



Christian Conference of Asia

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CCA's Statement on International Women's Day–2024 **'Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress'**

The world marks International Women's Day (IWD) on 8 March every year to renew collective commitment to achieving gender equality. The theme of this year is "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress". While the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) joins with the international community to commemorate International Women's Day, once again, we are reminded of the ongoing struggle for gender justice and equality, which remains yet to be fully realised. Commendable strides have been made by CCA's member constituencies in recent years; yet there remains a substantial gap between intention and action, which is a reflection of the trend of underinvestment in gender equality measures. When the world is at a crucial crossroads for attaining gender equality and facing substantial deficits in accelerating progress, significant measures need to be undertaken for investing in women to accelerate progress. To bridge the gap between intention and action, governments too must enact laws mandating gender-responsive budgeting and implement clear guidelines for its execution. Analysing gender gaps and increasing transparency in budget allocation are vital steps toward fostering accountability to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The CCA encourages its member constituencies to advocate before their governments for increased investments in enforcing gender justice, and to themselves pledge increased resources for gender justice initiatives. Funding for women's organisations can play a pivotal role in promoting and providing capacities of women to combat gender-based violence. Gender-based violence and human rights violations have become pervasive trends, with at least one in four women in Asia and the Pacific region affected. In such situations, critical support services such as shelters, counselling, legal aid, and hotlines for serving survivors to rebuild their lives need to be a priority. Despite their invaluable contributions, women's rights organisations remain underfunded in most countries. Investing in these women's organisations is imperative, as they possess an unparalleled understanding of their communities struggling to introduce and implement effective measures in reducing violence against women as well as empowering marginalised women. Gender-responsive budgeting within churches and faith-based organisations is also necessary.

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) calls upon its member churches and faith-based organisations to prioritise investment in gender justice initiatives through dedicating financial resources, providing training and capacity-building opportunities, and actively advocating for policies that promote gender equality within Asian communities. Churches in Asia can play a vital role in addressing the immediate needs of survivors of gender-based violence by establishing shelters or safe accommodation facilities, with emergency or transitional housing for survivors and their children, providing a safe haven to escape abusive situations and begin the healing process. Many Asian churches are in a better position to set up helplines, including both telephone and online modalities, to provide crisis interventions offering immediate assistance and guidance. Through such concrete and meaningful interventions, churches in Asia can actively contribute to creating a supportive and empowering environment for women and girls, ensuring their safety, well-being, and access to essential services in times of crisis. By promoting awareness-building programmes on gender equality from a faith-based perspective, a culture of respect, equality, and dignity for all members of society can be fostered. On this International Women's Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to investing in women and accelerating progress towards gender equality. By investing in women and gender justice initiatives within our faith communities, we affirm our commitment to upholding the principles of equality and justice.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary, CCA