-

being outcomes. Additionally, South Asian culture has accorded a subordinate place to women, who are expected to be socially and economically dependent on men.

The EWAAV Sub-Regional Consultation aimed at strengthening advocacy for women's empowerment and also focused on the collaboration and networking among churches and women's organisations in Asia to combat violence against women.

Nimalka Fernando, a woman human rights defender, introduced key issues related to Gender Equality and Challenges in South Asia. Ms Fernando highlighted the rising religious extremism and illustrated how the situation in each country exacerbates gender-based violence in the region. She also stressed that women must continue to be engaged in the campaign for women's liberation even amid the prevailing oppressive systems.

Shreen Abdul Saroor from the Women's Action Network (WAN) in Sri Lanka shared the importance of intersectionality in understanding violence against women and girls. She brought up the issues with the religious and cultural gender frameworks and patriarchal theologies of all religions and challenged the participants to revisit their theological understandings to quicken the journey toward gender justice.

Nelun Gunasekara, a Gender Consultant, facilitated a workshop on 'Gender Justice as Fundamental to Human Rights'. She led the group in discussing gender justice issues faced by women in their respective countries.

Esther Hoole from the UN Women facilitated discussions on Gender Equality and the role of churches and faith communities in contributing towards the attainment of the goals of overcoming gender-based discrimination and ending violence against women.

Atty. Vijula Arulanantham from the Church of Ceylon presented the International and Regional Mechanism for Women's Rights. Ms Arulanantham emphasised salient features of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which is seen as a mechanism for strengthening the advocacy for women's rights. She suggested possible advocacy outlines from the contextual backgrounds of countries in South Asia.

Dr Vethakani Vedhanayagam, a theological educator from the Church of South India, and Rev. Romella Robinson, an ordained

minister from the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, facilitated contextual Bible Study sessions, and they made attempts to re-read the biblical stories from the socio-cultural and religious contexts and shared insights about the courage portrayed by several women in the Bible.

Through this EWAAS South Asia Sub-Regional Consultation, the participants were sensitised on gender-based violence, women's rights, theological underpinnings of gender justice, and global and regional frameworks related to combating gender-based violence.

Young Ambassadors for Peace in Asia (YAPA)

Young Ambassadors for Peace in Asia (YAPA)–2022

7–14 August 2022 | Chiang Mai, Thailand



Participants of the YAPA–2022

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) organised the annual Young Ambassadors of Peace in Asia (YAPA). Twenty-six prospective young peace activists from various faith traditions across Asia who aspire to build just, peaceful, and harmonious communities attended the training held at CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

YAPA is an annual programme initiated by CCA in 2016 to train young peace activists from an interfaith perspective. The YAPA–2022 was attended by young people belonging to the Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu religions.

The CCA considers imperative and essential the task of training new generations of peace activists who are



Opening Worship of YAPA–2022

committed to the cause of justice and harmony. The power of transformational and lasting change lies in the promise of the youth, and thus it is vital to ensure that young people are brought up in the spirit of peace, justice, freedom, mutual respect, and understanding. Young people bear the potential and ability to lead and change their communities but may face obstacles in fulfilling this potential—they may be prone to radicalisation or lured into conflict situations, or may even be directly involved or trapped in hostile environments at times.

Thus, the CCA organised YAPA–2022 to enable young Asians to play positive and metamorphic roles as ambassadors of peace in their communities and to commit themselves to peacebuilding, reconciliation, and post-conflict reconstruction of communities suffering the aftermath of violence. Young people are in a better position to be catalysts and champions of peace, building bridges between communities, and buttressing Asia's long-nurtured and valued traditions of religious harmony and coexistence.

The theme of YAPA–2022 was 'Youths as Catalysts for Peace with Justice in Asia'. Young people often inherit the direct and indirect consequences of conflict and social divisions. Young people are not only mere victims and witnesses to conflict, but they are often politically immersed in violent conflict situations. At the same time, in many situations, they are an integral part of efforts to resolve conflict, helping communities to recover from violence and initiating creative solutions to longstanding problems. Young people are an often neglected yet powerful resource for initiatives aimed at positive change and building peace from the ground up. Just as young people are more likely to flourish and realise their potential in conditions of peace and security, those conditions of peace and security are more likely to be attained if they are allowed to play a full part. It is in this context that the theme of YAPA–2022, 'Youths as Catalysts of Peace with Justice in Asia', became timely and relevant.

The interactive sessions and thematic presentations of YAPA–2022 were designed



YAPA–2022 students learn peacebuilding through activities and group discussions

to enable the young participants to take the role of positive actors and catalysts of change in peacebuilding processes, while also strengthening their engagement in peacebuilding amidst conflicts, violence, and human rights violations in Asia.

Among the resource persons for YAPA–2022 were Lian Gogali (Indonesia), Dr M.P. Mathai (India), Dr Reynaldo Racaza Ty (the Philippines), Dr Le Ly (Vietnam), Venerable Dr Thippanakorn Lee (Thailand), and Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary.

Sessions included 'Religious and Cultural Identities: The Roots of Ethnoreligious Conflicts in Asia', 'Peace and Reconciliation: Religious and Ethnic Intersections', 'Peace and Reconciliation: Communal and Geopolitical Intersections', 'Peacebuilding: Concepts, Principles, Framework', 'Conflict Mediation: Dialogue, Collaboration, and Resolution', 'Conflict Prevention: Early Warning and Prevention Mechanisms', 'Conflict Transformation: Post-Conflict Trauma Healing, Reconciliation, and Rebuilding Community Trust', 'Non-Violence: Ontological, Epistemological,

and Ethical Dimensions', 'Non-Violence as Spirituality in Action', 'Education for Peace', 'Organising Locally for Peacebuilding: Potentials for Civil Society Organisations', 'Interfaith Perspectives on Peace and

Harmony', 'Emerging Geopolitical Tensions in Asia: Pathways to Peacebuilding', and 'Ambassadors of Peacebuilding in Asia: Towards a New Culture of Peace among Asian Youth'.



Students in conversation with Buddhist monks for an interfaith learning session during YAPA–2022

The visit to the Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) Campus in Chiang Mai and the dialogue with Venerable Dr Thippanakorn Lee, of MCU, offered the participants an opportunity to learn about Buddhist principles of peace and a way of living that promotes harmony with oneself and the environment—rather than a religion.

A statement prepared by the participants and presented at the valedictory session of the programme affirmed: "We express our commitment to work for building and living in a peaceful, diverse, multilingual, and multi-religious Asia and the world. We resolve to educate ourselves with the

knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to promote peace and be nonviolent in all approaches, be active actors in peacebuilding in ways that prioritise community needs and perspectives and use 'do no harm' principles, to work for peace, justice, and inclusion of the many."

"We work towards a long-term process to eliminate structural violence; promote equality and justice, focus on education for peace that will encourage independent thinking, open its doors to new ideas for peace with justice, and holistically engage with dignified human beings in all their local wisdom for global peace...", the statement continued.



PROPHETIC DIAKONIA AND ADVOCACY

OBJECTIVES

- To equip Asian churches to be competent in responding to social, economic, and political issues through acts of prophetic witness at times of brokenness and human need;
- To coordinate and facilitate ecumenical advocacy at national, regional, and global levels on emerging issues in Asia while expressing solidarity as well as upholding human rights for human dignity.

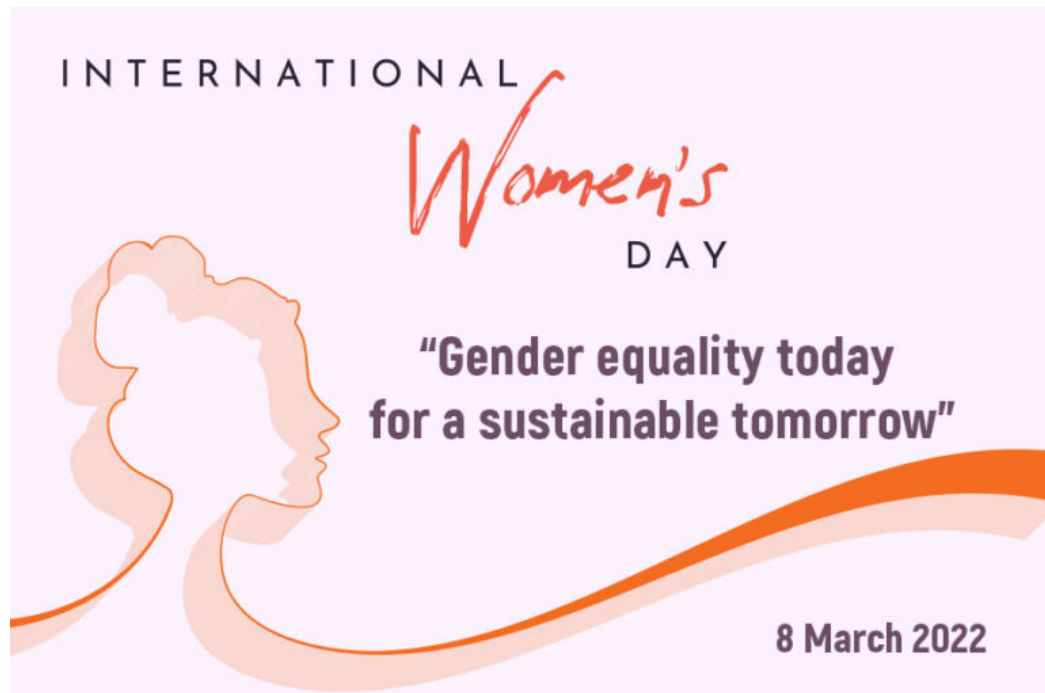
Emerging Issues in Asia: Regional and Global Advocacy

The CCA responded to several emerging issues in Asia and accompanied those constituencies that needed support on specific occasions or were undergoing

challenging situations. The following are summaries of public statements and letters of solidarity that were issued in 2022.

CCA Statement on International Women's Day–2022

8 March 2022



International Women's Day–2022

The CCA General Secretary released a public statement on International Women's Day–2022 on the annual theme 'Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow'. The theme focused especially on the unique role and leadership of women in the fight against climate change and in developing and furthering climate change adaptation, mitigations, and response strategies for a more sustainable future.

The CCA General Secretary wrote, "Gender inequality and climate change are closely linked. Tackling gender inequality is critical for climate adaptation. Climate change has severe and lasting consequences,

affecting not only the environment but also the economic and social development of individuals and communities. A growing body of evidence suggests that climate change has a differentiated impact on women and men due to structural inequalities and the gendered division of labour and is also the greatest contributor to hunger, malnutrition, disease, and displacement. Women and girls may bear the brunt of environmental, economic, and social shocks as they face greater health and safety risks due to compromises on water, food, and sanitation, and their care burdens increase in the face of dwindling and scarce resources."

"The dependence of women on natural resources, which face the most direct impacts due to climate change, also places them in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations. Women in Asia's rural areas are highly dependent on natural resources for their energy needs and livelihoods, but their ability to obtain these indispensable resources is reduced; thus affecting not only their material welfare but also their livelihood security, resilience, health, and dignity. Women, who tend to be responsible for water management at the household level, face the far-reaching effects of the erratic availability of freshwater, either due to floods or droughts."

The statement further read, "It is the imperative of the Church in Asia to continue to raise its prophetic voice by highlighting the gendered impacts of climate change and ensure the empowerment of women as an essential pre-condition for the promotion of sustainable development." The CCA called upon its member churches to work towards the full eradication of all forms of gender-based inequalities as an integral component of effective climate action and support strategies of mitigation and adaptation that effectively and systematically address the gender-specific impacts of climate change.

CCA's Statement on World Health Day–2022

7 April 2022



World Health Day–2022

The CCA General Secretary released a statement on the occasion of World Health Day–2022 on 7 April 2022. The theme of World Health Day–2022 was 'Our Planet, Our Health' which stressed the need to equate health and well-being with the environment, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Over 13 million deaths around the world each year are due to avoidable environmental causes. This includes the climate crisis, which is the single biggest health threat facing humanity today. The climate crisis is also a health crisis. Improving the quality of the environment in key areas such as air, water, and noise

can prevent disease and improve human health. The impacts of climate change pose immediate health threats, in terms of extreme temperatures, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and shifts in the patterns of infectious diseases and allergens. In the Asia region, emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, compromised food safety and security, and the health impacts of climate change all threaten regional health security," read the statement.

On World Health Day–2022, the CCA urged its member churches, councils, ecumenical partners, and like-minded organisations to take positive steps towards protecting the planet and controlling climate change and its implications on health, while also increasing resilience. Asian churches have

a crucial role in building awareness, taking measures to improve the environment and promoting healthy and healing communities at all levels, while being cognisant of the unique impacts of climate change on the health of vulnerable groups such as women, children, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, people living in poverty, and other marginalised communities.

"Asian churches can leverage existing grassroots networks and community ministries to ensure sustainable health programmes and increased access to services for all. Additionally, churches must boost climate action initiatives to reduce insecurities and vulnerabilities while increasing adaptation and resilience," concluded the statement.

CCA's Statement on World Environment Day–2022

5 June 2022



World Environment Day–2022

'Only One Earth', the theme of World Environment Day–2022, was a 'sobering call to the need for more respectful behaviour as we strive to create a just

balance among the economic, social, and environmental needs of present and future generations of humanity', said the CCA General Secretary in a public

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

statement released on the same day. World Environment Day is an opportunity to remind people and communities across the world to recall and emphasise the need for an important mechanism through which worldwide awareness of the environment is stimulated and social action and attention is mobilised.

The statement emphasised, "It is an irrefutable fact that climate change continues to be one of the most systemic environmental threats that humankind has ever faced. In the quest for rapid growth, it is the environment that is usually compromised the most. The adverse effects of environmental damage are borne by already vulnerable populations, such as those living in poverty, ethnic or religious minorities, indigenous peoples,

internally displaced peoples and migrants, people with disabilities, older persons, and children. Such communities, which have already been historically subject to discrimination, suffer the brunt of pollution, environmental degradation, and climate change."

The CCA reminded its member churches and councils that the environment in which we reside is God's gift, intended to fulfil the needs of all God's creation. In God's perfect love and goodness, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). The environment is thus not a space or property to be possessed and exploited by the privileged and powerful, but a gift to be received with gratitude with a sense of responsibility for the care of creation.

Series of Deadly Events in South Korea, the Philippines, and India

31 October 2022



Stampede in South Korea (left), Typhoon Nalgae in the Philippines (centre), bridge collapse in India (right)

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) expressed deep sorrow and grief over the loss of life in various parts of Asia, such as in South Korea, the Philippines, and India.

On 29 October, what was to be a night of celebration and revelry for Halloween turned deadly in Seoul's Itaewon nightlife area, in which at least 154

people died, with 149 people injured. A deadly crash was caused by dense and surging crowds of young people, numbering in the thousands, who were out to celebrate the first Halloween since the start of the pandemic free of limitations on the size of gatherings and the compulsions to wear face masks. Most of the victims were teenagers or in their 20s.

Over in the Philippines, heavy rains and strong winds pounded the capital, Manila, and surrounding areas, for two days as tropical storm 'Nalgae' forced tens of thousands of people to leave their homes and disrupted peak holiday travel in much of the nation. Nalgae killed at least forty-five people as of 30 October, with the brunt of it being faced in Mindanao.

In Morbi, in the Indian state of Gujarat, the collapse of a newly renovated pedestrian suspension bridge on 30 October, claimed the lives of at least 132 people, and the death toll is expected to rise further. The 754-foot-long bridge, built under colonial British rule in the 19th century, had recently opened to the public after being shut for renovations. Several people had gathered on the bridge, a popular tourist attraction, for Diwali celebrations, which had caused overcrowding and led to the bridge's collapse. Many among those in the crowd were children, who were swept away by the strong currents of the Machchu River flowing below.

While expressing deep sympathy to the family and relatives of all those who lost lives during the weekend in different fatal incidents in three Asian countries, the CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara said, "The news of the loss of life received from different parts of Asia these days is shocking and painful and CCA offers prayers for the consolation of all those who mourn."

The CCA General Secretary urged member churches and councils, as well

as all ecumenical partners and people of goodwill around the world to join the CCA in praying for the bereaved families who lost their loved ones and to extend support and solidarity in every possible way at the time of such painful situations.

WCC, CCA Joint Message on Attacks in Myanmar

16 November 2022

A joint message signed by World Council of Churches acting General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca and Christian Conference of Asia General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara expressed grave concern over recent attacks by the Myanmar military on a theological seminary and churches in Kachin and Kayah States.

The general secretaries observed that the recent attacks on churches and related institutions "are emblematic of the deteriorating humanitarian, human rights, and political situation in Myanmar" since the military coup that took place on 1 February 2021.

"The lives that many in Myanmar had begun to enjoy following the introduction of democratic reforms have again been destroyed and the country devastated," read the message. Armed clashes and attacks are now taking place in many parts of the country, and "since the military coup, the poverty rate in Myanmar has climbed to close to 50 percent, and people throughout the country have been reduced to extreme levels of vulnerability."

Rev. Sauca and Dr Chunakara reiterated the deep concern expressed during the past year over the deteriorating human rights situations in different parts of Myanmar. "We reiterate and underscore the concerns previously expressed about the ongoing violence—including sexual and gender-based violence—and brutal attacks by military and security forces," read the message.

"We renew our calls for the military authorities to hand back the control that they have illegitimately seized, to refrain from excessive use of force against protesters, to respect the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, to release all those who have been arbitrarily arrested, denied due process, and who remain in detention, and to allow unconditional and unhindered humanitarian access to all areas and all people affected by conflict and violence."

Rev. Sauca and Dr Chunakara appealed to all members of the international community to increase their active solidarity and humanitarian support for the people of Myanmar, "and to redouble their advocacy and engagement for justice, peace and the restoration of democracy in Myanmar." They also urged churches and related organisations around the world "to scale up their diaconal support and partnership with the churches of Myanmar" to help meet increasing community needs.

Earthquake in Java, Indonesia

22 November 2022



Powerful earthquake in Cianjur region, West Java, Indonesia

The CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, expressed concern and deep sympathy for those affected and bereaved by the 5.6 magnitude earthquake that struck the Cianjur region, West Java, Indonesia, on 22 November 2022.

The powerful earthquake left 162 dead and over 700 injured, with collapsing infrastructure being responsible for many casualties. The earthquake caused considerable damage, with landslides also occurring after the initial tremors. The earthquake itself was quite shallow, occurring at a 10 km depth. The affected

area was densely populated with many poorly constructed buildings. Electricity outages slowed rescue and recovery efforts.

The CCA General Secretary contacted CCA member church representatives in Jakarta and conveyed a message of solidarity and prayer support at this time of great sorrow: "Our thoughts and prayers are with those affected by this calamity. We offer prayers of consolation and comfort for all who have lost their loved ones and for the safe recovery of the injured. We also offer prayers for all who are engaged

in the rescue operations in strenuous circumstances.”

CCA member churches on the Java island in Indonesia include the Gereja Kristen Pasundan (Pasundan Christian Church), Gereja Kristen Indonesia (Indonesia Christian Church), Gereja Protestan di Indonesia Bagian Barat (The Protestant

Church in the Western Part of Indonesia), Gereja Isa Almasih (Church of Jesus Christ in Indonesia), Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (The Muria Christian Churches in Indonesia), Sinode Gereja-Gereja Kristen Jawa (Javanese Christian Churches), and the Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan (Christian Church of Eastern Java).

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

25 November 2022



International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women–2022

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) issued a statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, marked annually on 25 November.

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, CCA urged its member churches and councils, as well as all people of conscience, to be united in ending violence against women and girls.

“The theme of this year’s campaign is ‘UNITE! Activism to End Violence Against Women and Girls,’ which aims to mobilise all people to take on roles as activists to

prevent violence against women, to stand in solidarity with women’s movements around the world and resist the invalidation of women’s emancipation struggles, and, finally, to call for a world free of violence against women and girls. The campaign in 2022 also aims to combat rising anti-rights movements, which have resulted in the shrinking of free spaces and an increase in attacks on women’s rights defenders, advocates, organisations, and the feminist movement as a whole,” read the statement issued on behalf of CCA by the General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

“On this occasion of the commemoration

of the International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women, the Christian Conference of Asia joins with the rest of the global and Asian women's movements commemorating this important day...The Christian Conference of Asia reiterates its commitment to join its member churches and ecumenical councils in advocating for women's rights and in combating all forms of violence and abuse against women and girls. The CCA urges its member

constituencies to organise, strengthen, and institutionalise programmes and projects in churches and communities that will empower people at large in combating gender-based violence. As a fellowship of Asian churches and national ecumenical councils, CCA will continue to uphold the dignity of all God's creation, and calls upon all people of conscience to be united in ending violence against women and girls," concluded the statement.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD)–2022

3 December 2022



International Day of Persons with Disabilities



International Day of Persons with Disabilities–2022

The CCA General Secretary released a statement on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD), a day that each year raises awareness and promotes the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in political, social, economic, and cultural life. It also upholds and secures the rights of people with disabilities to participate fully, equally, and effectively in society along with others, and face no barriers in all aspects of their lives.

Asian cultural and societal perceptions of disabilities as being related to sin

or misconduct in a previous life also increase the stigma and discrimination towards persons with disabilities. In some instances, a family member with a disability is perceived as a disgrace to the entire family—which is another important reason for raising public awareness and destigmatising disability issues.

The statement called upon Asian churches to evaluate their capacities and make visible the needs of those with disabilities in

our communities. In many Asian churches, for instance, church buildings themselves remain inaccessible to those with disabilities, and the voices of the IDPDs are rarely heard in decision-making. The churches are called to act and reiterate commitments to persons with disabilities.

On the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the CCA urged its member churches and councils to motivate their members to embrace persons with disabilities, in keeping with the ministry of Jesus, for a fuller and more inclusive koinonia through advocacy and diaconal services in church and society.

Asia Regional Consultation on 'Towards Theological Education on Good Governance and Integrity Leadership'

28–30 November 2022 | Chiang Mai, Thailand



Participants of the Asia Regional Consultation on 'Towards Theological Education on Good Governance and Integrity Leadership'

An Asia Regional Consultation on 'Towards Theological Education on Good Governance and Integrity Leadership,' was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), from 28–30 November 2022, at the CCA headquarters at the Payap University Campus, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Around thirty-five participants, including heads of theological institutions, and related associations from across Asia attended the Consultation.

Integrity, pastoral care, and authority lie at the heart of Christian leadership and indeed, following Jesus in any capacity, and

they are also critical in state governance and Christian theological education. One of the most critical factors of governance lies in its contribution to both managerial skills and accountability of the Church as an organisation for continued growth and development. Good governance provides a framework for accountability to stakeholders, members, and the leaders of an organisation as well as to the broader society within which the organisation is part of management. It has spiritual, political, economic, environmental, cultural, and social dimensions. Good

governance is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, efficient, equitable, inclusive, and follows the rule of law. It ensures that corruption is minimised, the views of minorities are considered, and the needs of the present and future are addressed and met.

The church can be a role model of best practice, through leadership and servanthood, probity, honesty, integrity, generosity, and love. To ensure that good governance becomes an integral part of the church, it is important to develop the up-and-coming leaders of the

church, prospective pastors and vicars of congregations during their theological education and formative years, especially in theological seminaries and Bible schools. Incorporating the principles of good governance in theological curricula will build the capacity of future church leaders to incorporate systematic management and accountability as stewards of God's oikos when they themselves take up positions of power and authority. Thus, the theme of this critical Consultation was focused on 'Towards Theological Education on Good Governance and Integrity Leadership'.



Opening Worship at the Asia Regional Consultation on Good Governance

In his opening address, CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, spoke about how important it was for theological educators to train theological students, from the very beginning of their studies, in good governance and integrity leadership. A church or related institution that ensured good governance could enable future leaders to succeed in church administration and build up a corruption-free church. He highlighted the importance of instilling ideas and concepts of good governance into the programmes and curricula of theological educational institutions in training future

leaders and church workers, especially pastors and ministers in Asian churches. This was a matter of great relevance in the context of the rather frequent reports of corrupt practices in churches and related institutions in recent times.

How a church is administered at the local or national level is important, especially when Christians in Asia live as minorities. In an ethos characterised by religious plurality, Christian witness must remain uncompromised. To this end, church leaders are expected to be trustworthy and known for their integrity, stated Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

The CCA General Secretary expressed hope that the Consultation would spark new ideas for making qualitative differences in improving the curriculum of Asian theological institutions training a new generation of pastors and church workers who will nurture good governance and integrity leadership in churches.

During the biblical reflection on 'Good Theology = Good Governance: Being God's Stewards,' Prof. Dr Christoph Stückelberger, an ethicist and theological educator from Switzerland, addressed the group about the ethical challenges faced by churches and theological institutions across continents and countries around the world. He reminded the participants of the need to be model servants and to promote servant leadership in their roles as academics. He underscored the importance of openness and honesty in light of the corruption issues that often bedevil churches these days. He added that everyone should learn precisely about good governance mechanisms, and apply what they have learnt to improve ministry and mission work in churches and

theological institutions. He explained that good governance with Christian values has specific roots in stewardship, discipleship, and especially the double commandment of loving God and neighbour as oneself.

In the second session, which was on 'Church Leadership Models and Their Roots in Ecclesiology,' Stückelberger added that good governance requires all three levels of ethics—individual, interpersonal, and institutional. He challenged theological educators from different institutions in Asia to train future church leaders in the type of leadership that is consistent with their values and characters.

A situational analysis of challenges of governance in churches, theological institutions, and society was moderated by Prof. Dr Kitai Kim, Association of Christian Universities and Colleges in Asia, South Korea. The participants were divided into four groups and shared the challenges faced in their own context. These findings were presented, and further discussion was held.



Participants of the Asia Regional Consultation on Good Governance engage in small group discussions

On the second day of the Consultation, Dr Eva Wong Suk Kyun, Malaysia, Director of Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre, Bible College of Malaysia reflected on the passage from Matthew 25:14–30. She focused on the Master's Assignment, the Master's Appraisal, and the Master's Award from the parable of the talents.

Prof. Dr Christoph Stückelberger discussed 'Mapping of Assets of Churches and Theological Colleges'. He explained governance as leadership structure and decision-making rules and regulations (for assets). While management referred to the execution and monitoring of decisions of the governing bodies, stewardship was a Christian term for responsible, faithful

leadership and management (of entrusted goods/assets) as stewards of God as the owner of all (assets).

In the subsequent session on 'Overcoming Corruption: Forms, Solutions and Inputs for Curriculum', Dr Stückelberger emphasised the need for anti-corruptions strategies at individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels. He also mentioned that ethics as values-driven behaviour has a price, and one cannot be ethical without being ready to pay a price in situations where we must decide between a benefit. He mentioned that we need to reflect on and renew the theological basis for overcoming corruption, especially because of the doctrine of the triune God, from an ecumenical perspective.

The result of the situational analysis–assessment framework was discussed and moderated by Rev. Dr Vasantha Rao Chilkuri, United Theological College, India. This was followed by group discussion at the regional level towards the need for good governance as part of theological education.

On the third day of the Consultation, Fr. Dr Seung Jun Cho, Gwangju Catholic University (FABC-OEIA), South Korea reflected on Genesis 41:41–19 on the good governance of minister Joseph and the implications of Joseph's leadership virtues in promoting good governance. He explained the twelve leadership virtues of Joseph as having a prophetic vision, a positive attitude, honesty and morality, good risk management, having an attitude of service and consideration, faithful to one's essential duties, openness to readiness, prudence and composure, presenting vision and hope, positive acceptance of difficulty, never giving up and revealing his faith in God with love.

Two panellists, Rev. Dr Van Cliburn M. Tibus from the Divinity School of Silliman University, the Philippines,

and Rev. Dr Asigor Sitanggang from Jakarta Theological Seminary, Indonesia, presented the contextual values of indigenised management principles in good governance, particularly from Asian perspectives.

The existing curricula of the Senate of Serampore, India, were reviewed by Rev. Dr Naveen Rao, Leonard Theological College, Senate of Serampore and Asian Theological Association, and that of the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia and Asia Pacific Theological Association by Rev. Tham Wan Yee, Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, the Philippines. They discussed the existing topics and subjects related to governance in the curriculum.

During the session on 'Building a theological pedagogy on good governance and the next steps', the participants formed a core group with representatives from different countries to develop the curriculum related to good governance.

On the final day of the Asia Regional Consultation for Good Governance and Integrity Leadership, the participants finalised and put together a Communique for the churches in Asia. The Communique prepared by eminent theologians and heads of different theological institutions across Asia advanced the need for the implementation of good governance and integrity leadership in the Asian churches and theological institutions associated with it.

The Communique acknowledged that good governance and integrity leadership is indeed a challenge in many countries and is much required to challenge the corruption that is rampant in many institutions. The participants affirmed that good governance was at the heart of prophetic Diakonia and is imbibed in the Christian values of stewardship, discipleship, and love. Continuing with

the affirmation, the participants agreed that leadership is a blend of integrity, pastoral care, and authority and is a need in Christian theological institutions.

With the hope of a positive future, the Communique stressed the need to ensure and implement good governance on all decision-making levels for the common good of all. It further emphasised the necessity to train current and future leaders, irrespective of whether they were ordained or lay, on the importance of good governance and integrity through theological education.

Dynamically calling out to the Asian churches and theological institutions,

the Communique asked to first reflect on and renew the theological basis of good governance that is rooted in the Trinitarian mystery of God, and church leadership as service and good stewardship. Furthermore, it stressed the development and implementation of management skills and accountability frameworks. The Communique also highlighted the need to incorporate good governance within the curricula of theological institutions to build the capacity of current and future leaders of the church, both ordained and lay, such as integrity leadership, management principles, asset management, resource mobilisation, and anti-corruption strategies.

Statelessness and Human Trafficking

Asia Regional Consultation on 'The Effects of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons' 29–30 March 2022 | Online



Participants of the online Consultation on 'The Effects of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons'

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) organised a two-day Asia Regional Consultation on 'The Effects of COVID-19

on Trafficking in Persons' on 29–30 March 2022. The online Consultation, which was attended by over thirty participants from

across Asia, focused on issues such as the gendered nature of trafficking in Asia, the situation of labour trafficking, and the importance of comprehensive prevention and response strategies. The Consultation also offered a platform for the participants and resource persons to share innovations, best practices, and strategies of resilience and adaptation in ongoing anti-trafficking ministries amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was evident at an unprecedented scale in every sphere of people's lives. Worrying reports from Asia noted an increase in trafficking and exploitation of people since the onset of the pandemic. Economic determinants, such as poverty, unemployment, and lower income levels became the main factors that influenced victims' vulnerability to trafficking in persons. The COVID-19 pandemic had multiple effects on people's lives, and with a spike in debt bondage and forced labour, many across the world were more susceptible to becoming victims of human trafficking.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the patterns of trafficking in persons, which is also known as modern-day slavery. Trafficked persons may feel that they have no other alternative to meet their economic needs and they tend to take risks in hope of improving their economic situation. Women and girls, who constituted the most detected victims of human trafficking before the outbreak, were being specifically targeted by traffickers during the pandemic. Restrictions of movement, which was already inherent in trafficking for sexual exploitation, were further amplified by lockdown measures and travel prohibitions. Thus the online Consultation titled 'The Effects of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons' was organised by the CCA to understand the ground realities and respond to the crisis of trafficking in persons as the body of Christ, while also urging the member constituencies to fulfil

their potentials and the greater roles they could play in the prevention and response to trafficking in persons.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of the CCA, highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic had worsened human flows and migration, pushing people into vulnerability and into the risk of being trafficked: human trafficking has been identified as the fastest-growing criminal activity in the world today. The magnitude of this heinous crime is difficult to quantify and is often underestimated given its insidious and complex nature, which is only made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ingpat Pakchairatchakul, from the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) Asia Pacific Regional Office, spoke on 'The Effects of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons: An Overview' and shared the unique challenges of different population groups (children, women and girls, and migrant workers, as well as responders) that were most affected by trafficking during the pandemic. She mentioned that the increased presence of authorities and more robust regulations such as border closures, lockdowns, and travel restrictions might have been preventing crime, but human traffickers are gradually finding ways to adapt their exploitation patterns as inequalities surfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many traffickers have shifted their modus operandi and abused modern technologies to reach out to individuals, causing them to be at risk even when they are at a remote distance.

Ms Pakchairatchakul further detailed the roles of faith-based organisations and communities in combating trafficking during the COVID-19 era. Such strategies included identifying and reporting potential trafficking to law enforcement, collaborating with law enforcement to assist victims, educating the larger

community, especially vulnerable groups, and openly welcoming survivors who face social stigma.

Joanna Concepcion, the Chairperson of Migrante International, spoke on 'The Gendered Nature of Trafficking amidst COVID-19'. She emphasised that women have suffered the most from the economic and health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Victims of trafficking come largely from the peasant and working-class communities that are already economically insecure. Returning migrants are not receiving adequate support, alternative means of livelihood, or genuine reintegration programmes, and this makes them vulnerable to being re-trafficked.

The session on 'Asia's Labour Markets: Labour Trafficking amidst COVID-19' was facilitated by Rev. Jollify Daniel from the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (BCCM). She highlighted the fact that the political and public discourse have regularly come together to portray migrant workers as a potential threat to national security and detrimental to the country's long-term social and economic development. Rev. Daniel also elaborated on different recommendations for immediate action to cater to the needs of migrant workers. Rev. Daniel further spoke about the BCCM's ministry for migrant children through community learning centres.

Andrea Luisa Anolin, from the Batis Centre for Women in the Philippines, shared stories of women survivors of trafficking and the long process of rehabilitation and reintegration in a session entitled 'Voices from those Affected'.

The 'Biblical-Theological Reflection on Trafficking in Persons', conducted by Rev. Marie Sol Sioco-Villalon from the United Methodist Church in the Philippines, focused on Ezekiel 34 to point out how bad leadership was responsible for

leading people astray and forcing them into positions of abject vulnerability. She asked the participants if shepherding through loving the most vulnerable and exploited ones in a pandemic is a new way of being the Church, of being Christ. Asian churches in particular have the capacity and resources to share...Can our churches live out emptying themselves to love and share?

Yusmiati Vistamika Wangka, from the Christian Action Centre for Migrant Domestic Workers in Hong Kong led a session entitled 'Ensuring Comprehensive Strategies during COVID-19: Protection Strategies'. Through case studies of migrant workers who were trafficked in Hong Kong, Ms Wangka shared strategies to reach out to and provide services to victims of trafficking through legal support, well-being support, and reintegration programmes, while also outlining the significant challenges of unsafe migration and providing recommendations for church leaders.

Aasavri Rai, from the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), in a presentation on 'Ensuring Comprehensive Strategies during COVID-19: Coordination and Response Strategies' shared key protection principles for assisting victims of trafficking, models of vulnerability assessment, and two forms of best practices, namely, community policing and collaborating with law enforcement. Ms Rai further shared the necessity of being trauma-informed while catering to victims of trafficking: Trauma-informed approaches aim to protect the victims' security and well-being, improve victims' capacity to cooperate with law enforcement, as well as strengthen the capacities of those who work with survivors. This can be done by explaining all available courses of action, asking about concerns and needs, and assuring them that their narrations are credible and that

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

no one had the right to treat them that way, thus alleviating any guilt or shame.

A panel discussion on 'Mitigating the Impact of Human Trafficking: Role of Churches and Faith-based Organisations' saw the sharing of best practices from three church-based organisations from Asia.

Felicia Wijaya and Yi-En Tzeng, representing the Garden of Hope Foundation, elaborated on the complex modes of trafficking that occurred in Taiwan through education (student visas, internship programmes), labour (documented or undocumented workers), or even forced marriage, and said that it was critical to identify and address these different pathways.

Rev. Ira Imelda, from the Pasundan Durebang Women's Crisis Centre of the Pasundan Christian Church in Indonesia, provided a matrix to map the different roles that churches could play in sending,

transit, and receiving countries in the areas of prevention, handling and assistance, and rehabilitation and social reintegration.

Rupa Pradhan Chetri, who works with Justice Ventures International Project in Nepal, shared several pathways of action for ministries pertaining to trafficking. This included approaching the issue legally and theologically, aiding in law implementation, generating awareness among least-protected communities, working alongside other organisations to provide relief support, and helping survivors reintegrate through emotional and livelihood support.

The two-day Consultation was a unique platform provided by the CCA for more than thirty participants from across Asia to share and learn best practices for migrant ministries, understand the compounded complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic in the crime of trafficking, and identify further pathways for action.

Asia Regional Consultation on 'Diakonal Ministry of the Church in Developing Effective Responses to Combat Human Trafficking in Asia'

28–30 September 2022 | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



Participants of the Asia Regional Consultation on 'Diakonal Ministry of the Church in Developing Effective Responses to Combat Human Trafficking in Asia'

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) organised an Asia Regional Consultation on 'Diaconal Ministry of the Church in Developing Effective Responses to Combat Human Trafficking in Asia' from 28 to 30 September 2022. The Consultation was held at the Ecumenical Centre of the Council of Churches of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

About thirty participants specially invited from the CCA's member churches as well as from faith-based organisations and civil society movements in twelve countries, discussed short-term and long-term actions and strategies for engagement in anti-trafficking ministries.

Biblical and theological teachings proclaim the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of all human life. Each person is made in the image of God, loved immeasurably by God, and has inherent worth. Every person is precious, people are more important than possessions, and the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person. Trafficking in persons, or modern-day slavery, where men, women, and children are bought and sold like merchandise, inherently rejects this principle, showing absolute contempt for human beings. For this reason, eliminating human trafficking and empowering survivors should be a priority of the church. The church, as part of its prophetic witness and mission, has a responsibility to combat this violation and degradation of human dignity with a sense of urgency. In order to achieve this goal, churches in Asia need to be enabled to address the menace of modern-day slavery as part of their diaconal ministry.

The CCA organised the Asia Regional Consultation to focus on assisting churches in Asia as part of their diaconal ministry for developing effective responses to combat human trafficking. Ongoing social work and church diaconal ministries that work in advocacy and litigation face challenges

in overcoming the complex and intricate web of trafficking. The need of the hour is to evolve appropriate strategies to assist ministries of anti-trafficking initiatives by churches at local and national levels.

The programme provided a platform that brought together representatives from the CCA's member churches and councils to respond to trafficking in persons. It helped to sensitise Asian churches and communities to be prophetic witnesses in challenging human trafficking and advocate for the dignity and rights of victims and survivors of trafficking as part of their diaconal ministry. It also enabled the participants to learn effective advocacy measures as well as strategies on how to respond, prevent, rescue, restore, and reintegrate survivors and engage in other forms of relief and rehabilitation for trafficked persons.

Mary Girlie Glen "Gigi" Tupas, the Head of National Activation and Partnerships of the International Justice Mission (IJM), in the Philippines, spoke on 'The Web of Trafficking: Causes and Vulnerabilities'. She said that human trafficking is a crime that touches people we encounter every day and that one in 150 people on the planet is in slavery today. While describing the compounded complexities involved in detecting and preventing human trafficking, she called for strengthening Asian justice systems, as "five billion people are living outside the protection and benefits of the law". She advocated for interfaith and government collaborations, trauma-informed interventions, and survivor engagement to minimise trafficking-related vulnerabilities.

Maraiké Bangun, a member of the Faculty Development Programme of the Jakarta Theological Seminary (JTS) in Indonesia, proposed 'Imago Dei' (Genesis 1:26), 'Breath of God as Source of Life' (Genesis 1:2, Genesis 2:7, Job 27:3-4), and 'God's Heart for the Poor' as the pillars and thrust for the diaconal work of churches in

a session on 'Biblical-Theological Basis of Human Dignity'.

With a challenge of "Become a Church that dares to get hurt", Fr. Romo Chrisantus Saturnus Paschalis, the Chairperson of the Peace Justice Commission Pastoral Migrant, Diocese of Pangkalpinang in Indonesia, called upon those present to be 'an outwardly-oriented Church rather than an inwardly-oriented Church'. He said that social issues that trouble humanity, like trafficking, must disturb the peace of mind of every believer. A Catholic priest who works for migrant workers and trafficking victims in Batam, Riau, Indonesia, for Fr. Paschalis, the wounded Church's primary mission was to do the work of love through open eyes, a sensitive heart, and ready hands.

Glorene Das, the Executive Director of Tenaganita, a human and labour rights grassroots organisation in Malaysia, spoke on 'Immediate Effective Assistance, Protection, and Referrals'. Ms Das advocated for a victim-centred approach by placing the victims' and survivors' needs at the centre of discussions, debates, actions, and services. She demonstrated how this was put into action through Tenaganita's services of case management, legal aid, information sharing, partnership building, advocacy, and psychosocial support, along with building the capacities and skills of survivors.

Alex Ong from Migrant CARE, Malaysia, an expert on anti-trafficking crackdown and rescue operations, spoke on 'Long-term Support and Social Inclusion: Return and Reintegration'. Mr Ong, who has handled at least 3,000 cases of Indonesian migrant workers, spoke of the necessity of psychological preparation, adaptation and resilience, education and meaningful employment for survivors of trafficking as means of empowering them after rescue. He strongly promoted community engagement, working with community elders, instrumentalising customs, and

building relationships to provide a network of support for survivors of trafficking. He also spoke of trafficking within the megatrend of migration.

The session on 'Law Enforcement and Effective Legal Mechanisms in Asia' was jointly facilitated by Janejinda Pawadee from Thailand and Balmi Chisim from Bangladesh. Ms Pawadee, who is a Partnership Liaison Manager with LIFT International in Thailand, gave the Southeast Asia perspective on laws and legal mechanisms related to trafficking, such as the Bali Process (2002), the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2015), the ASEAN Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons, and the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Human Trafficking (COMMIT) (2004). To combat trafficking, Ms Pawadee suggested four Es, namely, Education on the issue, Engagement with stakeholders, Encouragement of victims and survivors, and Endless serving of the poor and marginalised.

Ms Chisim, a practising lawyer from Bangladesh, associated with the national YWCA of Bangladesh, shared the routes and pathways of trafficking in South Asia and the dynamic cross-border networks traffickers use. She also spoke about the SAARC Convention on Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution, and said that stronger regional legal mechanisms were needed, given the volume of trafficking victims from South Asia.

A panel session on 'Sharing of Best Practices' saw contributions from Rev. Joram H. Calimutan from the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, Hong Kong, Sr. Laurentina Pi from Divina Providentia JPIC, Indonesia, and Lee, Chang Gee and Kang, In-Gu of the Yeongdeungpo Urban Industrial Mission, South Korea.

In a panel session on 'Developing Effective Church Responses', Rev. Dr Khawlhing

Lalrinkima, Presbyterian Church of India, Rev. Christopher Ablon, Iglesia Filipina Independiente, the Philippines, and Rev. Ira Imelda, Gereja Kristen Pasundan, Indonesia shared strategies for church engagements in combating human trafficking.

A Communique developed by the participants called upon churches to repent for contributing towards 'othering', for a lack of concern against those discriminated against, and for covering up this lack with tokenism.



Sessions in progress at the Asia Regional Consultation on 'Diakonal Ministry of the Church in Developing Effective Responses to Combat Human Trafficking in Asia'

The participants pledged to increase commitments to anti-trafficking ministries as part of the church's diaconal mission by turning theology into action, adopting the mission strategy of Jesus by approaching rather than being approached, strengthening partnerships and cooperation, and boosting pastoral care for communities in sending and receiving countries.

The participants further noted the unique position of the Church in working with perpetrators or contributors to trafficking, such as households that employed trafficked workers and indulged in human rights violations, or people from the victim's community that sold them to traffickers or agents for a monetary commission.

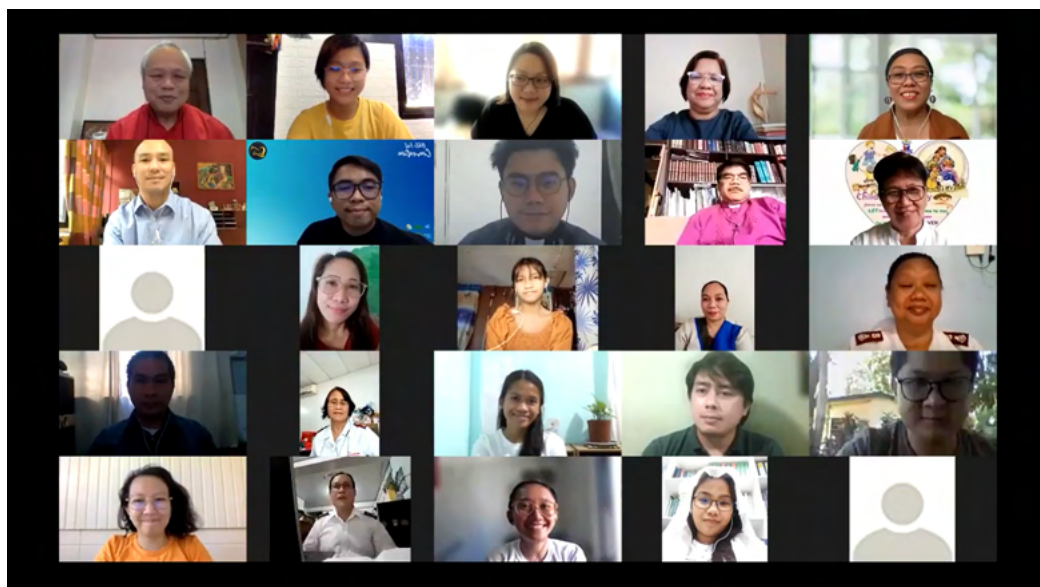
Upholding the Rights and Dignity of Children

National Consultation on 'Upholding Dignity and Rights of Children in a 'New Normal' Era'

1–2 March 2022 | Manila, The Philippines

The Christian Conference of Asia, in collaboration with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, organised a national ecumenical Consultation on Upholding the Dignity and Rights of Children on 1–2 March 2022. Thirty-one participants from the Apostolic Catholic Church, Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, Episcopal Church in the Philippines, Iglesia Unida Ekyumenikal,

Iglesia Evangelica Metodista En Las Islas Filipinas, Lutheran Church in the Philippines, The United Methodist Church, The Salvation Army, and United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Kalipunan ng Kristyanong Kabataan sa Pilipinas, Salinlahi Alliance for Children's Concerns, and Children's Rehabilitation Centre, attended the Consultation.



Participants of the Consultation on 'Upholding the Dignity and Rights of Children in a 'New Normal' Era'

Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza, NCCP General Secretary, shared a very informative and inspiring Biblical-Theological Reflection on the biblical passages in the New Testament that highlight Jesus as Child Rights Advocate. Commenting on the Gospel text of John 6:1–14, Bishop Marigza emphasised the fact that Jesus recognised the right of the child to participate in the well-being of the community.

The Consultation also provided updates on the situation of Filipino children as presented by Eule Rico Bonganay, Spokesperson of the Salinlahi Alliance for Children's Concerns. The participants expressed their deep concern over the appalling situation of children in the country. Indeed, the worsening poverty, hunger, and unemployment have aggravated the dire situation of the children. Mr Bonganay added that children continue to suffer from health risks, poor education systems, and mental health concerns amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to UNICEF, the vulnerability of children to violence has increased because of the lockdown. In the first quarter of

2021, the Children's Rehabilitation Centre recorded 43–44 child rights violations every day. Moreover, the Council for the Welfare of Children and UNICEF stated that two in three children experienced physical violence, two in five children experienced psychological violence, and one in four children experienced sexual violence.

Olivia Bernardo, Executive Director of the Children's Rehabilitation Centre delivered an input on child rights advocacy. Ms Bernardo presented various advocacy activities that promote child rights and dignity. She cited that some NCCP member churches and church institutions have been doing advocacy activities. Moreover, Ms Bernardo stressed that churches play an important role in advocating for children's rights. She also mentioned that churches have great potential in providing psychosocial activities for children.

A child advocate, Ayla Sol Rentillosa, shared her dreams of a child-friendly and safe society. She expressed the importance of working together to ensure that child rights are promoted and upheld.

During the workshop sessions, participants identified the gaps and challenges faced by

the churches/organisations in integrating child rights programming. They expressed the need to address these gaps by having intentional programmes that ensure the protection of the rights and dignity of children, especially the poor and the most vulnerable ones. They realised that it is imperative to strengthen our commitment to promoting child rights and to creating programmes that pay critical attention to empowering churches and communities in service towards children.

Some of the responses and commitments shared by the participants during the Consultation included developing or adopting child protection/safeguarding policies; integrating awareness-raising activities on child rights through the

various programmes of the church or organisation and in partnership with LGUs; conducting training on child rights and advocacy for Christian educators and volunteers working with children; providing psychosocial services and shelter to child victims of abuse and violence; ensuring children's meaningful participation in the programmes and ministries of the church; encouraging church initiatives to develop child-friendly/rights-based programmes in local congregations; partnering/ collaborating with organisations and local governments that focus on children's protection and rights; and strengthening ecumenical efforts to engage churches and partner organisations in child rights programming and advocacies.

Ecumenical Solidarity Accompaniment and Diakonia in Asia

Asia Regional Consultation on 'Ecumenical Diakonia, Church's Response to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia'

24–26 October 2022 | Chiang Mai, Thailand



Participants of the joint CCA-WCC Asia Regional Consultation on 'Ecumenical Diakonia, Church's Response to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia'

The Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches jointly organised a Regional Consultation on 'Ecumenical Diakonia, Church's Response

to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia' from 24–26 October 2022 at the CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Thirty-five participants

representing CCA and WCC member churches as well as ecumenical diaconal organisations from across Asia attended the three-day Consultation.

Ecumenical diakonia is an integral part of the mission of the church. It aims at the transformation of lives and working to resolve the problem of increasing social and economic inequalities. However, often it does not address the unjust distribution of power in the global system which is the principal cause of failed human development parameters.

The diaconal mission of the church traditionally in most contexts was limited to church-based development programmes including strong emergency responses or support from the Western development agencies of churches to developing countries. Such support will be often in the form of sharing of financial resources to implement the projects, training to manage small businesses and to produce and conserve food, support farming or fishing, as well as charity work of the churches themselves. Often the economic or financial assistance to poor countries or diaconal work of the churches in developing countries by the churches and related diaconal agencies belonging to economically advanced countries are based on the donor-giver relationship. Although the concept of development assistance or cooperation has changed over the years, there nevertheless persists a mentality and approach centred on the ecumenical diaconal mission of Western agencies and their participation in development cooperation in developing countries through churches.

In most recent times, the focus of development goals was anchored on the principles of the UN's sustainable development goals (SDGs). However, in many parts of the world, the SDGs and their relevance as articulated by the UN have not been conveyed to the churches

as part of the concerns of their diaconal missions. It is in this context that the relevance of the global ecumenical conversation on ecumenical diakonia initiated by the World Council of Churches was reflected upon in the Asian context at the Asia Regional Consultation that was organised jointly by the CCA and WCC.

The Consultation started with the opening worship facilitated by the CCA staff. The thematic address, and the biblical-theological Reflection, 'Called to Transformation: Ecumenical Diakonia and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' were the sessions scheduled for the first day.

The thematic address was delivered at the opening session by CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara. He observed that Diakonia was an integral part of the mission of the church. It aims to transform lives and resolve the problem of increasing social and economic inequalities. Dr Mathews George Chunakara pointed out that the focus of the development goals by and large has been anchored now on the principles of the United Nations SDGs, but in reality, the message of the SDGs has not reached the grassroots in Asia, including faith communities. He added that every church or congregation is involved in Diakonia as their prime mission in day-to-day witness, but these churches have not yet given adequate attention to responding to the SDGs. It is in this context that the relevance of the global ecumenical conversation on ecumenical Diakonia, initiated by the WCC, becomes relevant as it is aimed at helping, sensitising and motivating the churches as well as building their capacity. Also pointed out was the historical development of discussions related to developing new paradigms for interpreting and articulating the vision of Diakonia, especially authentic ecumenical Diakonia initiated by the WCC over the decades from time to time.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara commented that the contributions of WCC, not only in articulating its vision of ecumenical Diakonia but also in its practical application, have been considered unique and it has been valued by churches across the world, especially in the global South. However, in recent years WCC lost its original mandates of direct involvement in the practical application of ecumenical Diakonia through member churches; as such, most churches in developing countries have been now outside of the newly created ecumenical Diakonal platforms or structures. He added that the core principle of the SDGs is that 'no one is left behind,' in line with the cardinal principle of embracing all God's people and working for their welfare.

The session on Biblical and Theological Reflection on Diakonia as the mission and witness of the church was led by Metropolitan Yakob Mar Irenaios, the President of the Christian Agency for Social Action (CASA), India's largest diaconal mission agency established in 1947.

Metropolitan Irenaios affirmed, "Real witnessing is not through speeches or sermons but through life and life-enhancing activities. To say that ecumenical Diakonia is the Church's mission and witness means that the Church is to carry on what the Messiah has been and is still doing in this world; this is the true mission. Mission and witness are inextricably linked. The mission revolves around witnessing." Metropolitan Irenaios pointed out that the idea of 'Diakonia', or service, is not something new to the Church. The qualifying word, 'ecumenical', has added a new dimension to it. The Diakonia, the assigned duty with the Church, is for the whole world. Since Christian churches always uphold the value of human life and dignity, they shall come together, 'living' the spirit of the Holy Writ, to address the larger and subtler issues." The session was moderated by Rev. Narciso Jerson Benia from the Convention of Philippines Baptist Churches.

In a session on 'Called to Transformation: Ecumenical Diakonia', Rev. Matthew Ross, Programme Executive for Diakonia of the WCC, outlined the theological and practical service for Diakonia through a document adopted by the WCC, which was brought out as a publication during the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. He introduced the significance of the study document on ecumenical Diakonia, which focuses on prophetic Diakonia and addresses peacebuilding, climate justice, gender justice, racial justice, and health and healing. "Diakonia is church-related social care—an essential component of the service that we are called to do as Christians. Faith is our response to God's grace, and we are called to live out God's grace and love by loving our neighbour as ourselves. However, we cannot do it alone."

Rev. Ross extended the greeting on behalf of the WCC and outlined the new initiatives of working together with different regional ecumenical organisations across the world, especially in addressing emerging concerns in the area of sustainable development.

Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, programme coordinator of CCA, in a presentation titled 'Achieving Sustainable Development Goals: Measuring Change', described the challenges that Asia faces with the SDGs, including geographical expansion, social and cultural variation, rising inequality in Asian countries, widening disparities between rich and poor, and low wages that have negative social and environmental consequences. He explained, "The inequity of progress toward the SDGs is evidenced in the lives of vulnerable population groups throughout Asia and the Pacific who are most at-risk of being left behind. Slow progress, stagnation, and regression in meeting the SDG targets continue to place the greatest burden on the most vulnerable. There is an urgent need for regional collaboration and partnerships to ensure that no one

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

and no country in any of the Asia Pacific sub-regions is left behind as SDG progress stagnates or regresses," he added.

The second day of the Consultation provided the platform for participants to

discuss pathways for integration of SDGs in the Diakonia of Asian churches. The opening prayer and biblical reflection were led by Major Francis Ng of the Salvation Army from Malaysia.



Group discussions and sessions in progress at the Asia Regional Consultation on 'Ecumenical Diakonia, Church's Response to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia'

The session on 'Journeying together: Diakonia in a polycentric ecumenical movement' was moderated by Rev. Dn. Ribin John from the National Council of Churches in India.

Rev. Henrek Lokra of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) described the Diaconal activities of Indonesia's churches across the country. In response to socio-political-economic issues in Indonesia, he explained that PGI's ecumenical Diakonia focused on social justice, capacity-building for disaster management and climate mitigation responses, religious harmony, and paralegal training.

Patricia Mungcal of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP)

elaborated on the collective life and witness of the churches and their associates, as well as on concrete expressions of diaconal ministry, all with components of education, advocacy, and service, with a strong emphasis on placing people at the centre of the work, "for they are the ones we pledged to serve". Mungcal stated that the NCCP collaborated with grassroots organisations, rights organisations, and national civil society organisations on issues such as online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC), gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS, indigenous peoples, and human rights.

The session on 'Ecumenical Diakonia and Ecumenical Cooperation in Asia' saw

interventions from the representatives of the Myanmar Council of Churches, the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) and was moderated by Rev. Grace Moon.

Rev. Mahn Palmerston, General Secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC), spoke about how the churches and members expressed ecumenical Diakonia, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis. Besides providing relief assistance to COVID-19 patients, volunteers from MCC member churches cared for patients who had passed away due to virus infection.

Sungwon Jo of the Presbyterian Church of Korea's (PCK) Diakonia department shared concrete expressions of ecumenical Diakonia missions carried out through PCK in addressing issues such as human rights, social justice, peace, women's rights, mental health, environmental preservation, and refugees from war-torn countries. He also spoke about PCK's emergency response, relief, and

rehabilitation efforts, as well as its solidarity and advocacy work in situations that arose in Myanmar, the Philippines, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. Cooperation, according to Sungwon Jo, was key to pursuing genuine ecumenical Diakonia work with partner churches and local churches in Korea and around the world.

Rev. Huang Hsin-Lien, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan described diaconal work which involved congregations and local churches across the country. Prayers for 'Solidarity with Ukraine', the construction of bamboo houses in Nepal for underprivileged families, the Thai Labour Mission Centre, a project for Thai migrant workers in Taiwan, a centre assisting seafarers and fisherfolk, and fundraising for poor communities in Zambia that could not afford to purchase masks were among the initiatives they have carried out. Subsequently, Rev. Rii Tajimaraw, PCT's Indigenous programme secretary, also described the church's ministry to indigenous peoples.



Panel discussions on 'People's Participation in Achieving SDGs: Ecumenical Responses' and 'Journeying together: Diakonia in a polycentric ecumenical movement'

The session on 'People's Participation in Achieving SDGs: Ecumenical Responses' saw presentations from Rev. Moncy Varghese and Juliate Malakar. The session was moderated by Rev Marcela A Sacayle from the Uniting Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP).

Rev. Moncy Varghese, the Director of the Christian Agency for Rural Development (CARD), of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India, said, some of the initiatives that the CARD has undertaken since its inception include CARD-Care, food security and agricultural development, gender equality and women's empowerment, HIV and AIDS prevention, water conservation, biodiversity protection, climate change and disaster management, livelihood support, rural products promotion, and COVID-19 mitigation.

Juliate Malakar, the Executive Director of the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), shared a number of programmes under the CCDB's mandate of "working on the basis of ecumenical principles, to create a society where the poor, marginalised, and vulnerable people in Bangladesh can claim and enjoy their rights, and seek justice for a sustainable livelihood". The CCDB was a pioneer in poverty reduction and livelihood development through its flagship PMSC approach (formation and strengthening of people's institutions), where 90 percent of the workers and beneficiaries were women. Recently, the CCDB also inaugurated its Community Climate Resilience Centre (CCRC) to educate and empower communities for climate resilience.

Rev. Benjamin Inbaraj and Alwynn Javier shared their insights in the session on 'Towards an Effective Ecumenical Diaconia Ministry in Asia: Coherence and

Coordination'. The session was moderated by Ms Sheena Leeza Verghese from St Thomas Mar Thoma Church Kuala Lumpur.

Rev. Benjamin Inbaraj, Director of the Church of South India's 'Social Empowerment: Vision in Action' (SEVA), stated that the church's commitment was to "make congregations in every nook and corner of South India into Diaconal communities". He shared that during the COVID-19 lockdowns, the diaconal nature of the church "shone brightly, through the life-sustaining mission of every congregation, through feeding the hungry, sheltering migrants, providing medical aid, visiting patients, and facilitating burials".

Mr Alwynn Javier, the ACT Alliance Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific, provided an overview of ACT Alliance programmes and new additional focus areas and issues, as well as its different regional and national fora.

On the third day of the Consultation, Rev. Andrew Devadason from the Church of Ceylon Diocese Colombo in Sri Lanka led the morning prayer and biblical reflection.

The session on 'Stewardship and Accountability in Ecumenical Diaconia' was presented by Rev. Saut Horas Nababan and Rev. Joshua Peter.

Rev. Saut Horas Nababan of the Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP) in Indonesia spoke about the importance of collaboration and network building, particularly among Asian churches and ecumenical organisations. He went on to say that the HKBP Diaconia department works openly with the government, civil society organisations, the education sector, and a variety of other organisations which are advancing the church's Diaconal mission.

Rev. Joshua Peter of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India mentioned

the Stewardship and Accountability and Transparency (SAT) Policy, a mechanism used in his own church to ensure resource mobilisation efficiency.

In the group discussion, participants echoed that there is a strong call for churches to practice strict accountability, particularly regarding the proper management of financial and property resources, and to find innovative ways to move toward self-sustainability and self-reliance in their pursuit of diaconal ministry programmes.

Asian church representatives who attended the Consultation strongly affirmed the view that revisiting the church's teachings on stewardship, charity, and resource development will serve as the foundation for this work of accountability and transparency. Participants, on the other hand, proposed that identifying human resources and enhancing their capacities in local churches and ecumenical organisations would help scale up diaconal ministry work in various Asian churches.

Participants strongly recommended mapping human resources and mobilising local churches as diaconal ministry prime movers. It was also stated that collaboration and cooperation would maximise resources and close gaps among churches and local ecumenical organisations best suited to carry out programmes such as disaster risk reduction and psychosocial support in disaster and conflict-affected communities in Asia. Finally, the participants suggested to the CCA to keep the focus of Asia Sunday in future on the diaconal ministry of churches and ecumenical organisations throughout the region.

To conclude the discussion, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, reminded the participants that Asian churches have experiences in following best practices of their successful engagement in Diakonia from the grassroots to national levels, and even in their diaconal engagement at the international levels as those were shared by some Asian churches. These examples are clear evidence of the potential, capacity, and commitment of Asian churches to mobilise resources within each country in Asia. As this positive sign of increasing commitment to self-reliance and sustainability is encouraging, we need to find ways of strengthening the Asian ecumenical mission of Diakonia; at the same time, we should be mindful of sharing resources with better stewardship, accountability, and transparency as well as good governance in implementing projects and programmes.

In the closing session, Rev. Matthew Ross of the World Council of Churches affirmed the commitment of the WCC to enhancing the capacities of churches in ecumenical Diakonia. "Let us work together for the glory of God and the betterment of people everywhere," Rev. Matthew Ross of the WCC said at the end of the three-day Consultation.

Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia outlined the plan of action suggested for strengthening capacity-building in the diaconal ministry of CCA member churches through two regional programmes next year.

The three-day Consultation came to an end with the closing worship and a strong commitment to embracing the entire creation and seeking its well-being.



ACTION TOGETHER IN COMBATING HIV AND AIDS IN ASIA (ATCHAA)

OBJECTIVES

- *Capacity Enhancement:* Strategic prevention, care and support messages and action on HIV are implemented in the churches for the communities in Asia;
- *Leadership and Advocacy:* Safe spaces and an inclusive environment supporting marginalised and at-risk populations affected by HIV exist in the churches in Asia;
- *Interfaith Action:* Collective action of the already existing Interfaith Network on HIV/AIDS is strengthened.

Capacity-Building

Southeast Asia Sub-Regional Consultation on 'Southeast Asian Churches' Engagement with HIV and AIDS: Working Towards Informed Responses'

2–4 August 2022 | Chiang Mai, Thailand



Participants of the South-east Asia Sub-regional Consultation on 'Southeast Asian Churches' Engagement with HIV and AIDS: Working Towards Informed Responses'

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) organised a capacity-building programme for Southeast Asian ecumenical church leaders involved in HIV and AIDS advocacy on 2–4 August 2022 at the CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

With the theme 'Southeast Asian Churches Engagement with HIV and AIDS: Working Towards Informed Responses', the in-person training which was attended by twenty-two ecumenical church leaders, was aimed at equipping facilitators for HIV response in South-East Asia, strengthening Churches' HIV and AIDS advocacy and developing a Regional Strategy of Inclusiveness of Churches with regards to HIV and AIDS. The programme provided a platform for participants and resource persons to engage in discussions, and share experiences, innovations, best practices, and strategies of resilience in the midst of the pandemic.

An estimated 3.7 million people are living with HIV in Southeast Asia. Most HIV infections occur among key populations such as sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender persons, people who inject drugs, and their partners. While epidemiological trends show that both new infections and HIV-related deaths are continuing to decline, the rate of decline has plateaued over the past few years. The region is short of many targets, including access to antiretroviral therapy and mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

A renewed focus on the prevention of new infections among key populations and young people is the key to success. Such a focus would not only help reduce new infections but also help bridge the gap between the estimated number of PLHIVs and those who know their HIV status. A test-and-treat policy alongside these efforts will also have a direct impact on

mortality, by bringing people to treatment centres at an early stage of infection.

The CCA through its ATCHAA programme has been focusing on equipping its member churches and councils to respond effectively to HIV and AIDS issues. Several skill-building and advocacy programmes have been conducted, as well as efforts to build HIV-competent churches and communities. In this context, the CCA organised the Southeast Asia capacity-building training programme to bring together key representatives involved in HIV engagement from churches in the region and revive concerted efforts of churches in engagement with HIV and AIDS.

On the first day of the programme, Rev. Grace Moon, CCA Programme Coordinator, welcomed the participants on behalf of Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary, and conveyed the importance of discussing the roles and responsibilities of churches and ecumenical councils to become inclusive and relevant to people living with HIV and AIDS.

Quoting the four Es of Rev. Stephen Arulapalam from the Theological College of Lanka, namely, Education, Empowerment, Encouragement and Employment to PLHIVs, Rev. Grace pointed out four Es as the summary of the church and ecumenical councils' roles and responsibilities to uphold the dignity and rights of the people with HIV and AIDS. She expressed her great hope that the three-day Consultation will be a new step forward to create a network of south-east Asian churches and various ecumenical organisations in Asia to advocate the rights and dignity of PLHIV.

Dr Salil Panakadan, Regional Programme Adviser from UNAIDS Asia and the Pacific, shared on the topic, 'Coronavirus and HIV: A brief overview of HIV and AIDS in Asia and the Impact of COVID-19'. During

the presentation, he presented the latest data from the 24th International AIDS Conference (Montreal, Canada) containing the current situation of HIV and AIDS in the Asian and global scope. 38.4 million people are living with HIV and AIDS globally, 6 million of whom are from the Asia Pacific region. He also added there are 1.5 million new infections globally with 260,000 from the Asia Pacific region. The data presented displayed an overwhelming increase in the graphs presented from three countries namely: the Philippines with a 327 percent increase along with Fiji and Afghanistan revolving around a 100 percent increase.

Dr Salil concluded his presentation with a note to remind the churches and ecumenical councils in their HIV and AIDS advocacy, and that there is a constant challenge to maintain the commitment and gains of years while introducing new approaches and tools. He stressed the potential of change done through innovations but at the same time, he expressed the short supply of new technologies, kits, and medicines and the need to heighten reach and accessibility, forge partnerships with communities and organisations that can provide domestic funding, address structural barriers and promote sustainable and enabling policies in church and community settings.

Pastor Erickson Aldovino, from the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, shared a theological reflection on "Creating and enabling congenial environment for People Living with HIV and AIDS" based on the texts from Genesis 1:26–27 and Matthew 12:28–34. The reflection elaborated on the very basic belief that humans were made in God's image and with Jesus' challenge to love God and neighbour. He shared that in the church settings, HIV and AIDS have always been wrongly associated with sin. Through the said act, Aldovino expressed that this only shows that we have lost track of the

essence as God's followers called to share an inclusive love instead of hate, and companionship and acceptance instead of judgement.

Pointing out the holistic concept of healing which involves the capacity to experience and mediate love, acceptance, and forgiveness, Aldovino pointed out that "healing involves developing the capacity to engage others as it ends with themselves, as God's in expressing agape". "Judging those people living with HIV and AIDS cannot help and will never be helpful. Loving them and validating their feelings is a kind of care that they need," added Aldovino. Drawing inspiration from experiences of doing ministry to the people living with HIV and AIDS, his reflection challenged the participants to act with compassion instead of judgement and mockery. Aldovino concluded that loving those affected, accompanying them, and validating their feelings are but simple yet concrete means for churches and ecumenical councils responding to the problems of AIDS. The participants, organisers, and resource speakers shared reflections inspired by the theological reflection.

Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, Programme Coordinator of Prophet Diakonia and HIV and AIDS Programme of CCA, led a workshop on HIV-101 as an introductory course for the participants to relearn and review their knowledge related to the AIDS pandemic.

On the second day, after the opening prayer and recap of the previous day, a workshop on 'Perspectives from the Margins' was conducted. The participants were divided into four groups and had to discuss a particular passage from the scripture. The participants discussed the importance of contextualising the text in the current situation and re-reading it from the perspective of the margins.

Ms Arceli Bile, HIV and AIDS Advocacy Coordinator of CCA, discussed Stigma, Shame, Denial, Inaction, and Misaction (SSDIM) with the participants. Bile labelled fear as the rim of the wheel. The participants were given the opportunity to identify responses of churches, and priorities in overcoming SSDIM in the communities including education and awareness through various platforms, advocacy work in the communities, ending the stigmatisation of PLHIV and AIDS, incorporating in theological education and sustainable cascading of information to various levels in the church and ecumenical councils. The SAVE Approach (Safer Practices, Access to Treatment, Voluntary Counselling and Testing, Empowerment) was introduced as a more comprehensive approach to address the problem of HIV and AIDS.

'Safer Practices' refers to safer practices covering all the modes of transmission, for example, blood transfusions, and the use of condoms or sterile needles for injecting. 'Access to Treatment' refers to not just antiretroviral treatment (ART), but treatment for HIV-related infections as well as the provision of good nutrition to help adherence to ART, and clean water. It also refers to the need for all available pathological tests which can further inform treatment. 'Voluntary Counselling and Testing' (VCT) refers to HIV-related VCT. It speaks of the need to test regularly, and for the testing to be confidential. If one is positive, one could protect oneself and others, and take steps to live a healthy, productive, and positive life. If one knows one is negative, one could take the necessary steps to remain that way. 'Empowerment' entails education and advocacy. People need accurate information about HIV to make informed decisions and to protect themselves, their partners, and their children from HIV. Empowered people are able to challenge the stigma and discrimination that can make the lives of people with HIV so difficult.

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

In the session on 'Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges', various barriers including scientific, legal policy and procedure, religion and culture, social, government, partners and donors were discussed.

The three-day programme included a visit to four service-providing centres in Chiang Mai, namely, Ban Sabaay Foundation (HIV Shelter Home), CAREMAT (HIV Clinic

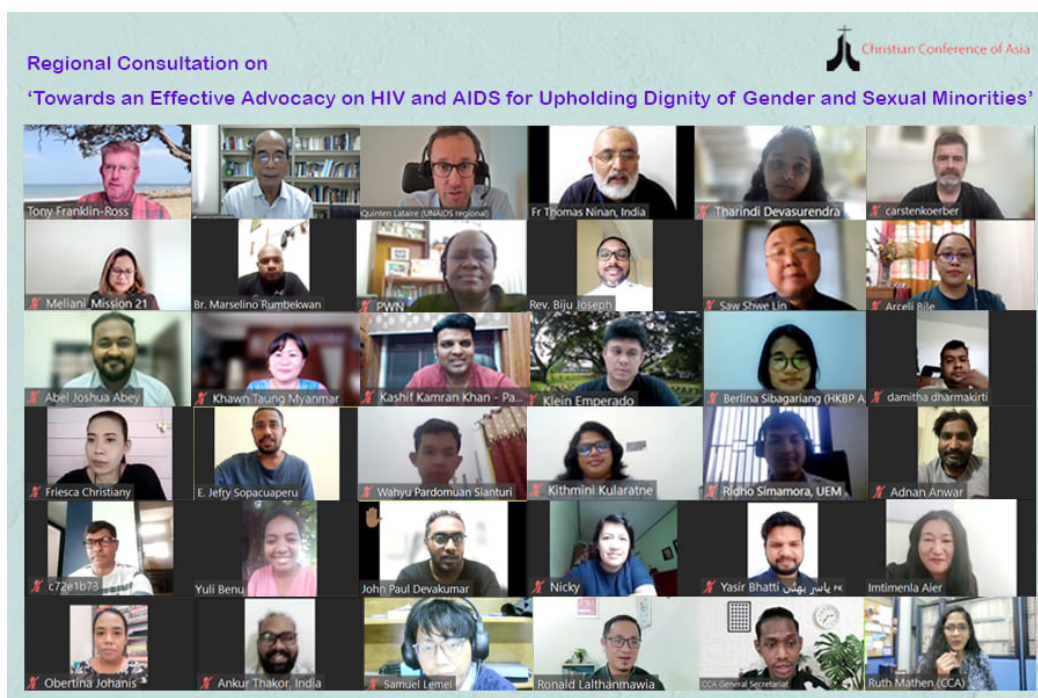
& Outreach), MPlus (MSM and Men's Health), and MAP Foundation (Migrant's Programme).

As an expected output of the capacity-building programme, the participants developed action plans to concretise their commitment to HIV and AIDS ministry through church-based programmes and activities.

Advocacy

Regional Consultation on 'Towards an Effective Advocacy on HIV and AIDS for Upholding Dignity of Gender and Sexual Minorities'

24–25 March 2022 | Online



Participants of the online Regional Consultation on 'Towards an Effective Advocacy on HIV and AIDS for Upholding Dignity of Gender and Sexual Minorities'

The Christian Conference of Asia organised two-day online Regional Consultation entitled 'Towards an Effective Advocacy on HIV and AIDS for Upholding Dignity of Gender and Sexual Minorities' from 24–25 March 2022. About thirty-one participants from different countries across Asia and beyond attended the online Consultation. The participants emphasised the

importance of addressing human sexuality in a comprehensive manner so as to initiate effective HIV programmes in churches.

Structural factors such as stigma, discrimination, and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and the criminalisation of same-sex practices, contribute to hindering the

availability, access, and uptake of HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services among gay men and men who have sex with men. The criminalisation of practices among vulnerable populations intersects with HIV and AIDS in multiple ways. Flawed public health perceptions may have once provided flimsy arguments in support of criminalisation. Today, however, there is overwhelming empirical evidence demonstrating the causal link between criminalisation and increased rates of HIV transmission. The global evidence is clear that public health is best served by removing discrimination and prejudice against vulnerable groups and thereby ensuring that the widest possible information regarding safe sex practices, health services, and HIV prevention and treatment measures is accessible to the people who need it most.

CCA acknowledges the importance of addressing the vulnerabilities of HIV and AIDS in the community. To combat the disease, it is important to address human sexuality and reproductive health and ensure the practice of safer sexual behaviours. Replacing discriminative laws with supportive policies can reduce the stigma experienced by PLHIVs and vulnerable groups. Challenging laws and addressing harmful social, sexual, and gender norms that increase the vulnerability of key populations to HIV are vital for effective HIV responses across the region.

Quinten Lataire, UNAIDS Asia Pacific, presented the first session on the session of an overview of legal barriers, particularly with HIV, gender and sexual minorities. He mentioned that HIV criminalisation violated human rights, including the rights to health, privacy, equality, and non-discrimination, and impeded HIV treatment and prevention. He also emphasised that those who live in countries that criminalise same-sex

relations are more than twice as likely to be living with HIV as those living in countries without such criminal penalties. Eighteen out of the thirty-eight UN countries still had the punitive law in Asia and the Pacific. He also spoke of studies that showed that transgender people who have experienced stigma in health care are three times more likely to avoid health care than transgender people who have not experienced stigma. He ended his presentation with three recommendations for faith-based organisations to listen, address stigma, and encourage testing.

In his session, Prof. Rev. Dr Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, from the Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana in Indonesia, highlighted the importance of reading the Bible in perspective and context. He mentioned that to have a deeper understanding of the context of diversity in human sexuality from the biblical perspective, we need to dwell on the relationship between religion and science. He also brought in the cultural context wherein the existence of diversity with regard to gender and sexuality must be reconsidered. He stressed the need to understand how all this is relevant to the approach to addressing these concerns in our own communities.

Tharindi Devasurendra, Project Manager of Youth Voices Count in Sri Lanka, explained in detail the spectrum of sexuality and gender. She mentioned that the societal construct of gender and sexuality has caused more harm to a person than uplifting their rights and dignity. Such stereotypes lead to aggressiveness and increased expectation which results in a negative outplay of emotions. She also encouraged the faith communities to 'do no harm' to anyone irrespective of the difference in virtues and principles.

Rev Tony Franklin-Ross, Methodist Church in New Zealand and Chairperson of the Ecumenical Relations, World

Methodist Council, spoke on the gender-transformative approaches within the HIV response, focusing on gender dimensions in HIV programming. He emphasised that the Christian response or understanding of sexuality needs to take account of the fullness of all these dimensions—balanced with a sense of mystery which God has given to human beings in sexuality as a whole. Like other aspects of creation, sexuality can be misused where people do not recognise or appropriately express personal responsibility. Ideas of what is sexually moral (in a right/wrong binary) are formed through personal and community values, to which faith systems are a contributing factor. Furthermore, gender-based responses should address questions of masculinity and its power which promotes men's and boys' participation in HIV response, in combating gender-based violence, and in defending human rights including gender minorities' rights.

Rev. Fr. Thomas Ninan, Christian Services Agency of the National Council of Churches in India, shared his experience in working with different sectors of the Church to build an inclusive community. He emphasised that the approach must be holistic in its nature and build the capacity of the leaders, lay, youth, and women in the Church. He also mentioned that introducing the topic in theological education is a foundation for future leaders to understand the subject from a broader perspective and a key instrument in building an inclusive community in the church.

The Consultation reinforced the need to have dialogue, open discussion, and deliberation to build a community where no one is left behind and where every individual becomes accountable for their rights and responsibilities.

National Consultation on 'Strengthening the Voices of the Youth in the Philippines for HIV Advocacy'

1 December 2022 | Cebu, the Philippines



Participants of the National Consultation on 'Strengthening the Voices of the Youth in the Philippines for HIV Advocacy'

On the occasion of World AIDS Day, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in collaboration with the Philippine Ecumenical Youth Council (KKKP) and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), organised a national Conference with representatives of

the churches across the Philippines on 'Strengthening the Voices of the Youth in the Philippines for HIV Advocacy'. The programme was held at the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP)–CENDET in Cebu City, the Philippines, on 1 December 2022.



World AIDS Day Observance at the National ATCHAA Consultation

Around sixty key leaders from the ecumenical youth movement attended the Conference, which aimed to revitalise churches' collaborative efforts in dealing with the recent uptick of HIV and AIDS transmissions in the Philippines.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNAIDS reported that the number of new infections in the Philippines increased by 327 percent. The alarming trend in the rise of infections is a stark reminder to the churches and ecumenical youth movement in the Philippines that their commitment to eliminating HIV and AIDS faces newer and more complex challenges.

Bishop Felician Tenchavez of the UCCP West Visayas Jurisdiction shared a biblical-theological reflection on the healing of the leper in Luke's gospel as well as Jesus' promise of abundant life. She emphasised

the fact that the reality of HIV and AIDS poses a big challenge to the redemptive and healing nature of the church as a faith community, comparing the leper from the text to people living with HIV and AIDS. She also mentioned that in dealing with people living with HIV and AIDS, even the church has succumbed to discrimination and stigma. People of the church may say that they are concerned with upholding the dignity of life because the gift of life is sacred and because, regardless of the HIV disease, their lives are sacred. She encouraged the ecumenical youth leaders as well as the churches to serve as change agents, thus promoting and protecting life and added that we are ambassadors and catalysts and to pave the way for them (PLHIV) to live abundantly.

Nica Bongco of the NCCP presented the context and situation of HIV and AIDS in

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

the Philippines, including data from the United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) indicating that the number of new infections in the Philippines increased by 327 percent by 2021, while the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic. In the same session, she explored the relationship between HIV, health, and human rights. She highlighted that when one's right to health is violated, it is impossible to live a life based on justice, peace, and truth. People living with HIV are severely deprived of their rights. She called upon the young Christians present to join them in living a life based on justice, peace, and truth.

Bongco led the participants in an interactive discussion on Stigma, Shame, Denial, Discrimination, Inaction, and Misaction (SSDDIM).

During a workshop session on 'HIV, Health and Human Rights: The Christian Youth Initiative', the ecumenical youth leaders narrated concrete plans for the continuation of HIV and AIDS advocacy in churches and communities around the Philippines which includes a proposed three-year programme on HIV and AIDS advocacy to be adopted by the Philippine Ecumenical Youth Council.

Dialogue with church and ecumenical youth leaders and advocacy networks, increased awareness and education, immersion at shelters, testing and treatment centres, interactions with people living with HIV and AIDS, peer training, providing direct services, and community-based ministry would all be part of the proposed programme. Coordination and collaboration with local churches, church youth organisations, and community stakeholders would be the bedrock of the plan to increase the effectiveness of campaigns and advocacies.

Key ecumenical youth leaders from the Philippines pinned each other with red ribbons during a special World AIDS Day commemorative liturgy that was held to close the sessions, symbolising their ongoing dedication to HIV and AIDS advocacy in churches and communities.

The CCA has been actively mobilising its member churches and councils to respond to the alarming trend of new HIV infections in Asia under the Action Together in Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) programme.



Appendices

CCA Programmes and Activities in 2022

No.	Programme/Activity	Date and Venue	No. of Participants	Ref. Number as per 2022 Programme Plan
1	National Consultation on 'Upholding Dignity and Rights of Children in a "New Normal" Era in the Philippines'	Online 1–2 March 2022	31	PD.5.1
2	Regional Consultation on 'Towards an Effective Advocacy on HIV and AIDS for Upholding Dignity of Gender and Sexual Minorities'	Online 24–25 March 2022	31	PD.SP. ATCHAA
3	Asia Regional Consultation on 'The Effects of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons'	Online 29–30 March 2022	30	PD.4.1
4	Southeast Asia Sub-Regional Consultation on 'Southeast Asian Churches Engagement with HIV and AIDS: Working Towards Informed Responses'	Online 2–4 August 2022	22	PD.SP. ATCHAA
5	Ecumenical Pastoral Solidarity Visit to Sri Lanka	Colombo, Sri Lanka 3–7 August 2022	4	BP.1
6	Young Ambassadors of Peace in Asia (YAPA)–2022	Chiang Mai, Thailand 7–14 August 2022	26	BP.4
7	Asia Sunday–2022	21 August 2022		EF.6.1
8	Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI)–2022	Chiang Mai, Thailand 19 September– 14 October 2022	24	EF.1
9	Ecumenical Women's Action Against Violence (EWAAV) in Timor Leste	Dili, Timor Leste 20–21 September 2022	35	BP.3.2

20 Report of Programmes and Activities

22 'God of Hope, Sustain Your Creation in Harmony'

10	Ecumenical Enablers' Training (EETA) in Timor Leste	Dili, Timor Leste 21–22 September 2022	30	EF.3.1
11	Asia Regional Consultation on 'Diakonal Ministry of the Church in Developing Effective Responses to Combat Human Trafficking in Asia'	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 28–30 September 2022	30	PD.4
12	Asia Regional Consultation on 'Health, Healing, and Wholeness of Life: Churches' Mission in Asia'	Chiang Mai, Thailand 10–12 October 2022	60	MU
13	Asia Regional Consultation on 'Ecumenical Diakonia, Church's Response to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia'	Chiang Mai, Thailand 24–26 October 2022	35	PD.6.1
14	Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence (EWAAV) in Sri Lanka	Colombo, Sri Lanka 11–15 November 2022	25	BP.3.1
15	Asia Regional Consultation on 'Towards Theological Education on Good Governance and Integrity Leadership'	Chiang Mai, Thailand 28–30 November 2022	35	PD.1.2
16	ATCHAA National Consultation on 'Strengthening the Voices of the Youth in the Philippines for HIV Advocacy'	Cebu City, Philippines 1 December 2022	60	PD.SP.ATCHAA
17	Biblical-Theological Bases on Human Dignity and Human Rights (Institute on Human Rights)	Colombo, Sri Lanka 4–11 December 2022	27	MU

Report of the CCA General Secretary to the Executive Committee Meeting–2022

Most respected members of the Executive Committee, Finance Committee and colleagues,

Once again, we are meeting on a virtual platform for this year's Executive Committee meeting. In normal circumstances, this should have been an in-person meeting. However, due to various reasons, it became inevitable for us to meet virtually this time as well. It is our hope and prayer that we will have an in-person meeting of the Executive and Finance Committees in March 2023.

Our meeting is taking place this time in the absence of Archbishop Willem T. P. Simarmata in our midst. The untimely and unexpected death of our dear Asian ecumenical and ecclesiastical leader Simarmata is a great loss for CCA; it is also a loss to the entire Indonesian churches and the people of North Sumatra irrespective of their religions. This report would be inadequate if I do not pay my tribute to the memory of the late Archbishop Simmermata at the outset of this meeting, as this happens to be the first Executive Committee meeting after his sad demise.

One of the most prominent leaders of the Asian churches and the modern Asian ecumenical movement, Archbishop (*Ephorus*) Simarmata was elected as the Moderator of the CCA at the 14th General Assembly of the CCA in May 2015, a position he served with capable and sincere leadership, especially in closely working together with me and the two other officers. He has been extremely helpful in shaping policies and guidelines for the future of the CCA ever since the CCA initiated its new programme structure by the end of 2015 and started implementing it since January 2016. We made several ambitious plans together with him including the preparations for CCA's 15th General Assembly, which he was hoping would be hosted in North Sumatra or North Sulawesi, in Indonesia.

I remember Bishop Simarmata's close association with the CCA since the early 1990s. He was an official delegate to the CCA Assembly held in 1995, and he participated at subsequent CCA Assemblies, as well as in many other major ecumenical events. I am personally aware of his contributions to CCA in vivid ways and the untiring leadership he provided in hosting and organising the 50th anniversary of the CCA which was held in Prapat in 2007. He was the General Secretary of the HKBP at that time, and subsequently, when he became the Ephorus of HKBP, the biggest Protestant church in Indonesia and the biggest among the whole CCA member churches in Asia, he came forward to accept the then CCA General Secretary's request to host the 14th General Assembly of CCA. I have fond memories of working together with him as CCA General Secretary under his guidance. I experienced him as a very dear friend, a guide, and a spiritual leader who treated me as his younger brother; he extended me all his support. I found him to be a very fine human being, who was pastoral in his approach and one who dealt with everyone in a true spirit of nobility. He personified charisma in his leadership there was a special grace radiating out from him. He mentored and inspired many young people in his church. Through his dealings and every action, he exemplified the message that dignity and honour are gifts from God. His contributions to the church and society in manifold ways will be remembered by the generations to come. His illustrious service spanned several decades, and he was known for his deep spirituality and commitment to ecumenism, as well as for his leadership at various levels. I am sure as members of the CCA Executive Committee all of us will always cherish and value our close friendship with him and will cherish his leadership.

On behalf of the CCA and our member constituencies, I conveyed our heartfelt condolences to the members of the bereaved family of Ephorus (Emeritus) Willem T.P. Simarmata and all members of the HKBP. When we received the news about his death, I was afflicted

with COVID-19 and was bedridden in Chiang Mai. I could not travel to Medan to attend his funeral, but our colleague, Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, travelled to Medan, participated in the funeral ceremony, and conveyed condolences to the family on behalf of the CCA Executive Committee. Later we organised an online condolence meeting which several of you attended. Bishop Simarmata's family members also attended the online meeting and his son spoke on the occasion.

In fact, several other church and ecumenical leaders also were called to eternity during the past three years while we were all living under lockdown situations and affected by COVID-19. We received information about the demises of some of them, but we came to know about the news of the death of several of our other friends in our ecumenical fraternity only very late. We remember their valuable contributions, we thank God for their life and witness. We believe, "...neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord". (Romans 8:38-39). Let us remember and pray for the life and witness of all those departed church leaders.

We Survived the COVID-19 Crisis by the Grace of God

Almost three years have passed since we started experiencing the impacts of the outbreak of COVID-19. Life in every sphere was paralysed for almost three years. The church and the ecumenical movement in every nook of the world have been faced with the innumerable and unexpected challenges of the pandemic that permeated all our lives. It has been an extremely difficult situation for millions of people around the world. The churches also have been facing countless problems for more than two years. In the midst of all such vulnerabilities and unprecedented situations, Asian churches also were desperate, but in many ways, they experienced the crises as opportunities. I had shared some of our own experiences in the past two EC meetings in 2020 and 2021. However, we are not able to share all that we have experienced or the several lessons we have learnt. Churches in Asia responded to the pandemic in manifold ways. The role of the churches in Asia in responding to the crises was recognised and appreciated at different times. CCA tried to evolve ecumenical responses and brought the church leaders together on common platforms during the past three years through virtual programmes focusing on the vulnerabilities and the COVID-19 situations from different contexts.

Radio Veritas Asia (RVA), a most prominent and the oldest media platform of the Roman Catholic Church, in a report about the content of one such virtual conference summarised what the Asian church leaders stated in one of the virtual conferences:

"The Christian churches in Asia are authentic lighthouses of hope and compassion in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. Churches live and play a crucial role in accompanying suffering people and communities while carrying a message of hope and mercy. Churches are provoked by the suffering of countless people who are influenced by the spread of the new coronavirus. The strength of mind, faith, hope, and constant trust in God inspires us to glorify God in this difficult time. God feels our pain, sees our tears and takes care of his people...The body, which brings together the major Christian denominations in Asia, including the Catholic Church, has launched a series of video conferences and webinars to discuss relevant issues and challenges caused by the global crisis..."

In the midst of adversities and vulnerabilities, we tried to accompany our constituencies in different ways although those were inadequate and insignificant when compared to the contributions of many churches in our constituencies across Asia. But the concerns we expressed, the contacts we maintained and the small supports we channelled were

appreciated from different corners. During my recent visit to Timor Leste, our member church in Timor Leste, the IPTL repeatedly recognised CCA's role and how they felt the warmth of CCA's accompaniment during times of isolation and helplessness.

When the coronavirus swept through our lives, it toppled everything—ongoing lifestyles, social interactions, health systems and medical treatments, economic life, fundamental institutional arrangements, communities, and everyday family life. It created divisions and compartmentalisations in our socioeconomic class structures. When we were faced with limitations and restrictions, when we had to live amidst extreme difficulties, we were looking for some help and alternative ways of dealing with difficulties or finding ways for our needs to be met.

Now we live in an improved situation, although one cannot say that we are totally liberated from all those difficulties we have been facing due to the pandemic that conquered us and paralysed our lives. However, a question that comes to our mind is: will there be a “new post-pandemic normal” soon or a full realisation of a “normal situation”? Will the Church and the ecumenical movement continue to be involved in the mission and witness a new post-pandemic normal situation?

Is Asia Facing a “Polycrisis”?

It is a fact that a trend of precarity is increasingly evident in the world. The worry that is pervasive everywhere in the world is that the new age of precarity looms ever larger. Historian Adam Tooze argues that the planet is now facing a state of “polycrisis,” Events that “would once have seemed fanciful are now facts.” In the polycrisis the shocks are unequal, but they interact so that the whole is even more overwhelming than the sum of the parts”. Asia, where a large majority of the world's people live, is not an exemption to precarity as such a trend of precarity is becoming more evident in many Asian countries. The increasing cost of living has driven public anger and unrest in countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Laos, and Indonesia. There are several reasons for the debacle in the economic development of Asian countries. China's growing economic influence and power in the region is a further source of tension, including controversies over Beijing-backed infrastructure projects in countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Pakistan. China's overall growth rate is falling now, which is threatening fallout across Asia. According to the World Bank forecast, rises in China's GDP would this year be lagging behind the rest of the countries in the region, excluding Japan, for the first time in decades. This is likely to have an impact on all those in Asia who work to supply goods to China or consume products from it.

Another disturbing trend in Asia is rising hunger and growing inequality. According to the UN, more than 424 million people in the region were undernourished last year, up from 398 million in 2020 and 340 million in 2019. South Asia had the highest number of people affected by conflict in 2021. The growing inequality in Asia today is more than a moral matter. An important dimension often underplayed is the uneven distribution of wealth. While inequality between nations has in many cases fallen during the past few decades, the divide within countries has often grown. A UN survey in 2020 estimated that 71 percent of the world's population lived in nations where inequality had risen during the previous 30 years. These included China and India, Asia's two largest countries by far.

The age of precarity has brought multiple interlocking and unwelcome crises, with Asia central to many of them. People's growing sense of insecurity is more evident in Asia. One is the impact of loneliness in high-income countries such as South Korea, and Japan where a third of all households in 2021 were single-person—an all-time high. Another is the effect of family separation in nations, such as the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, where large numbers of people relocate internally or migrate overseas for work.

While we were focusing our attention on the COVID-19 situation for more than two years, several other emerging situations in the world or situations that are emergent around Asia have become less important, despite the serious implications. The emerging situations in the geopolitical and socioeconomic arena did not attract our attention during the closed-down situation or even after the restoration of normalcy. A major matter of concern in Asia today is whether the changing scenario of Asia's geopolitics will help in maintaining peace and security. Although the United States of America says it does not seek a world of rival power blocs, many countries fear that the rivalry between big powers is leading to a new cold war. If that happens, it will have repercussions in Asia too. In Asia, the USA's effort to constrain China relies heavily on its network of formal alliances and budding partnerships, and bilateral defence treaties. In 2023, the USA wants to strengthen the "connective tissue" between its allies to the east and west. America has tried to overlay its alliances in the Indo-Pacific with ad hoc partnerships: trilateral missile-defence exercises with Japan and South Korea; naval exercises with Japan and Australia; and multifaceted Quad collaboration with Japan, Australia, and India on everything from vaccines to maritime piracy. Some new enthusiasm that has developed these days envisages strengthened linkages among European and Asian allies. Under the Australia-UK and US (AUKUS) deal, America and Britain will provide Australia with nuclear-propelled submarines and will collaborate in other fields such as cyber-security and hypersonic missiles. Some other countries are thinking of various options to expand the G7 Group of industrialised democracies into a "G12" by adding South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as NATO and the EU. There are other groups emerging including "I2U2" (linking Israel, India, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States) to develop technology for food security and clean energy. This is, in turn, an offshoot of the American-sponsored Abraham accords between Israel and several Arab states spurred by the fear of Iran.

As U.S. hegemony is not as strong as in the past, China is now more confident in seeking to challenge the status quo in several border regions. Recent tensions between China and Taiwan, however, have underlined the potential for the "frozen" conflicts in Asia to become hot again. Many fear that the long-simmering confrontations could once again become great power conflagrations. Different Asian countries are now opening their doors for the US to return to a trade deal known as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). At the same time, China and Russia are building up their own clubs. Membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is growing. So is that of the BRICS, a group of large emerging economies. From all these indications we can understand the precarious geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-strategic trends in Asia.

Almost every Asian country is affected by multiple problems. When we meet annually it is also our task to think about and reflect on the emerging contexts in which we live and witness, especially the situation in each country where our member churches and councils are located and the struggles in which they are directly and indirectly involved. Several instances were reported by our member churches and councils in recent times and at the same time, we were trying to express solidarity with them.

The situation in Myanmar gets less attention despite innumerable problems in the country. The country is wrought with devastation and the destruction of the improvements in quality of living that many around the country had begun to enjoy since the democratic reform was introduced. The conflict that has spiralled into bloody conflicts since the military removed Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in February 2021 is now destroying peace and security. More than 2,400 people have been killed in the past two years, according to the monitoring group, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, while the UN children's agency estimates that one million people have been displaced. The rampant militarisation, indiscriminate attacks on civilians and human rights violations are reported to be horrendous. Tatmadaw (Burmese Army) forces are systematically engaged in committing human rights violations through "clearance operations", combing areas in search of members of armed groups and arresting, torturing, and summarily

executing individuals, as well as looting and destroying property. Armed clashes and attacks are regularly occurring in each state, region, and union territory; and in around 220 out of 330 townships. People across the country live amidst unending nightmares. The news we received in early November about an attack by Myanmar's military on the Kachin Theological Seminary in Kutkai, Shan State on 3 November was further disturbing. Tatmadaw (Burmese Army) fired artillery shells and injured four students in the dormitory. The attack comes after an October 30 shelling that partially destroyed a Baptist church and hall in Momauk township, Kachin State. Subsequently, the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral of the Roman Catholic Church in Pekhonn town in the Kayah state was hit for a second time by the military on 9 November 2022. The WCC and the CCA General Secretaries issued joint letters and statements twice in 2021, and again now on 12 November 2022. I have been discussing with churches in Myanmar and WCC how to respond ecumenically to address the peace and security concerns in Myanmar. Several Myanmar church leaders were here at the CCA headquarters last month and this month to attend CCA programmes. We are now exploring the possibility of convening a meeting of representatives of Asian and global churches and ecumenical organisations to discuss ecumenical responses to the Myanmar situation.

Pakistan continues to face conflicts and violence in many parts of the country leading to chronic instability. The army is back at the centre of Pakistan's politics with the appointment of a key military figure as the head of the Army. But Pakistan's state of political uncertainty does not end there. The consequences for the country's democracy are likely to be disastrous. Protest marches broke out all over Pakistan immediately after the attack on former Prime Minister Khan brought utter chaos to the country. Although the planned protest rallies are stalled for a while, the conflict might erupt again. At the same time, Anti-Terror operations along the Afghan border have led to years of population displacement and Pakistan is now home to over 2.5 million displaced people, mostly from crisis-ridden Afghanistan. With large numbers of refugees, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, difficult economic and political conditions, inflation, and increasingly devastating extreme environment-related problems such as the catastrophic floods experienced two months ago, Pakistani people face many challenges. Christians as a minority living in the midst of rising Islamic extremism experience intolerance in their day-to-day life. At the same time deep divisions, and the lack of good governance, accountability and better stewardship among the church leaders are serious matters to be addressed by the Pakistan churches themselves. Several church leaders from Pakistan also were at the CCA headquarters during the last month and the current month for different programmes organised by CCA. They expressed their disappointment, concern, and anguish about ongoing court cases, power struggles, and competition among the church leaders to amass wealth through corrupt practices, especially by selling church properties. The lay faithful in Pakistan are deeply disappointed and concerned about the lack of credibility and integrity of church leaders in their country.

Sri Lanka faces the worst economic crisis in its history now. The dramatic fuel shortages that accompanied mass protests in Sri Lanka about three months ago have eased a little bit now, but for millions of poor Sri Lankans, the worsening economic situation has become a nightmare. Sri Lankan economists fear the economic situation could deteriorate rapidly without action by foreign creditors, placing the basic needs of millions of people in further jeopardy. To stabilise the economy, international creditors should agree to restructure Sri Lanka's debt so the country can secure final approval for an IMF loan and financing from other global agencies. Food price inflation was over 85 percent last month. This month, the UN renewed a humanitarian appeal, stating that 28 percent of the population faces food insecurity and that the poverty rate this year has doubled. The President has suppressed demonstrations and has used the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) to detain student activists. He has even warned that he will again declare a state of emergency and deploy security forces in the event of major protests. It was at the height

of the protests by the Aragalaya movement that CCA organised a pastoral solidarity team visit to Sri Lanka and met with leaders of the CCA member churches, NCC Sri Lanka, civil society leaders, members of parliament, political and human rights activists, trade union leaders, and others involved in the struggle.

All these three country situations I have mentioned here warrant serious attention on the part of Asian churches and the ecumenical movement, especially in terms of humanitarian aid and support. The CCA or the Asian churches as a united body has no capacity or mechanisms to extend support. The global ecumenical family's humanitarian support mechanism, ACT Alliance, has not been taking these situations seriously and churches in these three countries are no longer in a situation to help themselves to be engaged in the much-needed humanitarian assistance. It is in this situation that Asian churches need to think seriously about pooling resources within Asia as part of their ecumenical diakonia and come forward to extend support. Many churches in Asia have diaconal missions and they are deeply involved in their local contexts. Some other churches have a strong commitment to engaging in humanitarian aid assistance beyond the borders of their countries. This was evident through their engagements in Ukraine, Palestine and some other countries beyond Asia. CCA, together with WCC, organised two regional consultations on Ecumenical Diakonia. As an outcome of the discussions in those consultations, we are now planning to organise two consultations on Ecumenical Diakonia in Colombo, Sri Lanka and in Jakarta, Indonesia with wider participation.

Programmes: implementation and forthcoming activities

When it came to travel or moving around, the last two years were a time of great difficulty. We were totally cut off from our meetings and fellowships and faced hurdles on the path to the implementation of our planned and scheduled activities and programmes. All in-person programmes starting from April 2020 to May 2022 were postponed except for two national-level programmes in between. The prevailing travel restrictions detached us from directly interacting with our constituencies. In other words, we faced more than two years of total detachment, disappointments, and alienation from each other. Across the last two years, during our virtual EC meetings, I reported on how CCA had been functioning in the context of the "new normal". At that time, I reported that starting from the end of March in 2020, the CCA office in Chiang Mai was under lockdown and we strictly followed the Thai government's instructions and guidelines as well as the restrictions in the university campus where we are located. For some months in between, the office was functional on a part-time basis, but we have been fully back to normal only since June this year. Relaxation in travel restrictions and entry to Thailand became effective from 1 October 2022. This has helped us to organise more offline, in-person programmes instead of virtual programmes. During this period, we were able to organise a total of twenty-seven programmes and another one, a week-long training for young pastors and church workers, will be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 5 to 11 December 2022. We had organised fifteen online programmes since the last Executive Committee meeting in August 2021 to May 2022: from April 2020 to May 2022, a total of forty-six virtual programmes were conducted. Those programmes included two month-long programmes, the Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI), and in both those AEI courses, we were fortunate to have international faculty to provide leadership in facilitating the sessions. We also had the Institute on Human Rights for church workers, which lasted for 10 days. As I mentioned last time, staff members had to engage themselves fully and devote the same level of time to the preparations of each programme. It was true that virtual programmes helped us reduce the costs or overhead expenses, but we missed the real value of face-to-face interactions, ecumenical fellowship, and solidarity. More details and narrative programme and activities reports will be shared at this EC meeting.

We must spend our time, energy, and financial resources in 2023 mainly for the 15th General Assembly.

However, we are also expected to implement several programmes and activities in addition to the Assembly and pre-Assembly events. It is also envisaged that all programmes and activities we are planning to organise will emphasise the Assembly theme. Several issues and themes we have identified now will connect with the Assembly theme and all such programmes will be completed by June as the Assembly will take place in September 2023.

Asian Church Leaders' Consultation

It is the need of the hour to discuss and reflect on some most important issues related to the life and witness of the Asian churches and the ecumenical movement prior to the 15th General Assembly of CCA. Ecumenical Diakonia and Challenges of Asian Churches, Consensus Decision-Making, Good Governance and Integrity Leadership in Asian Churches, and the 15th Assembly theme are to be reflected upon, prior to the Assembly. The plan is to organise an Asian Church Leaders' Conference with the participation of heads of churches/general secretaries of member churches and general secretaries of NCCs; a total of about eighty participants are expected to attend. The proposed Consultation will have an expanded agenda to discuss issues such as Good Governance and Integrity Leadership in Asian Churches and Consensus Decision-Making in Asian Churches in addition to a major focus on 'Ecumenical Diakonia in Asia'. We have in principle decided to initiate and promote the need for consensus decision-making in Asian churches. However, due to the COVID-19 situation, we could not continue our initiative and now we need to move forward in that direction, especially in the context of the 15th General Assembly.

Artificial Intelligence and Post-Humanism

We have planned and scheduled an international Consultation on Artificial Intelligence and Post-Humanism, which will be held most probably in May 2023 in South Korea. Again, this theme is very much integral to the Assembly theme, "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation", and the sub-themes: 'Harmony with Creation', 'Attaining Life in Its Fullness', and 'Affirming the Will of God'.

As the sweeping societal changes taking place in the post-pandemic situation are taking the world towards greater inequality, rising authoritarianism and rampant misinformation, we find ourselves becoming too dependent on technologies. Over the last two decades, people's relationship with technology deepened as larger segments of the population come to rely more on digital connections for work, education, health care, daily commercial transactions and essential social interactions. As a result, we had to live with what has been described as a "tele-everything" world. On the other hand, those who have had less access to digital tools and less training or aptitude for exploiting them had to face difficulties during this period. Technological advancements or changes eliminated the jobs of many. At the same time, mega-technological companies started exploiting their market advantages and mechanisms such as Artificial intelligence (AI) in ways that seem likely to further erode the privacy and autonomy of those who are availing of such facilities. Many have now started worrying about significant damage to social stability. There is still a general perception and hope that life will be better in a world that would be built on the basis of 'tele-everything'.

The proposed Consultation on 'Artificial Intelligence and Post-Humanism' will be an opportunity for the representatives of churches to ponder together these complex realities. Artificial Intelligence has the capability to handle issues ranging from environmental disasters to financial crises, medical issues, crime, and appalling living standards. It is also increasingly evident that AI brings significant benefits to the economy, industry, agriculture, environment, social and medical processes, and the rest of our society as well. Post-humanism is the idea that humanity can be transformed, transcended, or eliminated either by technological advances or the evolutionary process, and the artistic,

scientific, or philosophical practices which reflect this belief. In today's cultural situation, it is almost impossible to have clearly defined borders between scientific concepts and terms in everyday discourse. Considering the proliferation of technology in everyday life, transforming the very cognitive capacities of the human mind (especially through changing the ways people experience the physical world), this situation can be seen as significant if we want to discuss 'intelligence,' 'mind,' 'cognition', and their relevance. From a Christian ethical and moral point of view, we need to look into some of these matters more attentively.

Programme Thrusts

The five-year strategic programme plan and programme priorities introduced with effect from 2016 are the basis of our ongoing programme thrusts. The Assembly will review our programmes and the new programme structure developed after the last Assembly, and the Assembly will give advice for setting programme directions and new priorities which normally happens at every General Assembly. I am pleased to report that we were able to organise over 90 percent of the programmes and activities we had planned and scheduled as part of the five-year strategic programme plan; from 2016 to 2020. In addition to these programmes, we initiated several additional programmes from time to time based on some emerging issues and concerns. We shall plan a new strategic programme direction for the post-Assembly period after the 15th Assembly.

Programme Evaluation

An update on the progress of a programme evaluation process was presented at the last Executive Committee. You might recall that the EC took the decision at its meeting in 2019 for the evaluation process to be initiated. The EC approved the terms of reference for the CCA programme evaluation and appointed two external evaluators- Mr Leo Bashyam and Ms Helen Monisha Sarker. The evaluation process commenced on 30 September 2019. The survey was progressing well for some time with the original plan of presenting the draft report to the EC and the GA in September 2020. The evaluators had started their work and attended various programmes of CCA in different countries and directly interviewed and interacted with the participants. They were able to conduct a number of telephone interviews with participants of different programmes, they spent time at CCA headquarters reviewing all relevant documents—including annual Programme Reports, Minutes of Executive Committee meetings, Programme Committee meetings, and reports of other sub-committees, and reports of various activities and programmes since 2015, Finance Reports, and CCA policies and guidelines, etc. However, the COVID-19 situation, especially the restriction of travel and the closure of the CCA office as well as the offices of member churches and councils in various countries, stalled the evaluation process. These details were reported at the last meeting of the EC. Now the evaluation process must be continued, and the task must be completed before the next Assembly as we are expecting the report to be presented to the Assembly in September 2023. A question we need to address in this regard at this stage is whether should we limit the period of evaluation for five years as we originally decided, which is from 2016 to 2020, or now give an additional mandate to cover the period for evaluation from 2016 to 2023, so as to include the programmes and activities conducted even during the COVID-19 situation. We will be having a meeting with the evaluators next week to work out certain practical details of the resumption of the evaluation process. It is expected that this Executive Committee will discuss the possibility of covering the period of evaluation of the implementation of programmes, especially the virtual programmes carried out during the COVID-19 period, and decisions based on the discussions will have to be conveyed to the evaluators.

CCA Property Development

The plans for CCA's property development have been a pending item for quite a long time. Our earlier plans and discussions in previous Executive Committee meetings, and

subcommittee meetings as well as our earlier decisions to commence the construction of the CCA office building and complex have not yet materialised due to various reasons. The Executive Committee meeting in November 2020 resolved to support the recommendations of the Finance Committee to develop property on 1/4th of the land owned by CCA in Chiang Mai and authorised the General Secretary to develop plans for the office building. Last year I reported that the COVID-19 situation is not congenial for any new initiative now, and as such, we did not follow up on this matter. This year also I can only report that there was no progress in terms of following up on the plan and earlier decisions. I am not confident enough at this stage to initiate the implementation of the earlier decision and plans for the office building. Our main partner and member church in Thailand is the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT). Whatever we plan and initiate regarding this building project should be implemented with the support of CCT. My observation and conclusion at this stage are that the leaders of CCT did not demonstrate a sense of ownership or sense of belonging as they were fully busy with their own regular official businesses. A positive sign for future collaboration we can anticipate now is the fact that a new team of leaders for the next four years, starting from January 2023, has been elected. We need to continue our discussion with the new leadership on all matters related to the building plan and property development.

CCA's 15th General Assembly

We revisited the original plan and decision of the Executive Committee meeting in 2019 and decided to review the proposed dates and venue in light of the travel restrictions, mandatory quarantine or isolation requirements, and the health and safety of all delegates. The Executive Committee noted the inability to hold the Assembly in 2020 and discussed the possibility of shifting the venue of the Assembly from India to another country in the context of the increasing travel restrictions and the widespread infections in India at that time. The EC authorised the General Secretary to make the necessary inquiries with a view to holding the 15th General Assembly in May–June 2022. The former Moderator, the late Bishop Simarmata, and I discussed various options to hold the Assembly in Indonesia and he was discussing this with the churches in North Sumatra and North Sulawesi. In 2021 we decided to postpone the Assembly to 2023.

After the passing away of Bishop Simarmata, as we did not find much enthusiasm in going back to the proposal of holding the Assembly in North Sumatra, we had to think of other options. I have visited certain new venues in and around Chiang Mai together with colleagues and we explored the possibility of holding the Assembly in Chiang Mai. First of all, in terms of budget, Chiang Mai is not an attractive venue for CCA. Second, we cannot expect the proper support needed for the Assembly from the local church. In this situation, again we revisited our original decision of holding the Assembly in Kerala, India. I wrote initially to five member churches of CCA that have a large presence in Kerala; among the five churches, four of them have their headquarters in Kerala. Subsequently, I met with the heads of four churches and explored the possibility of sticking to our original plan. They welcomed the idea and offered their support to organise the Assembly in Kerala, India. The venue proposed now is Kottayam instead of Trivandrum. There are many advantages to a venue in Kottayam, but there are certain disadvantages also. With the help of some church leaders, I visited the place, visited hotels, possible venues for meetings and pre-Assembly events, etc. More details will be shared when we will take up this agenda item.

Will There Be a Post-Pandemic Normal Soon?

For two years that have just gone by the pandemic was the force shaping the immediate future, but now, the main driver is the impact of the war in Ukraine. We have earlier noted how the world has already started to contend with the conflict's impact on geopolitics and security; high inflation; chaos in energy markets; and China's uncertain post-pandemic

path. This being the case, it is not surprising for us to wonder whether unpredictability is the new normal and if there is no getting away from it.

The question before us as the Church and ecumenical community is how are going to cope with the post-pandemic situation. When churches closed down during the pandemic and started arranging online worship services, people used to attend the worship services at home while sitting in front of TV screens or laptops or mobile phones. Now with the return of opportunities for us to freely attend worship services in our churches without restrictions, the free movement of parishioners is once again encouraged. But the irony is that the number of churchgoers has decreased and church life has become less active in many contexts. During my recent visits to CCA member churches in the Philippines, several church leaders shared with me their anxiety about whether more and more people will continue to prefer sitting at home on Sunday mornings and watching online Sunday services. This is a matter of concern for churches in different Asian countries. This is an indication of what was predicted earlier that the COVID-19 pandemic would profoundly influence the way in which the world experienced life and the situation in which people find themselves in isolation for such a long time. The reaction to the pandemic now calls for a new understanding of how rebuilding societies and communities, including church life, should take place in the future. This is an opportunity for us to view the future possibilities of new relations in the post-pandemic situation.

When I was quarantining in my apartment in Chiang Mai after being affected by COVID-19 I got the opportunity to read and understand varied Biblical exegeses related to the COVID-19 crisis in the world. All those exegeses that I went through focused on several questions related to the pandemic, and indicated how a new situation will emerge after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Questions also were posed by the exegetists on how the church would respond to the situation that would emerge post-COVID-19. What will be done and what will be the future of the church after this pandemic? How will the Church respond to challenges in the post-COVID-19 era? One of those exegeses was about the response of the Jewish community to the situation that arose after the siege of Jerusalem in 587-586BC, when the Babylonians took Jerusalem, destroyed the First Temple and burned down the city. The small settlements surrounding the city, and those close to the western border of the kingdom, were destroyed as well. The catastrophic destructions of the Temple in Jewish history led to different reactions. Although they left a serious mark on all of Israel's future endeavours, and the prophets warned the people of the forthcoming disasters, they also proclaimed hope, even after the destruction. Some Jews reacted to it by forming close-knit communities and by deepening their commitment to the Torah. It remained a serious challenge to their faith and community life. They carefully studied the prophets to understand the implications of the destruction of the temples. The question of how Christians regarded the destruction of the Temple was also interpreted there. In certain other articles that I read, aspects of the Christian understanding of the destruction of the Temple were dealt with. In the Gospels, the destruction of the Temple is clearly linked to the fact that Jesus foresaw it. Jesus foretold the terrible situation of the demise of the Temple and declared that his body would be the new Temple; new life is possible in Him and in the coming of the Kingdom. Some exegetes link the cursing of the fig tree by Jesus to the destruction of the temple, but others see it as a general warning to the Jewish people of their need to honour God. The resurrection of Jesus is regarded as the rebuilding of the new temple in his body. The exegetes interpreted in this way that after the COVID-19 pandemic, believers as servants of the Lord have to build up the church and empower the community of faith again. This should be done on the basis of Jesus the crucified and resurrected Lord. The church has a huge task in this regard, not only in proclaiming Jesus as our only comfort in life and death but also in the commitment to the building up of the community in the post-COVID-19 world.

It is being evident in our everyday situation that the Church has a profound influence on communities in most Asian countries. We can see from history how Jewish communities,

in particular, had to live in new relations after the destruction of the temple. The Jerusalem Temple held a central position in the relationship between the Jewish people and their God. The destruction of their temple created a major theological challenge for them. Their problem was how to continue the religion and maintain their identity as a people without the Jerusalem Temple. They were toiling with their questions and ideas on an urgent and essential need to discover what could serve as a substitute for the Temple, so long as the latter remained destroyed and unusable. Although the Temple was destroyed, the people of Israel found a new way of dealing with it. The Temple was viewed as an earthly pattern of God's heavenly kingdom. They, therefore, began to establish a community of faith amidst the challenges they faced. Their emphasis on family and a community of faith led to a new relationship with God after the destruction of the temple. This reminds us that the Church has a special task in empowering communities to be in new relations. The Church, deeply involved in diaconal ministries, should be concerned about the inequality that is seen in the post-pandemic era. It is imperative for the church to be more engaged in its diaconal mission and concentrate all its energies on the task of helping each other. It is becoming clear that the COVID-19 pandemic will have long-term consequences. Many people in several countries will never fully recover from the negative effects of COVID-19. This is an opportunity for the Church and the ecumenical movement in Asia to live out the new relation with God. This is an opportunity for the Asian churches to constantly engage the people and communities in the quest to find new hope; finding hope for all of God's creation even amidst despair. Believers should be prepared to be involved in the community, in order to bring about new life, renewal and restoration of the creation. The church and the ecumenical movement should proclaim that Jesus is the One who can give hope to the world; his body is the new temple of God and the church in Him is also a new temple of God.

Towards Hope in Action

As we now embark on a mission to prepare for the 15th General Assembly, let us help members of our churches and networks to carry this message of hope amidst despair; hope about the renewing and restoring spirit of God for all creation. Our prayer is "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation". Apostle Paul discusses the concept in Romans 8:19-25 that we, as creations and children of God, are subjected to our frailties in hope—in essence, hope for the repair of all our defects and the renewal of our damaged bodies upon our adoption and redemption. But he also implies in verses 20-22 that the "whole creation," seemingly the entire physical world around us—the rocks, the vegetation, and the animals—all have this same hope. Hope for Creation is a creative celebration of love, solidarity, and hope for God's creation. Paul reminds us again: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope." (Romans 8:20). Let our prayers, meditations, reflections, and statements lift up the message of love and hope for God's creation.

Let us be sustained by the hope for a post-pandemic normal soon.



Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary

2 December 2022

CCA Executive Committee Members 2015–2021

Officers

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Archbishop Willem T. P. Simarmata (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan in Indonesia)
(till 17 June 2022)

Acting Moderator

Rt. Rev. Dhiloraj Canagasabey (Church of Ceylon) (from 2 December 2022)

Vice Moderator

Rev. Diana Tana (New Zealand Maori Council of Churches)

Acting Vice Moderator

Rt. Rev. Reuel Norman Marigza (United Church of Christ in the Philippines)
(from 2 December 2022)

Treasurer

Augustine Dipak Karmakar (Church of Bangladesh)

General Secretary

Dr Mathews George Chunakara (Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India)

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Rt. Rev. Dhiloraj Canagasabey	(Church of Ceylon)
Huang Shin-Yi	(Presbyterian Church in Taiwan)
Ithrana Lawrence	(Council of Churches in Malaysia)
Rev. Kim Jong-goo	(Korean Methodist Church)
Rev. Kingphet Thammavong	(Lao Evangelical Church)
Rev. Moises Antonio da Silva	(Protestant Church in Timor Leste)
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Bishop P. C. Singh	(National Council of Churches in India)
Rt. Rev. Reuel Norman Marigza	(United Church of Christ in the Philippines)
Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian	(Armenian Orthodox Church in Iran)
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Supaporn Yarnasarn	(Church of Christ in Thailand)
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Dr Tong Wing Sze	(Hong Kong Christian Council)
Win Htut Thar Kyi	(Myanmar Baptist Convention)
Rev. Kim Kyrie	(Anglican Church in Korea)
	Programme Committee Chairperson

CCA Programme Committee Members 2015–2022

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Kaythi Min Din	(Myanmar Council of Churches)
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Tso Hiu-tung, Jessica	(Hong Kong Christian Council)
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