



## Statement of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Pre-Assembly (AEYA)

### *'We Have a Vision of Heaven on Earth'*

26–28 September 2023 | Vimalagiri, Kottayam, India

*"But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 1:7-8)*

(1) We, ecumenical youth from different countries in Asia, gathered for the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) organised by the Christian Conference of Asia in the city of Kottayam in India's Kerala state, on 25–28 September 2023.

(2) The previous AEYA, held in 2018, called on the CCA to "organise AEYA at least once in five years," appreciating the fruitfulness of spaces in which young Christians are reminded of their ability and power to analyse issues and determine solutions in collaboration with experts, victims and survivors, among others. Five years, various political upheavals and a pandemic later, the AEYA has remained a platform for young ecumenists to address problems and challenges concerning and frustrating them as individuals, and as members of church and society.

(3) Called from 12 countries and territories under the theme, "Asian Youth Affirming Renewal and Restoration of God's Creation," we brought with us stories from different faiths and spiritualities, cultures, ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, sexualities and more—some from our very own lives and the lives of those whom we consider friends and family, others from the vulnerable peoples with whom we express solidarity. These are narratives of suffering and survival, of hope and despair, of tragedy and victory, of gloom and festivity, amid the realities of a climate crisis that prevents the flourishing of a full and dignified life for all—concerns that we considered and discussed at AEYA.

(4) As the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia gathers, the AEYA participants acknowledge the urgent need for renewal and restoration in God's Creation, including humanity as part of God's design. Through prayer, reflection, learning, and dialogue, we found the trouble and despair that overwhelm today's young people but also found glimmers of hope in those among us whose faith drives them beyond helplessness into agency: into concern and activism for social and environmental justice and compassion for fellow humans and the rest of Creation emanating from Christ-like radical love.

(5) Inspired by youth in the Asian region who struggle for a vision of heaven on earth, and who have been made new by faith in Christ to partake in the divine mission of renewal and restoration, we pray:

### **God, Renew Us in Your Spirit**

(6) The youth of Asia find that many people undervalue our capacities and capabilities. In societies, we are often ordered around, people perceiving us as inexperienced or unprepared, and thinking we could not stand by ourselves or contribute valid ideas. Assuming we will have our day sometime soon,

they often dismiss or altogether neglect our thoughts, feelings, and opinions. The Church has been no different, relegating us to “reserves” who must begin in the lowest rungs and should stay behind others until our time comes.

(7) But history has shown that youth taking leading roles in the contexts where they are planted have positively disrupted communities, forcing difficult conversations into the light, and helping communities transform. God also chose youth like Jeremiah, Timothy, and Esther as leaders in Biblical times. Churches must take heed and see young faithfuls’ vital role in the church, not only as the future of the church but as partakers of God’s mission now—one with the rest of God’s children. We would like the CCA General Assembly to allow the young generation to be part of the pursuit of church growth in Asia; to contribute to the adaptation of the churches to changing times, passing generations and diverse contexts; to be examples for youths across the globe.

(8) Hope, energy, and idealism may lead to criticism of church structures and policies; but churches must take criticisms for self-reflection and evaluation and pray for humility and wisdom to discern which ones could lead to better life, work, and witness. As such, the church must equip more young people for Christ-like leadership and expand the decision-making table to accommodate more youth. While we appreciate the concern for the youth, young Christians everywhere would much prefer churches that worry *with us, not just about us*.

(9) May churches be renewed so they become worthy signposts heralding our vision of heaven on earth to the rest of the world.

## **God, Restore the Creation**

(10) Ecumenical youth today, like young people in other arenas of discourse, do not simply ask for representation. They seek values that matter to them. They call for greater inclusiveness across all the structures of the Church, down to the congregations; a readiness to bring unconventional or varied siblings in humankind and the rest of Creation into the fold, understanding that they are brought into existence by a mighty God who “creates diversities,” as noted by AEYA–2018.

(11) AEYA participants also espouse a perspective of God as an active creator. This unlocks a sustainable view of Creation that is holistic, interrelated, and cosmic; not partial, fragmented, and androcentric. The Church should be an advocate not only for order among human beings, but in the whole of Creation.

(12) AEYA–2023 places a specific emphasis on the climate crisis, but we find this global occurrence to be exacerbated by and contributing to issues of unpeace, displacement, and inequity, among others. In order for more church youth to respond to the groaning of Creation, the church must ensure that it has ministries open to the youth that go out to society, among the victims of climate-induced disasters and climate refugees and for the conservation of plants and animals endangered because of human intrusion and distressed habitats, among others. These programmes must address adaptation and resilience, safeguards ensuring people would not be caught up in endless cycles of trauma and devastation. These also include reforms in land distribution, indigenous peoples’ rights, and equitable and sustainable industrialisation, among others.

(13) With God and the rest of the household joining us in this pursuit of renewal and restoration, we will succeed in our mission.

## God, Be Present in Our Pilgrimage

(14) And so, with a wholehearted trust that God is with us, we enjoy the rest of the ecumenical household to realise the vision of heaven on earth. We issue calls to our fellow stewards to express their concern in actions that contribute to the active participation of more young people as stakeholders in the restoration.

- We ask the CCA to listen more to the voices of young people who share concerns for peace and justice in Asia, and to create spaces where more youth could participate in healing works with Christian compassion. It should open more opportunities to equip young people with Christ-like leadership.
- We ask the national ecumenical councils and churches to send more youth representatives to places where policies are set, encouraging and empowering them to bravely share their stories and ideas in those spaces. They should formalise youth participation in local canons and policies. They must also help youth come face to face with the issues challenging humanity and Creation, aiding the establishment of ecumenical youth movements that gather not only for worship but also for life-committed service and prophetic witness.
- We enjoin young Christians to collective responsibility. More young people should go beyond themselves and their comfort zones to understand the pains of their fellows and of Creation as their own. With a deeper understanding of the complicated and intersectional nature of the climate crisis, they should address the concerns with other sectors and demographics—in multisectoral work and intergenerational dialogue among others.

(15) Ecumenical youth in Asia must remain committed to our role as siblings to one another and as stewards of Creation, sharing hope, love, and compassion. With God in us and with us, inspiring and accompanying us, we must not stop achieving our vision of heaven on earth.