



Christian Conference of Asia



**ANNUAL REPORT
PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES**

2023

"God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation"

FOREWORD



I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the programmes and activities of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) for the year 2023, a salient year that has been both challenging and rewarding. This year marked a significant milestone in the journey of the CCA as it was a General Assembly year. The 15th CCA General Assembly was held after a gap of eight years since the last Assembly in 2015 due to the wide spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The challenges that the world faced, ranging from the ongoing impacts of global health crises to the escalating climate emergency and the deepening need for social justice called for a renewed and robust response from the ecumenical community in Asia. The environmental crisis remained at the forefront of our agenda and priorities, and the theological imperative of ecological stewardship found expression and culmination as the theme of the 15th CCA General Assembly, 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation'.

Being a General Assembly year, the number of programmes was limited in favour of the comprehensive preparations for the 15th Assembly in Kottayam. The organisation of the Assembly itself, in coordination with five of the member churches of the CCA in India as well as the National Council of Churches in India, was a remarkable exercise in strengthening ecumenism at the grassroots levels.

Recognising the interconnected nature of our world, the CCA in 2023 placed significant emphasis on responding to emerging issues. The CCA continued to be a platform of solidarity and advocacy, standing with the marginalised and the oppressed. Our commitment to social justice was reflected in our unwavering support for communities affected by conflict, displacement, and systemic injustices.

This narrative Annual Report of the CCA highlights once again the range of programmes and activities implemented in 2023 in our efforts to remain faithful to our calling as a fellowship of churches and national ecumenical councils across Asia, dedicated to witnessing the Gospel in a world of complexity. As we reflect on the year gone by, which marked the end of the implementation period from the 14th Assembly held in Jakarta in 2015, we look forward to the future. We are reminded of the continuous need for our ecumenical collaboration and solidarity in Asia and beyond. This Report is a tribute to our ecumenical journey together and a reaffirmation of our dedication to the ecumenical movement, as we strive for a just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary



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01

GENERAL SECRETARIAT (GS)

Coordination of Administration and Programmes

The General Secretariat of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) bears the responsibility for overseeing and coordinating all programmes within the four programmatic areas. In 2023, leadership in the coordination, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all CCA's programmes and activities was provided by the General Secretary.

Given that 2023 was a General Assembly year, the theme of the 15th CCA General Assembly, 'God, Renews Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation', undergirded the majority of the programmes. The organisation of the 15th CCA General Assembly, occurring after an eight-year gap due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, was the main focus of the CCA's programmatic efforts in 2023. Direction and supervision in all aspects related to the General Assembly and related programmes were handled by the General Secretariat. Information about these programmes was communicated through the CCA's digital communication pathways and online presence via its website and social media channels.

Strengthening relationships with member churches and councils, liaising with the governing board and advisory bodies, and building relationships with governments and intergovernmental organisations constituted some of the main responsibilities of the General Secretary. The regular tasks of maintaining and strengthening relations, which received renewed impetus due to the General Assembly, were continued by the General Secretariat.



Hybrid Executive Committee Meeting, 3-6 March 2023



WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay meets with CCA Officers and Executive Committee members prior to the 15th CCA General Assembly



Over 100 heads of churches attended the ACELC in Jakarta, Indonesia

Liaison with Governing Board and Advisory Committees

CCA Executive Committee Meeting

3–6 March 2023 | Hybrid & Dhaka, Bangladesh

26 September 2023 | Kottayam, Kerala, India

The Executive Committee convened in March 2023 with some members attending virtually and others in-person in Dhaka, Bangladesh. They discussed and planned the 15th General Assembly of the CCA. The Committee finalised seat allocations for the Assembly's 500 participants, including delegates, officers, non-voting delegates, and others. They approved the Assembly schedule, received reports from planning committees, and discussed the General Secretary's report, covering various issues and policies.

On 26 September 2023 at Kottayam, the venue of CCA's 15th General Assembly, the Executive Committee met together for a final time to review the preparations of the 15th Assembly, relating primarily to the daily agenda, thematic presentations, 'Churcha' ecumenical dialogues, Asian Ecumenical Festival, church visits and pre-Assembly events. In a landmark decision, the Committee decided upon incorporating consensus decision-making in the Standing Orders at the Assembly.

Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference (ACELC): Good Governance and Consensus Decision-Making

1–3 May 2023 | Jakarta, Indonesia

The Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference (ACELC): Good Governance and Consensus Decision-Making was held in Jakarta, Indonesia on 1–3 May. It was attended by more than one hundred heads of churches—primates, bishops, presidents, general secretaries, and moderators—as well as general secretaries of national councils of churches in Asia.

The ACELC was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in association with the Protestant Church in the Western Part of Indonesia (GPIB) and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI).

The Jakarta Conference provided an opportunity to reflect on 'who we are' and 'what we do' as a church in addressing issues strongly related to the life and witness of churches and people in Asia. The conference aimed to facilitate a common platform for church and ecumenical leaders from across the continent to reflect together on some of these issues and areas of missional engagements. The churches in Asia have been actively involved in their common witness, especially on several pertinent issues and themes affecting their day-to-day contexts. These issues include 'Good Governance, Integrity Leadership,

and Consensus Decision-Making' as well as 'Strengthening a Mission of Ecumenical Diakonia' by Asian churches. All these discussions took place in the context of the changing ecclesial and ecumenical landscape in Asia.

His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan, the Supreme Head of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India in his homily during the Opening Worship Service, mentioned that "The question asked is rightfully corrected and answered by the Teacher—we move from 'Who is my neighbour?' to 'To whom shall I be a neighbour?'"

"The call to common witness and accompaniment thus becomes an admonition to break through that inner deafness which we all suffer from, and which prevents us from hearing the cry of the weak and those who struggle for peace with justice. Christian witness is not a mere recitation of words, but becomes truly meaningful when the church responds to the pain and pathos of brokenness," said His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma. His Beatitude further expounded upon five facets of the theological understanding of accompaniment, namely, mutuality,

inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment, and sustainability.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the CCA General Secretary, delivered the ACELC Thematic Address on 'The Changing Ecclesial and Ecumenical Landscape in Asia: Our Common Witness and Ecumenical Accompaniment'.

The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews raised the question, "Has the ecumenical movement become more divisive and less effective?" The CCA General Secretary emphasised several challenges faced by the Asian ecumenical movement, such as increasing denominationalism, resistance to the call to wider fellowship, a tendency to revive and promote specific ecclesial or confessional groupings and identities, a multiplicity of ecumenical organisations and structures, a lack of vision and commitment on part of Asian leaders to promote ecumenism, and a lack of interest in the ecumenical formation of the younger generation.

The issue was raised in the context of the replication or duplication of efforts from a myriad of ecumenical organisations that address the same concerns within the same constituencies without any coordination or sharing of information, which detracts from the overall intended outcomes and negatively affects the coherence of the ecumenical movement. Such a trend was causing what the CCA General Secretary termed 'archipelago ecumenism'—where such bodies or ecumenical coalitions that parachuted from outside Asia are responsible for disunity rather than being committed to strengthening or promoting conciliar unity.

Another key point raised was the rise in unnamed churches and para-churches or freelance aggressive missionary evangelism that was causing further fragmentation of the Asian ecumenical movement and giving rise to 'missionary battlefields' with 'aggressive evangelisation tactics' promoted in countries such as Cambodia, Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia.

"The specific responsibility and role of the Asian churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia, as a whole, is to search for the expression of the Asian churches' common faith through their engagement in a pluralistic Asia and to work for visible unity at national and regional levels despite doctrinal differences or confessional barriers. A new way of working together by all ecumenical actors and denominational and confessional bodies engaged in their mission in Asia has to be found," said the CCA General Secretary.

Rev. Dr Asigor Sitanggang, the head of the doctoral programme at the Jakarta Theological Seminary, offered new insights into the churches' stewardship and care of God's creation. "The placement of human creation at the end of God's creation shows the vulnerability of humankind. God's creation of humans on the sixth day shows that humans cannot live without the support or even sustenance from all other creations of God, that were created from the first to the fifth day. Therefore, humans are precisely the weakest creatures among all existing creations," said Rev. Sitanggang.

"There are two sides to humans like there are two sides to a coin—on one side is our glory and honour, being made in the image of God, and on the other side is our humility, being made from dust. The 'power' thus accorded to us is not to conquer or exploit, but to nurture creation", Dr Sitanggang further explained. In his conclusion, he stated that "preaching the good news to the whole creation is not merely conducted by verbal activities, nor by "Christianising" the trees, water, air, land, and so on, but by nurturing nature as a whole".

Rev. Sitanggang said that in Acts 1:6-8, Christians were mandated to be witnesses 'in Jerusalem, in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth'. Although in missiological terms the 'ends of the earth' were Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Rev. Sitanggang said that Rome, the capital city of the Roman empire, was the actual 'end of the earth'; the term



His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India delivered the homily during the ACELC opening worship



ACELC opening worship was led by the Protestant Church in the Western Part of Indonesia (GPPIB)



The ACELC Thematic Address was delivered by CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara



Rev. Dr Asigor Sitanggang (Indonesia) spoke on 'Stewardship of God's Creation'



Rev. Terence Corkin (Australia) facilitated sessions on good governance at the ACELC



Bishop Steven Lawrence (Malaysia, left) and Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang (Indonesia, right) were the panellists for 'Integrity Leadership: Towards Mutual Accountability and Transparency', moderated by HG Dr Youhanon Mar Demetrios (India, centre)

more accurately refers to the centres of power in today's times. Rev. Sitanggang also spoke of the CCA as a platform to promote advocacy at the national, regional, and international levels.

The Jakarta Conference discussed 'Good Governance: Principles and Values, and Its Relevance for the Church'. The aspects of good governance were ensuring effective processes and big-picture policies, strong organisational culture and performance, compliance with the law and appropriate risk management, financial control and chief officers' selection, communication with stakeholders, and strategy formulation and approval.

Rev. Terence Corkin, a member of the Christian Conference of Asia's (CCA) Executive Committee facilitated sessions on good governance at the Jakarta Conference. "At its heart, governance requires two things—sustainability and effectiveness. Good governance enables us, as church leaders, to continue and serve God's mission to the best of our ability. We may believe that governance is a 'secular' concept and that we have nothing to worry about as 'we are all Christians here', but it doesn't always work out fine!" said Rev. Terence Corkin, an expert on mediation and governance while facilitating sessions on good governance, and added that although organisations could fail for many reasons, the biggest by far was the failure of governance.

Rev. Corkin explained in 'Tools that Support and Embed Good Governance' to make a distinction between governance and management, which were often confused with each other. Governance looked at the organisation's big picture and ensured that resources were available to accomplish the goals and mission of the organisation. Management, on the other hand, was responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation and other minute details. Practices that led to organisational success included strong conflict of interest policies, delegations, position descriptions for key roles, terms of references for committees, agendas,

good minute-taking, reports, self-review of the work of boards or committees, and meeting procedures. He also said that faith-based boards should be trained in policy development, review, and mentoring.

A special panel session on 'Integrity Leadership: Towards Mutual Accountability and Transparency' was led by two senior Asian church and ecumenical leaders, Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang from Indonesia and Bishop Steven Lawrence from Malaysia, who called upon one hundred Asian church and ecumenical leaders to pursue models of integrity leadership that were marked by humility, accountability, transparency, and integrity.

Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang, the Asia President of the World Council of Churches, illustrated the facets of Christian integrity leadership, at the heart of which are servanthood, sacrifice, and selflessness. "We believe that our leadership should be inspired by God; not by power, privilege, or position," said Rev. Dr Lebang. She further proposed the model of 'transcendental leadership'. While transactional leadership was profit-oriented and transformational leadership was people-oriented, transcendental leadership was planet-oriented and fulfilled the planetary call for the good governance of all creation.

Bishop Steven Lawrence, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia, presented a fresh reading of Mark 10:35–45, where, in the context of James' and John's unhealthy request for leadership and power, Jesus reveals his expectations of leadership and subverts the dominant associations of leadership with power. "God revealed Himself to us in opposites—His glory was in the cross and His power was in weakness. God measures success not by authority or prestige, but by humble servanthood and service. God does not approve of self-centredness, self-indulgence, and self-seeking behaviour in the leaders He appoints; greatness in God's kingdom comes through servanthood, suffering, and self-denial," said the Malaysian bishop.

The session on 'Consensus Decision-Making: Prospects and Challenges for

Implementation' was conducted by Rev. Tara Tautari, the General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Aotearoa New Zealand. The session spurred lively and engaging discussions on three key questions—what are the primary challenges for implementing consensus decision-making, what are the primary opportunities that consensus decision-making offers, and what might church leaders need to give up to make consensus decision-making work.

Responses from the floor included comments on the following: the space for multiple perspectives, ensuring that the voices of minorities are heard, ensuring that indigenous decision-making practices are respected, the need for translation and interpretation services, being open to receiving criticism, and being prepared both mentally and spiritually so as to not lose the prophetic voice amidst the gathering.

Bishop Hilary Jr. Pasikan from the Episcopal Church in the Philippines delivered the biblical-theological reflection. He drew connections between the renewal, transformation, and restoration of God's creation and the strengthening of community resilience and sustainability. "We have conveniently thought of our mandate as 'the exercising of dominion over created things' while forgetting that all created things are God's blessing and that God placed humans in the Garden of Eden 'to till and keep it'. This is one of the reasons why indigenous people around the world are outraged and persist in caring for the earth despite being vilified and tagged as terrorists," said the indigenous Bishop who belongs to the Igorot community that inhabits the Cordillera

region in the northern part of the Philippines.

Using the indigenous practice of storytelling, Bishop Pasikan took the participants through the history of the social engagements and community development work of his church, the Episcopal Church in the Philippines (ECP). The ECP's Community-Based Development Programme (CBDP) had received hundreds of thousands of US dollars in annual grants but the transformational activities that were meant to enhance the self-reliance of communities did not make any significant breakthroughs in terms of reducing dependency and mendicancy. Although well-intentioned, such unilateral flows of financial resources made communities helpless and powerless as they realised they could never generate these amounts themselves and therefore it was solely upon the grace of others that they received the same. The ECP has since turned the "receivers" into "givers", and raised the communities from levels of survival or subsistence to self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

Bishop Pasikan said that the communities moved from being unproductive 'Dead Sea' to productive 'Sea of Galilee'. "The Sea of Galilee receives water from the River Jordan, and it then releases the water downstream. The Dead Sea on the other hand contains the water it receives and does not share it. The receivers-to-givers policy has enabled communities which received fund support to eventually give back or give out what they receive so that they can share the blessings of the project with others," shared Bishop Pasikan.

The 15th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia

27 September–4 October 2023 | Kottayam, Kerala, India

The 15th CCA General Assembly was held from 27 September to 4 October 2023 in Kottayam, Kerala, India and brought together about 600 people from the region and globally.

The CCA General Assembly is the highest governing body of the CCA and normally meets every five years. It is a special event when representatives of the CCA's

member churches and councils as well as ecumenical partner organisations come together for a celebration of faith and to reaffirm the unity of the fellowship in the Asian ecumenical movement.

As the supreme decision-making representative gathering of its member churches and councils, the General Assembly celebrates the unity of the churches in Asia in



Rev. Tara Tautari (Aotearoa New Zealand) facilitated discussions on 'Consensus Decision-Making: Prospects and Challenges for Implementation'



Group discussions during ACELC examined the strengths and opportunities for implementing consensus decision-making in the Asian context



Bishop Hilary Jr. Pasikan (Philippines) spoke on 'Renewal, Transformation, and Restoration of Creation'



15th CCA General Assembly's inaugural ceremony

worship, study, and action. It provides the opportunity for the representatives of the CCA members to express the common vision of the churches for the direction and mission of the CCA. The General Assembly reviews the programmes and assesses the work carried out by the CCA in the past programme implementation period. It is also an occasion to enunciate general directions and a common vision for the future mission and programmes of the CCA. The General Assembly elects the leadership of the CCA for the upcoming years, including the Moderator, Vice Moderator, Treasurer, and seventeen members of the Executive Committee.

In 2019, the CCA Executive Committee decided to hold the 15th CCA General Assembly in September 2020 in Kovalam, Kerala, India. The subsequent COVID-19 pandemic derailed the preparations and arrangements. In 2021, the CCA Executive Committee considered either Indonesia or Thailand as the venues for the General Assembly, given the dire pandemic situation in India, and authorised the General Secretary to make the necessary enquiries. However, in 2022, the CCA Executive Committee revisited its original plan of holding the Assembly in Kerala. The General Secretary had been in consultation with the National Council of Churches in India and five of



social renaissance in the region.

The theme of the 15th CCA General Assembly was 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation'. The three sub-themes were 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Affirming the Will of God', 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Dwelling in Harmony', and 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Attaining Life in its Fullness'.

The CCA's 15th General Assembly was conducted as per the approved agenda with worship, business and plenary sessions, ecumenical conversations, thematic presentations, D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture, interreligious panel presentations, reports and discussions, felicitations, and worship with the local congregations on Asia Sunday. Assembly Committees such as Credentials Committee, Steering Committee, Nomination Committee, and Public Issues Committee were formed for special tasks.

Participants

There were approximately 600 participants, comprising voting delegates, executive committee members, ecumenical partners from related organisations, delegated observers, visitors, special guests, resource persons, accredited media persons, stewards, students of the Asian Ecumenical Institute, and staff, co-opted staff, and interns. Apart from these, there were members of the local host committees, media team, local organisers and managers, students from theological seminaries and colleges, and visitors from local congregations.

Inaugural Ceremony

A vibrant spirit of ecumenism marked the opening of the 15th CCA General Assembly, which was inaugurated with a celebrative worship ceremony in Kottayam, India, on the afternoon of 28 September 2023. The theme, 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation', served as the anchor for the Assembly, with approximately 600 registered participants gathered at the Mammen Mappillai Hall.

the CCA member churches in Kerala—Church of South India, Malabar Independent Syrian Church, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church—who had extended their support to host the Assembly in the historic city of Kottayam, in Kerala, which is an important centre of the St. Thomas Christians in India, a community that traces their origins to St. Thomas the Apostle, who is believed to have visited Kerala in 52 CE and established churches. Kottayam was also a centre of the Church Mission Society which initiated pioneering missionary activities from 1816, such as the promotion of education among oppressed peoples, leading to a



OPENING SESSION ←
attended by over 600 participants at Mammen Mappillai Hall



The worship, characterised by Asia's rich cultural diversity, commenced with a procession of symbolic representations of light, cross, and scripture. The tone was set with traditional Malayalam greetings of 'Namaskaram' and prayers with a choreographic performance in Indian classical dance, emphasising the adoration for the God of all creation. The homily was delivered by Rev. Idan Topno, an indigenous woman theologian from the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church, who drew attention to the environmental crisis affecting indigenous communities and emphasised the theme of renewal and restoration.

The 15th CCA General Assembly's formal inauguration followed, featuring the lighting of the lamp by Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, and leaders of five member churches in Kerala. Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary, extended a welcome to participants in Kottayam, a historic town hosting the CCA's second-ever Assembly in India, with the first held in Bangalore four decades ago. The event, graced by esteemed leaders and representatives, reaffirmed the commitment to the ecumenical movement and the theme of renewal.

The opening session, marked by introductory remarks from CCA Moderator Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey, as well as welcome and greetings addresses from heads of member churches, further emphasised the collective commitment to strengthening the unity of all God's people and the preservation of creation. Closing remarks by Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, the Vice Moderator of the CCA, signalled the end of the inaugural session that set the tone for thoughtful deliberations during the General Assembly.

Thematic Presentations

The first thematic presentation of the 15th CCA General Assembly was delivered by Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. He outlined the signs of the times through the 'poly-crises' or shocks being faced around the world, such as geopolitical problems and issues in the domains of

energy, economics, and the climate. Focused on the Assembly theme, 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation', the implication that something essential had been lost was highlighted, calling for a return to transformative principles.

The urgent need for the Christian community to address the climate crisis was underscored by Dr Pillay, citing the power of moral choices to affect societal transformation. A commitment to justice, with a particular emphasis on meeting the needs of the poor and oppressed globally, and extending justice to non-human life, was urged. Despite the observation of the world's deviation from God's desires, persistent prayer and action for the restoration of God's creation were encouraged by Dr Pillay, stressing the transformative power of God's Spirit. The address provided enthusiastic encouragement to all Assembly participants at the commencement of the General Assembly, which was inaugurated by Prof. Dr Pillay in the presence of church and ecumenical leaders across Asia.

At the second thematic plenary session on the second day of the General Assembly, 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Affirming the Will of God' was addressed by two renowned Asian theologians, Dr Judy Berinai and Rev. Dr Ferdinand Anno, both of whom are indigenous theologians from Malaysia and the Philippines, respectively.

The presentation by Dr Berinai, the Dean of Studies at the Sabah Theological Seminary, centred on the call for unity within local and global Christian communities, emphasising the need to overcome theological, doctrinal, and ethnic differences. The key factor enabling collective prayer and action for the renewal and restoration of God's creation was asserted to be unity in Christ.

The focus of Rev. Dr Anno, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, was on the distorted human-centric worldview rooted in a misinterpretation of Judaeo-Christian

cosmology. The indigenous ritual practice of Pudong from the northern highlands of the Philippines, symbolising unity, ecological consciousness, and the need to re-sacralise the profaned earth, was shared. Dr Anno advocated for a Jubilee declaration for the earth which recognised the necessity of rest and restoration, ultimately symbolising the potential for indigenous resurgence and a return to ecological consciousness.

The third thematic presentation took the form of a special interfaith panel session, featuring leaders from six religious traditions—Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, and Christianity. These leaders affirmed the necessity of dwelling in harmony with creation as crucial to the restoration and renewal of the entire creation. The importance of loving-kindness and four Buddhist principles addressing the tension between environmental protection and economic development were stressed by Ven. Kekirawe Sudassana Thero, a Buddhist Bhikku from Sri Lanka. His Holiness Dr S.S. Bhattaraka Charukeerthi Pandithacharyavarya Mahaswamiji, a Jain sage, highlighted tolerance and education for global development. Dr Sardar Sajjan Singh, representing Sikhism, spoke of surrendering to the Creator to overcome human weaknesses. Swami Narasimhananda, a Hindu monk, explained the Hindu perspective on harmony, emphasising interconnectedness and balance. Dr Citra Fitri Agustina, a Muslim leader from Indonesia, introduced the values of tolerance, moderation, consistency, and harmony practised by Nahdlatul Ulama. Chaired by Bishop Dhilloraj R. Canagasabey, the interfaith panel provided diverse and nuanced perspectives on dwelling in harmony with creation, emphasising the necessity of interfaith actions for the ecological crisis at the 15th CCA General Assembly.

The fourth thematic plenary session focused on the theme 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Attaining Life in its Fullness'. The interconnectedness of all forms of life in the context of the theme was emphasised by Rev. Dr Raj Bharat



The 15th CCA General Assembly was formally inaugurated by Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay, WCC General Secretary









Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay, WCC General Secretary delivers the first thematic presentation at 15th CCA General Assembly



Special interfaith panel discussion on 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Dwelling in Harmony'



Rev. Dr. Raj Bharat Patta (India/UK) and Rev. Prof. Dr. Vicky Balabanski (Australia) spoke on 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Attaining Life in its Fullness'



Dr. Judy Berinai (Malaysia, right) and Rev. Dr. Ferdinand Anno (Philippines, left), spoke on 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Affirming the Will of God'; moderated by Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit (Thailand, centre)













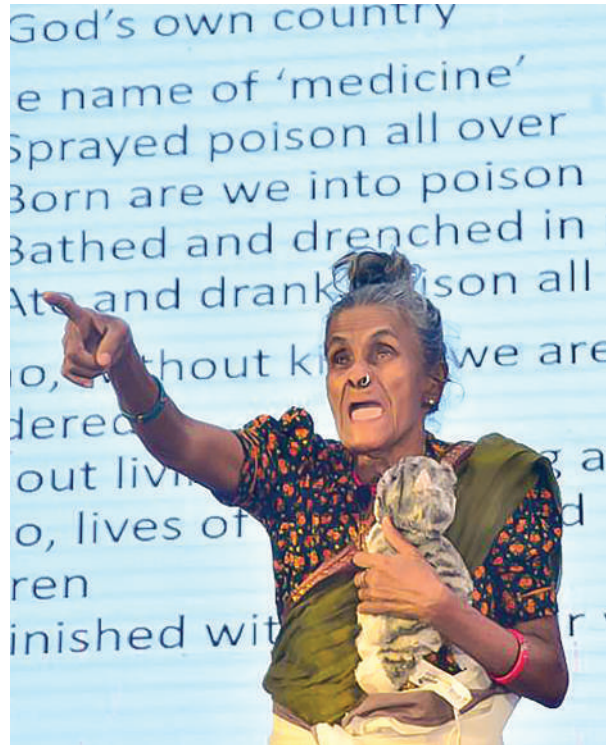
Patta, a prominent Asian Dalit theologian. Drawing from grassroots experiences, the consequences of de-ecologisation in the Anthropocene era were underscored, stressing the detrimental impacts of humanity's "othering", alienation, and lack of creativity on the environment. The concept of "soil theology" was delved into, portraying soil as a model of humility, complementarity, abundance, and hospitality. The urgency of acknowledging responsibility for biodiversity was stressed by Dr Patta, who urged a return to humility and a realisation of humanity's role as part of God's creation.

In the same plenary session, Rev. Prof. Dr Vicky Balabanski from the Adelaide College of Divinity in Australia highlighted the importance of desiring the abundant life of God, cautioning against the misconception of abundant consumption as a path to fulfilment, and emphasising the role of Christian leaders in shaping

communities' desires towards ecological virtues and practices.

D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture

The D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture was presented as a dramatisation by Dayabai, an Indian Roman Catholic nun turned social activist. The octogenarian, who is known for her commitment to social activism and advocacy for tribal populations, particularly the victims of Endosulfan pesticide in Kerala, presented a compelling narrative. She highlighted the interconnectedness of humanity and the environment, lamented the shift from "agri-culture" to "agri-business", and condemned social hierarchies for environmental degradation. She urged a holistic perspective on species' health and well-being. With an emotional dramatisation of the suffering caused by the pesticide, Dayabai's presentation received a standing ovation as she called for collective action against the environmental costs of greed and profit.



Social activist Dayabai presented a dramatisation for the D.T. Niles Memorial Lecture

CCA 15th General Assembly Participants







*Hon'ble Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr Pinarayi Vijayan,
inaugurated the Asian Ecumenical Festival*

Asian Ecumenical Festival

The Asian Ecumenical Festival (AEF) was held on 30 September during the General Assembly. Attended by ecclesial and ecumenical leaders, guests, and local congregations, the festival was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr Pinarayi Vijayan. Kerala's status as home to one of the oldest Christian communities globally was emphasised, and joy was expressed by the Chief Minister at hosting international ecumenical leaders, highlighting the significance of the AEF for the cause of ecumenism. The connection between environmental and human renewal

was underscored by the Chief Minister, aligning with the Assembly's theme on the environment and humanity's intertwined restoration. The uniqueness of the festival was remarked upon by Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the CCA General Secretary, who anticipated it as a tradition for future Assemblies. His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan, presiding over the event, emphasised the AEF's role in celebrating the diverse cultures and backgrounds of Asian churches, contributing vibrancy to unity in diversity. Greetings and felicitations were extended by various dignitaries and the festival featured cultural performances from participants.

Glimpses from the Asian Ecumenical Festival held at the Mammen Mappillai Hall





Asia Sunday–2023 was held in conjunction with the 15th CCA General Assembly

Asia Sunday

Participants of the CCA General Assembly experienced joy and spiritual enrichment as they joined over 70 local congregations in and around Kottayam on Asia Sunday, observed on 1 October. Engaging in morning liturgical worship and fellowship, the international participants connected with members of various denominations, including the Church of South India, the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. The visitation allowed them to share the CCA Assembly theme, 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit, and Restore the Creation,' with the local congregations.

Delegates expressed gratitude for the warm reception and the opportunity to witness the spiritual life of Kerala's ancient Christian community, regardless of

denominational differences. Participants from various Korean churches were particularly delighted, emphasising the abundance of opportunities for friendship and fellowship during Sunday worship services at local churches, where they gained insights into the rich liturgical traditions of Kerala's ancient Christian churches. The visitation was hailed as a beautiful aspect of the 15th General Assembly, strengthening the global ecumenical family through shared worship experiences.

Churcha: Deliberative Ecumenical Dialogue on Emerging and Theological Concerns

The 'Churcha' Deliberative sessions, in groups, facilitated ecumenical dialogue on pertinent theological, missiological, social, and geopolitical issues and themes. 'Churcha' is a local term derived from different Indian languages that means 'conversation', 'discussion', or



Fifteen Churcha sessions were organised in three venues across Kottayam

'sharing'. This deliberative approach allowed participants to choose from fifteen diverse topics, shaping the future priorities of the CCA's programmes and projects. The sessions were conducted at three venues, namely, the Orthodox Theological Seminary, the Mar Thoma

Theological Seminary, and the CMS College. The sessions covered themes such as responsible stewardship, eco-spirituality, climate crisis mitigation, eco-anxiety, indigenous struggles, displacement, bioethics, and life-giving agriculture.



Consensus Decision-Making process was implemented for the first time at the 15th CCA General Assembly



CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara delivers a report during a Business Session at the 15th CCA General Assembly



Consensus Decision-Making

The Executive Committee of the CCA decided to introduce a consensus decision-making process, which seeks the common mind of delegates in attendance without resorting to a formal vote, engaging the delegates or members of a particular body in genuine dialogue that is respectful, mutually supportive, and empowering while prayerfully seeking to discern God's will.

A special orientation session was facilitated by Rev. Terence Corkin, a member of the outgoing Executive Committee of CCA, and Rev. Tara Tautari, the General Secretary of the Methodist Church in New Zealand, at the start of the 15th General Assembly.

The consensus decision-making process was warmly welcomed by the Assembly delegates as a historic milestone in the ecumenical journey of CCA.

From Jakarta to Kottayam

The CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, presented a report highlighting the CCA's journey from Jakarta to Kottayam. The report detailed the restructuring of the CCA's programme areas and the adoption of a new strategic programme plan, leading to the implementation of 224 programmes with 9,693 participants from 2015 to 2023.

The CCA Acting Moderator, Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey, presented a report highlighting global unrest and the overarching threat posed by human greed, arrogance, and violence to the well-being of the planet. The Treasurer's Report, delivered by Mr Augustine Dipak Karmakar, outlined trends in income and expenditure over the past eight years and emphasised the importance of self-reliance and ownership of the CCA by its constituencies.

Programme Review and Programme Direction

An important function of the General Assembly is to review the mission and work of CCA and provide directions for the future.

A special Programme Review deliberative session on 29 September was organised for the Assembly participants to evaluate and provide feedback on the work of the CCA over the past eight years. The first group looked at the General Secretariat, Finance, Relationships, and Communications. The second group focused on Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology as well as Ecumenical Leadership Formation, and Ecumenical Spirituality. The third group examined Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts as well as Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy.

The participants reconvened to deliberate future directions on 2 October. The discussions provided direction for the CCA programmes for the upcoming period from 2023 to 2028 and emphasised engagement with constituencies, leadership development for women



Newly elected CCA Officers (Moderator, Vice Moderator, and Treasurer) and CCA Executive Committee members



Installation of the newly elected CCA Officers and Executive Committee members during the closing worship and Eucharistic service

and youth, impact assessments, and contextual biblical-theological studies on relevant emerging issues. Priority concerns such as changing demographic patterns, migration, and isolation in Asian churches, along with issues like peacebuilding, interreligious harmony, and health, were identified. The relocation of the CCA headquarters was a key issue, prompted by challenges in the current location, and the General Assembly authorised the incoming Executive Committee to consult on a potential new location if the challenges persisted.

Churches' Response to Emerging Asian Issues and Concerns

The Assembly of CCA discussed a wide range of emerging concerns and issues, and adopted statements such as 'Against Increasing Militarisation in Asia', 'Australia's First Peoples Voice', 'Exploitative Extraction of Natural Resources leading to Environmental Crises and Forcible Displacement', 'Peace in the Korean Peninsula', 'Creation Care', 'Human Dignity and Wholeness of Life', 'Public Debt', 'Human Trafficking

and Forced Migration’, ‘Ending Human Rights Violations in the Philippines’, and ‘Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh’.

Election of CCA’s New Leadership

The 15th CCA General Assembly unanimously elected the new Executive Committee and three of the four Officers for the upcoming quinquennium.

The newly elected officers include Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza (United Church of Christ in the Philippines) as Moderator, Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon (Council of Churches in Malaysia) as Vice Moderator, and Rev. Chan Kwok-Keung (Hong Kong Christian Council) as Treasurer, constituting the CCA Officers’ team alongside the current General Secretary.

The newly elected members of the Executive Committee are Basanti Biswas (Methodist Church in India), Rev. David Anirudha Das (National Council of Churches in Bangladesh), Rev. Dethsacda Aphayamath (Lao PDR Evangelical Church), Archbishop Dikran Sebouh Sarkissian (Armenian Orthodox Church of Iran), Dymeas Sovy (Kampuchea Christian Council), Hannah Manickyam Cassandra Mesa (Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia), Rev. Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty (The Communion of Churches in Indonesia), Rev. John Gilmore (National Council of Churches in Australia), Rev. Levi Vasconcelos Pinto (Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosa’e), Nant Ruth Shwe Sin Nyein Aye (Myanmar Council of Churches), Rev. Dr Pradit Takerngrangsarit (Church of Christ in Thailand), Su-Hong Lim (Presbyterian Church in Taiwan), Tiurida Hutabarat (Protestant Christian Batak Church), Ven. David Nigel Perry Brohier (Church of

Ceylon), Dr Youngmi Cho (Presbyterian Church of Korea), Zion Chung (Korean Christian Church in Japan), His Grace Dr Kuriakose Mor Theophilose Metropolitan (Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church/ Chairperson of Programme Committee).

The installation ceremony took place at the closing worship and Holy Eucharistic Service held at the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church in Kottayam, India, on 3 October 2023.

Closing Worship

The 15th CCA General Assembly concluded with a worship service and Holy Eucharist at the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church in Kottayam, India. It was attended by all Assembly participants, including members of the Assembly Host Committee from five CCA member churches in Kerala and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). The Holy Eucharist service followed the Lima Liturgy and was guided by representatives from different Asian churches.

The Most Rev. Joel Ocop Porlares, the supreme head of the Philippine Independent Church (IFI), delivered a homily on the importance of using God’s Kingdom language for unity and renewal. He challenged the Asian church and ecumenical leaders to lead using the Kingdom-oriented language of Jesus.

The closing worship also marked the introduction and installation of the newly elected executive committee members and officers. The installation service formally concluded the Assembly’s official proceedings, while a concluding plenary business session took place earlier at the Juhanon Mar Thoma Memorial Hall.

Church and Ecumenical Relations

Meetings and Visits of CCA Staff with Member Constituencies

The following is a list of visits and meetings undertaken by CCA staff to CCA member constituencies.

- CCA Executive Committee members met with church and

ecumenical leaders in Bangladesh for a fellowship meeting at the headquarters of the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh (NCCB) in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 3 March 2023.

- CCA was invited to the commencement of Kawthoolei



*Ecumenical closing worship service at the
Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church*

Karen Baptist Bible School and College (KKBBS) in the Maelah refugee camp at Mae Sot. Rev. Grace Moon attended on behalf of CCA and delivered a congratulatory speech on 12 March 2023.

- CCA Executive Committee member Ms Nirmala Gurung attended and presented greetings on behalf of the General Secretary at the 29th General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), in Hyderabad, India, from 21–24 April 2023.
- The General Secretary extended congratulatory messages and greetings on the occasion of the enthronement of the Philippines Independent Church's (IFI) 14th Obispo Maximo, His Beatitude Joel Ocop Porlares in Manila, Philippines, on 29 June 2023.
- CCA General Secretary extended greetings to the 72nd General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) on 20 November 2023.
- CCA General Secretary attended and presented congratulatory greetings at the service of the consecration of three new bishops of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church at the headquarters of the church in Thiruvalla, Kerala, India, on 2 December 2023.
- CCA General Secretary visited the Headquarters of the Council of Churches of Malaysia and Malaysia Theological Seminary in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 3–5 December 2023.

Meetings and Visits from Member Constituencies and Ecumenical Partners to CCA Headquarters

The following is a list of visits from member constituencies and ecumenical partners to the CCA headquarters.

- Representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Director for Asia Rev. Dr Y. Franklin Ishida and Programme Director Rev. Teresita C. Valeriano visited the CCA office on 19 January 2023.
- A twelve-member team from the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) offices in Lao PDR, and their partners, visited the CCA office on 27 February 2023.
- A team of twenty-one students and faculty members of Chung Chi College's Divinity School in Hong Kong visited the CCA office on 8 May 2023.
- Kerk in Actie Director Jurjen de Groot, Operational Manager Pepijin Trapman, and Programme Officer Adriana de Fitjer of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in Action visited the CCA office on 20 June 2023.
- The Asian Migrant Centre Director Dr Reiko Harima and Chairperson Rev. Hans Lutz visited the CCA office on 28 June 2023.
- Miyeon Cho and Rev. Jinho Cho from the Korean Methodist Church visited the CCA office on 7 September 2023.
- Felicitas Menz from Bread for the World visited the CCA office on 20–21 November 2023.
- Representatives from the Korean Methodist Church (KMC), namely Rev. Dr Dong Hwa Tae, Vice-President of the National Christian Council of Korea and General Secretary of KMC General Board of Mission, Rev. Susan Nam, KMC Global Ministries Department, and Rev. Woong Beom Jung, KMC Missionary, visited the CCA office on 1 December 2023.
- Dr Johan Hasselgren from the Church of Sweden visited the CCA office on 6 December 2023.



CCA Executive Committee member Ms Nirmala Gurung delivers greetings on behalf of CCA at NCCI General Assembly



CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara meets with the leadership and staff of the Council of Churches of Malaysia



Delegation from the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) offices in Lao PDR



Representatives from the Korean Methodist Church (KMC)



Representatives from Kerk in Actie



CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara attended the annual meeting of the General Secretaries of the World Council of Churches and Regional Ecumenical Organisations

Relations with Ecumenical Partners

Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC) 17th Quadrennial General Assembly *6–8 November 2023 | Hsinchu, Taiwan*

The Asian Church Women's Conference held its 17th Quadrennial General Assembly at the Presbyterian Bible College, Hsinchu, Taiwan, from 6 to 8 November 2023, with the theme "Women Caring for God's Earth". Sixty women representing women's organisations in 13 ACWC member countries and members from the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coins (ICFLC) participated in the Assembly. The ACWC General Assembly elected its new officers from 2024–2028. Delegates of the Assembly expressed their appreciation to the former officers through the leadership of its President, Ms Supaporn Yarnasarn from the Church of Christ in Thailand, a member of the CCA Executive Committee (2015–2023). Arceli P. Bile, as a representative of CCA attended the ACWC's General Assembly.

International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC) Annual Meeting *8–11 November 2023 | Hsinchu, Taiwan*

The 43rd annual meeting of ICFLC was held at the Presbyterian Bible College, Hsinchu, Taiwan, from 8 to 11 November 2023, hosted by the Women's Ministry Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. Arceli P. Bile, staff for Ecumenical Relations, represented CCA in this meeting.

Global Mission of United Methodist Church (UMC)

Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church sent a youth intern to CCA as a part of their Global Mission Fellows (GMF) programme. Ms Yu Ting Chiu from the Methodist Church in Taiwan as a Mission Fellow of UMC, joined the CCA in August

2023. The GMF programme is a two-year missionary engagement for young people between 20 and 30 years of age to work with the UMC's ecumenical partners on work and ministries that are related to social justice, including migration, education, public health, and poverty.

Kerk in Actie

Kerk in Actie Director Jurjen de Groot, Operational Manager Pepijin Trapman, and Programme Officer Adriana de Fitjer of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in Action visited the CCA on 20 June 2023 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The representatives of Kerk in Actie shared their interests and concerns in the Asia region and CCA's involvement and advocacy with Asian churches. The CCA and Kerk in Actie explored possible areas for further cooperation. Kerk in Actie, the diaconal and missionary organisation of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, has developed their ecumenical partnership with local churches and partner organisations around the world, focusing their services on emergency relief, dignity and rights of children, poverty and social injustice, and supporting migrants and refugees.

World Council of Churches (WCC)

The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara visited the headquarters of the WCC and the Bossey Ecumenical Institute for the annual meeting of the WCC and regional ecumenical organisations (REOs). The meeting was an opportunity to express ownership in the polycentric ecumenical movement. Since several REOs and the WCC itself held their General Assemblies in 2022 and 2023, the meeting also served to reconcile strategic priorities and direction for programmatic cohesion and cooperation.

Youth Internships and Training

Through the youth internship programme, CCA has strived to strengthen leadership development and capacity-building of the youth of CCA's member churches and councils. The internship programme is designed to provide immersive training and practical experience in programme organisation. The interns also participate in all CCA programmes, join exposure

visits, and interact with church and ecumenical leaders. The 2023 batch of interns were Mr Sha Mgwe La Ah Tha Pa (Anglican Church in Myanmar), Ms Hnin Wai Thi Aung (Church of the Province of Myanmar), Ms Yu Ting Chiu (Methodist Church in Taiwan/Mission Fellow from Global Ministries of UMC).

Communications

In preparation for the 15th CCA General Assembly, a strategic initiative was undertaken to overhaul and modernise the official CCA website, resulting in a dynamic platform built on the Drupal framework. The website had a separate online Assembly registration portal for a paperless registration process for all Assembly participants and provided them with a secure login to access real-time updates concerning their registration and other pertinent information related to the Assembly. The website is also a comprehensive hub for all CCA updates and ecumenical resources, enhancing accessibility for all those who visit the website.

The Communications team plays a crucial role in maintaining the website with instant updates on CCA programmes. Utilising social media platforms such as Facebook

and Instagram, the team ensures widespread dissemination of information and engagement with the audiences from both CCA member churches and councils, as well as ecumenical partners from across the globe.

The live-streaming of select Assembly sessions on both CCA's YouTube channel and Facebook page enabled virtual audiences to actively follow and connect with the deliberations. To ensure broader outreach, all CCA news releases are not only published on the website but are also systematically delivered to the organisation's extensive base of over 5000 subscribers. These technological enhancements and communication strategies underscore the commitment of CCA to accessibility, transparency, and engagement with its diverse member constituencies.

Publications

In the General Assembly year, CCA produced a higher number of publications, providing ecumenical resources not only for member churches and councils but also for anyone seeking insights into CCA and Asian ecumenism. These publications are available in electronic format on the CCA website. Notable releases in 2023 include the CCA 15th General Assembly Theme Study document titled 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation', the 'Assembly Handbook', and the 'Assembly Worship Resources' document. The 'Assembly Bible Studies' is a collection of perspectives on the Assembly theme and sub-themes. The book 'From Jakarta to Kottayam' is a comprehensive report of the CCA's

programmes and activities from 2015 to 2023, along with reports from the General Secretary to the Executive Committee spanning the same period. 'Prophetic Echoes: A Journey of Advocacy and Action' is a compilation of the CCA's public statements and pastoral letters. Other publications include 'Asia Sunday 2023 Liturgy', the 'Report of Programmes and Activities 2022', and the 'Strategic Programme Plan 2023'. Then, the Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA)-2019 report themed 'Arise, be Awake to Reconcile, Renew, and Restore the Creation' is also available, along with the Report of the Ninth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS-IX) (2019).



15th CCA General Assembly-related special publications





MISSION IN UNITY AND CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY (MU)

OBJECTIVES

- To accompany churches in Asia to strengthen the Church's mission and witness in multi-religious contexts;
- To assist member churches and councils of the CCA in revitalising and nurturing the unity of churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia;
- To develop 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 who are engaged in mission and witness in Asia;
- To initiate, facilitate, and strengthen ecumenical theological initiatives in Asia.

Theological Consultation on the Theme of the 15th General Assembly

6–7 February 2023 | Cochin, India

A theological consultation on 'God, Renew Us In Your Spirit and Restore the Creation', the theme of the 15th General Assembly of CCA, was held in Cochin, Kerala, India from 6–7 February 2023. The sub-themes such as, 'Towards Dwelling in Harmony with Creation' (Isaiah 65:25); 'Towards Attaining Life in Its Fullness' (John 10:10); and 'Towards Affirming the Will of God' (Romans 15:5–6, Psalm 143:10) were also studied and discussed. The purpose of this Consultation was to reflect critically on the theme of the Assembly and to produce a study document. Each participant contributed

their theological insights to help sharpen the proposed theme and prepare a study document on the Assembly theme.

The theologians at the consultation were Bishop Rev. Dr Daniel Thiagarajah, Bishop Emeritus Kumara Illangasinghe, Fr. Dr K.M George, Rev. Dr Jangkhoham Haokip, Rev. Dr Mothy Varkey, and Rev. Dr Robinson Christian.

Bishop Rev. Dr Daniel Thiagarajah presented his insights on the theme, asserting that humans are not just co-creators and stewards of the creation, but were called to be co-reconcilers.

Experts at the Theological Consultation on the Theme of the 15th CCA General Assembly



Rev. Dr Mothy Varkey highlighted the theme as a reminder to humans to understand that Creation could restore itself without human intervention. He opined that humans should refrain from hegemonic notions such as considering themselves as the stewards of creations and as the solution-providers for creation care.

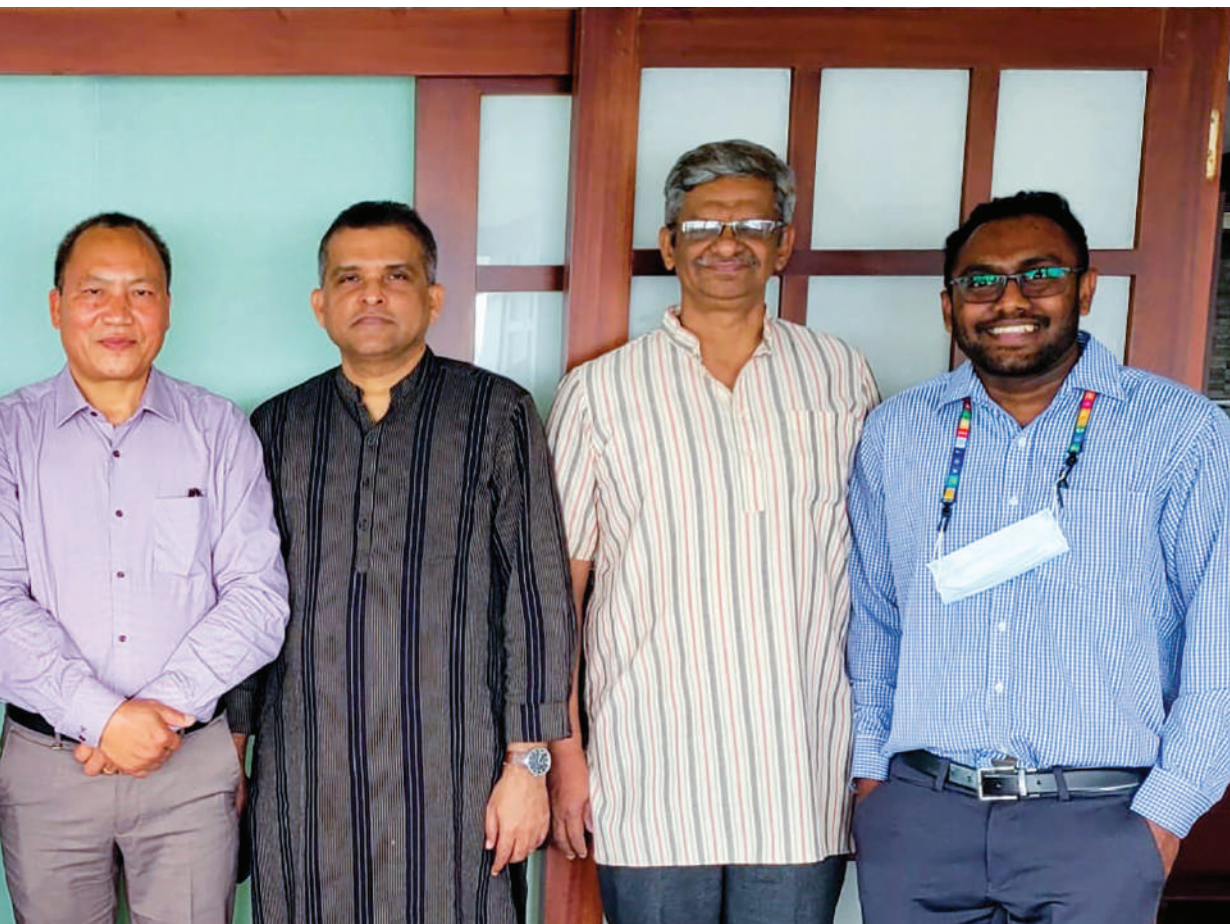
This was followed by Fr. Dr K.M. George's presentation on the theme as a call to shift from Anthropocene to Symbiocene approaches. He also urged that the Asian church should look at the local cultures and other faiths of Asian origin to reconstruct its creation care theologies and praxis.

The fourth presenter was Rev. Dr Jangholam Haokip, an indigenous eco-theologian from northeast India's Kuki

tribe. He asserted that the theme was a call for the Asian church to expand the horizon of our understanding of God, the scriptures, and the creation through the lenses of indigenous people who have rich eco-spirituality. He also indicated the need to understand and co-exist with both visible and invisible nature from the indigenous wisdom on creation.

Bishop Emeritus Kumara began his presentation with words from Dhammapada (Pali Canon) which calls people to form a community of love, spiritual health, peace, and joy. He reflected on how the theme iterated the panorama of the joy of human redemption with the entire creation.

Rev. Dr Robinson Christian connected the Assembly theme with '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' a Sanskrit term meaning



'One Earth, One Family, One Future' which was the motto of the G20 summit that was scheduled to take place a few weeks before the CCA's General Assembly.

The theologians discussed and created a framework for a theological document that would expound on the Assembly theme. The theological consultation provided critical reflections on the

Assembly theme, bringing together diverse theological perspectives and urging the need to expand our understanding of creation and our role in it. The outcome of the theological consultation, the Assembly Theme study document, was a valuable resource for the 15th CCA General Assembly and for further theological discussions on creation care.

Scholarships and Exchange for Theological Education

The CCA Scholarship is for theological students from countries where there is a lack of theological education facilities. The scholarship fund has been utilised to equip pastors or young leaders for a holistic ministry by facilitating and creating opportunities for them to attend

relevant courses or short-term training and academic seminars.

In 2023, Rev. S. Sureshkumar from the Church of Ceylon was given a partial grant to study at Virginia Theological Seminary USA.



ECUMENICAL LEADERSHIP FORMATION AND ECUMENICAL SPIRITUALITY (EF)

OBJECTIVES

- To assist the ecumenical formation of a new generation of leadership in churches and ecumenical councils in Asia;
- To develop human resources committed to the renewal of ecumenical spirituality and understanding Christian tradition; and,
- To provide ecumenical space for sharing spiritual life among member churches and national councils in Asia.



Students of the Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI)-2023

Asian Ecumenical Institute

Asia Ecumenical Institute (AEI)

7 September–4 October 2023 | Hybrid & Kottayam, Kerala, India

The AEI, a one-month-long training of CCA, is an ecumenical leadership formation programme that allows young ecumenists and prospective Asian church leaders to envision wider ecumenism with new theological insights, by “breaking up” an exclusive community and leading to a more inclusive human community, as well as achieving wholeness and integrity with all of God’s creation. The AEI provides participants with experiences to empower their leadership capacity with a strong sense of rootedness in their Christian faith, tradition, and Asian heritage, and motivation to transcend the boundaries of denomination, culture, socio-economic strata, or political affiliations.

In 2023, in conjunction with the 15th General Assembly of CCA, the AEI programme was conducted from 7 September to 4 October 2023 in two components; one week via online mode and the other as a three-week training as an in-person training at Thomas Mar Athanasius Memorial Research and Orientation Centre located at Manganam, Kerala, India.

Eighteen students from different Asian countries attended the AEI–2023. As the AEI–2023 was strategically held simultaneously with the CCA’s General Assembly, the AEI students could attend two pre-Assembly events, namely, the South Asia Sub-Regional Consultation on ‘Ecumenical Diakonia: Towards Attaining Sustainable Development Goals’ and the Asian Ecumenical Migrants Advocacy Network Forum, as well as observe all the proceedings of the Assembly with the opportunity to meet many prominent ecclesial and ecumenical leaders from Asia and beyond.

The theme of AEI–2023 was ‘Young Asian Ecumenists for Renewal and Restoration of God’s Creation’, emphasising the vital role of young leaders in actively engaging in God’s transformative

work in creation. All the AEI sessions empowered the participants with a deep sense of purpose and commitment, grounding them in biblical-theological and socio-political perspectives primarily focusing on ecological advocacy and recognising their responsibility in addressing pressing global challenges and mobilising communities towards positive change.

A team of prominent theologians and ecumenists with professional expertise were the main resource persons. Resource persons of AEI-2023 included His Grace Dr Yakoob Mar Irenaios Metropolitan (Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church), His Grace Kuriakose Mor Theophilose Metropolitan (Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary), Rev. Dr Asigor Sitanggang (Jakarta Theological Seminary), Rev. Dr Dietrich Werner (Humboldt University Berlin), Fr. Greger Kollannoor (Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary), Hiu Fan Chung (The Korea Christian Environmental Movement Solidarity for Integrity of Creation), Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay (World Council of Churches), Rev. Dr John G. Mathews (Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church), Rev. Dr Mothy Varkey (Mar Thoma Theological Seminary), Dr Selin Abraham (The Lifeline Hospital), and Rev. Dr Seoyoung Kim (Manchester University, UK). Rev. Dr R. C. Thomas from the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church was the Academic Dean of the AEI–2023.

Rev. Dr Mothy Varkey, an expert in religion, ecology, and colonialism, provided a critical examination of colonialism’s environmental impact. He discussed how colonial forces viewed the world through a Eurocentric lens, fostering European superiority and undervaluing other cultures, particularly in Asia. The discussions highlighted the need for an intersectional approach to address climate change, recognising the historical responsibilities of regions like the United States and Europe. Rev. Dr Varkey stressed the importance of re-enchanting

our connection with nature and called for ecological conversion, encouraging repentance for ecological sins.

Rev. Dr Seoyoung Kim from Manchester University, UK in her virtual session titled 'Water Justice and Its Implications on Christian Spirituality' stressed interdependencies, interrelationships and mutualities between creatures and water. Reflecting on the narrative of the Samaritan Woman at the well (John 4:1–42), she re-interpreted 'water' as a physical resource and as a spiritual metaphor, articulating the oppression of both nature and women. She said, "How should we view natural disasters? The groans of the earth are linked to the groans of God, the howls of God and warning. The climate crisis is directly linked to social injustice. Everything on Earth is connected." Dr Kim reflected on the physical and spiritual meanings of water which are deeply interconnected and shared significance in addressing water justice in the twenty-first century.

Theological perspectives from Metropolitan Dr Yakob Mar Irenaios, a bishop of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, emphasised the importance of renewal and restoration. God's creation is depicted as emerging from chaos, and the earth is considered God's own, with humanity as its workers. The motive behind renewal was questioned: was it driven by self-seeking motives or genuine love for creation? These teachings urged every individual to emulate God by loving, caring, and serving others, regardless of religious affiliation. Stewardship emerged as a collective responsibility for the environment.

Dr Selin Abraham, a medical doctor and a member of WCC's Commission on Health and Healing, led a session on 'Churches in Asia Engaging to Address Health and Healing'. Dr Abraham said, "Church is a healing community and should focus its ministry on promoting health and healing to care for the sick and destitute with compassion and love. To equip the churches as health-promoting and healing communities, they need to develop health education,

practical action, advocacy for creation care, and empowerment of public witness."

Rev. Dr R. C. Thomas, the AEI's Academic Dean, discussed the ecumenical movement in Asia and the role of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in significantly uniting Christian churches, contributing to the development of Asian Christian theologies, and addressing numerous social, economic, and human rights issues in the region.

Rev. Dr Dietrich Werner, a renowned environmentalist and theologian, stressed the urgency of addressing the climate crisis and called for an ecological reformation within the Christian community. The discussions also emphasised the need to incorporate periods of rest into our relationship with nature, end conflicts between humans and animals, and engage with indigenous and interfaith wisdom traditions. The intersection of economy and ecology was examined in the Asian context, with a focus on the importance of balancing these two aspects of life. The discussions highlighted the role of churches as advocates for long-term development and the need for a complete change in perspective to address the environmental crisis.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, in his dialogue with the AEI students, made remarks on the importance of the youth leadership development to empower their stewardship of God's creation with care and responsibility, especially when faced with enormous ecological challenges and the climate crisis. "We are all called to transform God's oikos as it was created in the beginning of God's creation. Keep praying, 'Lord, start with me, and work in me and through me to restore your creation'."

The AEI students delivered presentations on a variety of topics, including human rights, gender justice, climate migration, interreligious dialogue and promotion of interfaith harmony, economic injustice and youth unemployment, land and dignity of indigenous people, and churches'

action to restore the creation. AEI participants engaged in discussions about climate change mitigation strategies, sustainable church practices, and collaborative efforts to protect the environment while exploring theological foundations, drawing wisdom from diverse perspectives, and deepening their understanding of the interplay between spirituality, justice, and environmental well-being.

Aside from classroom sessions, AEI-2023 participants were involved in field visits to several places of religious and cultural importance in Kottayam; Thirunakkara Mahadeva temple, St Mary's Knanaya

Syrian Church, Kottayam Cheriyaapally, Jama Masjid, CSI Central Kerala Diocese headquarters, and Malankara Knanaya Syrian Archdiocese headquarters, for inter-denominational and interreligious interactions.

The AEI equipped the participants with the necessary skills and vision to actively contribute to the ecumenical movement, helped develop Asian and international ecumenical networks for collaborative actions in the future, and enhanced the students' capacity and leadership to be part of God's renewal and restoration of Creation.

Youth Leadership Development

Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly-2023

26-28 September 2023 | Kottayam, Kerala, India

The Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) was held at Vimalagiri Pilgrim Centre, Kottayam, India from 26 to 28 September 2023, and served as CCA's Pre-Assembly meeting for youth. More than sixty youth representatives from Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand attended the AEYA to celebrate young people's participation in the Asian ecumenical movement by giving young people the opportunity to identify challenges in caring for creation, articulate experiences in overcoming these challenges, and build strategies and networks to contribute to sustainable development in their respective contexts.

Rosiana Purnomo welcomed all AEYA participants on behalf of the Christian Conference of Asia. In her opening remarks, she invited the young people who gathered in a spirit of unity, amidst various global challenges including the climate crisis, poverty, conflict, and inequality, to find shared strength in innovation, collaboration, and commitment towards a harmonious and sustainable world with all creation. "Let this Assembly be a momentum of our movement together towards renewal and restoration of creations," she said.

Karen Puimera, member of the WCC's Executive Committee and Moderator of the WCC Commission on Young People in the Ecumenical Movement, also spoke to the youth participants. In her speech, Karen invited all participants to impart God's love to all creation by living in harmony and sustainability with nature. She also encouraged all participants to actively participate at the AEYA.

"We must use our rights as an opportunity, as many youth's hopes are fought for through voices and actions. May God enable us in our leadership, spiritual growth, and ecumenical mission to express love for both our fellow humans and the environment," said Ms Puimera.

The first day of the AEYA featured a session on biblical foundations of the theme "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation", which was led by Dn. Dr Anish K. Joy, and a session on Youth in the Church and Ecumenical Movement facilitated by Yowanda Yonggara (Executive Representative WSCF Asia Pacific) and Hnin Wai Thi Aung (CCA).

Dr Joy stated that it was our calling as the followers of Jesus to care about nature. He further commented on the current reality along with the challenges. At the

end of his presentation, the participants were given a space to express their views on the topic. Ms Wai Thi introduced the WSCF and how young people in Myanmar were working on various advocacy efforts in their context. Ms Yonggara took participants through the history of various youth movements and their relevance to today's youth movements.

In the afternoon, all participants had a fellowship through various activities to foster friendships, as well as to build communication and leadership. The evening service was led by Nathanael Elia Budi (Gereja Kristen Indonesia) with several participants involved in the worship liturgy.

The second day of AEYA began with morning worship. Rev. Lee Chang-gee led the bible study session, which was based on Matthew 4:17. In his reflections, Rev. Lee invited participants to reflect on 'metanoia', or active human repentance. He also reminded the nature of human creation, where God's spirit was present in humans. Therefore, humans should also realise the part of God that is within themselves, including God's desire for the renewal of broken things. Rev. Lee then touched on the communal call, and how communal solidarity could help us achieve transformation.

The session on the second day began with a panel presentation on the Ecumenical Youth Movement in Global and Asian Context, presented by Karen Puimera (Moderator of YPEM-WCC), Fan-Wei Liang (Taiwan), Ma. Kay Catherine (Philippines), and Imran Mrong (Bangladesh). Ms Puimera shared how WCC involved young people in service work, starting from ECHOS to YPEM. Each panellist also shared the movements of young people in their respective regional contexts.

The participants were then made to understand more about the ecological crisis and how young people can take a role through the session on 'Unleashing the Power of Young People for Climate Action' facilitated by Md. Foezullah



Talukder from the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCBD). Mr Talukder elaborated on the causes and impacts of the ecological crisis. He then explained the categories of adaptation carried out by humans, including structural/physical, technological, (modifying) ecosystems, and services. At the end of his presentation, Mr Talukder offered four practical recommendations that young people could implement,



Participants of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA)-2023

namely: speaking up, joining pro-ecological movements, adopting a sustainable lifestyle, and choosing/taking sustainable (green) initiatives.

On this second day, participants also had the opportunity to discuss in more depth various issues/themes that young people in Asia struggle with, such as technology and artificial intelligence, economic empowerment, rights of indigenous

people, secularism and democracy, human sexuality, and freedom of religions and beliefs (FORB). Input from each discussion group became reference material for the drafting committee to prepare the AEYA-2023 communique.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, visited and greeted the AEYA-2023 participants. Dr Pillay affirmed

the importance of the role of youth in the ecumenical movement. He also acknowledged that young people were the leaders of today and thus their participation was urgent. He stressed that the future of the oikoumene and the ecumenical movement was in the hands of young people today. Related to the theme, Dr Pillay appreciated young people who were at the forefront of various advocacy movements. He invited all young people to walk together and contribute to the pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity.

The participants then developed actions together for climate justice, facilitated by Rev. Nam Ki-Pyeong and Rev. Kim Seongung. The afternoon service adopted the Taizé service, and AEYA's second day of activities ended with a cultural evening.

The morning worship on the last day of AEYA was based on the WCC's Lima Liturgy. Angielyn Moreno (National Council of Churches in the Philippines)

facilitated a bible study based on Romans 12:1–2. Ms Moreno revealed that the Apostle Paul's message was honest and clear: 'Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice...'. The "body" referred to all aspects and dimensions of humans, while "life" referred to ongoing processes, something that continued to change and develop. She invited young people to overcome various conflicts to unite for a common commitment to protect all of creation through living sacrifices. "Restoration is impossible without renewal. May we all be the Church that is always renewing, with discernment what is the will of God", she concluded.

The final session of AEYA–2023 was a discussion of the Communique. The drafting team consisted of Vanessa Jane (Philippines), Suhash Swaminathan (India), Kim Yumi (South Korea), Loini Simeti (New Zealand), and Ashen (Sri Lanka). The closing service was conducted by the local organising committee.

Women Leadership Development

National Women's Leadership Development Training in Lao PDR

16–19 January 2023 | Vientiane, Lao PDR

A National Women's Leadership Development Training was held at the Nakham Church in Vientiane, Lao PDR from 16–19 January 2023 under the theme, 'The power of the Holy Spirit poured upon us' (Acts 1:8). Fifty women leaders from eleven districts of Lao PDR, namely, Wunporn, Jumpasak, Kamsai, Suwannakai, Saisombom, Chiangkeaw, Nakornlovang, Nasai, Natkham, Nongka, and Vientchen attended the training.

Rev. Maneewan, President of the Women's Association of Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) stressed that the participants were called together to become witnesses of the Gospel in all the corners of Lao PDR. She stated that both women and men were disciples of Jesus, equally missioned by God.

Adjarn Willai, the Vice-Director of the Women's Department under the Church

of Christ in Thailand, in her biblical reflection, emphasised the imperative of our faithful stewardship to keep and sustain the beauty of God's creation.

Rev. Grace Moon from the CCA stressed the importance of women's leadership in the church and society and their involvement in the churches' mission, reflecting on the story of Samaritan woman at the well. She also introduced the Asian Christian women's networks, CCA's women leadership development programme, the EWAAV (Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence) programme, and other women-related activities of CCA.

Ms Saithong, a young participant, commented that Christian women should be the soil for our own small innovative ideas that can be used to empower and strengthen other women.



Participants of the National Women's Leadership Development Training in Lao PDR

Rev. Dr Sirirat Pusurinkham, the former President of Church of Christ in Thailand's (CCT) Women's Association, encouraged the participants to strengthen their capacities as leaders. "Please remember 'BEGIN', five letters which stand for 'Begin-Enjoy-God-Identify-Nature'. Begin with the lessons from the bible in doing your own mission with our God-given talents for your family, children, friends, churches, and community members. Enjoy your work and mission tasks. God is with us. Always remember your Christian identity. This should be our nature as leaders to keep and develop more in our service in churches and communities."

Adjarn Thappyavone shared the LEC women's involvement in the 'mission and evangelism movement' in Lao PDR and how women's contributions in such ministry had borne fruitful outcomes. She pointed out that their faith urged them to raise their voice and stretch out their helping arms to their sisters in their villages. Caring for others by a simple offer of a warm cup of tea could move others to feel the warmth of Jesus' love.

She also mentioned that the LEC Women's Association had been extending support to strengthen cooperative mission activities with all sisters in every district and province of Lao PDR. She encouraged the participants that they could do more marvellous things with the power of the

Holy Spirit and with their passion and commitment.

In sharing on the women's status and the arising concerning gender issues in Lao PDR, Ms Siamphone, one of the young women shared that Lao women work much more than men, especially in rural regions, doing double-burdened housekeeping work and farming, but they did not have any voice in the family. She shared the powerlessness and lack of confidence that women her age felt. Ms Kimphone Lovan shared the situation of tribal women who were not acknowledged as citizens of Lao PDR. She further explained that there were many taboos on some minor tribes and that tribal women experience discrimination. Both Ms Siamphone and Ms Kimphone expressed that it was a blessing that many young women were given the chance to be part of the training that provided tools to develop their leadership capacities.

Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) is the only CCA member church from Lao PDR and the only officially recognised Protestant church in Lao PDR. The LEC is the fastest-growing Christian church in Lao PDR with about 1000 congregations nationwide. Although the LEC is one of the newly growing Christian churches in Asia, they send missionaries and mission teams to neighbouring nations like Vietnam, Myanmar, and Thailand to witness the Gospel. It is estimated that approximately

30 percent of the total LEC members are women. The national women leadership development training with LEC was conducted by the CCA to strengthen women's capacities while enhancing

their theological, biblical, and ecumenical understanding and perspectives, enabling them to extend their ministries in serving their communities.

Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA)–2023

26–28 September 2023 | Chaitanya Pastoral Centre, Kerala, India

The Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA)–2023 was held in Chaitanya Pastoral Centre in Kerala, India, from 26–28 September 2023, with the theme 'Asian Ecumenical Women: Journeying Towards the Renewal and Restoration of God's Creation'. The AEWA–2023 was one of the pre-Assembly events held in conjunction with the 15th CCA General Assembly in Kottayam, India. Sixty-three women from twenty-one countries participated in this event, including the CCA 15th General Assembly delegates, women from CCA member churches and councils, and ecumenical partner organisations.

Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang, former CCA General Secretary and WCC Asia President, delivered the keynote address. She highlighted in her speech the wisdom tradition of the Torajanese, her Indonesia indigenous tribe, and explained, "In the cosmology of traditional Toraja people, the creation is a process and all the creation, including human beings, is considered one family, known as 'sangserekan' or 'originated from one source'." She underscored that the sustainability of life on this planet depended on the realisation of human beings' partnership with all creation to fulfil the purpose of God, which required humility on the part of human beings to accept and respect other creations as their partners.

Ms Daya Bai, a former Indian Roman Catholic nun turned social activist from Kerala, shared an hour-long presentation where she dramatised the heartbreaking suffering of children born with neurological and genetic disorders caused by harmful pesticides rampantly used in agriculture. She emphasised that everything was interconnected and that

all should live healthy lives in partnership and cooperation. She emphasised that social hierarchy and greed were the root causes of environmental and social crises. She highlighted the urgent need to be in solidarity and accompaniment with those who suffer from the cost of greed and profit.

Rev. Jyoti Singh, the Executive Secretary for Women's Concerns of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), facilitated a workshop on 'Women and Girls in Asia: Vulnerabilities and Capacities in the Face of Climate Emergency'. During the group discussion, the participants shared the impacts of climate change in their respective countries. Participants also shared their opinions about what women, churches, and ecumenical organisations could contribute to addressing climate challenges and concerns.

Ms Darlene Marquez-Caramanzana, Area Liaison for Asia and the Pacific of the General Board of Global Ministries, delivered a thematic presentation on 'Climate Change and Gender Justice'. She stressed that climate change was both a human rights and social justice issue. She also emphasised that climate change was a gender justice issue. Women and girls experienced the enormous impact of climate change, which amplified existing gender inequalities and posed unique threats to livelihood, health, and safety.

Ms Marquez-Caramanzana stressed that a thorough analysis of women's situations, their contexts, and their vulnerabilities, as well as identifying systems of power that aggravate their already vulnerable conditions, could lead to more meaningful actions and a gendered approach to climate justice. She believes



Participants of the Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA)–2023

the framework and approach for climate response should also include identifying and affirming women's agency, which included their ability to define and act on goals, make decisions that matter to them, and participate in the economy and public life.

Rev. Dr Aye Nwe, Associate Professor of the Myanmar Institute of Theology, and Dr Vedhakani Vedhanayagam from the Church of South India facilitated the contextual bible studies during the AEWA–2023.

Rev. Dr Nwe gave her reflection on the theme 'Dwelling in Harmony with Creation' from a Myanmar woman's perspective. She shared that in Burmese culture, men were considered superior to women, and women were the most oppressed group in social, economic, political, and religious categories. Thus, she proposed reading Isaiah 65:25 as the voice of a marginalised woman asking the question: "When will the harmony between the powerful and the powerless be realised?" Such an approach to reading the text encouraged the participants to reflect on and realise the significance of the partnership of women and men in taking up the responsibility of building and transforming a community towards 'shalom'.

Dr Vedhakani Vedhanayagam from the Church of South India focused her presentation on the spirituality of 'rupture'. She explained that the revelation of God and encountering God have been tragically intercepted and have become lost realities among faith communities because of dominant power relations such as patriarchy, capitalism, and anthropocentrism. Thus, journeying towards life in fullness can be possible through or begins with a 'rupture' in these dominant power relations.

Dr Gay B. Manodon from the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and Fanny Hiu Fan Chung from the Korea Christian Environment Movement Solidarity for Integrity of Creation (KCEMS) were the panellists for the session 'Sharing of Best Practices for Climate Justice Advocacy'. They discussed the programmes and initiatives of the NCC Philippines and the KCEMS aimed at addressing the challenges of the climate emergency.

Dr Manodon shared that the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), their member churches, and ecumenical partners are committed to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. She underscored

three district values that must be present in our response to climate change: justice and peace, human dignity, and the integrity of creation.

Fanny Hiu Fan Chung shared that the Korea Christian Environment Movement Solidarity for Integrity of Creation (KCEMS) is committed to transforming peoples' understanding of justice and crisis in the face of climate change through concepts and discussions through research and education, such as publications, seminars, and workshops on justice and crisis in the face of climate change.

The AEWA participants also gathered for a cultural night to celebrate the gifts,

graces, beauty, and diversity of the Asian culture and contexts. Notably, young women were represented in this AEWA gathering and actively engaged during the programme.

Participants of the AEWA Pre-Assembly drafted a statement focused on the AEWA theme, which was shared and received during the CCA 15th General Assembly session. The AEWA statement called for women, churches, and ecumenical organisations to take concrete actions that would contribute to the restoration and renewal of God's creation. It emphasised the need to work together in faith and strengthen cooperation in bringing a radical transformation to ensure the sustainability of God's creation.

Ecumenical Spirituality and Nurturing of Contextual Liturgical Traditions

General Assembly Worship Preparation

9–12 February 2023 | Kottayam, India

The Assembly Worship Committee met for four days in Kottayam, Kerala, from 9–12 February 2023 to plan and prepare the worship liturgies for the General Assembly. The members of the Assembly Worship Committee included Pdt. Ester Pudjo Widiasih (Jakarta Theological Seminary), Rev. Mathews George (Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India), and Rev. Hyun Joo Lee (The Presbyterian Church of Korea), along with CCA staff Rev. Grace Moon and John Paul Devakumar.

The Assembly Worship Committee finalised the plans for the worship sessions at the General Assembly. Taking inspiration from the diverse ecclesiastical, spiritual, and cultural traditions of Asia, the Committee developed liturgical resources and selected appropriate biblical texts and passages and Asian hymns for the daily worship sessions throughout the week-long Assembly.

The Committee members visited the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church and Juhanon Mar Thoma Hall in Kottayam,

the venue for the General Assembly. They had a meeting with Fr. Dr M.P. George of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church at the SAMA Music Institute to discuss ideas on Eastern Christian liturgies and Indian music elements that could be incorporated into the General Assembly's worship.

The Committee also met with the clergy of the local host committee assigned to assist them in the preparations for the Assembly worship, sharing the requirements for the Assembly worship liturgy from the host member churches.

The committee members took part in the Sunday morning worship service at the Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church and attended the opening session of the Maramon Convention 2023 of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, held at Maramon, Pathanamthitta, Kerala. This visit helped the committee to gain more insights into the local worship culture and Christian traditions, and incorporate them into the worship liturgies for the upcoming General Assembly.

Asia Sunday-2023
1 October 2023



500 participants of the 15th CCA General Assembly joined over 70 local congregations in and around Kottayam for worship services on Asia Sunday

The Asia Sunday in 2023 was observed on Sunday, 1 October 2023. Every year, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) observes Asia Sunday on the Sunday before Pentecost. In 2023, Asia Sunday was specially observed in conjunction with the 15th CCA General Assembly, which was held from 27 September to 4 October 2023.

The theme of Asia Sunday–2023 was the same as the theme of the 15th CCA General Assembly: ‘God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation’. The specially prepared liturgy exhorted repentance and confession for humanity’s role in the

orchestration of the climate crisis, through the exploitation and misuse of natural resources induced by greed and power. The liturgy also acknowledged the suffering and groaning of creation.

The Asia Sunday–2023 was replete with prayers beseeching divine intervention, ‘God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation’. During the 15th CCA General Assembly, over 500 representatives from Asian and global churches, national Christian councils, and ecumenical partner organisations joined with over 70 local congregations to commemorate the Asia Sunday on 1 October 2023.



BUILDING PEACE AND MOVING BEYOND CONFLICTS

OBJECTIVES

- To analyse the context of conflicts and develop methodologies for churches' participation in peacebuilding; and,
- To assist churches in their initiatives in responding to conflict situations and to raise awareness through interreligious platforms, enabling them to contribute to the building of sustainable and peaceful societies.



CCA Executive Committee members met with national church and ecumenical leaders at NCCB headquarters

Asian Church Leaders' Pastoral Visit to NCC Bangladesh

3 March 2023

The leadership of CCA and representatives of churches in Asia undertook a pastoral visit to the headquarters of the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh on 3 March 2023.

A group of church leaders from twenty-one member churches and nine associated member organisations affiliated with the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh (NCCB) expressed their concern and anguish over the highly precarious situation faced by Christians in Bangladesh. The group highlighted the fact that Christians are a very small minority in Bangladesh, and are therefore extremely vulnerable. The event was held in conjunction with the Executive Committee meeting of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA).

Bangladeshi Christians make up less than half a percent of the country's population, with around 600,000 living in the country. As a religious minority in a majority Islamic nation of over 170 million, they are particularly vulnerable and face existential threats on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, recent times have seen a sharp decline in, and endangering of, religious freedom in Bangladesh, with increased levels of violence directed against religious minorities. Despite its reputation as a liberal and tolerant society, Bangladesh today presents a scenario where violence against religious minorities has become more common. Christian places of worship have been attacked and vandalised, but these incidents are often dismissed as isolated events.



Despite political parties making a host of promises to improve the lives of religious minorities before each election, few notable efforts have been made over the decades to address the situation over the years. As a result, the quality of life of religious minorities in Bangladesh remains poor, with little hope for improvement in the near future. In some parts of the country, tribal Christians face ostracism and discrimination and they are being accused of carrying out religious conversions.

The Christians in Bangladesh are highly fragmented due to the multiplicity of Christian denominations. However, there are many new initiatives to strengthen ecclesial unity by enabling the Protestants, Roman Catholic, and Evangelical churches to come together on a common Christian platform.

Rev. David Doss, the General Secretary of the NCCB, shared examples of how the NCCB has been deeply engaged in promoting interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, and HIV and AIDS advocacy initiatives.



CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara speaks to church and ecumenical leaders of Bangladesh



Rev. John Probudhan Hira, Joyantha Adhikari, Bishop Simon Biswas, and Augustine Karmakar participated in discussions on behalf of Bangladeshi churches.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of the CCA, explained the long-standing involvement and accompaniment of the global ecumenical movement in Bangladesh, dating back to the time of the Bangladeshi liberation war in the early 1970s when various initiatives of ecumenical support were taken to provide emergency relief and rehabilitation with the coordination of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The General Secretary of CCA also spoke about the role and contributions

of the Asian ecumenical movement to accompany and support the churches in Bangladesh through the CCA, even when the country was still part of Pakistan and was formerly known as East Pakistan. He further acknowledged the important contributions made by Bangladeshi church leaders who were at the forefront of the Asian ecumenical movement ever since the founding of the CCA in 1957.

In concluding the pastoral visit to the NCCB, Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey, the Acting Moderator of CCA, expressed deep appreciation to the churches in Bangladesh for their warm hospitality and for welcoming the CCA leadership to the NCCB, and affirmed to continuously pray for interreligious harmony and peace in Bangladesh.



PROPHETIC DIAKONIA AND ADVOCACY

OBJECTIVES

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



Turkey-Syria earthquake



International Women's Day-2023

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 2023..

Grief on the loss of thousands of lives in Turkey-Syria earthquake

6 February 2023

The CCA expressed grief and mourned the loss of thousands of lives in the earthquake that ravaged Turkey and Syria on 6 February 2023.

The 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck 23 kilometres east of Nurdagi in Turkey's Gaziantep Province in the early morning when most people were asleep in their homes. The quake was one of the strongest to hit the region in more than 100 years.

Syria, where over four million people were affected by the decade-long conflict and civil war, was badly affected, too. It was reported that at least 15,000 people were killed and tens of thousands were injured in the devastation.

The CCA General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara expressed profound grief at the death and destruction caused by the earthquake and said, "We hold in our prayers the victims and their families as well as the communities in these affected areas that continue to work tirelessly in hazardous conditions to rescue survivors."

"The CCA expresses solidarity with the people of Turkey and Syria in this tragic situation. We pray for God's comforting presence among the affected people at this time of loss, destruction, and deep uncertainty. We also commit those engaged in rescue operations and provisions of aid and assistance," stated the CCA General Secretary..

International Women's Day

8 March 2023

The CCA General Secretary released a statement on the occasion of International Women's Day (IWD)-2023, titled, "DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality", which addressed the impact of the digital gender gap on widening economic and social inequalities, and also highlighted the importance of seeking a more inclusive and equitable world.

"On this International Women's Day, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) affirms its commitment to standing in solidarity with women and girls around the world and to using our platforms, voice and resources to advocate for gender equality and justice. The CCA calls

upon its member constituencies and ecumenical partners to deepen their understanding of digital inequalities and address, to the best of their capacities, the barriers that women and girls face in the productive use of digital technologies and science," said the statement.

The CCA called upon its member churches and councils to promote community awareness and education campaigns to eliminate discriminatory norms and attitudes that underpin gender-based discrimination and violence and also to make available pastoral care for women and girls who have experienced online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

World Refugee Day–2023

20 June 2023

In the CCA's statement on World Refugee Day–2023, the General Secretary of CCA said, "The theme of World Refugee Day–2023, 'Hope away from Home: A World Where Refugees are Always Included', reminds us of the transformative power of inclusion and the importance of equitable access to spaces where refugees can be safe and thrive. Inclusion is key to empowering refugees and enabling them to restart their lives, contributing to their host countries, and preparing for the possibility of their returning home when conditions allow."

The statement also stated, "We must strive to reach those most in need and protect human rights, equality, dignity,

meaningful participation, peace and security. Together, with the dedication of citizens and organisations, we can make a difference in the lives of refugees and work towards a more just and compassionate world."

In the statement, the CCA affirmed its solidarity with refugees, especially those in Asia, acknowledging the immense hardship they experience, and their courage amidst adversity. The CCA also urged the international community and neighbouring Asian countries to take immediate action for refugee support and protection and also appealed for peace and long-term solutions to the refugee crisis.

World Day Against Trafficking in Persons

30 July 2023

The CCA released a statement on World Day against Trafficking in Persons–2023, highlighting the importance of "collective effort, transcending the boundaries of government, business, and civil society" to tackle the global problem of trafficking by creating "a net of safety to protect each victim of trafficking, ensuring no one is left behind".

"As Christians, we are called to love our neighbours and extend a helping hand to those in need. Leaving no one behind in the fight against trafficking means ending the exploitation of victims, providing comprehensive support for survivors, and addressing the vulnerabilities that make certain groups more susceptible to trafficking. It requires us to build strong

partnerships based on trust, respect, and shared responsibility. We are reminded "to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute" (Proverbs 31:8)."

The General Secretary of CCA urged Asian churches to be sensitised to the reality of trafficking and encouraged increased attention and resources of Asian churches to stop trafficking in all forms. The statement further urged that as Christians we are compelled to "join hands and form partnerships to address the root causes of trafficking and work towards its eradication", including partnering with survivors, ensuring that "their voices are heard, their rights protected, and their dignity is upheld."

Condemning violence against Christians in Jaranwala, Pakistan

17 August 2023

The General Secretary of CCA strongly condemned the attack on the churches and homes of Christian families in Jaranwala, Faisalabad district, of the Punjab province in Pakistan.

On 16 August, two Christians were allegedly accused of committing blasphemy and violating the Quran. Angry mobs descended onto Maharanwala Basti, a predominantly Christian neighbourhood, and set fire to

WORLD Refugee Day

JUN 20



World Refugee Day–2023

World Day Against Trafficking in Persons

30 Jul, 2023

'Reach Every Victim of Trafficking:
Leave No One Behind'



World Day Against Trafficking in Persons–2023



Violence against Christians in Jaranwala, Pakistan



CCA joined Mission-21 workshop on Good Governance

eleven churches and several houses and shops, which forced over 500 families to vacate.

In the statement, the CCA denounced the weaponisation of Pakistan's blasphemy

laws against minority groups and called for immediate police intervention and for the safeguarding of Christian residences and churches to prevent further violence.

Urging immediate lifting of the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh

18 August 2023

The General Secretary of CCA called for the immediate lifting of the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, which spurred a humanitarian crisis affecting over 120,000 individuals, including 30,000 children.

Azerbaijan blocked the Lachin corridor, which is the sole connecting route from the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia for several months. This ensuing humanitarian crisis was caused by dwindling supplies of food, medicine, electricity, and fuel.

In the statement, the CCA condemned Azerbaijan's blockade of the ethnic Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh, denouncing it as a violation of international agreements and human rights principles. "The deliberate obstruction of the Lachin corridor exacerbates an already dire situation for the Armenian residents. Such actions contradict claims of goodwill and humanitarian responsibility by Azerbaijan, underscoring the urgent need for international attention," said the statement.

Good Governance

Good Governance Workshop: Mission 21 and Partners

15–20 January 2023 | Bali, Indonesia

Mission-21 (M-21) organised a Good Governance programme with its partners in Asia from 15 to 20 January 2023 in Bali, Indonesia. The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) was represented by John Paul Devakumar and Yuliana M. Benu. Twenty-five interfaith partners of the M-21 in Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Malaysia attended the meeting.

The week-long programme focused on increased awareness and respect for citizens' rights among the M-21 partners. The M-21 asked its partners to bring new hope for people and communities in their own contexts with stronger commitments to a human rights-based approach and sustainable development. The M-21 also urged its partners to implement PSEAH (Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment) in their working system.

Ciput Eka Purwianti, Director for Special Protection for Children from Violence of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, explained the context of Indonesia related to gender-

based violence experienced by children and women. She also stressed that modern technology contributed to new forms of violence.

"Green corruption" was also highlighted as a salient issue. Laode M. Syarif, Executive Director, KEMITRAAN and Faculty of Law, Hasanuddin University, presented this topic by explaining the interconnection between corruption in mining activities, climate change, and natural disasters. He demonstrated how rich the natural resources were in Indonesia. However, corruption and irresponsible actions impacted the environment and people.

It was also stressed that government leaders must be held accountable for signing long-term contracts with multinational companies for over two decades of mining activities. The monitoring and control system of governments related to mining activities did not effectively work and failed to prevent environmental exploitation.

The worsening environmental situation posed a great challenge for churches, organisations, governments, and the public to stand together and take responsibility for the sustainability of the environment, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia, which are located in the 'Ring of Fire'. Hence, disaster risk management was necessary to reduce hazards by conducting training on disaster management, contingency plans, and codes of conduct for humanitarian workers, camps, and volunteer management.

COSO Audit Management System and Corruption and Excursion Fraud and Fraud Control Plan sessions were discussed, followed by best practice experiences from Pasundan Christian Church (GKP). Rudi Rany and Yulison Marpaung explained the correlation between the internal management systems of organisations and communities related to internal and external audit results. Poor management systems could lead

individuals or a group of people to commit fraud. Hence, strengthening systems, including fraud control plan mechanisms and crisis management systems, was necessary to prevent fraud and safeguard the organisation from short- or long-term crises.

Claudia Buess in her session 'Decolonise Aid', stated, "Many current practices and attitudes in the aid system mirror and are derived from the colonial era which most organisations and donors in the Global North are still reluctant to acknowledge."

Reflecting on this situation, organisations and communities in partnership with M-21, which mostly were from the Global South, were called to evaluate and reflect on the process of networking. Evaluation processes could assist and strengthen M-21 and its partners to avoid Global North superiority usually associated with white supremacy, power abuse, and structural racism in development cooperation and partnership relations.

Ecumenical Diakonia, Solidarity, and Accompaniment

Leaders' Conference (ACELC) on 'Ecumenical Diakonia and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia'

3–5 May 2023 | Jakarta, Indonesia

The Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference (ACELC): Ecumenical Diakonia and Ecumenical Accompaniment was held in Jakarta, Indonesia on 3–5 May and focused on ecumenical diakonia and ecumenical accompaniment.

The ACELC was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in association with the Protestant Church in the Western Part of Indonesia (GPPI) and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI). It was attended by more than one hundred heads of churches—primates, bishops, presidents, general secretaries, and moderators—as well as general secretaries of national councils of churches in Asia.

"Diakonia is a permanent activity of the church and is as important as worship and witness. Today, we see contexts of

weaponisation of diakonia as a means of dominance and dependence, to create spheres of influence as well as to demonstrate the superiority of the giver. A truly authentic diakonia, which involves more than the giving of money, goods, and services, and more than the sharing of resources or personnel, needs to be evolved. Diakonia demands taking upon oneself the suffering of others. Participation in the struggle for social justice and echoing the prophetic voice must be part of the church's diaconal mission," said CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara narrated the metamorphosis of the concept of diakonia; from its narrow understanding of charity, or following a practice of giving and receiving, to sharing and pooling of resources together as well as extending



CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara speaks on 'Ecumenical Diakonia: The Ecclesial Action for all God's People and all Creation'



WCC Programme Executive Rev. Matthew Ross introduces WCC publication 'Ecumenical Diakonia: Called to Transformation'



Rev. Dr Mery Kolimon (Indonesia) speaks on 'Diakonia: Service for Humanity'



Dcn. Ayub Junus (Indonesia, left), Ms Juliata Malakar (Bangladesh, centre), and Rev. Joshua Peter (India, right) spoke on 'Ecumenical Diakonia: Effective Models of Partnership in Witness and Service in Asia'

support to mega development projects with back donors' funding. He also said that ecumenical diakonia should not have a 'hit-and-run' approach or a one-off project but entails continuing accompaniment, solidarity, and advocacy, in which churches can play important roles through local congregations who are engaged in diakonia. In Asia today, Ecumenical Diakonia is projected or understood as a corporate enterprise of certain church development agencies bilaterally operating in poor countries without involving local churches as they consider the local churches are incompetent bodies who cannot demonstrate any professionalism in diaconal mission.

Rev. Matthew Ross, Programme Executive for Diakonia and Capacity-building with the World Council of Churches (WCC), delivered a presentation on 'Ecumenical Diakonia: Called to Transformation' which primarily focused on the 2022 WCC publication of the same name. "Diakonia is church-related social care—an integral part of Christian service which we in faith are called to do. Faith is our response to God's grace; so, sustained by worship, prayer, and the Word of God, we are called to live out God's grace and love in loving neighbour as self. Yet, we cannot do this alone. We need to work in collaboration with our Christian sisters and brothers. In working together, we increase our capacity and maximise the benefits for those who need them most. Hence, ecumenical diakonia," said Rev. Ross. He further added that diakonia must be inclusive—not merely doing acts of kindness to others from a position of wealth or privilege, but recognising that human beings are equal in God's sight, and that diaconal service must involve and engage the users rather than treating them as passive recipients from whom gratitude is anticipated.

Rev. Dr Mery Kolimon, the Moderator of the Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor in Indonesia and a theological educator, emphasised the need for the proper perception of diakonia. "Diakonia is a sign and proclamation of God's love to everyone. Services for the poor

and marginalised must be carried out in respect of human dignity as the image of God. Diaconal services should not be used to belittle those who are assisted or to create dependency. Instead, diaconal service should be based on the understanding that each human being has an intrinsic capacity, which is stimulated through the empowerment and independence offered through service-as-accompaniment", said Rev. Dr Mery. She said that diakonia, as primarily understood by the Indonesian churches, functioned at three levels: charitable, reformative, and transformative. Charitable diaconal services were incidental to needs in the short term, while reformative diaconal services were intended to strengthen the quality of human life. Transformative diakonia served the struggle for peace and justice for humans and nature, including advocacy against injustice and exploitation of vulnerable groups and the environment, said Rev. Kolimon.

The session on 'Ecumenical Diakonia: Effective Models of Partnership in Witness and Service in Asia' was led by Juliate Malakar from the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), Rev. Joshua Peter from the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India, and Dcn. Ayub Junus from the Protestant Church in the Western Part of Indonesia (GBIP). Rev. Dr Kim Sungjae from the National Christian Council in Japan was the moderator of the session.

Ms Malakar, the Executive Director of the CCDB, presented programmes addressing poverty reduction, food security, climate change, economic empowerment, resettlement, post-disaster humanitarian responses, and organisational sustainability.

The Climate Centre was a new initiative of the CCDB, clubbed with a climate park with training facilities on organic food production and food security, crop resilience, and agrotourism. As an ecumenical development organisation originally founded in the 1970s by the World Council of Churches (WCC) together with several ecumenical partners from different parts of the world, the CCDB has been a model in the ecumenical family for

mutual learning and sharing of resources. The 700-strong staff team also comprised people of different faiths and gained strong credibility with the government.

Rev. Peter, the Executive Secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI), a communion of twelve Lutheran denominations in India, spoke about the successful ecumenical diaconal initiatives in India, such as relief and development, healthcare, education, advocacy, and social justice. He added that effective partnerships could be strengthened through mutual respect and trust, shared vision and goals, complementary capacities, and effective communication.

Rev. Peter strongly emphasised what he termed 'dia-praxis' or interfaith dialogue model of partnership. Such a partnership, with people of other faiths, was based on a shared commitment to the promotion of peace, justice, and human dignity. It would help to build bridges across religious divides, provide opportunities for mutual learning and support, and offer a common platform to work together on shared social and environmental concerns.

Dcn. Ayub Junus, the Chairperson of the Diakonia Foundation of the Protestant Church in the Western Part of Indonesia, said, "Ecumenical diakonia calls for the unity of all churches to promote peace and social justice in the world created by God by serving more communities in need and expanding the outreach to those in need, both near and far away. Ecumenical diakonia goes beyond the limits of our congregation and passes across borders of countries to support people who need help, lack resources or access to opportunities, and are in distress, poverty, or other difficult living circumstances."

Dcn. Junus spoke of the experiences of working among Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia and other Asian countries and outlined pathways of collaboration between Indonesian and Malaysian churches to provide legal aid, raise awareness through lobbying and

advocacy, and offer support and comfort to migrant workers.

Delivering a sobering message and a call to action in the session entitled 'Ecumenical Diakonia: Prophetic Witness and Participation in the Struggle for Peace with Justice' on the fourth day of the ACELC, Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, CCA Vice Moderator, who belongs to the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, said that through prophetic witness the Church was challenged to be ambassadors for Christ and heralds of God, agents of justice, and advocates of a new reality so that transformation and reconciliation could be experienced by all people.

Bishop Marigza said, "The biblical concept of shalom is more than peace... it is wholeness, well-being, growth, harmony, security, and equality—not just the absence of violence and war. No justice, no peace! Know justice, know peace!" He also outlined the struggles or complexities involved in being prophets or human rights defenders in the Filipino context.

Bishop Marigza also put forth an acrostic 'PROPHETS': where 'P' was no palliative solutions, 'R' was for righteousness and justice, 'O' was for overhauling the system, 'P' was for pastoral care, 'H' was for holding on to the will of God, 'E' for exposing the wrongs and evils of our times, 'T' for truth-telling, and 'S' for sacrifice and self-emptying.

The discussion on 'Enhancing Capacities of Asian Churches for Strengthening Ecumenical Diakonia' saw presentations by Rev. Asir Ebenezer from the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), Rev. Dr Park Do Woong from the Korean Methodist Church, and Rev. Levi de Vasconcelos Pinto from the Protestant Church in Timor Leste. The session was moderated by Rev. Po Kam Cheong from the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China (HKCCCC).

Rev. Asir Ebenezer, the General Secretary of the NCCI, said that 'there is no diakonia without koinonia'. Ecumenical diakonia



Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza (Philippines) reflected on ‘Ecumenical Diakonia: Prophetic Witness and Participation in the Struggle for Peace with Justice’



Rev. Asir Ebenezer (India, right), Rev. Levi de Vasconcelos Pinto (Timor-Leste, centre-right), and Rev. Dr Park Do Woong (Korea, centre-left), spoke on ‘Enhancing Capacities of Asian Churches for Strengthening Ecumenical Diakonia’; moderator by Rev. Po Kam Cheong (Hong Kong, left)



Rev. W.P. Ebenezer Joseph (Sri Lanka) spoke on 'Ecumenical Diakonia: Solidarity and Accompaniment'



Participants of the ACELC at the GPIB Emmanuel Church in Jakarta, Indonesia

was diakonia that was expressed, practised, and rolled out ecumenically with the optimisation of resources and amidst hostile conditions where no other organisations could permeate, unlike the churches. “Churches have the capacity of being living examples of Christ in community,” he added.

“We need to start with what we have through an appreciative inquiry. Jesus fed 5000 with five loaves and two fish; He healed a congenital eye disease with saliva and soil,” said Rev. Asir, encouraging the ACELC participants to harness, recognise, and acknowledge the human resources, capacities, and expertise in their congregations.

Rev. Dr Park Do Woong, a member of the Central Committee of the WCC from the Korean Methodist Church, strongly presented the case for ecumenical diakonia given the situations of social divides and economic inequality, slow growth of churches after the COVID-19 pandemic, weakening of the church’s prophetic voice, lack of theological interpretations and messages on crises such as climate change and war, challenges from fundamentalism and heresies to authentic mission and evangelism, and a lack of training and resources for the younger generations.

“Christian churches in Asia and all over the world have a responsibility to sympathise with the challenges and crises that humanity faces, and to present religious alternatives,” said Rev. Dr Park. Ecumenical diakonia could strengthen the prophetic voice of the church through solidarity and cooperation, and enable the development of ecological theologies, green spiritualities, and other new paradigms of faith and theology curricula.

Levi de Vasconcelos Pinto, a leader from the Protestant Church in Timor Leste, spoke about the post-Independence experiences of his church in diaconal ministry with ecumenical partners such as the CCA, WCC, and Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), World Communion of Reformed Churches

(WCRC), in the ‘joint struggle for independence and human rights’.

“The ecumenical community supported the people of Timor Leste by providing scholarship opportunities, sending medicines, building clinics, and giving humanitarian support to strengthen the persistence and resistance of the local people,” shared Mr Pinto.

Mr Pinto further talked about the theological characteristics of diakonia, namely, diakonia that resists any form of dominion, diakonia that emerges from the margins, and diakonia that is experienced in the Eucharist of the risen Christ.

The concluding biblical-theological reflection on ‘Ecumenical Diakonia: Solidarity and Accompaniment’ at the ACELC was delivered by Rev. W.P. Ebenezer Joseph, the President of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka.

“Ecumenical diakonia is not comfortable or pleasant; it is to be immersed in a journey that expresses solidarity until the aspirations of those we serve are fully met...We must be immersed in the pains and agonies of people, and walk with them in the journey they determine, we must be with them until they experience a perfect transformation. Have we [as the Church] discerned the nature of our call to be in solidarity and accompaniment?” remarked the head of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka and recipient of the 2022 World Methodist Peace Prize.

Recounting the service and accompaniment of the Sri Lankan churches during the thirty-year civil war, the 2004 tsunami, and the more recent economic crisis, Rev. Joseph said, “The [Sri Lankan] people saw the witness of the Church as one that accompanied in solidarity with and among them, that did not abandon them or escape but suffered and served with and among them. The call for solidarity and accompaniment is rooted in self-sacrifice and needs courage, commitment, and hope. The contemporary Asian Church needs to repent, reflect and reorient its lifestyle, renew its commitment, reaffirm its hope, respond in faith, and be ready to sacrifice itself.”

Rev. Joseph concluded with thought-provoking questions, such as, “Will we give up solidarity and accompaniment when there is no donor money, no specialists, no profit, nor recognition or affirmation? Are we willing to serve as one Church with an ecumenical dimension, rather than as separate denominations? We serve people regardless of their faith—but are we willing to serve with people of other faiths?”

An interesting proposal that emerged and was discussed at the ACELC was the creation of an ecumenical diakonia forum, facilitated by the CCA, that would function as a platform for sharing of resources generated within Asia by churches and related ecumenical organisations. This would require Asian churches to be engaged in project collaborations and accompaniment as part of the authentic

diakonia and witnessing together amidst Asia’s pluralistic contexts.

The Jakarta Conference explored the capacities of Asian churches for strengthening diakonia, diakonia as a prophetic witness and participation in the struggle for peace with justice, effective models of partnership in witness and service, and biblical-theological reflections on diakonia as service for humanity and diakonia as solidarity and accompaniment.

A Communique released at the end of the high-level historic meet of ecumenical and ecclesial leaders reflected a renewed commitment from the participants to strengthening ecumenical diakonia in Asia, including the proposal of a common platform to synthesise regional diakonal efforts that would operate under the aegis of the CCA.

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

26–28 September 2023 | Kottayam, Kerala, India

At the Diakonia Pre-Assembly, participants hailed from various countries, including Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Germany, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, South Korea, Cambodia, and Bhutan.

The journey towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through Ecumenical Diakonia began with the opening worship. This service served as a reminder to each participant of the collective calling to strive for authentic service and love for all creation consistently. Together, humans were called to embark on this journey with God, standing in solidarity with the suffering and the earth in distress and pushing beyond comfort zones.

Dr Manoj Kurian from the World Council of Churches emphasised that participants in the Assembly were not merely attendees for training or facilitation. With diverse backgrounds, the goal was mutual learning and sharing. The sessions went beyond lectures but were opportunities to unite in understanding diakonia as holistic. Dr Manoj invites everyone as

fellow co-workers, encouraging self-challenge in the current challenging world. He urges participants to dedicate and utilise this time to become peers in fellowship.

Rev. Prof. Dr Dietrich Werner-Dorfel from Gossner Mission addressed the theme ‘Ecumenical Diakonia, towards attaining Sustainable Development Goals’. Dr Werner-Dorfel discussed diakonia as the second language of Christians, emphasising action through social Christian work. He highlighted the symbolic language of deeds, expressing love, mercy, and justice, particularly for the wounded and those working in the field. He emphasised the importance of every church, regardless of size, engaging in giving and receiving, stressing its significance in ministry. Diakonia, he asserted, goes beyond mercy—it is about justice for societal transformation globally.

Dr Werner-Dorfel encouraged bold public voices, advocacy, and addressing sensitive issues in countries. The concept of ‘Ecumenical Diakonia’ was discussed, emphasising

the church's interconnectedness and support for one another. Biblical references such as Acts 11:27-29 and Matthew 25:40 underscored the humanitarian and ecumenical response. Integrating development work, disaster response, and human rights work was explored, challenging churches to rethink their role in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The talk highlighted SDGs' alignment with ecumenical diakonia, emphasising a transformative approach to global development. Metanoia, a change in direction, was proposed, emphasising the need for a global shift in human development, especially concerning climate issues. Dr Werner-Dorfel stressed the vital role of governments and the closeness of churches to people, particularly in rural areas, upholding the dignity of individuals.

Rev. William Premkumar Ebenezer Joseph from Sri Lanka reflected on the theme of 'Stewardship of God's Creation'. His reflection began by highlighting the divine mandate for humanity to serve as stewards of creation, ensuring the continuation of life. Notably, the emphasis was not solely on human life but extended to all living things, drawing inspiration from Genesis 1. Further details were explored in Genesis 2:15, reinforcing the mandate to preserve and care for the environment. The reflection emphasised the interconnectedness of humans, God, and the world, portraying God as the symbol of the entire totality of creation. Expressions of faith, whether through praise and worship or other forms, were urged to be practised in alignment with the stewardship mandate. To truly understand this responsibility, immersion and a revised approach to nature were essential in today's pluralistic world. The reflection also touched on the current state of the church, expressing concerns about potential identity loss when actions do not align with statements. The call was for the church to move beyond mere verbal expressions, emphasising the need for meaningful action and a genuine embodiment of the principles it preaches, especially concerning the stewardship of God's creation.

Dr Manoj Kurian from the World Council of Churches discussed the salient features of 'Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia'. Diakonia, he asserted, is an integral aspect of the church's essence and mission. Understanding diakonia requires recognising humanity's creation in the image of God. Dr Kurian questioned whether diakonia is lost in translation, emphasising that the Hebrew word encompasses both service and worship. Strategies for effective Diakonia include ensuring the dignity of all through a rights-based approach.

During the Q&A session, a question about the effectiveness of diakonia in oppressive government or dictatorial societies was addressed. Dr Kurian stressed the importance of serving the oppressed and not merely standing or speaking for them. He compared this role to a symbolic metaphor of yeast, implying that even a small effort can significantly impact. Dr Kurian urged the church to move against the current development trend, emphasising resilience and the role of individuals as the hands of God, bringing hope. He highlighted the importance of sensitivity and the need to share stories of diakonia, suggesting a shift from social diakonia to eco-diakonia. To enhance understanding, he encouraged collecting and sharing stories, emphasising the importance of the common voice of Asians in diakonia, currently overshadowed by a Western perspective.

Mr Anand Joshua from TENT India delivered a talk on 'Integrity Leadership: Towards Mutual Accountability and Transparency'. He outlined seven habits of highly effective strategic leadership, emphasising the importance of being grounded in vision, mission, and core values, accountable leadership and governance, effective communication, a focus on people, shared ownership, strategic focus, and feedback and learning. He posed critical questions about the relevance of diakonia, urging leaders to continuously ask why they are doing what they do and ensuring clarity on their role in the changing context.

Mr Joshua delved into the challenges of the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world, emphasising that leadership demands a deep understanding beyond a mere job description. He provided strategies for handling the VUCA world: vision for volatility, understanding for uncertainty, clarity for complexity, and agility for ambiguity.

The discussion shifted to the strategic aspect of leadership, emphasising the need for clarity as leaders move forward. Mr Joshua proposed clarifying mutual aspects in leadership, questioning whether accountability and transparency are mutually exclusive, and calling for strategic clarification. He stressed the shared nature of vision and prompted reflection on building accountability and transparency within the mission. Key questions included defining mutual accountability in the kingdom journey and encouraging Christians to reflect on these issues within their churches and institutions.

Bishop Feliciana Tenchavez from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines comprehensively reflected on the theme 'Diakonia: Service for Humanity'. Bishop Tenchavez explored the meaning of diakonia, emphasising its role as a permanent activity of the church rooted in Christ's service and teachings. The reflection delved into the spirituality and purpose of diakonia, connecting it with justice, kindness, and humility. Bishop Tenchavez also highlighted the challenges faced in the Philippine context, particularly concerning human rights violations and the persecution of church leaders engaged in diakonia. Additionally, she discussed diakonia in relation to indigenous peoples' spirituality, emphasising their deep connection to nature. The reflection concluded by addressing the impact of diakonia on climate change issues and the urgent need for the renewal and restoration of creation. The reflection emphasised the call for Christians to serve humanity and care for God's creations through diakonia.

Dr Manoj Kurian from the World Council of Churches discussed the relevance of the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to the church and its diakonal ministries. He noted that the SDGs of the United Nations do not sufficiently highlight the concerns of indigenous people, a viewpoint supported by the World Council of Churches. He then outlined the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, emphasising their significance in addressing global challenges, including poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. Dr. Kurian highlighted the importance of ecumenical diakonia, aligning it with Christian principles of service and ministry to address the SDGs.

He concluded by posing reflective questions for faith communities and organisations to assess their engagement with each SDG. These questions encourage a thoughtful, informed, and systematic approach, stressing inclusivity, collaboration, and communication in pursuing justice, equity, and flourishing.

Anand Joshua from TENT India discussed the theme of 'Good Governance for Effective Diakonal Ministry' and focused on strengthening management systems in terms of human and financial resources. He addresses the role of Christians, particularly people in business, in making a meaningful impact on society. Joshua emphasised the road to good governance, including accountability, stewardship, statutory compliance, responsiveness, and transparency. The speaker underlined the importance of vision and mission alignment, governance and board commitment, leadership support, staff commitment and capability, and establishing effective systems, processes, and structures for business and mission continuity. Learning from failures, practising servant leadership, and avoiding involvement in too many activities are encouraged.

Stewardship was highlighted as a crucial aspect of giving back to the community, whether in terms of human or financial resources. Joshua delved into human resources management, encompassing planning, organisation, direction, control,



Rev. Prof. Dr Dietrich Werner-Dorfel (Germany) spoke on 'Ecumenical Diakonia, towards attaining Sustainable Development Goals'



Participants of the Pre-Assembly Consultation on Ecumenical Diakonia

and handling personnel. Financial resources, involving funds and assets, were discussed in terms of managing finances, generating finances, and fostering generosity. The speaker advocated for a shift from talking about 'giving' to promoting 'generosity'.

The presentation concluded with the Employee Value Proposition, a response to a changing environment, and the embrace of best practices. The Employee Value Proposition involved providing attractive benefits, a positive work environment, and aligning organisational values with staff care. Adapting to a changing environment required a flexible yet disciplined approach, emphasising compliance and delivering care while building organisational capacity. Embracing best practices entailed strategic alignment with people and culture, dynamic structures, technology-driven solutions, compliance focus, effective leadership, and risk management.

The group identified the strength of tradition as a significant aspect of their ministry expressions. However, they acknowledged that relying solely on tradition could pose a challenge, particularly in connecting with the younger generation. The importance of preserving the philosophy of tradition while adapting it to resonate with younger members was emphasised. Addressing the generation gap and actively involving the youth was necessary for their ministry's continuity and relevance.

The discussion on the future included the proposal to initiate Asian ecumenical institutes for diakonia ministry, emphasising a collaborative effort involving multiple countries rather than being owned by one or two. Another perspective involved the idea that power comes from the people, emphasising the organisation of people and the future of leadership. Additionally, there was a focus on integrating technological processes into development and exploring how technology can enhance their Diakonia ministry.

Ms Juliate Keya Malakar, the Director of the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) facilitated the session

on 'People's Participation in Sustainable Development'. She highlighted the work of CCDB, especially in empowering the community towards achieving sustainable development goals. She mentioned that people should be the heart of development and that learning their innovations has a deeper impact on sustainable development.

In Mr Anand Joshua's presentation on 'Strategic planning towards Ecumenical Diakonia and SDGs in South Asia', service was defined as going beyond one's capabilities, starting with genuine self-service. The focus extended to serving distant individuals and those near, including family. The emphasis is on being 'incarnate' with society, striving for a decent life for all. A key takeaway is the call for church leaders to come down the streets, emphasising practical engagement over mere strategising.

Rev. Asir Ebenezer, the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) shared the biblical reflection on 'Diakonia as the Mission and the Prophetic Witness of the Church'.

Dr Manoj Kurian facilitated a vital segment of the session, delving into networking, accompaniment, and peer support, highlighting the imperative nature of community networks and supportive structures. The discussion underscored the need for accompaniment and peer support for effective community engagement. Capacity-building and resources pillars were addressed with a strong emphasis on enhancing individual capacities and allocating resources to meet community needs.

The recognition of the significance of equipping theological institutions and diakonia practitioners formed a pivotal aspect of this discourse. Another focal point was the connection between theological institutions and diakonia practitioners, stressing the importance of a robust link between these entities. The discussion highlighted the need for strong ties, emphasising the relevance of theological education in addressing

contemporary social issues and ensuring practitioners stay updated with the evolving landscape.

The conversation acknowledged a commitment to these pillars and outlined a comprehensive follow-up strategy. This approach centres around practical actions, transformative ecumenism in theological education, and creating platforms for discussions and awareness. Dr Kurian and the participants emphasised the significance of providing spaces for

dialogue in diverse contexts, including church assemblies. The commitment to networking, ensuring clear resources, and strengthening theological ties was reiterated, with participants encouraged to provide feedback through online forms. Furthermore, the dialogue touched upon the importance of encouraging church members, promoting educational initiatives, and engaging with neighbouring faiths, particularly in the dynamic context of Asia.

Migration, Trafficking, and Statelessness

Asian Ecumenical Migrants Advocacy Network (AEMAN) Forum

25–28 September 2023 | Kottayam, Kerala, India

The Asian Ecumenical Migrants Advocacy Network (AEMAN) Forum Meeting was held from 25 to 29 September 2023 at the CMS College in Kottayam, India. The programme was organised in conjunction with the 15th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia.

The AEMAN was attended by forty-five participants, comprising official voting delegates to the Assembly, specially invited experts, representatives from the Gulf region, and theological students. The participants originated from seventeen regions/countries: Aotearoa New Zealand, Bhutan, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kuwait, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom.

The keynote address on 'The Rights and Dignity of Asian Migrant Workers in the Diaspora' was delivered by Prof. Dr S. Irudaya Rajan from the International Institute on Migration and Development. He emphatically declared, "The church needs to recognise and internalise migration". The renowned scholar said that churches should not fear the changing demographics of their congregations due to migration but rather should thoroughly prepare people who intend to migrate.

The Biblical-Theological Reflection on 'Affirming God's Will: Justice and Hospitality for Restoration and Renewal' was delivered by Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah from the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India. He said, "Providing hospitality to the stranger or outsider or alien as the Old Testament emphasises is not a comfortable compassionate act; it is an act associated with respecting one's humanity as in the image of God (imago Dei). The act of hospitality is an act of justice for the restoration and renewal of relationships. This will overcome the "strangeness" human beings find in others. When humans extend hospitality, they identify themselves with the nature of God's character."

Rev. Oscar J. Cuevas from the Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines and Mr Jiji Varghese from DPCOG Saudi Arabia spoke on 'Challenges faced by Asian Migrant Workers – I'.

Rev. Cuevas shared six key challenges related to labour markets, namely, exploitative labour practices, unsafe working environments, debt bondage, discrimination and xenophobia, lack of access to healthcare and education, and human trafficking and forced labour.



AEMAN Pre-Assembly Forum's Keynote Address was delivered by Prof. Dr Sebastian Irudaya Rajan (India)

He also analysed trends of economic recovery and job opportunities, return migration and reintegration, digitalisation and automation, and government policies.

Mr Jiji Varghese, an entrepreneur who is also deeply involved with social organisations to combat human rights violations, spoke about the "Drama of Recruitment", which included migrant workers, labour recruiters, business enterprises, and multinational brands". He also shared the impact of the kafala system in Saudi Arabia: although it had been abolished two years ago, it still had consequences on the dynamics between employer and employee in the country.

The session on 'Challenges faced by Asian Migrant Workers – II' saw presentations by Dr Ginu Zachariah Oommen from the International Institute for Migration and Development and by Ms Janejinda Pawadee from LIFT International.

Dr Oommen focused on 'Transnational Families: Impact of Migration on Family Dynamics' and spoke about the social cost of migration compared to the economic cost of migration. He pointed

out the difference between male-centric migration to the Gulf (construction labour) versus female-centric migration to the Gulf (nursing), and how both affected the basic family unit. Further issues highlighted were the absence of grandparents, monoculturalism and monolingualism, education-work mismatch, and reverse remittances.

Ms Janejinda Pawadee presented on 'Systemic Inequalities: Barriers to Medical, Social, and Legal Access'. She spoke about the wanted and unwanted flows of people, irregular migration, and reasons for undocumented migration. Systemic inequalities were made worse by ignorance/stereotypes, culture clashes and misinterpretation of traditional or religious perspectives, unequal power relationships, illiteracy, and fear. She presented case studies from Thailand and other Mekong countries.

The Biblical-theological reflection on 'The Exodus Narrative: Liberation and Journey to Freedom as Attaining the Fullness of Life' was delivered by Rev. Prince Devanandan from the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand. He

emphasised the theological aspects of the Exodus narrative and connected it with two migration flows: from Canaan to Egypt due to a severe drought and the subsequent liberation from slavery in Egypt. The presentation also drew parallels between the Exodus narrative and contemporary issues, particularly the exploitation and oppression faced by migrant workers. It underscored the breakdown of divine norms and the prevalence of human greed, leading to social and economic disparities.

The session on 'Gender Dynamics in Migration: Women Workers' Experiences' saw two presentations by Ms Yusmiati Vistamika Wangka from the Christian Action Centre for Migrant Domestic Workers in Hong Kong, and Rev. Jollify Daniel, the Director of Women's Ministry at the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (BCCM).

Focusing on the feminisation of migration, Ms Wangka also touched upon pre-migration gendered aspects such as the feminisation of poverty, gender roles and inequality, gendered division of labour, and the migration industry. "The vast majority of women migrate out of necessity, not out of choice," she said.

Rev. Daniel shared the work of the BCCM's Grace Centre which caters to the children of migrant workers. She talked about the challenges of negotiating different identities and the role of women in securing transnational families.

Atty. Vijula Arulanantham who practices law in Sri Lanka, and Mr Solomon David, a consultant from Dubai working also as a coordinator for migrant workers delivered presentations during the session on 'Promoting a Culture of Human Dignity'.

Ms Arulanantham emphasised standardised/fair contracts of employment, wage protection and benefits, healthcare, access

to justice and just laws, adequate living and working conditions, education/training, reforms to the employer sponsorship system, recruitment, repatriation and reintegration, grievance redressal mechanisms, partnership and collaboration, and international conventions.

Mr David spoke on 'Cultural Diplomacy: Promoting Understanding between Sending and Receiving Countries'. He emphasised pluralism, tolerance, and intercultural dialogue. He also spoke of recognising God in the other as a Christian mission in a multi-religious world.

'Mobilising Churches for Action: Raising Awareness and Providing Support – I' was the focus of two presentations by Ms Zion Chung, a missionary from the Korean Christian Church in Japan, and Rev. Jimmy Sormin, who works with the Communion of Churches in Indonesia.

Rev. Zion Chung spoke on 'Digital Empowerment: Technology's Role in Migrant Advocacy' and brought out the positive impacts that technology could have for improving the lives of migrant workers. She presented the context of migration in Japan and shared case studies of two NGOs offering migrant services.

Speaking on 'Religious Spaces as Support Networks for Community Action', Rev. Sormin shared best practices from the churches and national council in Indonesia for migrant ministries. These included training for church workers and pastors, advocacy on legal issues, building shelters, and supporting migrant workers' training.

Bishop Steven Lawrence and Dcn. Stephanus Suwu were the speakers for the session on 'Mobilising Churches for Action: Raising Awareness and Providing Support – II'.



Participants of the AEMAN Pre-Assembly Forum meeting

Bishop Lawrence, the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia, spoke on the topic 'Unpacking Cultural Integration' and shared the history of Malaysia as a country defined by migration, as well as several examples of the integration of distinct ethnic communities.

Dcn. Suwu from the Gereja Protestan di Indonesia bagian Barat spoke on 'Narrative of Returning and Reintegration' and shared the challenges of migrant workers who return home, especially after negative experiences of exploitation and discrimination. He shared several ways in which such migrants who returned could be supported by pastoral ministries.

The Biblical-theological reflection on 'Jesus as the Migrant: Incarnation and Solidarity in his Dwelling with Creation' was delivered by Rev. P.G. George, a scholar on immigrant theology from the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Jesus' very incarnation and moving from heaven to dwell with his creation is viewed as an archetype for migration study.

The AEMAN programme closed with the presentation of the AEMAN statement by the drafting team and a lively discussion on not just the points of the statement but the reiteration of the participants' commitment to advocacy for and empowerment of migrant workers.



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

Capacity-Building

Capacity-Building on Vulnerabilities to HIV for Youth

8–9 March 2023 | Dhaka, Bangladesh

A capacity-building on vulnerabilities to HIV for youth was organised to bring together key youth leaders from various churches in Bangladesh. The two-day capacity-building training of twenty youths from across Bangladesh closed with an affirmation to advocate for HIV prevention, care, and support for people living and affected by HIV in their setting. The training was held from 8–9 March 2023 at the Hope Foundation centre in Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh jointly organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh (NCCB).

The opening worship was led by the participants of the training programme. In the opening session, Rev. David A. Das, General Secretary of NCCB welcomed youth representatives from twenty-one member churches of NCCB. He emphasised the need for the youth to understand the ecumenical initiatives in Bangladesh and to take an active role in the activities of NCCB.

Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, Programme Coordinator of CCA, highlighted the need for the voices of the youth in advocating for issues in Asia particularly on HIV and AIDS. Dr Probir Khyang, moderator of the medical board of NCCB and Dr Marvin Anik Choudhary, member of the medical board of NCCB also welcomed the participants and encouraged them to be the change agents in the society and the church.

The second session includes HIV 101 where the participants are encouraged to discuss the basic facts about HIV transmission, treatment, care, and support. The session also encouraged the participants to learn from each other in a participatory manner. The latest updates on HIV were also shared with the participants.

Dr Marvin Anik Choudhary from District Hospital Chaudanga, also a member

of the medical board of NCCB, shared the situation of HIV in Bangladesh. He mentioned that the epidemic might be low in numbers but there is an increase in new infections and deaths every year in Bangladesh. He also mentioned that high-risk behaviour groups were increasing in Bangladesh, especially among men having sex with men and male sex workers which remain hidden in the society.

Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia shared the vulnerabilities of youth to HIV, especially in the Asian context and how HIV incidence is increasing in many Asian countries including Bangladesh. He emphasised the need for a comprehensive approach to HIV including addressing sexual and reproductive health to ensure that the youth are informed and make the right decisions in preventing themselves from HIV infection.

The biblical reflection from Mark 2:1–12 was discussed in groups to understand the healing process of the paralysed man and the role of his friends as instruments for the healing process. The participants were encouraged to reflect on the current context and understand the various roles and responsibilities of the church and youth for the vulnerable and marginalised communities amongst us.

The SAVE (Safer Practices, Access to Treatment, Voluntary Counselling and Testing, and Empowerment) was introduced through group work. The tool which was developed by the Religious Leaders Living and Affected by HIV highlights the comprehensive approach to addressing HIV through religion without stigma and discrimination.

The session 'Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights' focused on the need for formal education on sex and reproductive health especially in the context of HIV where most of the transmission is through sexual transmission. The Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights from



Bible study group activities at the National Level Capacity-Building on Vulnerabilities to HIV for Youth

the perspectives of WHO and UN were highlighted and discussed with the participants.

The participants were encouraged to identify the strengths of the church and their leaders including themselves to be caring and compassionate to people living with HIV. The participants acknowledged the role of youth in sharing the right information with their peers and friend circles.

A session on addressing stigma and discrimination associated with HIV

was conducted where the participants identified the root cause of stigma including lack of information, myths and misconceptions, structural barriers, and societal influence. They made an action plan to address the causes of stigma and discrimination.

The gain in knowledge and change of attitude was measured through pre- and post-tests which show remarkable gain in knowledge and willingness to advocate for HIV in their own settings.

Youth Advocacy for HIV and AIDS and Leadership Programme

30–31 March 2023 | Phnom Penh, Cambodia

A Youth Leadership Programme was conducted under the banner of the Christian Conference of Asia's Action Together in Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) initiative from 30–31 March 2023, at the International Christian Assembly (ICA) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. It was attended by thirty-nine

youth and church leaders (21 male and 18 female) from different parts of Cambodia.

The first day of the programme commenced with an inspiring opening worship session, setting a spiritual foundation for the subsequent activities. Through prayers, hymns, and reflections,



Participants of the Cambodia ATCHAA youth capacity-building and training programme



Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, CCA Programme Coordinator for ATCHAA, at national level Youth Advocacy for HIV and AIDS and Leadership Programme



participants were encouraged to seek guidance and wisdom from the grace of God.

Welcome remarks were provided by Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, highlighting the importance of youth development and the role of the Christian community in shaping the future of Cambodia. The introduction session served as an orientation, acquainting participants with the programme's objectives, structure, and anticipated outcomes.

The following session was led by Rev. Sok Nev and focused on a comprehensive understanding of the specific issues and challenges faced by Cambodian youth. Through interactive presentations and discussions, participants explored topics such as health, education, employment, and social vulnerabilities. This session provided a critical overview of the context in which youth development initiatives would be implemented.

In line with the Christian Conference of Asia's commitment to ecumenism, participants engaged in a session led by CCA staff Abel Joshua Abey that introduced them to the principles and practices of ecumenical cooperation. Through the talk followed by a Q&A session, the participants explored the significance of unity and collaboration among different Christian denominations in addressing societal challenges.

The final session and group discussion was led by Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, and provided a comprehensive overview of HIV and AIDS, focusing on prevention, treatment, and support. Participants learned the importance of testing and early intervention and the role of community engagement in reducing stigma and discrimination. This session aimed to equip participants with the essential knowledge to effectively respond to the challenges posed by HIV and AIDS. Recognising the significance of faith in addressing societal issues, participants engaged in group discussions to explore

biblical and theological perspectives on youth leadership and social responsibility. Some participants also shared their personal experiences in battling the stigma around HIV and AIDS.

The following day began with a recapitulation of what the participants had learned on the first day, which was followed by a session on the principles of servant leadership and its relevance in the context of Christian youth leadership. Through interactive presentation and group discussion, participants explored the qualities of effective leaders and discussed strategies to develop servant leaders who prioritise the needs and well-being of their communities. This session was led by Abel Joshua Abey.

One of the most important sessions of the programme was guided by Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, where participants learned about the SAVE approach, a comprehensive framework for addressing HIV and AIDS. They gained insights into promoting safer practices, ensuring access to essential services, encouraging voluntary testing, and empowering individuals and communities affected by HIV. This session equipped participants with practical tools to implement effective HIV prevention and support initiatives.

Dr Ronald also spoke on the crucial role of young people in driving HIV and AIDS advocacy. Through interactive discussions and case studies, participants explored innovative approaches to engage and empower youth in creating change. They discussed strategies for mobilising young voices, fostering peer support networks, and utilising digital platforms to amplify advocacy efforts.

The programme concluded with a worship and reflective session, allowing participants to share their learnings, insights, and commitments moving forward. This session served as an opportunity to consolidate the outcomes of the programme, celebrate achievements, and discuss strategies for continued collaboration and engagement in youth development and HIV and AIDS initiatives.

National Capacity-Building Training on HIV in Timor Leste

25–27 April 2023 | Dili, Timor Leste

A three-day national capacity-building of church and youth leaders of the Protestant Church in East Timor (IPTL) focused on the role of churches in advocacy, prevention, and care and support of people living with HIV. Thirty participants across Timor Leste came together to strategise plans to combat HIV and AIDS in the country. The event was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) with the Protestant Church in East Timor (IPTL) at Dili, Timor Leste from 25–27 April 2023.

The Director General of the National AIDS Control Programme of the Government of Health in Timor Leste, Mr Atanasio de Jesus presented the current scenario of the HIV status in Timor Leste. He emphasised the alarming increasing rate of HIV incidence among married women in the country. He also mentioned that the age of infected individuals was becoming younger between the age of 15–24. The staff of the department also presented various campaign materials of the government and oriented the participants on HIV and AIDS. He also mentioned that there is a need for people to get tested to know their status and churches can play a role model in reducing the stigma towards testing.

The second session revisited the basic information on HIV and AIDS through a group activity and the participants were able to learn from each other. The biblical reflection encouraged the church leaders to take an active role in reaching and helping the vulnerable and those in the margins.

The participants were also given the opportunity for testing at the training site provided by the government department of health. The testing was voluntary and led by the Moderator of IPTL. In subsequent sessions, doubts, myths, and misconceptions about HIV were clarified and the participants were able to ask questions and share their experiences.

Rev Leny H.F. Mansopu of Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT) and Yosafad Ician

of CD Bethesda YAKKUM, Indonesia shared their experience of working with PLHIV in West Timor and discussed ways of collaboration, especially with the continuation of treatment in the Timor Island. Rev. Leny said that GMIT has developed a code of conduct which is used by the local congregations and priests in their ministries to support people living with HIV. GMIT is its own work to educate and make people more open-minded about HIV issues to reduce stigma and discrimination. Yosafat, at the same panel with Leny, emphasised important collaborative works of churches, NGOs, and the government on the border side to support people living with HIV, especially those who take antiretroviral medicine.

The vulnerabilities of HIV especially for the youth were discussed. The alarming trend of increasing new cases amongst gender and sexual minorities was regarded as a priority in Timor Leste. Gender-based violence and increasing commercial sex work was highlighted as a matter of concern by the participants.

Through an appreciative inquiry, the role of the churches was discussed. The participants realised the strengths of the church in addressing important factors like stigma and discrimination for people living with HIV in Timor Leste.

Ines Sermento Lopes from Estrela Plus, an organisation supporting and empowering people living with HIV shared the stigma index assessment conducted in Timor Leste amongst PLHIVs. She mentioned that stigma was still very high in the country and many PLHIV faced discrimination in their own homes. She highlighted that lack of awareness, myths, and misconceptions increase stigma within the community, and that the church has a big role in spreading awareness in order for PLHIV to live with hope. She also brought out the concern of the high dropout rate of antiretroviral treatment in the country. She also brought in the concern regarding



Participants of the National Capacity-Building Training on HIV in Timor Leste

traditional healers in the country where many PLHIV receiving treatments discontinued and sought treatment from them. The participants then visited the Estrela Plus centre and interacted with them.

The participants made action plans in their own settings for a strategic intervention towards raising awareness and care for PLHIV. The Moderator in his closing remarks mentioned that IPTL

prepared a strategic plan for the church to address HIV and AIDS and submit recommendations to the government towards incorporating basic sexual and reproductive health education in the school curriculum.

The programme closed with a closing worship led by the Moderator. Pre-Test and Post-Test were conducted to assess the gain and knowledge and change of attitude towards PLHIV.

Interfaith Action

Regional Interfaith Conference on 'Towards Strengthening Interfaith Networks for Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia'

22–25 January 2023 | Bangkok, Thailand

The Christian Conference of Asia organised the Regional Interfaith Conference on 'Towards Strengthening Interfaith Networks for Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia' from 23 to 25 January at the Royal Benja Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand. The CCA remains committed to working alongside other faiths to combat the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Asia.

The conference brought together sixty participants including faith leaders and non-governmental organisations working in the field of HIV and AIDS from various parts of Asia to discuss interfaith initiatives and actions in combating the epidemic. The conference had three distinct segments: The global response to HIV and AIDS from UNAIDS and interfaith perspectives on the issue; challenges



CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara delivered opening remarks at the Interfaith ATCHAA Conference



New members of the AINA Steering Committee

and opportunities of FBO and CSBO in working for HIV and AIDS advocacy; and the voice of PLHIV.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the CCA General Secretary, delivered the opening remarks at the inaugural session. In his speech, he urged Asian religious leaders to deliberate upon strategies for working together and sensitising members of their respective faith communities to address the AIDS pandemic and mobilise communities for wider advocacy. The CCA General Secretary further stated that such a coming-together of all faith traditions was rooted in the common concern to uphold and affirm the dignity of fellow human beings.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara outlined the CCA's work on HIV and AIDS as a priority through broader partnerships with other faith communities, civil society organisations, and intergovernmental organisations such as UN agencies.

Mr Surapong Mitrakul, the General Secretary of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), gave his greetings to the participants. He called for faith-based organisations to offer holistic healing that did not just cater to physical health but also addressed the deep scars and wounds inflicted by society through stigma and discrimination.

Dr Boonchuay Doojai, the Chairperson of the AINA, also addressed the opening of the conference. He highlighted the significance of a strong network that worked on the prevention of HIV transmission, supported the care of people living with HIV and AIDS, and developed enhanced insights into the causes of HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

The first presentation was led by Dr Salil Panakadan, the UNAIDS Asia Pacific Regional Programme Adviser. He shared the latest statistics: out of the 38.4 million HIV and AIDS cases worldwide, six million were in Asia and the Pacific. He

reminded participants that there are still a lot of cases of the new infection with 1.5 million cases worldwide and 260 thousand in Asia and the Pacific.

The panel presentations at the Conference featured Christian, Islamic, Sikh, Buddhist, and Hindu perspectives on equality and human dignity. The religious leaders who made the presentations affirmed concrete expressions of solidarity with people living with HIV and AIDS. The interfaith panel was moderated by Dr Among Jamir from Nagaland, India.

Rev. John Wilson, who heads Snehatheeram, a rehabilitation centre for people living with HIV and AIDS in Tamil Nadu belonging to the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India, challenged Christian believers to engage with the fact that Jesus provides a space for people living with HIV and AIDS rather than acting as a barrier to healing.

Fr. Joseph 'Joe' Maier, a Redemptorist priest from the Roman Catholic Church who co-founded the Human Development Foundation (HDF) Mercy Centre which works for children living with HIV and AIDS in Bangkok's slums, shared his conviction that "the church and all of us share the responsibility of caring for the poor and sick".

Dr Citra Fitri, a mental health specialist at YASRI Hospital in Indonesia and the secretary of the Health Department of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organisation, shared the Islamic perspective. She talked about NU's HIV prevention work which began in 2010.

Speaking from the Hindu perspective, Swami Atmananda, a member of The Art of Living Foundation, elaborated on the phrase 'the whole world is one family' which encapsulates the entire mission of the Hindu teaching of upholding the value of human dignity.



Interfaith ATCHAA Conference on 'Towards Strengthening Interfaith Networks for Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia'

Dr Boonchuay Doojai, a renowned Buddhist scholar from the Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Chiang Mai and chairperson of the Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS (AINA), spoke about Buddhist religious responses in addressing Thailand's current HIV and AIDS situation.

Frank Sethi, a Sikh community leader from Chiang Mai, Thailand, spoke about the Sikh religious faith perspective on dealing with HIV and AIDS, which requires people to cherish one another by caring and sharing to address society's and the world's sufferings and difficulties.

The second day of the conference focused on the best practices and challenges that faith-based organisations and civil society organisations have encountered in their HIV and AIDS campaigns. The presentations were divided into two sessions and moderated by Ms Jennifer Meneses, from the Philippines and Ms Poh Siew Lin from Malaysia.

Khwan Taung from the Myanmar Council of Churches' HIV and AIDS Prevention Care described the interfaith initiatives in Myanmar effectively carried out by a committed group of faith-based organisations in the country. In addition to the stigma and discrimination relating to HIV and AIDS, another concern to advocacy is the state's registration law, which limits social work carried out by religious leaders.

Dr Alphinus Kambodji, the chairperson of the INTERNA (Indonesian Interfaith Network on HIV and AIDS), highlighted strategic efforts for combating the AIDS pandemic including strengthening commitment, expanding collaborations, embracing innovative approaches by incorporating young people's talents and resources and providing services that are accessible to all. He added that Indonesian interfaith networks,



theological institutions, and ecumenical organisations must mainstream HIV and AIDS in addressing stigma and discrimination.

Sovann Son from the Salvation Centre in Cambodia informed the group that his organisation's scope of work included nearly thirty years of collaboration with Buddhist monks on community-based HIV and AIDS response programmes. The training and empowerment of monks and monk peer educators for counselling programmes are part of the work.

Michael Jesus Mahinay, the executive director of Alagad, based in Davao City in the Philippines, highlighted direct services and support, and the development of partnerships and networking among various sectors and stakeholders such as faith-based organisations based in various traditions. He shared that his experience working with various organisations in

the HIV and AIDS field has outlined challenges for him, among them the fact that they merely offer services and no education or advocacy.

Somasundaram Shiran Mahesh, a programme executive at the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka shared experiences of ministering to children living with HIV and AIDS.

The third day of the conference provided a platform for the representatives from networks of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and from religious communities to share their initiatives in combating HIV and AIDS. The session was moderated by Aan Sasono from Indonesia.

Hiramani Sitaula of the Positive Network in Nepal stated that the organisation's goal was to improve the quality of life of PLHIVs by responding to the challenges they faced through meaningful involvement in capacity-building and

policy development programmes.

Wangda Dorji, executive director of Lhak-Sam in Bhutan, emphasised the importance of developing a strong support system for PLHIV, information and education campaigns to combat the disease and stigma, and the importance of establishing networks to share best practices.

Loon Gangte, the founder and executive director of the Delhi Network of Positive People (DNP+) and the Regional Coordinator of ITPC-South Asia, shared about the DNP+'s work in influencing policies, such as easy access to treatment and in providing safe communities and spaces through organised support groups in their communities.

Some of the PLHIV participants at the conference also expressed their personal experiences with stigmatisation and prejudice throughout the discussion. They also acknowledge that the Women's desk at the church has been tremendously supportive of the positive women in their community.

Maria Cristina Caminos Morales, an HIV advocate and trainer representing the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), described the efforts to assist women and children living with HIV and AIDS, especially focusing on access to support services and other health-related interventions.

Sr. Mercedes Placino of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul spoke about the Catholic Asia Pacific Coalition on HIV and AIDS (CAPCHA), which has been dealing with the social, health, and pastoral aspects of the ministry

throughout Asia.

Dr Panakadan reiterated the importance of the faith communities in combating the AIDS pandemic and assured them that their efforts are appreciated as being a significant part of the overall global efforts aimed at helping humanity overcome the crisis.

The three-day regional conference that concluded on 25 January 2023 appointed new members to the steering committee, consisting of Ven. Lam Ngodup (Buddhist), Bishop Feliciano Tenchavez (Christian), Sr. Mercedes Ruz Placino (Christian/Roman Catholic), Swami Atmananda (Hindu), Dr Citra Fitri (Muslim), Frank Sethi (Sikh), Aan Sasono Rianto (Christian/PLHIV), and Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia (CCA ATCHAA Programme Coordinator).

In a statement, the participants expressed their commitment to understanding and upholding the role of faith- and religion-based organisations in Asia by working with people infected and affected by HIV, as well as advocating, educating, and meditating for HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and care. It was also stated that faith leaders and communities should be willing to identify common themes and reinterpret interfaith teachings in new ways that could address challenges related to stigma and discrimination against people infected and affected with HIV.

The Asian Interfaith Conference on 'Towards Strengthening Interfaith Action Networks for Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia', concluded with an interfaith closing prayer service.

Appendices

CCA Programmes and Activities in 2023

No.	Programme/Activity	Date and Venue	No. of Participants	Ref. Number as per 2023 Programme Plan
	National Women's Leadership Development Training in Lao PDR	Vientiane, Laos 16–19 January 2023	45	EF.4.1
	Regional Interfaith Conference on 'Towards Strengthening Interfaith Networks for Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia'	Bangkok, Thailand 22–25 January 2023	60	PD/ATCHAA
	Theological Consultation on the Theme of 15 th General Assembly	Cochin, India 6–7 February 2023	9	MU.1.2
	General Assembly Worship Preparation	Kottayam, India 9–12 February 2023	5	EF.5.2
	Asian Church Leaders' Pastoral Visit to NCC Bangladesh	Dhaka, Bangladesh 3 March 2023	55	BP.1
	Capacity-Building on Vulnerabilities to HIV for Youth	Dhaka, Bangladesh 8–9 March 2023	25	PD/ATCHAA
	Youth Advocacy for HIV and AIDS and Leadership Programme	Phnom Penh, Cambodia 30–31 March 2023	39	PD/ATCHAA
	National Capacity-Building Training on HIV in Timor Leste	Dili, Timor Leste 25 – 27 April 2023	30	PD/ATCHAA

Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference (ACELC): Good Governance and Consensus Decision-Making	Jakarta, Indonesia 1–3 May 2023	100	GS
Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference (ACELC): Ecumenical Diakonia and Ecumenical Accompaniment	Jakarta, Indonesia 3–5 May 2023	100	PD.6
Asia Ecumenical Institute (AEI)	Hybrid & Kottayam, Kerala, India 7 September–4 October 2023	20	EF.1
Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA)–2023	Kottayam, Kerala, India 26–28 September 2023	65	EF.3.1
Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA)–2023	Kottayam, Kerala, India 26–28 September 2023	63	EF.4.2
Asian Ecumenical Migrants Advocacy Network (AEMAN) Forum	Kottayam, Kerala, India 26–28 September 2023	45	PD.3
Asia Regional Consultation on 'Ecumenical Diakonia, Church's Response to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asia'	Kottayam, Kerala, India 26–28 September 2023	33	PD.6.1
The 15 th General Assembly of CCA	Kottayam, Kerala, India 27 September–4 October 2023	650	GS.7
Asia Sunday–2023	1 October 2023		EF.5.1



Report of the General Secretary to the 15th CCA General Assembly

29 September 2023 | Kottayam, India

I feel honoured and privileged to have this opportunity to address you all as delegates and participants of the 15th General Assembly of the CCA and present the General Secretary's report which is mandatory and customary. It is also my joy to welcome you again today on behalf of the Officers of the Christian Conference of Asia, especially when begin our official business sessions.

It is more than eight years since the 14th General Assembly of CCA was held in Jakarta, Indonesia in May 2015. The constitutional mandate stipulates the General Assembly to be held once every five years. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent situation compelled us to postpone the date of the Assembly twice: first from 2020 September to 2021, and then to 2023. It became inevitable that we had to wait eight years to hold the CCA Assembly which was unprecedented ever since the first Assembly was held in Prapat, Indonesia in 1957. Finally, we have reached this destination, Kottayam, by the grace of God.

The General Assemblies of the CCA, since its second Assembly, are considered radiant mosaics, composed of the diverse hues of Asian Christian traditions, the interwoven threads of ecclesial unity leading to common action for wider ecumenism. Although the General Assembly is the highest decision-making body of the CCA, it is also the largest representative ecumenical regional gathering of the Asian churches, where the pulse of the Asian churches resonates. The General Assembly is an occasion for assessing the visible manifestation of 'life together' of the Asian churches, a coming-together that resounds with hope and commitment to collective witness, service, and mission. As each Assembly convenes, it weaves new chapters into the Asian ecumenical pilgrimage, reflecting the evolution of Christian thought, expression, and action as well as setting up guiding principles for future directions. The 15th General Assembly is yet another historic milestone and an occasion for assessing the ecumenical journey of CCA during the past eight years.

Eight years ago, the General Assembly elected three officers as Moderator, Vice Moderator, and Treasurer, and I joined that team as the new General Secretary. But today when we are meeting here two of those Officers are not with us. Archbishop Willem T.P Simarmata passed away in June 2022. The Vice Moderator Rev. Diana Tana informed us earlier of her inability to continue in the Vice Moderator position as she resigned from the membership of her church. The CCA Executive Committee subsequently made alternative arrangements as per the constitutional provisions and elected an Acting Moderator Bishop Dhiloraj Canagasabey and an Acting Vice Moderator, Bishop Reuel Marigza. Both have been members of the current Executive Committee starting from the very beginning of this term and in that way, it was helpful for ensuring the continuity and coherence in decision-making processes in the Executive Committee meetings. I am sure, like me, all of us value the leadership and contributions of these two senior Asian church and ecumenical leadership as Officers.

The Assembly Amidst the Asian Context

The context in which the Assembly is taking place has not been so congenial for most of us as a once-in-a-century game-changer for the world as COVID presented enormous challenges to all of us. The COVID-19 pandemic, a generation-defining event that happened during our lifetime with far-reaching implications proved that it was not only

the most severe public health emergency in recent history but also an economic and social crisis of unparalleled proportions that has been affecting every aspect of human life. Now it is evident that the Asian countries are undergoing their worst economic shrinkage due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The resultant economic weakness is likely to set back the region's socio-economic progress and is predicted to push a significant number of people into unemployment and poverty while increasing inequality. In this context, an urgent challenge facing Asian countries is to figure out how to survive and thrive. For most Asian countries, economic recovery in the post-COVID period can be advanced only by greater efforts to boost longer-term resilience and sustainability. These measures needed will be coordinated, targeted responses to mounting climate risks, new and creative ways, and measures for addressing poverty and inequality, harnessing digitalisation to drive sustainable economic growth, increased productivity, human capital development, and financial inclusion should be important post-pandemic policy priorities in Asia. It is predicted that Asia Region would contribute about 70 percent to global growth this year—but still faces challenges from inflation, debt, and financial vulnerabilities.

CCA Amidst Changing Geopolitics in Asia

Asia's rise has captured the popular imagination for three decades. However, there are variations in perceptions and views when we closely look at the emerging Asian contexts from time to time. One may say that such variations are often obvious and evident in all aspects of life including emerging trends in geopolitical, geo-economic, and geo-strategic arenas in Asia. Asia has emerged as the world's third pillar, along with the United States and Europe. Indeed, many commentators have argued that the 21st century will not only be dominated by key Asian states such as China, India, and Japan, and major middle powers including South Korea, Vietnam, and Indonesia but also that the region as a whole is on its way to eclipsing the West.

Multiple risk factors affect Asia in many areas. Strategic competition will intensify, with countries striving for greater self-sufficiency, especially in the technology and military spheres. A geopolitically assertive China will seek closer collaboration with non-aligned countries and those that are currently more US-leaning. Taiwan will remain a focal point of contention in US-China tensions. There are many kinds of conflicts and disputes in which countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, India, and Pakistan are involved. Dispute over the South Sea and Taiwan is another area. There are many other issues and problems related to territorial disputes, population, and cultural variations among Asian countries. These differences can be a main contributor to Asia's security challenges. For example, the fact that China is both the biggest country and economy in Asia can be regarded as a threat to other Asian countries, which may cause other hidden security issues. The complicated relationship of international relations as well as the tension between countries has a fundamental effect on the relationship with neighbouring countries. East Asian security environment is stranded in a deteriorating situation. The prospects of peace, stability, and unity in the Korean Peninsula, and the impact of this on Asia's geopolitics and power game among different nations across Asia in West Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia with their competing interests affect the peace and security in the region.

It is in this context that CCA has been called to be a prophetic witness in a changing Asian context and respond to the emerging situation as part of our Christian faith. The CCA is not just a mere ecclesial body that focuses or concentrates only on certain traditional areas of mission and evangelism. The role and function of the CCA are very clearly articulated as believing that "the purpose of God for the Church in Asia is life together in a common obedience of witness to the mission of God in the world". In this context, it is pertinent that CCA is called to address the manifold challenges amidst Asia's emerging realities as part of its faith, vision, and mission".



Post-Jakarta Assembly Programme Restructuring

The 14th General Assembly held in Jakarta in 2015 highlighted the need to restructure the CCA's programme areas as the Constitutional Revision Committee recognised the need for a new programme structure. The 14th Assembly instructed the new Executive Committee to restructure programme areas that aligned with emerging ecumenical, ecclesial, and missiological contexts and realities. The constitutional amendments adopted by the 14th Assembly gave mandates and a wider scope for restructuring of programmes. As per the provisions in the new constitution, there is only one programme committee now, instead of three different programme area committees and three moderators existed earlier with a total of forty-five members. In the new structure, we have now one programme committee with twenty members and a chairperson.

The Executive Committee which met after the Jakarta Assembly adopted a new five-year Strategic Programme Plan for the period starting from 2016, which largely reflected the vision of the CCA for shaping a new paradigm in 'living together in the household of God'. The revised programme structure was organised into four core areas: Mission and Unity and Contextual Theology (MU), Ecumenical Leadership and Ecumenical Spirituality (EF), Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts (BP), and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy (PD), along with the special Action Together to Combat HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) project.

Programme Highlights Since the Jakarta Assembly

The period between CCA's post-Jakarta Assembly, starting from mid-2015 to the Kottayam Assembly in 2023 has been a challenging period for CCA. A comprehensive report of the CCA's journey over the past eight years from Jakarta to Kottayam has been shared with you all, and it is posted on the CCA website also. The narrative style of this report illustrates detailed accounts of the work the CCA has initiated and implemented including during the lockdown period.

The CCA, which exists as an organ and a forum of continuing cooperation among the churches and national Christian bodies in Asia, has tried to achieve the expected objectives such as the promotion and strengthening of the unity of the churches in Asia. Its constitutional mandates seek the exploration of opportunities and the promotion of joint action for the fulfilment of the mission of God in Asia and throughout the world; the encouragement of Asian contributions to Christian thought, worship, and action throughout the world; the development of mutual awareness, fellowship, and sharing among the churches in the region, and of relationships with other regional ecumenical organisations and the World Council of Churches. Various programmes and activities initiated and implemented by CCA in cooperation and collaboration with its member constituencies and partners aimed at achieving the expected goals in respective areas. The programmes focused on various issues and themes in the stimulation of initiatives and experiments in dynamic Christian living and action, development of effective Christian responses to the challenges of changing societies in Asia, the promotion of relationships with people of other faiths in Asia, the protection of human rights and human dignity, and the promotion of caring for the creation with stewardships.

The implementation of all programmes initiated and planned, faced unexpected and grave challenges with the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, causing widespread health crises and socio-economic-political impacts across Asia. As life came to a standstill during the pandemic crisis, we reflected on our shared vulnerabilities and tried to express solidarity in different ways. Consequently, the General Assembly and other planned programmes had to be postponed, prompting the CCA to swiftly adapt by organising a series of webinars on COVID-19 and related topics like health, gender, children, migration, and trafficking, as well as several relevant programmes conducted

entirely online. The CCA also accompanied churches in crisis situations during the pandemic. The CCA office adhered to Thai government directives and transitioned to remote work while successfully engaging a diverse audience through virtual programmes. When the global travel restrictions eased in mid-2022, the CCA reintroduced in-person programmes. Although the Strategic Programme Plan was originally envisaged for five years, the mandate was extended from five years to eight years, given the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, and lockdown situations.

During the past eight years, we were able to organise a total of 224 programmes through four programme areas in which 9,693 people from various Asian countries attended. Participation of women and young people in CCA programmes have increased during the past 8 years. This total number of participants does not include the large number of participants who became part of major events such as the Diamond Jubilee celebrations held in Yangon, Myanmar in 2017 or those who were part of the Asia Easter celebrations organised in conjunction with the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly in Manado, North Sulawesi in Indonesia in 2018. Both events attracted the participation of thousands of people coming from various local congregations. As the pandemic situation paralysed the entire world for more than two years, it affected the implementation of several CCA programmes during that period. However, as it was originally designed, and initiated a wide range of programmes and activities were implemented in areas such as mission and witness in unity (MU), ecumenical formation and leadership development (EF), building peace and conflict resolutions (BP), and prophetic witness and advocacy (PD).

Ever since the founding of the CCA, our forefathers affirmed and articulated the vision that the central calling of the ecumenical movement is to respond to the quest for mission and witness and unity. They often affirmed that ecumenical movement is more than a movement for One Church in one place in Asia, it is a movement providing impetus for the Church to proclaim and live out the message of the gospel of Christ in Asia through united witness and participate in God's mission. The Asian churches also shared their insights and motivations that should sustain the ecumenical movement are not only based on addressing ecclesiastical divisions, but they should be focused on sustaining the spirit of overcoming the obstacles to unity of the whole inhabited world of all God's creation. The churches in Asia realised that the things that unite us are greater than those that divide us. It is with this conviction that the CCA was engaged during the past eight years also with the main objectives of strengthening its mission and witness in a multi-religious context; revitalising and nurturing the ecumenical movement through a united witness in Asia; developing contextual theological undergirding for mission and witness while addressing emerging issues in Asia; and strengthening collaboration and cooperation among ecumenical actors in mission and witness in unity. The programmes and activities that were planned and conducted during the past eight-year period tried to achieve objectives broadly in areas such as mission and witness in a multi-religious Asian context, interreligious cooperation amidst growing religious intolerance, contextualisation of theology and ecumenical theological education, leadership development in new churches in Asia, young Asian women doing theology, and creating ecumenical theological educators' network and database in Asia (ETENDA).

As a regional fellowship of Asian churches, CCA has been following a constant policy of focusing on ecumenical formation and ecumenical leadership development which are essential components for responsiveness to God's call for unity. In the search for developing ecumenical formation as well as leadership, CCA believes that all efforts require a pedagogy relevant to ecumenical formation and leadership development at the grassroots level in order to replace the old, classical approach of defining and interpreting ecumenism as a platform for addressing ecclesial unity or disunity. With these convictions that CCA has been focusing its ecumenical formation and leadership development training through the ecumenical enablers' training in Asia (EETA), youth



leadership development, women's leadership development, nurturing ecumenical spirituality and contextual liturgical tradition, the renewed ecumenical impetus for grassroots ecumenism especially in the so-called "forgotten areas" in the ecumenical movement such as in countries like East Timor, Cambodia, Laos, Bhutan, and Nepal. The ecumenical formation training CCA organised for Bible School teachers in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border is now considered a unique activity. Another important concern of these days, changing family values in Asia, and the Christian response also was a focus of this particular programme area. (EF)

CCA realised the fact that Asia faces an ever-increasing level of multifaceted social, economic, political, and security challenges, a wide array of problems is precipitating in Asian societies, causing threats to peace and denial of justice. Armed conflicts and violence, increasing poverty, inadequate health care, economic exploitation, environmental degradation and exploitation of natural resources, militarisation, arms build-up, nuclearisation, the spread of small arms and light weapons, domination and intervention of major powers from outside the region as well as within the region; ethnic and religious conflicts, communal violence, and political unrest; torture, custodial death, suppression of people's legitimate right to self-determination; lack of rule of law and democratic governance, peace with justice and human security, accompanying churches and communities in conflict situations, churches in action for moving beyond conflicts and reconciliation were part of a series of programmes organised through the programme area Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts.

As diakonia is central to what it means to be the church and fulfilling the church's mission and witness as servants, and diakonia is a core component of the gospel which is not an optional, but an essential part of discipleship, prophetic witness and advocacy emerged as a primary concern of CCA. So, the CCA affirmed that diakonia is a gift of the Holy Spirit and a manifestation of practical love for human beings. While initiating and organising the programmes, CCA has been conscious of the fact that in a situation where the world is becoming more broken, where the sin of injustice abounds, God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit calls the church to gather God's people of communities. It was in these contexts that advocacy on initiating churches' response to militarisation, nuclearisation, and arms race in Asia, eco-justice for sustainable peace, regional and global advocacy, human rights in Asia, and ecumenical advocacy at the UN, rights of migrant workers, human trafficking and statelessness, marginalisation of indigenous and vulnerable communities, upholding the rights and dignity of children, and health and healing, Disability Advocacy Network, Ecumenical Solidarity Accompaniment, and Ecumenical Diakonia in Asia also were priority programmes and activities of CCA from 2016 to 2023. The special programme Action Together in Combating HIV and AIDS (ATCHA) to deal with and equip churches to Combat HIV and AIDS was continued with expanded programmes and activities and with enhanced human resources. In order to address the increasing menace by Asian churches, a strategic approach was initiated in enhancing the capacities of the CCA network in the areas of advocacy, self-assessment of churches' inclusiveness by using appreciative inquiry methods, exchange of learning and sharing of resources within CCA and interfaith networks, motivating youth as change agents, specific advocacy related to prevention, care, support, and treatment to global and concerned organisations, development agencies, and government, strengthening regional and national interfaith networks for the exchange of learning, expertise through the Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS (AINA) with focus on interfaith advocacy and encouraging mutual support within faith-based communities and organisations in Asia, etc., were initiated during the past eight years.

Some of the major events CCA organised during the past eight years include the Asia Mission Conference (AMC) in 2017 with 300 participants, Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) in 2018, with about 400 participants, Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA) in 2019 with 250 women participants. The AEWA-2019 was the

first Asia ecumenical women's Assembly that CCA organised. The month-long training programme for ecumenical formation and ecumenical leadership development, the Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI) has been revived since 2016 as a month-long residential programme; this was continued except for two years of lockdown, but the course was conducted online for the same duration of one month. The programme on Ecumenical Women's Action Against Violence (EWAAV), a new initiative has been focusing the rights and dignity of women. As part of EWAAV capacity-building initiatives and advocacy and awareness-building have been organised at national, sub-regional and regional levels during the past eight years.

Young Ambassadors of Peace in Asia (YAPA) programme started in 2016 has been providing training for young people to be peacemakers in Asia. The YAPA has trained twenty young peace advocates every year since 2016 and helped a new generation of young peace activists to build peace, healing, reconciliation, and interfaith harmony. About 160 young ambassadors of peace in Asia (YAPA) were trained during the past eight years.

The International Consultation organised by CCA on 'Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia' in July 2017 was an enriching experience as it helped to reflect on the situation of the ecumenical movement in Asia. This Consultation was organised as part of the 60th year of the founding of CCA. Sixty representatives from various churches as well as ecclesial and ecumenical organisations in Asia came together and reflected on the need for renewed commitment and a shared vision to revitalise the Asian ecumenical movement, urging increased cooperation and coordination among ecumenical actors and their respective constituencies.

Environmental challenges, and human-made abuses threatening the sustainability of God's creation were addressed through different programmes organised at the regional and national levels. Asia's developing economies are faced with serious environmental problems that threaten to undermine future growth, food security, and regional stability. Asian countries are faced with a series of environmental and ecological problems and urgent attention is warranted in areas such as water management, air pollution, deforestation and land degradation, and climate change. The focus of a national-level consultation organised in 2020 was on 'Contextual Theology and Sustainability of Creation'.

Observance of Asia Sunday on an annual basis continued for the past eight years. The specific thematic focus of Asia Sunday in previous years included 'Korea: Towards Unity in the Bond of Peace' (2016), 'Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light, in Asia' (2017), 'Embracing the Differently Aabled, and Upholding Their Dignity' (2018), 'Stateless and Trafficked people: Our Common Pilgrims' (2019), 'God, Heal Us as We are Vulnerable' (2020), 'I am the Lord Who Heals You and Restores Your Health', (2021), 'Christ's Love Reconciles and Unites' (2022) and 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation' (2023).

Since its inception in 1997, the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS) has been a dynamic force in nurturing innovative theological thinking in Asia. The CCA has taken a prominent role in promoting the Asian theological agenda within the Asian ecumenical movement through CATS. Recognising the need for a clearer articulation of Asian theologies, cultivation of new methodologies tailored to the Asian context, and the enhancement of academic and professional training for Asian theological scholarship, CCA organised and facilitated CATS Summits. CATS– VIII in 2016 and CATS- IX in 2019 were held in Kochi, India and Medan, Indonesia. The CATS–X was scheduled to take place in 2021. An online CATS–X Advisory Committee meeting was held in April 2021, with the participation of representatives from FABC, ATESEA, and BTESSC. The meeting decided to develop a theme and sub-themes for CATS–X, focusing on emerging



issues in Asia. Discussions included the COVID-19 pandemic situation and theological agendas, resulting in the proposed theme, 'Will of God' and 'Healing and Restoration of Community', but it was postponed due to the lockdown situation. Over the years it was recognised that CATS' impact extended beyond theological discourse, strengthening the foundations of the Asian ecumenical movement, and nurturing ecumenically committed leaders within Asian churches. Recognised as a valuable instrument initiated by the CCA in 1997, CATS actively engaged in global theological dialogues, making a distinct Asian contribution.

The CCA has consistently demonstrated its mission of advocacy and accompaniment in different ways. The compilation of public statements, communiques, and letters of solidarity spanning the years 2015 to 2023 bears witness to the commitment of Asian churches through the CCA to stand against injustice, uplift the oppressed, and echo the transformative message of love and hope.

One of the last programmes we organised in the current programme cycle that ended by mid-2023 was the Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference (ACELC), which was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in the first week of May. The ACELC was attended by 101 leaders of the CCA member constituencies—Moderators, Presiding Bishops or Primates, General Secretaries, heads of churches, and the General Secretaries of national councils of churches.

CCA's Programmes Evaluation

CCA had undertaken a major evaluation process some years ago. Based on the recommendations of that evaluation process subsequently, CCA introduced several changes in the organisational and programme structures. Those changes were introduced starting from the period of the Jakarta Assembly. With a new programme structure and governance structure in place, the executive committee decided to undergo an evaluation. Two external evaluators were selected by the Executive Committee and their report has been finalised, which will be shared with everyone for further discussion.

Emerging Concerns and Ecumenical Responses

Numerous other emerging concerns also need to be addressed in Asia as part of our Christian witness. Growing trends of religious intolerance, sectarian strife, persecution against religious minorities, ethnic and religious conflicts, etc., are some of the emerging concerns that need to be addressed as these problems haunting people in different parts of Asia such as in Pakistan, Iran, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, West Papua, southern Thailand. The politicisation of religion and religionisation of politics are major reasons for continued disharmony and religious intolerance in Asia.

A matter of serious concern being faced by Asian churches now is the large-scale migration or exodus of Asian Christians from their respective countries to outside the region. Various Christian denominations in different Asian countries are concerned that their young people are migrating to other countries and are not returning. The number of empty nests is increasing, where only the old people are left, and their children are migrating. These days it is easy to move abroad; young people are going first for education and then for employment with the intention to settle elsewhere. A new phenomenon is the emergence of 'assisted living sectors'—not old age homes. Elderly parents are being financially supported by their children living abroad, and they live comfortable lives instead of staying alone by themselves. The same is the case in Pakistan. Several Christians are looking for opportunities to migrate elsewhere. Two of my former CCA colleagues moved very recently to Europe and North America.

The changing demography and nature of the family in Asia are receiving increasing attention these days. Rapidly ageing societies in Asia, especially East Asia, have resulted

in more consideration being paid to issues such as the demand for care workers to assist the elderly. From South Asia, several young Christian people and their families are moving out of their home countries and leaving behind their ancestral land these days in several Asian countries. This is more evident mostly in South and Southeast Asian countries. In some of these countries congregations have only old people as members. That means, the membership in churches is limited to the elderly. Once-active congregations have become less active or even empty. This exodus of Christians beyond Asia is a matter of serious concern. The services of highly educated Christian youth will no longer be available to their own communities or countries, and this must be seriously reflected upon by churches. Two of my colleagues in recent times migrated to Europe and North America. The paradox is the aggressive missionary evangelism taking place in Asia by Christian fundamentalist groups are focusing their attention and resources on the elderly, who are switching their membership from their own denominations to some of these para-church groups or free churches giving them pastoral assistance. Mainline denominations are simply not providing that kind of concern or care.

The last decade has seen an increase not only in the number of Asians moving between nations, but the types of mobility have become more complex. The reasons which are responsible for this increase in the movement are associated with globalisation, increased levels of education, proliferation of international media, improved transport systems and the internationalisation of business and labour markets. Asia has the largest number of international migrants when compared with any continent; about 80 million. Between 1990 and 2017 it increased by 31 million, the largest growth in the world (UN, 2017). 89% of this growth could be attributed to intra-continental flows. Most international migrants in Asia had been born in the region. 61 million of the world's migrants have moved within Asia, making it the largest intra-regional migration flow in the world., according to the UN. Between 1990 and 2000 only three of the top ten bilateral corridors were within Asia but between 2010 and 2017 that number had increased to six. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka – have been shaped by major migratory movements, both within the sub-region and globally.

Asia is also a source region of international migration of students. China and India are the largest student-sending countries and account for a significant part of the international outflows of money paid for student fees, much of which flows outside the continent.

CCA Headquarters Location and its Future

The CCA shifted its headquarters from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai in 2006. It was at the 2005 Chiang Mai Assembly that a major decision was taken with much hope and enthusiasm to shift the headquarters to Chiang Mai. However, many factors were not in favour of CCA ever since CCA pitched its tent to Chiang Mai from Hong Kong. We must now evaluate whether Chiang Mai should continue to be the place where we should be anchored or located in the coming years. I feel that it is my duty to report to this highest decision-making body the merits and demerits of our being in Chiang Mai, Thailand, especially by evaluating the situation ever since CCA shifted its headquarters from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai in 2006.

In recent months we have been experiencing challenging situations from the Thai Immigration Department about our visas, and the changing policies of the Labour Department. These are not convincing reasons for us to continue to be based in or the headquarters to be located in Chiang Mai, or even in Thailand.

When it was decided to move out of Hong Kong, immediately they registered the CCA as a legal entity in Thailand, assuming it was the easiest way at that time. Now we are facing lots of problems as the Thai immigration and Thai labour departments are every



now and then asking our new recruits to submit monthly reports of activities. They come suddenly or without prior notice to our office to examine such things. Most of the time the overseas staff even cannot communicate with the inspection team due to language barriers. So how long will we continue this kind of practice, especially when staff needs to travel and organise programmes outside of Thailand? We also keep the major portion of our funds in Hong Kong bank accounts and transfer funds to Thailand depending upon our needs. However, now some donors are suggesting that CCA must have its primary bank accounts in Thailand, not in Hong Kong due to the changing political situation in Hong Kong. These trends are not helpful for CCA as an international organisation as all the funds a Thai organisation receives in Thailand Banks for use in programmes will have to be converted to the local currency although the currency fluctuations end up in losing money. Moreover, when we need to organise programmes abroad, we will have to buy US dollars, and after the programmes, the balance amount must be converted to local currencies. Even though we can have a US dollar account for minimum transactions, lots of risk is involved in withdrawals and deposits in hard currencies and exchanges in local currencies. Conversion and reconversion of currencies will end up in losing money. As the foreign currency needs to be obtained from the head office of the Banks in Bangkok, every time we must request whatever amounts of cash, we require one or two months in advance. Sometimes we postpone or cancel the programmes, but we still have to draw the already requested amount and keep the large sums of money in the office. We are not comfortable keeping large amounts of money in the office. This is the nature of the problem that we are facing. Therefore, I mentioned that it is high time for us to think about where the headquarters location of the CCA to be based in future.

I am reminded of one of the statements made by the first CCA General Secretary D.T. Niles. After ten years of CCA's existence, the first General Secretary of CCA presented a report at the Bangkok General Assembly in 1968, he said that our experiences show we have no Switzerland in Asia for CCA to be rooted in a free and fair political atmosphere. Of course, CCA's history has been punctuated with such moves and shifts, from Bangkok to Singapore, then being expelled from Singapore in 1987, then being relocated to different places, in Hong Kong, Osaka, Manila, and Chiang Mai; and then coming together under one roof in Hong Kong. Again, the whole office was shifted to Chiang Mai. Now 16 years after the relocation from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai, we are struggling in Chiang Mai with our normal operations as an international religious organisation in Asia. We must ensure a certain sense of ownership or commitment of our member churches in this regard.

We had ambitious plans and programmes about constructing the CCA headquarters and training institute, which we could even rent out and fetch income. But amidst the changing situation in Thailand, it is getting difficult. This is the reason that last time in the Executive Committee meeting, I mentioned that at the beginning of our term, I had the enthusiasm and ambition to initiate something, and the Executive Committee supported that idea. Although it was decided by this Executive Committee, now I am convinced that we cannot implement those plans. I informed the Executive Committee early this year that I am not that enthusiastic about recommending the construction of a new headquarters for CCA in Thailand. Based on the discussions in the Executive Committee meetings, I have had some informal conversations with some of our member churches. During my visit to the Philippines last time, I discussed this with the leadership of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). I also had some other informal conversations with the church leaders in the Philippines. During the Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference, I reported on the situation and subsequently initiated conversations with the Persekutuan Gereja-gereja Indonesia, or the Council of Churches in Indonesia. We have limited options for situating the CCA in the right locality in Asia. Hong Kong is quite expensive, and this was one of the main reasons why we moved from Hong Kong to Thailand. Now Hong Kong has other problems these days even in

keeping our bank accounts. The banking system and its restrictions are also difficult to navigate.

It is high time that start reflecting on a plan B, plan C, or even plan D. The General Assembly needs to be aware of the situation and this is the reason that I am reporting it here.

Sustainability of CCA

The other matter I want to share with the delegates of the 15th General Assembly is about the sustainability of CCA. Asian churches are participating in ecumenical activities more actively these days, and I say this from my experience. I was on the staff of the CCA in the 1990s. I was recruited to work for the CCA when its headquarters was based in Hong Kong and spent seven years there. Then I moved to the World Council of Churches, where part of my responsibility was to coordinate the roundtable meetings, especially those of the CCA, to discuss the sharing of ecumenical resources from Western agencies. I was aware of the amount of money CCA used to get in those days and the amount of support the local churches were giving CCA. From my experience, when I look back, on these thirty years of experience in dealing with CCA in different capacities, I can say that churches' involvement and active participation in CCA has increased. The financial support and in-kind contributions member churches provide to CCA also are increasing from Asian churches. At one CCA roundtable meeting in the past, it was noted that Asian churches' contribution was only eight percent, but when it was estimated four years ago, it was noted that Asian contributions came up to forty percent. That is why we have been able to survive and organise more programmes. But still the sixty percent of the income has been coming from outside – whether that will remain the case going forward is the question before us. All indications point to the fact that we cannot simply expect substantial funds in the future from outside of Asia. When CCA completes seventy years of existence in 2027, we need to discuss the kind of ecumenical structure that will persist in Asia, and the sustainability of such a structure in the future and the future of this valuable ecumenical instrument in Asia.

When I started my term as the General Secretary about eight years ago, at the first meeting of the Executive Committee, I summarised the General Secretary's report with a statement that "we need to recover our vision and passion for ecumenism, discerning in the depth of our faith. We need to recognise that as members of the Asian ecumenical fraternity, we have to grow and progress in the quest for accepting the growing reality of our common belonging and our being in Christ. Let us keep travelling to reach the goal of our common witness in unity".

Almost eight years later, I can only reiterate the same statement as I feel it is still relevant. What we need is a follow-up. I thank you all profoundly for the support and encouragement we have been receiving from all CCA member churches and councils during the past eight years. May God Almighty bless us all.



Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary, CCA

29 September, Kottayam

CCA Executive Committee Members (2015–2023)

Officers

Moderator:

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

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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Rev. Kim Jong-goo (Korean Methodist Church)

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Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian (Armenian Orthodox Church in Iran)

Dr Sawako Fujiwara (National Christian Council in Japan)

Supaporn Yarnasarn (Church of Christ in Thailand)

Rev. Terence Corkin (Uniting Church in Australia)

Dr Tong Wing Sze (Hong Kong Christian Council)

Win Htut Thar Kyi (Myanmar Baptist Convention)

Rev. Kim Kyrie (Anglican Church in Korea/ Chairperson of Programme Committee)

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Chhoden Tshering (National Christian Council of Bhutan)
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Rev. Dr Henny William Booth Sumakul (The Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa, Indonesia)
Rev. Evelyn Ruth Bhajan (Church of Pakistan)
Kaythi Min Din (Myanmar Council of Churches)
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Patrick Yuen (Hong Kong Council of Churches of Christ in China)
Robert Bruce Chellappa (Church of South India)
Israel Paulraj (Church of Ceylon, Sri Lanka)
Nuttee Kunlacharnpises (Church of Christ in Thailand)

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General Secretary (GS)

Dr Mathews George Chunakara

Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology

Rev. Jung Eun Moon

Chalvin Kores Tehuayo (till June 2023)

Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Ecumenical Spirituality

John Paul Devakumar

Abel Joshua Abey (till May 2023)

Yuliana Magdalena Benu (till May 2023)

Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts

Ruth Mathen

Yodinge Kithminee Chamathka Kularatne (till May 2023)

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Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia

Arceli Pepito Bile

Klein Fausto Emperado

Communications

Sha Mgwe La Ah Tha Pa

Yu Ting Chiu (from August 2023)

Finance and Accounts

Friona Kallyani Sarker

Nathi Schumann

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Administration, Library, House Service

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Arpa Yai-Chid



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