



Christian Conference of Asia



# ANNUAL REPORT

## PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES

# 2024

**"Affirming God's Vision for Justice and Enduring Love in Asia"**



## FOREWORD



The year 2024 has marked another fruitful phase in the ecumenical engagement of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in its ongoing journey. This annual report narrates and highlights the programmes and activities carried out through CCA's four main programme clusters, as well as the key role played by the General Secretariat in coordinating and facilitating these efforts in collaboration with member constituencies across Asia.

Each stage of programme implementation brought enriching experiences of mutual learning and a deepened sense of togetherness in our common ecumenical journey. These occasions also presented opportunities to confront challenges, particularly amid the growing need for financial and human resources to sustain a wide range of programmes throughout the year. Many of the programmes and activities were organised by my colleagues at regional, subregional, and national levels, with the gracious support of member churches and councils, as well as the assistance of several ecumenical partners.

In total, 31 programmes and activities were organised and facilitated by the CCA, directly engaging more than 1,495 participants. However, limitations in funding often hindered timely interventions and responses to ecumenical needs. In such contexts, we were also reminded of the need to remain conscious of our responsibility to be faithful stewards of the precious resources entrusted to us, and to continually evaluate our ecumenical engagement and ensure the most effective use of available financial and human resources, so that we may become more agile, efficient, and responsive to emerging needs in diverse contexts. The 2024 programme report in the accompanying pages reflects our various efforts, through which we have sought, at the very least, to create meaningful ripples.

It has been a privilege for me to lead the CCA over the past nine years and to present the annual narrative programme and activity reports since 2016. I extend my sincere gratitude to all who have enriched the Asian ecumenical journey of the CCA throughout these years. I also express my deep appreciation to my colleagues for their dedication in implementing the programmes and activities. Indeed, I believe our shared mission has stood us in good stead.

Yours along the journey,

Dr Mathews George Chunakara  
*General Secretary*

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01

GENERAL SECRETARIAT

## GENERAL SECRETARIAT (GS)

In addition to overseeing and coordinating all programmes across its four programmatic areas, the General Secretariat of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) bears multifaceted tasks. In 2024, the General Secretary provided leadership in coordinating, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating all of CCA's programmes and activities, as well as continuing tasks related to developing ecumenical relations within Asia and in the international arena.

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 received renewed impetus in the post General Assembly period.

### Liaison with Governing Board and Advisory Committees

#### CCA Executive Committee Meeting

16-19 January | Chiang Mai, Thailand

The newly elected Executive Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) held its first meeting from 16 to 19 January 2024 at the CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The committee was formed during the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly in 2023 in Kottayam, India, where three Officers and seventeen Executive Committee members, including the Chairperson of the Programme Committee, were elected.

The Executive Committee assessed CCA's current programme structure and resolved to maintain the existing programme directions, along with incorporating additional thematic focuses in response to emerging Asian contexts until the 16<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly in 2028.

## CCA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



*CCA Executive Committee members during their first meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand – January 2024*



*CCA Executive Committee meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – October 2024*



Under the programme structure initiated after the 14<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly in 2015 and in place since 2016, the CCA programmes operate in four areas: Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology (MU), Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Ecumenical Spirituality (EF), Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts (BP), and Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy (PD). The CCA's special project, Action Together to Combat HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA), is also part of this structure, while an additional focus on health and healing has been added as a priority activity.

In the CCA General Secretary's report, Dr Mathews George Chunakara informed the Executive Committee that in the proposed draft strategic programme plans, the existing programme structure provided the CCA with the necessary flexibility and scope to incorporate and address a diverse array of issues and themes relevant to Asia's evolving socio-economic, ecological, geopolitical, ecclesiastical, and ecumenical environments.

The General Secretary recommended that the key areas of programme implementation to be continued might include issues and themes such as care for creation and its theological emphasis; Asia's religious plurality and freedom of religion; shrinking civil spaces in Asian societies; upholding human rights; ecumenical formation and leadership development; good governance and integrity leadership in Asian churches; gender justice; ecumenical advocacy initiatives against violence towards women; youth empowerment; training of youth ambassadors for peace; migration, statelessness, and human trafficking; artificial intelligence and its ethical implications; health and healing; ecumenical diakonia; and nurturing the acumen of budding theologians through the Congress of Asian Theologians.

The Executive Committee decided to constitute the Asian Ecumenical Diakonia Network to strengthen the ecumenical diaconal involvement of Asian churches. This decision emerged from the mandates expressed by Asian ecumenical and ecclesial leaders both at the Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders' Conference in Jakarta, Indonesia, in May 2023, as well as the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly in Kottayam, India, in September–October 2023.

The report of the external evaluation of CCA conducted by external evaluators was reviewed and discussed in detail. The external evaluation was initiated by the CCA Executive Committee to assess the viability and effectiveness of the new programmatic structure and the new management mechanisms introduced in the post-Jakarta Assembly period.

The 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly had received the external evaluation report and had commended it to the Executive Committee for follow-up actions concerning the recommendations. To this end, the Executive Committee appointed a special four-member task group for careful planning and implementation of the report's recommendations.

The Executive Committee appointed the members of the Programme Committee, the Finance Committee, the CCA Thailand Foundation, the Board of the CCA Hong Kong Company, and the CCA Investment Committee in Hong Kong.

The Executive Committee also discussed the proposals by the General Assembly to study problems related to operational constraints due to the Thai government policies, as well as visa and banking restrictions which hampered CCA's smooth functioning in Chiang Mai. A sub-committee was appointed to study matters related to relocation options of the CCA headquarters.

## Second Meeting of the CCA Executive Committee

29-31 October | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The second meeting of the Executive Committee was held on 29-31 October 2024 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in conjunction with the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of Asian Theologians and the inauguration and commemoration of the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Nicene Council of 325 AD, which some members of the Executive Committee attended.

The Executive Committee received the report of the Programme Committee that met in Medan, Indonesia in May 2024 and adopted its proposal of upcoming years' programme thrusts and a new programme structure, namely Mission in Unity (MU),

Ecumenical Formation (EF), Building Peace (BP) and Public Witness and Advocacy (PW). The Committee accepted the Strategic Programme Plan for 2025-2028 with a new programme structure. The CCA Evaluation Report for the year 2015-2022 was accepted, with a decision to discuss it further in the next Executive Committee meeting.

The Committee also formed a Search Committee to initiate the process of identifying and appointing a new General Secretary of CCA, as the incumbent General Secretary would complete his mandate of ten years.

## Programme Committee Meeting

2-6 May 2024 | Medan, Indonesia



*Programme Committee Members with CCA staff in Medan, Indonesia*

The first meeting of the newly constituted Programme Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) took place in Medan, Indonesia hosted by CCA member church, the Batak Protestant Christian Church (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan, HKBP) and its University of HKBP Nommensen in Medan, Indonesia from 2 to 6 May 2024.

The CCA Programme Committee's main sessions focused on reviewing CCA's current

programme structure and programme priorities in the context of the recommendations by the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. Through study-reflection sessions, focus group working sessions, and in-depth discussions at plenary sessions, the Programme Committee identified and prioritised programme areas and activities in accordance with constitutional mandates, affirming the enduring vision and mission of the CCA—namely, Mission in Unity (MU), Ecumenical

Formation (EF), Building Peace (BP), and Public Witness and Advocacy (PW).

The Programme Committee endorsed the formation of an Asian Ecumenical Diakonia Network Forum and mandated the development of its guidelines. The

Committee also decided to constitute five Working Groups to assist the core staff in developing strategies to improve the quality and implementation of programmes, focusing on human rights, ecumenical diakonia, health and healing, care for creation, and good governance in churches.

### CCA Foundation Thailand Meeting

The CCA Foundation Thailand met on 19 August at the CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai. Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of CCA shared the activity report of CCA including the management of CCA's legal property, the staffing of CCA and their visa process in Thailand. The Foundation also approved to retain the current auditing company in Thailand, NB Audit Services and appointed a new committee member, Ms Janejinda Pawadee to replace Rev. Dr Chuleepran Srisoontorn.

The CCA Foundation Thailand is a legal entity registered in Thailand as per the Thai laws, under which the CCA has its functioning office based in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The overseas staff working at the Chiang Mai office are sponsored by the Foundation. The members of CCA Foundation Thailand are Dr Pradit Takerngangsarit, Chairperson; Mrs Supaporn Yarnasarn; Dr Sompan Wongdee; Dr Prawate Khid-arn; Rev. Thaworn Sutyka; Ms Janejinda Pawadee; the members of the Church of Christ in Thailand; and Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of the CCA.

## Church and Ecumenical Relations

### Visits and Message of Greetings to Member Churches

- CCA General Secretary visited Sri Lankan churches and held meetings with them in Colombo in January 2024.
- CCA General Secretary, who serves as the Moderator of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches, attended and chaired the CCIA Commission meetings held in Geneva, Switzerland in March 2024.
- CCA General Secretary had ecumenical fellowship meetings with leaders of CCA member churches in North Sumatra,

Medan, Indonesia from 1 to 5 May 2024. The visit took place in conjunction with the Programme Committee Meeting of CCA and the Asia Regional Consultation on Ecumenical Diakonia.

- CCA General Secretary led a five-member pastoral solidarity team visit to Cambodia from 16 to 19 May 2024. The team visit included meetings with church leader, former officers of the defunct Kampuchea Christian Council (KCC), civil society representatives, and government officials.
- CCA General Secretary visited CCA member churches in Malaysia, as



## CCA Participation in the Centennial Celebration of NCC Korea held in Seoul, South Korea – September 2024



*CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara delivered a thematic address on "Geopolitics in Northeast Asia, and its Impact on Peace and Security in the Korean Peninsula - Ecumenical Responses" at the International Conference for the 100th Anniversary of the NCCK*



well as the member council—the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM)—in April and June as part of preparations for CATS-X and the commemorative celebrations of 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nicaea AD 325.

- CCA extended greetings to the Ninth General Assembly of the Igreja Protestante Iha Timor Lorosa'e (IPTL) which took place from 4 to 10 July 2024.
- Congratulatory Message from the CCA General Secretary on the occasion of the consecration of Rev'd James N. Boliget as the new Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines on 26 July 2024.
- CCA General Secretary extended solidarity greetings and expressed support on the 71<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice and the observance of Korea Peace Action Day organised by the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) on 27 July 2024.
- CCA General Secretary met with the Secretary General of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) Fr William LaRousse, MM, at the FABC headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand on 22 August 2024.
- CCA General Secretary attended the General Assembly of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, 14 to 16 September 2024.
- CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara delivered a keynote address titled "Geopolitics in Northeast Asia, and its Impact on Peace and Security in the Korean Peninsula – Ecumenical Responses" on 20 September 2024 at the International Conference on

Peace and Security in the Korean Peninsula.

- CCA General Secretary delivered a message of greetings and congratulations to the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) on the occasion of its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations held at Yeondong Church – Presbyterian Church of Korea, on 22 September 2024. In recognition and appreciation of NCCCK's prophetic witness and missional engagement over the century, a memento from CCA was presented to the General Secretary of the NCCCK, Rev. Kim Jong Seng, by the Bishop Reuel Norman O Marigza, Moderator of CCA.
- CCA General Secretary attended the international conference on ecumenism organised by the Old Catholic Church of the Union of Utrecht at the Theological Faculty of the University of Bern, and presented a paper on Receptive Ecumenism in October 2024.
- On behalf of the CCA General Secretary, Rev. Jung Eun Grace Moon, Programme Coordinator of CCA, extended greetings and delivered the General Secretary's message to delegates and participants from PGI's 97 member churches gathered at the Assembly from 8 to 14 November 2024.
- CCA General Secretary delivered a speech at the opening session of the General Assembly of Kampuchea Christian Council (KCC) in November 2024 and reflected on the ecumenical accompaniment programmes initiated by CCA and WCC in Cambodia since the 1980s. He highlighted how these initiatives ultimately led to the establishment of KCC in 1998.

## Meetings and Visits of Church Leaders and Ecumenical Partners to CCA Headquarters

- Ten representatives from the Anglican Church of Myanmar, including three bishops, Bishop Alan Kyaw Myo Naing, Bishop James Min Dein, Bishop Clement San Oo visited CCA headquarters in Chiang Mai on 11 January 2024.
- Rev. Mads Christoffersen, Senior Advisor for Contextual Theology in the Danmission (the Danish mission society) and Jorgen Skrubbeltrang, the Country Director of Danmission (Myanmar) visited the CCA headquarters on 31 January 2024.
- Officials from the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) University in Medan, Indonesia, headed by the Rector, Dr Richard A.M. Napitupulu, S.T., M.T., the Vice Rector for Partnership and Promotion, Dr Ir. Erika Pardede, M. App.Sc., and Wakil Rektor II, Dr Ferry Panjaitan, S.E., M.Si., visited the CCA headquarters on 16 February 2024.
- Rev. Ute Hedrich, Executive Secretary, Head of Asia, Middle East, and the Pacific Desk of EKD Germany visited the CCA headquarters on 29 February 2024.
- Mr Oliver Märtin, Director of International Programme (interim), and Head of Department for Asia, Pacific and Europe of Bread for the World, Germany, visited the CCA headquarters in Chiang Mai on 1 March 2024.
- Adriana de Fijter and Dick Loendersloot, Programme Officers of Kerk in Actie (Church in Action) visited the CCA Headquarters on June 14, 2024.
- Andreas Dybkjær-Andersson, the International Director for Programs and Partnerships of Areopagos Norway visited CCA headquarters in Chiang Mai on 28 June 2024.
- A group of peace and conflict resolution initiators and facilitators from the Asian Kachin Baptist Association visited the CCA headquarters on 18 July 2024.
- The Executive Committee members of the Association of Christian Universities and Colleges in Asia (ACUCA) visited the CCA headquarters on 28 August 2024.
- Rev. Dr Judy Chung, Executive Director of Global Ministries–Missionary Service Unit of the United Methodist Church, visited the CCA headquarters on 11 September 2024.
- Christopher Selbach, Head of Unit (Worldwide Projects, East Asia, Mekong), and Konstantin Muenchau, Project Officer, from Bread for the World, visited the CCA headquarters on 2 October 2024.
- Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) delegation visited the CCA headquarters on 14 October 2024.
- Doug Fountain, Executive Director of Christian Connections for International Health (CCIH), Washington, D.C., United States of America, visited the CCA headquarters on 17 October 2024. CCIH is a global network of Christian organisations committed to advancing health and wholeness.
- A delegation from the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China (HKCCCC) visited the Christian Conference of Asia headquarters on 5 November 2024 as part of their retreat and training programme.





*Officials from the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) University at CCA Headquarters*



*Representatives from Asian Kachin Baptist Association at CCA Headquarters*



*Visit of Myanmar Baptist Convention delegation to CCA Headquarters*

## PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES

"Affirming God's Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia"

- Church of Sweden Director Rev. Anna Jennie Moon-Ok Nordin and Asia Secretary Dr Johan Hasselgren to CCA headquarters on 29 November 2024.
- Jørgen Mahnke Skrubbeltrang, Dan Mission Country Director for Myanmar, visited the CCA headquarters on 4 December for a meeting with the General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, to explore potential for further

collaboration and partnership between the two organisations.

- Rev. Nang Zin Gam Seng, Bau La Doi, and Dr Gumgrawng Hkan Naw from the Asian Kachin Baptist Association, Rev. Dr Khusnud Azariah from the Christian Study Center, Pakistan, and Rev. Mahn Palmerston from the Myanmar Council of Churches visited the CCA Headquarters for a time of fellowship and shared reflection on 5 December 2024.

## Relations with Ecumenical Partners

A delegation of pastors of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), serving in different German-speaking congregations across Asia, visited the CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai on 5 March 2024. The delegation was led by Rev. Ute Hedrich, EKD Executive Secretary for Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific.

A group of EKD pastors working in different Asian countries visited the CCA Headquarters and participated in a special worship service on International Women's Day, 8 March 2024. The gathering served as an affirmation of accompaniment on a shared ecumenical journey.

The Executive Committee members of the Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC) visited CCA Headquarters on 13 June 2024. They joined CCA staff and women representatives of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) Women's Unit for an opening prayer. CCA and ACWC have journeyed together for over 60 years, sharing a common vision of unity and a collective witness in building communities for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Mission 21 has been a longstanding ecumenical partner of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), supporting the initiatives focused on Good Governance, Human Trafficking, and Overcoming

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (OSGBV). On 9 September 2024, CCA staff coordinating these programmes held an online mid-term review meeting with Rev. Karmila Jusup, Mission 21 Asia Regional Coordinator, and Rev. Elizabeth Mesdila, Sectoral Programme Coordinator – Good Governance. The meeting included discussions on the half-yearly narrative and finance reports, planning for the second half of the year, and a new proposal for the coming years.

Oliver Martin, International Programme Director and Head of Department for Asia, Pacific, and Europe of Bread for the World, visited the CCA Headquarters on 1 March 2024.

Christopher Selbach, Head of Unit (Worldwide Projects, East Asia, Mekong), and Konstantin Muenchau, Project Officer, from Bread for the World visited the CCA headquarters on 2 October 2024 to discuss various aspect of the ongoing projects of Bread for the World (BfdW) and Christian Conference of Asia.

The 44<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin was held online from 21 to 24 November 2024. Several working committee meetings were also conducted in preparation for the annual meeting.





*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), Germany delegation at CCA headquarters*



*EKD women pastors with women staff of CCA on International Women's Day 2024*



*Executive Committee members of the Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC) at CCA*

## PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES

"Affirming God's Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia"



*Rev. Ute Hedrich (EKD Germany) with CCA General Secretary*



*Oliver Märtin (Bread for the World, Germany) at CCA*



*Dick Loendersloot and Adriana de Fijter (Programme Officers of Kerk in Actie) at CCA*





*Visit of Andreas Dybkjær-Andersson (Areopagos Norway) to CCA headquarters*



*Visit of Christopher Selbach and Konstantin Muenchau (Bread for the World, Germany) to CCA Headquarters*



*Dr Johan Hasselgren  
Asia Secretary, Church of Sweden at CCA Headquarters*



*Rev. Dr Judy Chung  
(The United Methodist Church) at CCA*

## PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES

"Affirming God's Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia"

Arceli P. Bile, staff for Ecumenical Relations, represented CCA in this meeting.

The CCA has continued to collaborate with various programme areas of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and in 2024, joint efforts were undertaken in implementing programmes related to peace and human rights, health and healing, ecumenical diakonia, church and ecumenical relations, and mission and evangelism. The CCA General Secretary regularly participates in the REO General Secretaries' meetings with the WCC General Secretary and facilitates the exchange of information on Asia-related issues between the WCC and CCA. In addition, the CCA General Secretary serves as the Moderator of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and as a member of the Reference Group for the Pilgrimage of Peace and Reconciliation.

Kerk in Actie (KIA) is part of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands which has two million members in over 1,600 local

congregations. KIA aims to collaborate and cooperate with other organisations and churches across the world to work with and for the people in vulnerable conditions. They aim to make people resilient against climate change and other threats, and they are there for refugees, the poor, and the marginalised people, including in the Netherlands. For decades, the CCA and KIA have developed good relations in collaborating and supporting their mission activities, especially on theological education and leadership development in Asia.

On 14 June, Adriana de Fijter and Dick Loendersloot, Programme Officers of KIA, visited the CCA Headquarters in Chiang Mai. During their meeting with the CCA staff team, they were introduced to CCA's programme thrusts and strategic direction as mandated by the 15<sup>th</sup> CCA General Assembly held in 2023. They also discussed ways to develop youth leadership in Asia and to advocate for and support people in fragile and vulnerable situations.

## Communications

The CCA continued to make strong and effective use of its social media channels to communicate ongoing programmes, updates, and developments, as well as to engage with member constituencies and global ecumenical partners. The Communications team played a crucial role in maintaining the website, providing timely updates on CCA programmes.

By leveraging social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, the team ensured widespread dissemination of information and active engagement with audiences and subscribers from CCA member churches, councils, and ecumenical partners worldwide.

Regular updates on programmes and activities were shared through photos and short video formats. The team continued the popular "Monday Genesis" initiative and launched a new weekly campaign, "Midweek Gallery", which showcased Christian art from Asia. Periodic interviews with participants and resource persons from CCA programmes were also featured. As a result, CCA's social media presence experienced increased engagement and steady growth in followers across platforms. To ensure broader outreach, all CCA news releases were published on the website and distributed to the organisation's extensive subscriber base of over 5,600.

## Publications

The CCA published a number of reports and books in 2024: Asia Sunday - 2024 Liturgy, the Report of Programme and Activities 2023, the Strategic Programme Plan 2024, and the Handbook of CATS – X. “Module on Strategic for Churches’ Effective Response to HIV and AIDS in Asia”

was published to foster more active social action in response to HIV and AIDS and to build the capacity of churches by training facilitators at regional, subregional, and local levels, while addressing the ongoing impact of HIV and AIDS.

## CCA Staff

New recruitments and appointments of Programme and Administrative Staff members were made: Ms Navya Dinah Saji (India) was appointed as Communications

Consultant and Ms Pakakrong Srikhamfan (Thailand) as a staff for Administration and Office Management.

## Youth Internship and Training

The CCA continued to offer youth internships and training opportunities for young individuals from its member churches and councils. This programme is meant to provide selected youth with valuable practical experience within an ecumenical organisation while actively engaging in initiatives led by the CCA.

The 2024 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 the Global Ministries of UMC), and Mr Jacob Trent Ngileb (Episcopal Church in the Philippines).

## In Memoriam

The CCA received news about the sad demise of its close associates and prominent leaders in Asia.

**Bishop Jintaro Ueda**, Bishop of the Diocese of Tokyo—Anglican Church of Japan, passed away on April 8, 2024. Bishop Jintaro Ueda served as CCA Programme Executive Staff from 1981-1985. He also served the Asian Rural Institute as its Director from 1994 to 2004 and board member from 1994 to 2008.

**Dr Helen M. Hill**, a well-known ecumenist, educator, and human rights defender

from Australia passed away in Melbourne on 7 May 2024. She was 79 years old. Dr Hill was instrumental in developing the leadership skills of many young people in different countries in the Asia Pacific regions as well as advocating for the rights and dignity of oppressed people in the colonised countries.

**Rev. Dr Dhyanchand Carr**, a native of Thanjavur District in Tamil Nadu, was born in 1938 and passed away in Madurai, India, on 30 July 2024. He served the Christian Conference of Asia in Hong Kong from 1993 to 1997 at the Mission and

Evangelism desk. Dr Carr was instrumental in initiating a very inspiring and innovative programme in CCA focused on “reading and re-reading the Bible through Asian eyes”.

**Rev. Saw Shwe Lin**, prominent church and ecumenical leader and former General Secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC), passed away at the age of 59 on 27 August 2024, in Yangon, Myanmar. He was a member of the General Committee of the CCA from 2010 to 2015. He was also an active participant in CCA’s programmes over the years. Rev. Saw Shwe Lin played a significant role as the local coordinator for the Diamond Jubilee Celebration of CCA and the Asia Mission Conference (AMC) which were held in Yangon, Myanmar in 2017.

**His Beatitude Catholicos Aboon Mor Baselios Thomas I**, the head of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in India, entered eternal rest on 31 October 2024, at the age of 95. His

Beatitude Catholicos Baselios Thomas I, a deeply respected spiritual leader, led the church for over two decades and played a pivotal role in the establishment of various educational institutions and hospitals.

**Prof. Dr C. S. Song**, a renowned theologian and distinguished Professor Emeritus of Theology and Asian Cultures at the Pacific School of Religion, who was closely associated with CCA for several decades, passed away on 26 November 2024 at the age of 95. He served as the Principal of the Tainan Theological College of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, Visiting Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, Director of Study for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Secretary for Asian Ministries of Reformed Church in America, and Associate Director of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. He was also actively involved in the Christian Conference of Asia’s (CCA) theological commissions and education programmes during the 1970s and 1980s.





## MISSION IN UNITY AND CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY (MU)

### OBJECTIVES

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

## Commemoration of the 1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea

24 Oct 2024 | Zion Cathedral ELCM, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



*Church leaders and participants from across Asia at the Commemoration of the 1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea*

On 24 October 2024, the Zion Cathedral of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM) in Kuala Lumpur served as the sacred venue for a momentous event marking the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea and the inauguration of the Tenth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS-X). This historic occasion united over 120 theologians, clergy, church leaders, and laypersons from across Asia, alongside prominent ecumenical leaders, in a solemn celebration of unity and theological reflection.

The day commenced with an ecumenical worship service that set a tone of solemnity and spiritual reflection. The sacred liturgy underscored the theological and historical significance of the First Council of Nicaea, uniting participants in shared prayer and worship.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), delivered the welcome address.

He framed the gathering as a platform to engage with the many theological challenges faced by Asian Christians living amidst diverse faith traditions. Drawing attention to the CATS-X theme, “Echoes of Nicaea: Enduring Faith and Embracing Unity,” Dr Chunakara remarked, “This theme underscores the historical importance of the Nicene Council and challenges us to advance the vision of unity established at Nicaea.”

In his Presidential Remarks, Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza, Moderator of the CCA, emphasised the inseparable connection between Christian unity and mission. He reflected on the Nicene Creed’s role as both a doctrinal cornerstone and a living witness to unity amidst diversity, stating, “Christian unity exists so that the world may believe.”

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), delivered the Inaugural Address virtually.

## 1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea – Public Meeting



*Dr Mathews George Chunakara  
CCA General Secretary*



*Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza  
CCA Moderator*



*His Holiness Dr Baselios Marthoma Mathews III  
Supreme Head of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*



*His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan  
Supreme Head of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church*



*His Eminence Cardinal Sebastian Francis  
Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)*



*Pr Sam Ang, Secretary-General  
National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia*

### PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES

"Affirming God's Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia"



## 1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea – Public Meeting



*Rt Rev. Dr Timothy Chi-pei Kwok  
Anglican Church in Hong Kong*



*Bishop Park Jung Min  
Korean Methodist Church*



*Bishop Steven Lawrence  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia*



*Very Rev. Philip Thomas Cor Episcopa  
President, Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM)*



*Rev. Philip Lok, General Secretary  
Council of Churches of Malaysia*



*Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon  
CCA Vice Moderator*



## Commemoration of the 1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea – Ecumenical Worship Service



### PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES

"Affirming God's Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia"





*His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan, His Eminence Cardinal Sebastian Francis, and His Holiness Dr Baselios Marthoma Mathews III at the Nicaea 1700<sup>th</sup> Commemoration*



His address centred on five calls to action for the modern Church: embodying faith through deeds, pursuing visible unity, engaging in justice, fostering reconciliation, and decolonising theological perspectives. “The legacy of Nicaea,” he remarked, “calls us to incarnate Christ’s love through justice, reconciliation, and the affirmation of human dignity.”

The thematic focus of CATS-X, introduced by Rev. Prof. Dr Pillay, addressed critical contemporary issues under three sub-plenaries: Ecclesial Synchrony: Exploring unity in faith, witness, and mission; Biocentric Solidarity: Advocating ecological integrity and cosmic wholeness; and Cybergenic Synergy: Reflecting on digital ethics and humanity’s future. These themes encapsulated the pressing need for theological engagement with the complexities of the modern world.

His Eminence Cardinal Sebastian Francis, representing the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), delivered the Nicaea-1700 Commemorative Address. He emphasised the enduring theological and ecclesial relevance of the First Council of Nicaea, stating, “The Nicene Creed is a proclamation of unity that transcends division.” Cardinal Francis posed a challenge to all present, asking, “Can we, as one Church, bear witness to joy, mercy, and hope through the shared profession of the Nicene Creed?”

Distinguished Church leaders delivered benedictory addresses that underscored the ecumenical significance of the Nicene Creed: His Holiness Dr Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, highlighted the Creed as an expression of unity in the

triune God; His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan, Supreme Head of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, reflected on the Creed’s role in affirming the Trinitarian faith; Rt Rev. Dr Timothy Chi-Pei Kwok, Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong, spoke on diversity as a strength within the Church; Bishop Park Jung Min of the Korean Methodist Church celebrated the timeless unity expressed in the Nicene Creed.

Greetings were extended by notable Malaysian ecumenical leaders, including Very Rev. Philip Thomas Cor Episcopa, President of the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM), and Bishop Steven Lawrence of the ELCM. Their remarks reflected the shared hope for unity and collaboration in the spirit of the Nicene Creed.

Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon, Vice Moderator of the CCA, concluded the programme with a heartfelt vote of thanks. She acknowledged the collective efforts of the organising bodies and participants, expressing hope that the spirit of unity fostered at this gathering would inspire ongoing collaboration among Asia’s Christian communities.

### **Inauguration of the Tenth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS-X)**

The commemoration of the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea, coupled with the inauguration of CATS-X, symbolised a renewed commitment to unity and theological dialogue. It reaffirmed the enduring relevance of the Nicene Creed as a foundation for faith and witness in a diverse and rapidly changing world.

## The Tenth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS-X )

24-29 October 2024 | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The Tenth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS-X) held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 24 to 29 October 2024, commemorated the 1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea. Organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), this landmark programme brought together 122 participants under the theme “Echoes of Nicaea: Enduring Faith and Embracing Unity.” The Congress aimed to reinterpret the Nicene legacy to address contemporary theological, social, and ecological challenges in Asia’s pluralistic context.

CATS-X commenced with a keynote address by Rev. Prof. Dr J. Jayakiran Sebastian from the United Lutheran Seminary, Philadelphia, USA. Speaking on the overarching theme, Dr Sebastian challenged participants to revisit the Nicene Council as a living source of theological insight. He underscored the Creed’s relevance to Asia’s pluralistic societies, urging theologians to “reach back to move forward” by integrating early theological debates with present-day challenges. Emphasising linguistic and cultural translation, he explored how the Creed, originally Greek, must evolve to resonate with Asian languages and metaphors. His reflection on the translation of *Homoousion tō Patri* into Kannada exemplified the richness of contextual theology.

Dr Sebastian also highlighted the Nicene Creed’s ecumenical potential, advocating its themes of unity and inclusivity as a foundation for addressing contemporary issues such as gender inequality and interdenominational collaboration. He urged Asian theologians to revitalise the Creed as a vision for enduring faith and a cohesive response to the fragmented realities of modernity.

Concluding with a vision of unity, Dr Sebastian affirmed that the echoes of Nicaea remain vibrant within Asia’s

cultural and historical landscapes, offering pathways for compassion, inclusivity, and hope in the Church’s mission today.

The first thematic plenary, “Ecclesial Synchrony: Oneness in Faith, Witness, and Withness” commenced with His Grace Bishop Daniel of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who highlighted the historic role of the Coptic Church at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). Emphasising its contributions in affirming Christ’s divinity against Arianism, Bishop Daniel called for churches today to embody unity and theological soundness in their ecumenical efforts.

Sr. Dr Rasika Pieris from Sri Lanka presented on the Asian Church’s call to embody heterogeneous oneness, urging a departure from Eurocentric ecclesial models. She advocated for inclusivity rooted in Asian values of interconnectedness, reflecting the Nicene Creed’s vision of divine unity. Rev. Prof. Dr Johnson Thomaskutty linked the Johannine themes of unity in John 17 with the Nicene Creed’s ecumenical aspirations, proposing a collaborative framework to promote wider inclusivity across denominations.

The second plenary, “Biocentric Solidarity: Covenantal Bond for Cosmic Wholeness”, addressed ecological justice from theological perspectives. Prof. Dr Sharon Bong critiqued anthropocentric views, proposing an ecofeminist approach to creation’s sanctity. Maria Glovedi Joy L. Bigornia presented indigenous Filipino spirituality through the *tadek* dance as a symbol of cosmic solidarity. Rev. Dr Hong Seung Man introduced the Korean concept of *ssangsaeng* (mutual life-giving), while Rev. Prof. Dr Paulachan Kochappilly advocated for “biocracy,” a governance model prioritising interconnectedness and life.

The session on “Cybergenic Synergy: Envisioning Humanity and Digital Wellness”, examined the convergence of faith and





*Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay  
General Secretary, World Council of Churches*



*Rev. Prof. Dr J. Jayakiran Sebastian  
USA*



*Sr. Dr Rasika Sharmen Pieris SFB  
Sri Lanka*



*Rev. Dr Victor Lee  
Malaysia*



*Rev. Levi Vasconcelos Pinto  
Timor-Leste*



*Rev. Jenne Jessica Revanda Pieter  
Indonesia*



*Rev. Prof. Dr Johnson Thomaskutty  
India*



*Dr Alfian Rico Komimbin  
Indonesia*



*Dr Annie George  
India*



*Rev. John Gilmore  
Australia*



*Dr Leonard Chrysostomos Epafras  
Indonesia*



*Dr Jason Lam  
Hong Kong*

## PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES

"Affirming God's Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia"

## Panel Discussions



## Discussions in Plenary





## Discussions in Plenary



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digital advancements. Dr Jason Lam explored the implications of resurrection in a cybernetic context, challenging traditional views of materiality by integrating spirituality and science. His assertion that Christ's resurrection encompasses continuity of identity sparked new reflections on cybernetic wellness. Rev. Dr Yong Sup Song highlighted the potential of "Religious AI" grounded in ethical and cultural principles like the Korean *Jeong* for promoting compassionate connections. Dr Leonard Chrysostomos Epafra introduced "*ecclesiology*," urging thoughtful integration of digital tools to sustain spiritual and communal life, encapsulated in the Javanese concept of *Manunggaling Kawula Lan Mayantara*.

The final day of the Tenth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS-X) opened with the thematic plenary session on "Enduring Faith and Embracing Unity - Asian Ecumenical Response". Capturing the commitment of Asian theological voices to address modern challenges, the last session of CATS-X featured three experts sharing their perspectives on the values of Nicaean ideologies and reflected on the Nicene Creed as a living text for addressing global crises. Rev. Prof. Dr Eleazar S. Fernandez proposed a bio- and cosmo-centric ecumenism, challenging anthropocentric theology. Dr Shiluina Jamir highlighted the Creed's transformative potential in Asian contexts, while Rev. Dr Hyeong Kyoon Kim reinterpreted the Trinity from a migrant perspective, offering

hope and empowerment to marginalised communities.

Daily worship sessions and thematic hymns enriched the Congress, fostering a spirit of unity. On 27 October 2024, participants joined ecumenical Sunday worship across Kuala Lumpur's churches, symbolising the theological and cultural diversity of Asian Christianity.

In his closing remarks, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary, celebrated the Congress as a sacred milestone, likening its ecumenical spirit to the confluence of rivers. The final homily by Rt Rev. Dr Joseph Mar Ivanios Episcopa, "*Illuminated to Illumine the Creation*," called for transformative action inspired by divine light.

The Congress concluded with a communique emphasising the hermeneutical principle of "reaching back to move forward". This approach revitalised the Nicene legacy by integrating its insights into Asia's contemporary challenges, fostering theological innovation and solidarity in addressing issues of faith, ecology, and digital transformation. CATS-X affirmed the enduring relevance of the Nicene Creed, inspiring a cohesive and inclusive response to the fragmented realities of modernity. The Congress stands as a testament to the vibrant and dynamic theological engagement in Asia today.

## Mission and Witness of Church in Cambodia

Christian mission in Cambodia has a long and complex history, beginning with the arrival of the first Roman Catholic missionary, Gaspar de Cruz. Over the centuries, the Church in Cambodia has endured traumatic experiences, including extended periods of persecution. Protestant mission work began in 1923 with the arrival of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. However, the most devastating period for Cambodian Christians occurred during the brutal regime of Pol Pot, when

the practice of religion was severely suppressed.

Although a few underground churches began to operate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was only after the UN-mediated and monitored elections, along with the adoption of a new constitution following the Paris Peace Agreements, that religious freedom was formally recognised and various religious groups were allowed to function openly. Since then, the Christian



*Participants of Kampuchea Christian Council (KCC) Mission Conference, Phnom Penh, Cambodia*

presence in Cambodia has grown steadily, with members now belonging to hundreds of church denominations.

The CCA played a pivotal role in initiating and facilitating the founding of the Kampuchea Christian Council (KCC) in 1998 as a national ecumenical body. However, KCC later became inactive due to a range of challenges. Contemporary Cambodian Christianity continues to face issues such as the proliferation of denominations, aggressive missionary evangelism promoted by foreign mission agencies and churches, and a shortage of trained local church leaders. In this context, the CCA

has continued to accompany Cambodian churches and the KCC in their efforts to address these challenges.

In conjunction with the General Assembly of the KCC held in November 2024, the CCA facilitated a mission conference that brought together representatives from various churches across Cambodia. The mission conference, held at the Family of God's Church in Phnom Penh, was attended by over 200 participants. The CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, delivered the thematic address on "Witnessing Together in a Multifaith Cambodia".

## Asia Sunday

Asia Sunday is annually observed on the Sunday before Pentecost, and it fell on 12 May in 2024. In the context of the worsening human rights situation and ongoing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, the Christian Conference of Asia decided 2024 Asia Sunday would be focused on Myanmar. Since the military coup in 2021, Myanmar has endured three tumultuous years of brutality, repression, and suffering inflicted by the military regime.

The atrocities committed by the Myanmar military against its own people are staggering, ranging from mass killings and arbitrary arrests to torture and sexual violence. Ethnic minority populations, including those in Kachin, Karen, Karenni, and Shan states, have borne the brunt

of these crimes against humanity. Despite international outcry and calls for accountability, the military junta has continued to defy justice, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar.

A special order of worship for Asia Sunday on 'Myanmar: God of Hope, Fill Us with Joy and Peace' was developed. In the CCA General Secretary's introduction to the order of worship, Dr Mathews George Chunakara stated, "As we pray to the Lord Almighty in line with our theme for this year's Asia Sunday: 'Myanmar: God of Hope, Fill Us with Joy and Peace' (Romans 15:13), we are reminded that God is the source of our hope; in a world filled with hopelessness and despair, God is both the source and the sustainer of our hope."

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“May the observance of Asia Sunday—2024 be a moment for us to refocus international attention and resources towards preventing atrocities and ending the conflict in Myanmar. As churches in Asia, let us extend all forms of assistance and support to our brothers and sisters in Myanmar, and let our collective prayers be a source of strength and hope amidst the darkness... Let our solidarity with the people of Myanmar be a tangible expression of God’s love and compassion amid darkness and despair,” added the General Secretary.

The CCA encouraged all member churches and councils as well as ecumenical partners to observe the Asia Sunday - 2024 on 12 May, with focus on Myanmar. CCA staff members observed the Asia Sunday with the members of the Payap Church Congregation of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) on 12 May and offered special prayers for peace in Myanmar. Worship service was led by Rev. Teerapong Chaisri. On 6<sup>th</sup> August, special prayers for peace in Myanmar were offered by the participants of Asian Ecumenical Institute with Myanmar diaspora members in Chiang Mai.



*Asia Sunday worship in Chiang Mai, Thailand*





## **ECUMENICAL LEADERSHIP FORMATION AND ECUMENICAL SPIRITUALITY (EF)**

### **OBJECTIVES**

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

## Youth Leaders Training

### Ecumenical Youth Programme on Eco-Justice and Care for Creation

29 April - 1 May | Siantar, Indonesia

An ecumenical youth training programme, organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) with the participation of CCA member churches in the North Sumatra region in collaboration with the youth desk of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI/PGI), focused on the theme “Eco-justice and Care for Creation”. The three-day training held from 29 April to 1 May 2024 at the Sekolah Tinggi Theologia of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (STT HKBP) at Pematangsiantar, Indonesia was attended by 40 participants from across the region.

Rev. Dr Sukanto Limbong, President of the Theological Seminary - STT HKBP, welcomed the participants and highlighted how special it was for young leaders from different church backgrounds to come together as a unified community to address the emerging concerns and pressing need of the hour: eco-justice and care for God’s creation. Stressing the importance of eco-justice in today’s world, Dr Limbong said

that the gathering of young Indonesian Christians would be helpful in fostering collaboration, dialogue, and collective action towards sustainable environmental practices and eco-justice.

Rev. Septhian T. Sijabat of the National Committee of Lutheran Churches, in a biblical-theological reflection based on Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15, explored humanity’s connection with the environment, emphasising the essence of the image as the love for all creation. The theological reflection session underscored humanity’s interconnectedness with the natural world, reinterpreting the concept of dominion and highlighting its true meaning of responsible care and preservation of creation rather than exploitation, and recognising it as a divine mandate rooted in the image of God. “God created the environment not just for our benefit but also entrusted us with the responsibility of its care. We have been given the power, but it is our duty to wield



Group activities as part of the ecumenical youth training programme in Siantar, Indonesia



it responsibly. If we are human beings, we bear responsibility in the ecological movement,” said Rev. Sijabat.

Rev. Dedi Pardosi of the HKBP presented an overview of the history of ecumenism in both global and Asian contexts. Emphasising the significance of youth in the ecumenical movement, Rev. Pardosi underscored the importance of respecting differences. “In the ecumenical movement, we encounter a multitude of differences in doctrines, values, and principles. Our commitment to respecting other traditions is paramount, as failure to do so can lead to conflicts,” stated Rev. Pardosi, who once served as a youth programme intern at CCA.

Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia led a discussion on the intricate relationship between human, animal, and environmental health, highlighting how disruptions in one area can impact others. The conversation delved into pressing health challenges in Asia, including disparities in public health spending and the urgency of addressing diseases like HIV and AIDS, especially the spread of HIV among young people in Asia. Dr Lalthanmawia said, “In the realm of health and healing the ‘3 H’s’— Head, Heart, and Hands— symbolise key aspects. The Head signifies knowledge, empowering informed decisions. The Heart embodies empathy, recognising

emotional and spiritual well-being. Finally, the Hands represent action, translating knowledge and empathy into tangible deeds for holistic wellness. Together, these ‘3 H’s’ remind us that true health and healing require a holistic approach that engages the mind, the Heart, and the Hands in harmony.”

The exploration of crucial issues and fostering of leadership within the communities of the participants were also part of the training sessions. Participants’ engagement in a contextual bible study titled “Dwelling in Harmony with God’s Creation,” helped generate deep discussions and enabled reflections on humanity’s role as stewards of creation and on ways to effectively convey the message of stewardship and harmony with nature.

Manuel Simbolon of the World Christian Student Federation (WCSF) facilitated a workshop on Climate Change and Globalisation. Rising temperatures and extreme weather conditions, like tornadoes in Indonesia and floods in Dubai, underscored the urgent need for action. He opined that while industrialization in the Global North historically drove climate change, ongoing development in the Global South exacerbated the crisis. A panel discussion facilitated by Rev. Berman Maeda Situmorang of the Christian Protestant Church in Indonesia

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*Participants of the Ecumenical Youth Programme on Eco-Justice and Care for Creation in Siantar, Indonesia*

(GKPI) and Mikhael Sihotang (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan) highlighted the need for actions such as encouraging organic farming initiatives in villages.

Dr Melinda Siahaan, of the Institut Agama Kristen Negeri (IAKN) Tarutung, led a session with focus on empowering ecumenical youth leadership and navigating intergenerational dynamics within church communities. Dr Siahaan delved into pressing intergenerational issues, highlighting the metaphor of “Haminjon” (Frankincense) as a symbol of eco-intergenerational friendship amidst significant deforestation in Sumatra. Ester Kristina Purba from the Indonesian Christian Church (HKI) addressed the church’s response to environmental needs and youth concerns, and emphasised the vital role of young people as pillars of creation, care and response to it. Ms Purba also raised concerns about environmental degradation and pollution, and she

urged greater collaboration between generations to address these pressing challenges. Mikhael Sihotang emphasised the importance of churches responding to environmental needs and youth concerns, urging for solidarity and clear communication between generations.

Various sessions also addressed challenges faced by youth in advocating for change within church systems, including obstacles posed by elders and limited opportunities for participation. As discussions concluded, participants expressed their commitment to translating insights gained from the session into concrete actions, including Earth Day initiatives and ongoing community engagement projects. The session underscored the vital role of ecumenical youth leadership in driving environmental stewardship and promoting intergenerational collaboration within church communities.

## Youth Leadership Development Training in Laos

*16-18 May | Vientiane, Laos*

The National Ecumenical Youth Leadership Programme was held in Vientiane, Laos, from 16 to 18 May. Themed “Empowering Youth to Transform for Christ,” the programme highlighted the essential roles

of individuals committed to ecumenical formation and leadership within churches and ecumenical organisations. The programme aimed to strengthen the ecumenical movement by fostering



*Participants of the Youth Leadership Development Training in Laos*

unity and collaboration among Christian communities.

Ecumenism necessitates a renewal of attitudes and a flexible approach in the pursuit of unity. The ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement—and the focus of ecumenical formation—is to fulfil the hope embodied in Jesus’ prayer, “that they all may be one.” This programme represented a significant step towards achieving this unity, fostering collaboration, and equipping the next generation with the knowledge and leadership skills needed to serve effectively in their ministries and communities.

In Laos, Christianity remains a minority religion with three recognised churches: the Catholic Church, the Lao Evangelical Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Since the 2000s, religious freedom has gradually improved, as the government engages in dialogue with the United Nations and various organisations. This progress provides a hopeful backdrop for the efforts of young Christian leaders, despite the challenges they still face in their missions and ministries.

The youth programme in Laos brought together 40 participants from various

provinces, including Vientiane Capital, Bolikhamxay, Xaisomboun, Udomxai, Savannakhet, Luang Prabang, Champasak, Salavan, Luang Namtha, and Xayaboury. The participants engaged in a series of enriching activities and discussions.

The training began with morning worship led by Ms Oui and the LEC Nakham Church team, followed by a biblical reflection (Matthews 28:19-20) delivered by Rev. Doungprachan, Vice President of LEC. Participants attended insightful sessions on outreach and orphan support presented by Ps. Khammon and Mr Sethai, highlighting the increasing number of orphans and the ongoing need for support to ensure their survival. Dr Sonexay Khounlavong facilitated an interactive session on youth engagement, emphasising the importance of active participation by young people.

The morning session concluded with an introduction to the Christian Conference of Asia’s youth capacity-building initiatives and a discussion on the significance of ecumenical collaboration. In the evening, Ps. Waeng Kounlavong spoke on “The Witness and Mission among Youth and Children,” followed by Rev. Dethsacda addressing the risks of drug addiction and prevention strategies.

Ms Anousala from Interwoven presented “Empowering Women in Youth Ministry,”



shedding light on the challenges faced by vulnerable young women affected by trafficking and the critical need for educational support. The first day concluded with a discussion led by CCA staff John Paul Devakumar and Sha Mgwe La Ah Tha Pa on discipleship and its application to public witness and advocacy, reinforcing the programme's commitment to fostering youth leadership and community engagement.

The second day began with a worship session led by Pastor Cindy and the worship team. This was followed by a powerful biblical reflection on Matthews 24:14 delivered by Dr Sonexay Khounlavong, which deeply resonated with the attendees. The morning sessions featured Pastor Kav Vang and Rev. Khamfon Manichada, who provided valuable insights into discipleship and effectively channeling youth energy into church ministry. The morning concluded with discussions on Christian Stewardship by CCA staff John Paul Devakumar and Hnin Wai Thi Aung inspiring LEC youth to become exemplary stewards within their communities. Youth pastors from various provinces shared their experiences, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration among participants. The day concluded with a session on Christian Youth Leadership led by CCA staff John

Paul Devakumar, Sha Mgwe La Ah Tha Pa, and Hnin Wai Thi Aung.

Throughout the day, participants were encouraged to engage in discussions about ongoing missions and ministries. CCA staff actively listened and contributed to these discussions, aiming to enhance the participants' strengths and capabilities in their current endeavors. The day was marked by active engagement, insightful discussions, and a strong sense of community, all contributing to the programme's goal of empowering youth to transform for Christ.

On the final day of the training, Pastor Cindy and the worship team led the morning worship session, followed by Rev. Ken Lattaphone, who shared his ministry experiences from Luang Prabang. John Paul Devakumar discussed the meaning of "Diakonia" and the role of Asian churches in God's mission. Rev. Dethsacda concluded the program with participants sharing their experiences, expressing gratitude, and joining in prayer and holy communion.

Overall, the National Ecumenical Youth Leadership Programme made significant strides in empowering young leaders, promoting unity, and equipping participants with the skills necessary to transform their communities and ministries for Christ.



## Asian Ecumenical Institute

22 July-17 August | Chiang Mai, Thailand



AEI - 2024 participants

The Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI) 2024 took place from 22 July to 16 August 2024 at the CCA headquarters on the Payap University campus in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This month-long programme was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in collaboration with the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The theme of AEI-2024, "Creation Care and Eco-Justice: Our Faith and 'With-ness'", was anchored in the theme of CCA's 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, "God, In Your Spirit, Renew and Restore Your Creation." The theme aimed to provide participants with a broader ecumenical perspective based on biblical and theological undergirding in Asian contexts, focusing on the role of churches and ecumenical movements in creation care and ecological justice. It also encouraged a renewed commitment to God's transformative work in creation through our faith and 'with-ness.'

The theme emphasised the vital role of young people in actively engaging

in creation care and affirmed their commitment and strengthened bond of 'with-ness' in God's transformative work. As we live in an era where creation care is urgently needed and climate change is already having devastating effects on Asia, it is essential to equip young people to play a pivotal role and take on leadership within the environmental movement as part of creation care and justice. By highlighting the interconnectedness between faith and the ecological crisis, the theme urged young Asian ecumenists to practise holistic ministry and work for creation care.

Through AEI-2024, participants explored theological foundations, drew wisdom from diverse perspectives, and deepened their understanding of the interplay between spirituality, justice, and environmental well-being. The theme also emphasised collaboration and collective action, encouraging participants to form networks beyond boundaries of nationality,

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*Rev. Dr Benjamin Simon, World Council of Churches, at AEI-2024*

denomination, and culture. By fostering a community of young Asian ecumenists dedicated to caring for God's creation, the AEI cultivated an environment of mutual learning and collaboration.

A cohort of 25 young ecumenists from across Asia actively participated in this leadership formation programme, which sought to integrate biblical and theological perspectives with critical contemporary issues such as creation care and social justice. The curriculum was designed to explore the intersections of faith, ecology, and justice, encouraging participants to examine present-day challenges through a theological and critical lens, and to respond with a spirit of community and solidarity.

The General Secretary of the CCA, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, in his opening address, welcomed this year's cohort and expressed his joy in seeing

young ecumenists attending the Institute from lesser-represented areas in the Asian ecumenical movement, such as Laos, Myanmar, Timor Leste, and West Papua, as well as representatives from the Mae La refugee camp—one of nine camps along the Thai–Myanmar border housing refugees from Myanmar. He highlighted the unique opportunity that AEI participants received during the month-long training programme to live, learn, and interact with people from diverse Asian cultures and ecclesial backgrounds, and to gain knowledge from some of the best resource persons in different fields.

AEI–2024 provided a comprehensive and enriching experience, blending in-depth discussions with practical engagement and spiritual reflection. It included theological and biblical expositions, thematic presentations, field visits, and cultural exchanges, allowing participants



*Team building activities at AEI-2024*

to immerse themselves in ecumenical and interfaith perspectives and gain contextual insights into global issues from a faith-based standpoint. Thematic areas of focus encompassed eco-theology, ecumenism, missiology, peacebuilding, gender justice, and post-humanism within a Christian framework, while also engaging with other religious traditions, including Buddhism and Sikhism.

AEI-2024 brought together an array of internationally recognised ecumenical leaders, theologians, biblical scholars, social scientists, ecumenists, peace activists, development practitioners, and environmental advocates. They facilitated engaging and impactful sessions that delved into a wide range of topics, fostering an environment of learning and dialogue among participants.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara delivered the first two thematic addresses of AEI,

titled “Care for the Creation in God’s Oikos” and “Ecumenism, Economics and Ecology.” He provided a comprehensive introduction to the concepts of oikos, oikumene, and care for creation in the oikumene. He also elaborated on the need to nurture sustainable communities in the oikumene, the interconnection of ecumenism, economics, and ecology, the importance of upholding the integrity of creation, and the crucial role humans are expected to play as stewards in the oikos to protect and uphold the dignity of God’s creation.

Rev. Dr Benjamin Simon, Programme Executive at the World Council of Churches and Director of Education and Ecumenical Formation at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, delivered a presentation on the Vital Issues and Concerns of the Ecumenical Movement and the Prospects and Challenges Facing the Ecumenical Movement. In his address, he highlighted

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*AEI participants engaged in group activities*

five key areas to consider in addressing current challenges and fostering transformation: cultivating a shared sense of respectful unity; acknowledging our collective vulnerability and responsibility toward God's creation; embracing the positive aspects of Christian diversity and the broader "one human family"; raising awareness that identities are fluid and being open to the transformative nature of Christianity; and harnessing the power of social media as a catalyst for change.

Rev. Dr Kenneth Dobson, DMin at Princeton Theological Seminary, delivered an insightful biblical reflection on the profound wisdom inherent in God's creation and God's redemptive providence at work within it. Ajarn Sawai Chinnawong, a Thai artist and painter who depicts Bible narratives in a Central Thai (Buddhist) setting, led the creative sessions on Indigenous Spiritualities and Christian Engagement and Meditating on the Beauty of God's Creation through Arts.

Rev. Eric Baldonado, faculty at Union Theological Seminary, Philippines, presented

on Christian Spirituality and Transformational Leadership, Doing Mission with Integrity within the Ecumenical Framework, Ecumenical Missiology, and Grassroots Ecumenism. Rev. Dr Chammah Kaunda offered insights on Transforming Mission in a Changing Global Society, Mission as 'With-ness', Re-thinking Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural Society, and Mission as Peacebuilding and Reconciliation. Dr Rey Ty, faculty member of the Department of Peace Studies in the Religion, Culture, and Peace Lab (RCPL) at Payap University, led the session on God's Peace with Justice: Interfaith Perspective.

Darlene Marquez-Caramanzana, Area Liaison for Asia and the Pacific for the General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, facilitated the sessions on Re-reading the Bible from New Eyes: Feminist Perspective, Christian Women's Action for Creation Care, and Empowering Women's Leadership in the Church. Rev. Dr Yoon Tae Kim, an ordained



*Participants engaged in group discussion*

pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, provided input on Christian Mission and Evangelism in the Era of AI, Digital Revolution and Its Implications on Christian Spirituality, and Posthumanism and Missiological Hope.

Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, Programme Coordinator at CCA, facilitated sessions on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Health and Healing. John Paul Devakumar, a staff member at CCA, led a session on Good Governance and Integrity Leadership. Additionally, CCA staff conducted various sessions focused on HIV awareness and addressing vulnerabilities related to HIV.

The participants were given the opportunity to lead worship, present their national and ecclesial contexts, and share their reflections on insights related to the various themes explored throughout the AEI programme. These sessions enriched the group's collective understanding and highlighted the unique perspectives each

participant brought, shaped by their cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Participants also visited the Gurdwara Chiang Mai, a Sikh temple, and Wat Pha Lat, a Buddhist temple in Chiang Mai, where they engaged in meaningful dialogue to deepen their understanding of different faith traditions. This time of reflection fostered insights into interfaith collaboration as a powerful approach to addressing various societal issues and challenges.

A worship service based on the Asia Sunday Liturgy, titled "Pray for Myanmar: God of Hope, Fill Us with Joy and Peace," was held, followed by student presentations on peace and security issues in their local contexts. Afterwards, a discussion on CCA's accompaniment with the people of Asia was led by Rev. Grace Moon, CCA Programme Coordinator.

Before the culmination of the programme, the participants organised a Cultural Evening, reflecting the importance of



*AEI participants at the Cultural Evening*

unity amidst diversity and encouraging everyone to appreciate and embrace their differences as strengths rather than barriers.

The programme concluded with a deeply meaningful closing worship service, followed by a heartfelt valedictory session. This closing session served as a moment of affirmation for participants, recognising their potential to act as catalysts for transformation in their respective contexts and to impact the wider ecumenical movement. It challenged them to carry forward the rich tapestry of learning, connection, and inspiration they had built during the programme.

Putra Arliandy from Indonesia said, "Through AEI-2024, I have learnt to understand the complexity of the ecclesial, economic, political, socio-cultural, and

ecological issues that we face and the Christian responses to complex issues and situations. The AEI has inspired us to develop a collective spirit to unite as the Body of Christ in action. AEI-2024 has also reminded me that God's mission is not just the work of Christians alone, but we are called to collaborate with other communities, as well as governments, to effectively implement the values of God's Kingdom."

"Over the past four weeks, I have learnt so much about ecumenism and the various issues and concerns in Asia. The sessions were eye-opening, and the experiences here have deepened my compassion and responsibility towards God's creation," remarked Eunike da Graça de Vasconcelos, a young church worker from Timor-Leste.





## **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

## Solidarity and Accompaniment

### Pastoral Solidarity Visit to Cambodia

16 to 19 May 2024



*CCA Pastoral Solidarity Visit Team with Cambodian church and ecumenical leaders*

Christian witness in Cambodia faces a severe crisis today due to multiple factors affecting the Cambodian churches and related organisations. This concern was expressed by a group of church and ecumenical leaders during their meeting with a pastoral solidarity team from the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), which visited Cambodia from 16 to 19 May 2024.

The representative group of Cambodian church and ecumenical leaders, who belong to different generations of post-Khmer Rouge era Cambodian Christianity, shared with the CCA team the current situation of the church and ecumenical organisations in the country.

The church leaders, who gathered for a meeting after a long gap, affirmed their

commitment to strengthening common witness in unity and evolved a plan of action to strengthen the defunct ecclesial and ecumenical organisational structures at the local, provincial, and national levels in the country. A 15-member ad hoc working committee was formed to undertake the task of promoting unity and strengthening the organisational structures, including at the provincial levels.

Leadership conflicts, an increased communication gap among leaders, lack of transparency and accountability in resource management in churches and organisations, and competition for leadership positions were pointed out as reasons for polarisation within the small Christian community in the country.

Aggressive evangelisation tactics promoted by certain overseas missionary groups working under the labels of denominations and confessional organisations in different parts of Cambodia have intensified conflicts and fragmentation among local Cambodian Christians, as explained by the church leaders.

Christianity in Cambodia emerged from the dark period of the Khmer Rouge tyranny, and present-day Cambodian Christianity traces its history back to the period when the country was reopened after the Paris Peace Agreements (Comprehensive Cambodian Peace Agreements) were signed towards the end of 1991. The church leaders who met with the CCA delegation included some of the first Christian leaders to return to war-torn Cambodia from the refugee camps. These leaders took the initiative in organising Christian fellowship groups for the first time in the country after the Pol Pot era.

The church leaders who had been in leadership positions with the defunct Kampuchea Christian Council (KCC), a member council of CCA in Cambodia, shared their anguish and disappointments regarding the disunity that arose among KCC members due to a small piece of land acquired by CCA for the use of Cambodian churches in the 1990s.

The Kampuchea Christian Council, the first national ecumenical body formed in Cambodia after five years of intensive work by the Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches from 1993 to 1998, was officially inaugurated in 1998. The property was originally registered in the name of a former officer of the KCC due to legal impediments in registering immovable property in the name of religious organisations, but the ownership of the land remains with a former office-bearer of the KCC. The KCC was the first Christian organisation to be registered under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Cult of the government in the Royal Kingdom of Cambodia.

The Pastoral Solidarity Team Visit was headed by CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara, along with Prof. Dr Pradit Takerngrangsarit, member of the CCA Executive Committee, Rev. Jung Eun Moon and Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, CCA Programme Coordinators. The solidarity visit was organised as part of CCA's accompaniment with member churches and councils in Cambodia who are going through difficult situations especially in areas of developing integrity leadership, mutual accountability, and good governance in managing church and ecumenical bodies.

## Ecumenical Women's Advocacy Against Violence (EWAAV)

### Gender-Based Violence and Forced Migration of Women: Towards Strengthening Gender Justice Advocacy

19 – 21 November 2024 | Bangkok, Thailand

Amid the rising challenges of gender-based violence and forced migration of women, the Asia regional consultation of the Christian Conference of Asia's (CCA) Ecumenical Women's Action Against Violence (EWAAV) programme focused on exploring the Church's role in amplifying

efforts to create a gender-just community that upholds women's dignity and rights.

The three-day consultation on "Gender-Based Violence and Forced Migration of Women: Towards Strengthening Gender Justice Advocacy" was held at





*Opening worship of the Regional Consultation on Gender-Based Violence and Forced Migration of Women: Towards Strengthening Gender Justice Advocacy in Bangkok*

the Bangkok Christian Guest House in Silom, Bangkok, from 19 to 21 November 2024. Thirty-two participants from across Asia representing the EWAAG network of CCA member churches attended the consultation. Rev. Jung Eun Grace Moon, Programme Coordinator of CCA, opened the consultation by welcoming the participants and extending greetings on behalf of the CCA General Secretary. The first day featured two thematic presentations offering critical insights and strategies for combating violence against women and gender justice advocacy.

Rev. Wella Hoyle de Rosas from Silliman University Divinity School in the Philippines delivered the first thematic address titled 'Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Forced Migration of Women: Towards Gender Justice'. Drawing on experiences in the Philippines, Rev. de Rosas highlighted the pervasive challenges faced by women in Asia. She analysed how patriarchal societal norms perpetuate cycles of violence and forced migration, dictating women's roles and limiting their autonomy. Women fleeing abusive relationships or forced marriages often find themselves in exploitative labour conditions abroad. This interconnectedness of gender-based violence and forced migration creates a vicious cycle of oppression. She

emphasised the need for a gender-just community rooted in Christian values with theological undergirding, advocating for



*Rev. Wella Hoyle de Rosas delivering thematic address*

equality, mutual respect, and the inherent dignity of all individuals, inspired by Christ's inclusive approach to women.

Rev. Ira Imelda of Gereja Kristen Pasundan in Indonesia explored evolving patterns of gender-based violence in Asia in her presentation, 'Gender-Based Violence in Asia: Emerging Trends and Strategic Approaches in Addressing the Issues'. Rev. Imelda addressed diverse forms of violence—domestic, sexual,

cyber, and land-related—and their impact on marginalised communities. A case study on Papua's food estate programme illustrated how land-related displacement exacerbated violence against women, especially indigenous women. She identified priorities for ecumenical women's actions in areas such as intersectional advocacy, leadership training for women, and economic empowerment which are key strategies for tackling gender-based violence.

The engaging discussions following both presentations, drawing from the diverse experiences of participants from across Asia, highlighted the need for collective action involving individuals, communities, governments, and national, regional, and international organisations.

On the second day, a contextual Bible study was presented by Rev. Jung Eun (Grace) Moon, Programme Coordinator of CCA. She shared the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) and highlighted how women's struggles can become sources of strength and healing for others. She emphasised that the story of the Samaritan woman, an outcast burdened by shame, illustrates how an

encounter with Jesus led to healing, transformation, and the turning of her wounds into strength.

Nelun Chrisanthi Gunasekara, a seasoned gender trainer from Sri Lanka, led an engaging session on 'Achieving Gender Equality: The Rights and Empowerment of Women and Girls'. She urged participants to critically examine their specific contexts and evaluate the legal and policy frameworks in their countries, identifying factors that either support or hinder progress. Highlighting the importance of meaningful empowerment, Ms Gunasekara stated that empowering women should take into consideration their realities and contexts and be meaningful rather than driven by actions that may inadvertently disempower them.

Dr Young Mi Cho of the Presbyterian Church of Korea led a session on 'Women and Men Partnership in Combating Gender-Based Violence: A Collaborative Approach' and emphasised the importance of involving men in the gender equality movement. She stressed that as gender conflicts rise, there is an urgent need for inclusive policies that engage men in gender equality efforts. She noted



*Participants of the Regional Consultation on Gender-Based Violence and Forced Migration of Women: Towards Strengthening Gender Justice Advocacy in Bangkok*

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that analysing and strengthening policy and legal frameworks based on evidence of what works and what does not is key to the success of gender equality initiatives.

A three-member panel of church women activists from Bangladesh, the Philippines, and South Korea explored 'Gender Justice Advocacy in Churches' and shared insights into the Church's response to the growing issues of gender-based violence.

Daisy Roy, Executive Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh (NCCB), addressed the challenges of advancing gender equality and women's rights within the country's predominantly Islamic cultural context. Key obstacles included early child marriage, limited access to education for women, and widespread societal discrimination. In response, the NCCB has launched initiatives such as gender equality workshops, child education programmes, and advocacy efforts to promote women's rights.

Sheena Camille Calma, programme coordinator for the United Methodist Church's Women's Programme, highlighted the primary challenges tackled by the church, such as gender-based violence in church spaces, inadequate institutional responses, and various other forms of discrimination. She

shared how the Methodist Church in the Philippines has implemented leadership training, social justice ministries, and human rights campaigns to combat oppression, raise awareness, and promote equity. These initiatives aim to create inclusive and equitable spaces while advocating for gender justice, encouraging communities to unite in driving meaningful change.

Dr Hyunju Lee of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea addressed the alarming rise of sexual violence and its far-reaching effects on South Korean society, particularly within the church. She highlighted key issues such as femicide, deep fake pornography, and the abuse of power by church leaders through grooming. Dr Lee added that, in response to these growing concerns, efforts have been made to introduce gender equality codes, amend church policies, and provide comprehensive counselling and training. However, she noted that despite these positive developments, significant challenges persist in South Korean church and society, including deeply entrenched patriarchal culture and resistance from some church leaders.

Topics on 'Contextual Value and Restoration of Women in Migration', 'Violence Against





*Participants in a group activity*

Women in the Context of Forced Migration’, and ‘Gender Approach to Migration: Role of Churches in Local Contexts’ were discussed on the third day of the regional women’s consultation.

Ms Wangka highlighted how migrant workers were often coerced into exploitative labour through false promises or entrapment upon arrival in host countries. Drawing on examples from Hong Kong and Singapore, she highlighted the practices of recruitment agencies and employers who subjected workers to long hours, meagre wages, and physical abuse. Her presentation stressed the urgent need

for stronger labour law enforcement, better access to healthcare, and better support systems to safeguard the rights of migrant workers. She also underscored the importance of collective action and advocacy to combat violence against women and provide meaningful support for migrant domestic workers.

In her second presentation on ‘Gender Approach to Migration: Role of Churches in Local Contexts’, Ms Wangka explored the gender dynamics of migration. She explained that the majority of migrant workers from prominent source countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines were women. She emphasised that the vast majority of women migrated out of necessity, not out of choice. She also highlighted the widespread discrimination, inequality, and exploitation endured by women migrant workers. She described them as a “silent majority” who often remained quiet about harassment, injustice and exploitation due to fear of losing their jobs and their inability to support their families.

She stressed the importance of the churches role in providing support in areas such as access to healthcare, participation in decision-making processes, and control over resources, advocating for a more



*Yusmiati Vistamika Wangka*



*Group Discussions*

inclusive and equitable approach to migration.

Dr Judy Berinai, lecturer and dean at the Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia, led a session on the contextual value and restoration of women in migration, emphasising the importance of praxis Bible study—an approach that blends biblical reflection with practical action. Dr Berinai highlighted the significance of the book of Ruth, recognising Ruth as a migrant, and the narrative of the woman with chronic bleeding from Luke 8, emphasising her physical and social challenges. Drawing upon these biblical narratives, Dr Berinai illustrated how scripture could inspire practical action, encouraging participants to engage deeply with the text and address real-world issues faced by women.

A communique adopted at the closing session of the consultation outlined guidelines and actionable steps to promote gender justice in diverse contexts.

In the communique, participants urged women across communities to empower themselves and others by cultivating awareness of gender-based violence, advocating for survivors, and collaborating with organisations to address the root causes of violence and forced migration.

Discussions during the consultation on the importance of involving men in gender justice dialogues to dismantle harmful patriarchal structures and promote healthier, more inclusive communities were reflected in the communique. The participants emphasised the need for collaborative, inclusive, and transformative action to address gender-based violence (GBV) and the forced migration of women.



*Bishop Genieve Blackwell*

The role of churches in combating gender-based violence was highlighted, with participants urging faith communities to raise awareness, challenge patriarchal perspectives, and support survivors with comprehensive care. Churches were

*Group Discussions*

encouraged to promote gender justice through theological education, policy development, and active participation in decision-making processes to ensure women's voices are heard at all levels.

Participants also urged CCA member churches and ecumenical organisations to use their platforms to raise awareness about the impact of GBV and forced migration on women, and to advocate for stronger policies that protect women's rights. Emphasis was placed on the crucial

need for collective commitment from all sectors of society, particularly faith-based communities, to combat gender-based violence and provide support for those affected by forced migration.

The three-day consultation culminated in a closing worship where participants affirmed their shared commitment to fostering a more equitable and gender-just society, pledging to work together towards lasting change and the empowerment of women.

## International Conference on Towards a Global Advocacy for Democratisation, People's Security, and Peace with Justice in Myanmar

22-25 November 2024 | Bangna – Bangkok, Thailand

An international conference on "Towards a Global Advocacy for Democratisation, People's Security, and Peace with Justice in Myanmar" was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and held in Bangna, Bangkok, Thailand, from 22 to 25 November 2024. Sixty participants from diverse sectors—including advocacy networks, faith-based and civil society organisations, academia, media, diplomacy, and human rights movements—gathered from across Asia, Europe, and North America to deliberate on Myanmar's deepening political,

economic, and humanitarian crises. It provided a space for critical engagement and the development of coordinated advocacy strategies.

The conference opened with an interfaith prayer service and welcome address by Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of CCA, who also delivered the thematic keynote. His presentation, titled "Towards a Global Advocacy for Democratisation, People's Security, and Peace with Justice in Myanmar", detailed the deteriorating conditions in Myanmar since the military coup of 1 February 2021.

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He highlighted the escalating violence, widespread displacement, and increasing humanitarian needs—citing that over 18.6 million people required urgent assistance in the first half of 2024 alone. Dr Chunakara called for intensified international pressure on the junta, increased humanitarian aid, and greater support for democratic movements, emphasising the challenges posed by ethnic fragmentation and entrenched military control.

Dr Michal Lubina from Jagiellonian University, Poland, presented a paper on “Legacy and the Conundrum of Conflicts

in Myanmar: Role of Military, External Influences, and Geopolitics”. He provided a historical overview of Myanmar’s multiethnic society, shaped by colonial legacies and the rise of military dominance. He discussed the long-term impact of British colonisation, the emergence of the Tatmadaw, and the systemic failure to build an inclusive national identity.

The plenary discussions that followed stimulated intensive discussions by both Myanmar and international participants. Myanmar delegates spoke about the regime’s repressive actions and stressed



Prof. Dr Michal Lubina  
Poland



Ven. Ariyavamsa  
Thailand



*Dr Sai Kyi Zin Soe  
Thailand*

the necessity of ending military influence in governance. International attendees gained critical insights into the complexities of the crisis, particularly those unfamiliar with Myanmar's socio-political context. The presentation by a refugee rights and peace activist on "People's Security in Myanmar: Challenges Within and Beyond Borders" underscored the growing refugee crisis and its profound impact on regional stability.

On the second day, the session "Challenges to Peace in Myanmar: Border Criminal Activities, Armed Conflict Stalemate, and Widespread Violence" examined the influence of transnational criminal networks and the surge in online scams originating in Myanmar. These developments were analysed as by-products of systemic insecurity, economic hardship, and weak



*Jason Tower  
USA*

state structures, underscoring the need for immediate and collaborative international responses.

The session on "Ethnic Diversity, Ethnic Strife, and the Future of a Democratic and Federal Myanmar" explored Myanmar's ethnic and cultural diversity and its significance in shaping the country's future. Active discussions followed, highlighting the importance of addressing historical and ongoing grievances to foster inclusivity and unity. A concluding plenary for the day brought all participants and speakers together to revisit the key themes and facilitate cross-sectoral reflections, further reinforcing mutual understanding and commitment.

Dr Michal Lubina's second presentation focused on the theme "Myanmar's Civil War: Foreign Policy in Relation to



*David Scott Mathieson  
Australia*



*Minnie Anne Mata-Calub  
Philippines*

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*William Gray Rinehart*  
USA



*Srey Sotheavy*  
Cambodia

Russia, China, and ASEAN.” He delved into Myanmar’s historical emphasis on sovereignty while analysing its current geopolitical complexities. Dr Lubina also highlighted ASEAN’s limited impact and the contrasting strategies adopted by major global powers such as China and Russia.

The session on the “Role of Civil Society and Faith-Based Organisations in Peacebuilding

in Myanmar” underscored the crucial role these groups play in fostering reconciliation and promoting justice. Similarly, the session on “Human Dignity and Human Rights in Myanmar: Reflections from Inter-Religious Perspectives,” emphasised the role of faith communities in promoting justice and dignity, highlighting the vital role of faith communities in advocating for human rights and dignity.



*Dr Youngmi Cho*  
South Korea



*Rev. Dr Jin Yang Kim*  
USA



*Rev. Tun Lin Oo*  
Thailand



*Rev. Dr Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty*  
Indonesia



The session on “Towards Policy Solutions for a Peaceful and Democratic Myanmar: Alternative Prospective Pathways,” highlighted innovative strategies for fostering peace and democracy in Myanmar. The presentation delved into potential policy frameworks and approaches that could address the ongoing challenges and pave the way for a more inclusive and stable future.

Closely related was the session on “Global Advocacy and Solidarity with

Myanmar’s Human Rights Movements”, which underscored the significance of international cooperation in amplifying Myanmar’s pro-democracy efforts. Meanwhile, a panel on “The Role of Ethnic Communities in Ensuring Peacebuilding” highlighted the active engagement of ethnic groups in promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and national unity.

On the final day, the session on “Roles of International Community and Multilateral



*Rev. Dr Abraham Mathew  
India*



*Rev. Anna Jennie Moon-Ok Nordin  
Sweden*



*Dr Sarosh Koshy  
USA*



*Joergen Mahnke Skrubbeltrang  
Denmark*



*Rev. Saw Ler Htoo  
USA*



*Fernando Wattala Pedige Joseph Basil  
Sri Lanka*

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*Rev. Rothangliani Rema Chhangte  
USA*



*Dr Hayso Thako  
Thailand*

Organisations in Peacebuilding in Myanmar” called for cohesive, multilateral interventions to support conflict resolution and democratic transition. Discussions focused on how global actors and institutions can facilitate sustainable peace and regional stability.

The conference concluded with the adoption of a communique outlining key recommendations and collective commitments. Participants called upon the Christian Conference of Asia

and its ecumenical partners to initiate the Myanmar Ecumenical Solidarity Accompaniment (MESA) programme. This initiative aims to coordinate global solidarity efforts, strengthen advocacy for peace and democracy, and facilitate a comprehensive humanitarian response—ensuring that the international community remains actively engaged in the pursuit of peace, justice, and democratic renewal in Myanmar.



*Participants of the International Conference on Towards a Global Advocacy for Democratisation, People's Security, and Peace with Justice in Myanmar*



## 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.



## Emerging Issues in Asia: Regional and Global Advocacy

### CCA Executive Committee expresses concern over escalating conflicts and violence across Asia

19 January 2024

The Executive Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia expressed deep concern over the escalating conflicts and violence across Asia, emphasising the urgent need for peace and security. The Statement highlighted the detrimental impacts of religious and ethnic conflicts, increasing militarisation, particularly noting the escalations of military actions between Iran and Pakistan, tensions in the Korean Peninsula, cross-strait tensions between China and Taiwan, and increasing arms build-up. In India, the ethnic conflicts in Manipur have resulted in significant Christian community casualties and displacement. The Statement urged immediate action to stop the violence.

The Statement also addressed the dire situation in Myanmar, where ethnic communities were suffering under brutal military crackdowns, and called for the

“full restoration of democracy and peace”. Highlighting the plight of over 980,000 displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh, the Statement underscored the urgent need for a solution to their statelessness and suffering. The economic and political crisis in Sri Lanka and the struggles for self-determination in West Papua were also emphasised in the Statement.

The Statement did not overlook the war in Gaza in the West Asia region, where ongoing war had led to widespread death and destruction, outbreaks of illness, and the potential for famine. It also pointed out the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on Asian economies. Emphasising the need for a strong ecumenical and prophetic witness, the Statement called for unity among Asian churches in addressing such complex challenges.

### International Women’s Day – 2024

8 March 2024

The General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Dr Mathews George Chunakara, released a statement on the occasion of International Women’s Day (IWD)–2024. Acknowledging that commendable strides had been made by the CCA’s member constituencies towards gender justice in recent years, the Statement pointed out the “substantial gap between intention and action”, which was

reflective of a trend of underinvestment in gender equality measures.

The theme of IWD–2024, ‘Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress’ was a call to prioritise investment in gender justice initiatives through dedicating financial resources, providing training and capacity-building opportunities, and actively advocating for policies that promote gender equality within Asian communities.

## CCA offers prayers and extends condolences over the loss of lives in Taiwan's earthquake

4 April 2024

Following the devastating earthquake that struck off the coast of Hualien, Taiwan, on 3 April 2024, the General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Dr Mathews George Chunakara, issued a statement offering prayers and expressing condolences to the bereaved families.

"It is with dismaying feeling that we received the news of such a devastating natural calamity. May those who lost their lives in this tragic event rest in peace. On behalf of all CCA member churches and councils we express our heartfelt

condolences to the bereaved families; we pray for a speedy recovery for the injured, and the swift rescue of those trapped. May God almighty strengthen the people of Taiwan as they undergo traumatic experiences," said the CCA General Secretary.

The Yushan Theological Seminary, affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan—one of CCA's member churches—was among the institutions impacted by the earthquake.

## CCA condemns brutal violence against Christians and churches in Sargodha, Pakistan

26 May 2024

The General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Dr Mathews George Chunakara, in a letter addressed to the President of Pakistan, urged the government to take immediate and necessary action against those orchestrating violence against Christians, and to ensure the safety and security of the Christian minority in the country.

The violence resulted in the brutal killing of Nazir Masih, a Christian labourer, and the destruction of churches, homes, and

Christian-owned businesses. As the attacks escalated, many families were forced to flee in fear. Churches were set ablaze, and Christian properties looted.

In the letter, the CCA General Secretary expressed grave concern over the misuse of Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which are increasingly weaponised against minority communities, and highlighted the ongoing persecution and systemic discrimination faced by Christians in the country.

## CCA expresses condolences to families of Asian migrants who died in the devastating fire in the Mangaf area in Kuwait

17 June 2024

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) issued a statement of condolence and solidarity following the devastating fire on 12 June 2024 in a migrant workers'

accommodation in Mangaf, southern Kuwait, which resulted in the deaths of at least 49 migrant workers—primarily from India and the Philippines. The majority

of victims were aged between 20 and 50 and included engineers, accountants, supervisors, and drivers. Among the deceased were 24 individuals from the Indian state of Kerala, with others from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and several other states.

“The loss of the families of the victims of the Mangaf tragedy is heart-breaking and beyond words. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have lost their near and dear ones. We pray that the injured will recover at the earliest. May divine grace strengthen and console all family

members, friends, and their co-workers in the destination country”, stated Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

In the message, the CCA General Secretary emphasised the need for greater accountability and highlighted that such tragedies are symptomatic of longstanding neglect of the safety, rights, and dignity of migrant workers in host countries. The CCA called attention to the broader structural issues affecting migrant workers and reiterated the urgent need for improved safety standards and humane living conditions in destination countries.

## **World Day Against Trafficking in Persons – 2024**

*30 July 2024*

In a statement released on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, the Christian Conference of Asia called on churches in Asia to “sensitise and mobilise their communities and maximise their resources to save children from the inhumane conditions of human trafficking.” The theme for World Day against Trafficking in Persons-2024 was “Leave No Child Behind in the Fight Against Human Trafficking”. This theme aimed to raise awareness of children’s heightened vulnerability to trafficking and stimulate urgent action to stop child trafficking.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary said, “The abuse,

exploitation, and trafficking of children are a blatant disregard for human dignity and must be categorically denounced.” He encouraged Asian churches to provide adequate support for victims of child trafficking and to create safe spaces where children can grow up without fearing exploitation and abuse. Dr Mathews George Chunakara also stated, “As we are reminded of the words of St. Paul: ‘Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them’ (Ephesians 5:11), it is imperative that we join efforts to challenge the structures and policies that enable human trafficking to go undetected.”

## **CCA expresses concern over crisis in Bangladesh and hopes for the restoration of democracy, peace, and safety**

*8 August 2024*

In light of the escalating violence and political turmoil in Bangladesh, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, sent a pastoral solidarity message to CCA member churches in Bangladesh

and the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh (NCCB), expressing profound concern and solidarity.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara informed the churches in Bangladesh, “We stand



with you as you provide comfort and support to your communities during this challenging and distressing period. We pray for the restoration of democracy, peace, and safety in the country at the earliest, so that it may resume its path of reform and development, ensuring that the rights and freedoms of its citizens are safeguarded”.

The protest against the quota system for government jobs escalated into widespread looting and rioting across the country. The minority community,

primarily adherents of the Hindu faith, came under attack, with Hindu temples being set on fire and the homes and businesses of Hindus targeted in various areas.

The General Secretary voiced concern over the spread of organised crime and violence directed at minority religious groups and law enforcement officials. He urged all parties to de-escalate the violence and restore a state of calm, emphasising the need for peace and harmony for the nation’s development and progress.

### **CCA General Secretary urges GRP and NDFP to resume stalled peace negotiations in the Philippines**

*30 August 2024*

The Christian Conference of Asia General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, called for an urgent and renewed commitment to resume the stalled peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) to realise lasting peace and security.

Sunday, 1 September 2024 was declared as the National and International Day of Prayer for Just Peace in the Philippines by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). In solidarity with the initiatives of the churches and the ecumenical movement in the Philippines advocating for the resumption of peace negotiations between the GRP and NDFP, the CCA General Secretary stated, “The root causes of the ongoing conflict in the Philippines remain unaddressed, and military solutions alone have proven inadequate in achieving conflict resolution

and lasting peace. It is imperative that both the GRP and the NDFP return to the negotiating table with determination to resolve the longstanding conflict and people’s struggle for human rights. Comprehensive dialogue must address social injustices, economic disparities, and human rights violations that fuel the conflict in Filipino society.”

“Ensuring peace and people’s security requires addressing the root causes of the conflict through dialogue. The continuation of military operations, red-tagging, and human rights abuses only deepens divisions among people and communities and prolongs suffering of the poor and marginalised people. By resuming peace talks, the government can work towards a just and enduring resolution that upholds the human rights of its citizens, fosters socio-economic development, human security and promotes national unity”, added Dr Mathews George Chunakara .

## CCA expresses solidarity with National Council of Churches in the Philippines' (NCCP) observance of the Day of Prayer



The CCA prepared a prayer for peace and reconciliation in the Philippines in solidarity with the NCCP's observance of the Day of Prayer. "The CCA expresses solidarity with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and supports its initiative in observing the Day of Prayer for just and lasting peace in

the Philippines. While CCA is committed to accompanying the churches and the ecumenical movement, we urge member churches and councils of CCA to stand in solidarity with the people of the Philippines by observing this Day of Prayer for Just Peace in the Philippines on 1 September 2024", said the CCA General Secretary.

## International Day of Peace – 2024

*21 September 2024*

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara, in a statement released to commemorate the International Day of Peace 2024, reaffirmed CCA's commitment to cultivating a culture of peace and promoting peace in Asia and beyond.

The International Day of Peace, observed globally on 21 September, calls for 24 hours of non-violence and ceasefire. The theme for 2024, "Cultivating a Culture of Peace," carried special significance, as 2024 also marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

the UN General Assembly's adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace—a landmark in global efforts to foster peaceful societies.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara stated, "As Christians, we are reminded of our duty to be peacemakers, following the teachings of Christ: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' (Matthew 5:9). The task of cultivating a culture of peace begins with us and must extend to those spaces where violence and

discord have taken root. It is vital to instill the values of peace, non-violence, and justice in children, our future generation, through both formal and informal education. Churches, as beacons of peace, play a central role in this endeavour.”

He further added, “The future of our world depends on our collective efforts to nurture understanding, respect, and harmony. Inculcating a culture of peace and prioritising peaceful solutions over warfare is vital to achieving this.”

## World Mental Health Day – 2024

*10 October 2024*

In a statement released on 10 October 2024, for World Mental Health Day, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) urged churches to lead efforts in promoting mental health awareness, reducing stigma, and providing support to those struggling with mental health challenges. The theme for World Mental Health Day 2024 was “Mental Health at Work”.

CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara underscored the need for mental health protection to be treated as a fundamental human right. He highlighted that mental well-being is often stigmatised, especially in professional settings, where vulnerability is seen as weakness. Many employees suffer in silence, fearing judgement or career repercussions, which deepens their isolation and worsens mental health challenges.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara said, “It is important to build strong support systems where individuals facing challenges feel secure, valued, and understood. Churches have a vital role to play, not only in advocating for mental health awareness but also in breaking down the barriers of stigma. By fostering environments of care and compassion, both at home and in the workplace, churches can help ensure that mental health is prioritised, and people feel encouraged to seek help without fear.”

“CCA urges its member churches and councils to engage in open discussions, equip counsellors, train professionals, and motivate volunteers to offer support and accompaniment, ensuring that every person experiences holistic health—physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual,” added the General Secretary.

## CCA supports Armenian church leaders’ appeal for restoration of human rights of the Armenian population in Artsakh

*8 November 2024*

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, joined Armenian church leaders in West Asia—His Holiness Catholicos Aram I of the Armenian Church, Holy See of Cilicia; His Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch Raphaël Bedros XXI of the Armenian Catholic Church; and Rev. Dr Paul Haidostian, President of

the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East—in calling for the Armenian people’s right to return to their historical homeland of Artsakh and for the restoration of their human rights.

In a joint appeal issued ahead of the COP29 UN Climate Change Conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, the three Armenian church



leaders called for an end to the immense suffering endured by the Armenians of Artsakh due to prolonged conflict and forced displacement.

Supporting the appeal of the Armenian church leaders, Dr Mathews George Chunakara stated, “CCA stands with the Armenian church leaders in their call for the international community to address these pressing issues and to ensure the protection and well-being of all those affected by this crisis. CCA also urges political, governmental, and diplomatic circles to heed the calls of the Armenian

people and to support efforts for advocacy, justice, and the protection of Armenian cultural, historical, and religious sites in Artsakh.”

The statement called for decisive action to address the injustices faced by the Armenians in Artsakh and urged CCA member churches and councils to pray for peace and the quick release of all those imprisoned by Azerbaijan. The statement also called on COP29 participants to advocate for a peaceful and just resolution that respects the rights of the Armenian people.

## World Children’s Day – 2024

*20 November 2024*

On World Children’s Day, Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) reaffirmed its dedication to advocating for the rights, and well-being of children across Asia. Observed annually on 20 November, this day serves as a call to amplify children’s voices and reaffirm global commitments outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara, through a statement, highlighted the challenges faced by millions of children in Asia, including inadequate education and healthcare, exploitation, forced labour, trafficking, and discrimination, particularly in conflict and emergency settings.

Underscoring the paramount role of the Church in affirming the dignity and rights of children, the CCA General Secretary stated, “The Church must uphold

their rights, listening with patience, compassion, and respect, advocating for a world that protects and nurtures children. We believe that churches in Asia can make a transformative impact by advocating for accessible education and healthcare, implementing child protection policies, fostering inclusive, violence-free communities, and creating platforms where children’s voices are valued and taken seriously”.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara urged CCA member churches and councils to create safe spaces for children, foster inclusive communities, and advocate for accessible education and healthcare. “Through partnerships with families, communities, and organisations, the Church can ensure that children are heard, their dignity upheld, and their potential realised”, he added.

## International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

*25 November 2024*

On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Christian Conference of Asia

(CCA) renewed its urgent call to confront the enduring scourge of violence against women and girls (VAWG). CCA General

Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara highlighted that, while decades of advocacy had illuminated the path toward gender equality, the persistent reality of gender-based violence, particularly across Asia, served as a stark reminder of the work still to be done.

The General Secretary stated, “The CCA urges its member churches and councils to amplify efforts to address violence against women and girls through advocacy, public statements, and concrete actions that promote women’s safety, dignity, and empowerment, which includes supporting survivors of violence, engaging in

educational initiatives to change harmful attitudes, and working with other key actors to take meaningful action and work towards lasting transformation”.

Violence against women manifests in numerous ways, including intimate partner violence, human trafficking, exploitation, and femicide. These acts are often driven by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and systemic inequalities, which continue to fuel a cycle of harm. In several Asian countries, the situation remains dire, with widespread domestic violence, trafficking, and exploitation continuing to affect vulnerable women.

## World AIDS Day – 2024

*1 December 2024*



The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) observed World AIDS Day on 1 December 2024 with a resolute reaffirmation of its commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of individuals living with or affected by HIV. The theme of World’s AIDS Day-2024 ‘Take the Rights Path’, emphasised the importance of prioritising

human rights and empowering vulnerable communities to lead the fight against AIDS.

In a statement released, the CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, underscored the urgent need for a rights-based approach to achieve the global goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

## PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES

“Affirming God’s Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia”

“By taking the rights path, we affirm that protecting human dignity is fundamental to ending AIDS”, Dr Chunakara stated, urging churches and Christian communities across Asia to strengthen their efforts in addressing the epidemic.

The statement placed particular focus on the rights of children and teens living with or affected by HIV. Despite global progress, the alarming rise in new HIV cases in Asia highlights persistent gaps, with many young people still denied access to essential, age-appropriate services. The CCA General Secretary called on its member councils and churches

to strengthen initiatives, responses, and services for future generations.

Dr Chunakara also called for the abolition of laws that infringe upon human rights and the enactment of policies that protect vulnerable communities. Reiterating the CCA’s commitment to fostering collaboration, he stressed the need to create safe spaces, ensure access to essential services, and build a more inclusive world. “Taking the rights path means being the change we wish to see. Together, we must uphold our values and continue our efforts to empower the next generation to live with dignity and hope”, stated Dr Chunakara.

## International Day of Persons with Disabilities

3 December 2024

In a statement released on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, CCA amplified the call for inclusion and leadership of persons with disabilities. Reflecting on 2024’s theme, ‘Amplifying the Leadership of Persons with Disabilities for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future’, CCA underscored the vital contributions of persons with disabilities in shaping a more equitable and inclusive society.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary, emphasised the urgent need to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of community life, stating, “Their leadership is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and addressing the barriers that hinder progress toward a just and sustainable future”.

With approximately 700 million people living with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region, the CCA General Secretary highlighted the pressing challenges they face, including limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. He also drew attention to the heightened vulnerabilities of women and children with disabilities, who often

encounter compounded discrimination and marginalisation.

The statement urged CCA member churches to reflect on their inclusivity, encouraging them to examine whether persons with disabilities are fully welcomed into worship, ministry, and community activities. “Our faith calls us to emulate Christ’s compassion and advocacy for equality. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that people with disabilities find dignity, belonging, and love within our churches and society”, Dr Chunakara said.

The CCA General Secretary called for a concerted effort to dismantle systemic barriers and cultural prejudices that perpetuate the exclusion of persons with disabilities, noting that this included addressing harmful practices in healthcare, challenging societal stigma, and providing equitable access to education and employment. He further urged churches and society to take active steps toward holistic healing—of spirit, mind, body, and soul—ensuring that no one was left behind and that all individuals could experience dignity, belonging, and love.



## CCA's statement on the escalation of attacks on religious minorities in Bangladesh

6 December 2024

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) expressed deep concern over the surge in violence targeting religious minorities in Bangladesh, particularly Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist communities. The attacks, which included assaults on individuals, their residences, places of worship, and educational institutions, raised alarm about the security of religious minorities in the country, threatening pluralism and communal harmony.

CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara called on the interim government of Bangladesh to take immediate action to safeguard the rights and security of all citizens, regardless of

their religious beliefs or ethnic identities. He emphasised the need for robust security measures, swift investigations, and accountability for perpetrators.

Highlighting the importance of interfaith cooperation and dialogue, the CCA General Secretary urged efforts to rebuild trust, promote reconciliation, and uphold the values of Bangladesh's cultural and religious diversity. Dr Chunakara reaffirmed CCA's solidarity with all communities in Bangladesh and appealed to the government to uphold justice, peace, and inclusivity, ensuring that the country remains a place where people of all faiths can live together in harmony and security.

## Human Rights Day – 2024

10 December 2024

On Human Rights Day, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to advocating for human rights across Asia. Under the 2024 theme, "Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now", the CCA called for immediate action to uphold the dignity and rights of all individuals, stressing the urgent need for collective responsibility in shaping a future rooted in justice, peace, and equality.

In the statement, CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara highlighted the deep-rooted challenges facing Asia, urging that these systemic inequalities demand a united response. He called on governments, civil society, and faith communities to uphold the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and take decisive action to address and overcome these injustices. Dr Chunakara

stated, "The Church in Asia bears a significant responsibility as a beacon of hope and a catalyst for positive change. Rooted in Christ's teachings, the Church is called to protect human dignity by standing in support of those whose rights are under threat, ensuring that no one is left unheard or unseen."

Dr Chunakara also called for enhanced collaboration between churches, governments, and local organisations to promote equality, ensure access to education, and advocate for policies that prioritise fairness and human dignity. He emphasised the critical importance of protecting children's rights, recognising their vulnerability and the need to safeguard their future to build a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

## Good Governance, Stewardship and Integrity Leadership in Asia

### Christian Theology on Good Governance and Transparency – National Capacity Building Training

19-21 February | Dili, Timor Leste



*Participants of the National Capacity Building Training on Christian Theology on Good Governance and Transparency in Dili, Timor Leste*

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and its member church in Timor-Leste, Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosa'e (IPTL), jointly organised a national-level training program on "Christian Theology of Good Governance" at the IPTL headquarters in the capital city, Dili, from 19- 21 February, 2024. The training programme had a total of 44 participants who were pastors, evangelists, lay leaders, and youth leaders from five regions.

The Igreja Protestante iha Timor Lorosa'e (IPTL) made commendable efforts to promote accountability and transparency within its organisational framework. While the principles of good governance and related policies have not yet been explicitly articulated as church standards, the Synod of IPTL recognised the importance of strengthening this commitment and fostering a culture of modern church practice. In response, the Synod initiated a specialised "Good Governance" training programme tailored for pastors, who hold

pivotal roles in strategic decision-making.

Using modules developed by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) on good governance and stewardship, the programme was contextualised to meet the specific needs of IPTL as a member church of the CCA. The training covered key topics such as the biblical foundations of good governance and stewardship, the church as a Christian organisation and resource analysis, Christian leadership models, ensuring accountability and monitoring mechanisms, as well as resource and asset management. Additionally, the programme included discussions on understanding the basics of the good governance system and strategic planning for church activities and diakonia.

The morning worship services on both days were led by the students from the IPTL's Theological Learning Center (CFT-IPTL). Rev. Domingos Alves, IPTL Moderator greeted the gathering and welcomed John Paul Devakumar, CCA staff member who

*Group Discussion*

coordinated and facilitated the sessions in the training programme. The sessions on the first day emphasised understanding the resources and gifts given by God to be used properly within the church as a Christian organisation. The biblical characters of Adam, Joseph, and Moses were referenced to illustrate how God's stewards fulfil roles of management. From Jesus' teachings, participants understood the biblical standard of stewardship: "managing God's blessings in God's way for God's glory."

Moreover, the training sessions extended to personal levels, emphasising transformation from within, starting with internal beliefs that guide one's choices. Good governance qualities such as Integrity, Accountability, Empathy, Humility, Resilience, Influence, and Positive Thinking were highlighted for application in family, church, and society settings.

Rev. Levi Vasconcelos Pinto, a member of the CCA Executive Committee and Secretary of the IPTL Theological Learning Center, expressed, "The biblical foundation of good governance inspires us to rethink our mission, pay close attention to our experiences, and cherish the resources we have. Although challenges may arise in asset and resource management, stewardship is not solely the pastor's

responsibility but that of the entire community. We look forward to analysing governance within the church and society, utilising and releasing God's grace to become good stewards of God."

The second day sessions focused on practical aspects of Good Governance and Stewardship in Church administration. The fundamental principles and systems to incorporate "accountability and monitoring mechanisms" were introduced in the morning session. The sessions underscored the importance of transparency in church management, particularly in finances and expenditures, and highlighted the significance of tithing beyond monetary value. Accountability and Monitoring Mechanism were emphasised using Jesus' teachings on stewardship, noting that accountability is essential at both personal and organisational levels. The afternoon session closed with open mic discussions based on the grassroots level queries on Church administration raised by the participants.

Rev. Neliana S. Nope, the treasurer of IPTL Synode who participated in the training programme said, "sessions on Christian leadership were both inspiring and reflective as they directly correlated with the manner in which we ought to conduct ourselves within our congregations. They prompted us to view ourselves not



merely as leaders, but as stewards, and encouraged introspection regarding our calling to assume leadership roles and responsibilities.” She also commended the sessions on church resources and finances management with accountability and transparency.

Participants conveyed their gratitude to CCA for organising such an important training programme. Many pastors acknowledged their prior superficial comprehension on Good Governance and Transparency, noting a cursory familiarity with the overarching concepts but lacking in-depth understanding. This training programme gave them an exposure to understand the importance of acquiring wider and practical knowledge of Good Governance among church members, emphasising its potential to cultivate improved governance practices within the church community, thereby promoting transparency and accountability.

Rev. Levi Vasconcelos Pinto said, “Good governance is central for the church, and good stewardship is the responsibility given by God to humankind. It is hoped that this training programme and formation will enable the congregation leaders of the IPTL to play greater roles in

their local communities.” Rev. Pinto added, “Co-organising this programme with the CCA demonstrates the IPTL’s commitment to being more accountable, transparent, and effective in carrying out our mission in sustainable and productive ways.”

Key sessions facilitated by the CCA included ‘Biblical Foundations of Good Governance and Stewardship’, ‘Church as Christian Organisation and Analysis of Resources’, ‘Models of Christian Leadership, Ensuring Accountability and Monitoring Mechanisms’, and ‘Resources and Assets Management’. Other themes discussed included ‘Church and Good Governance in the Synodal System’, ‘Leadership and Policy in Service’, ‘Theological and Philosophical Bases and Applications in Church Systems’, ‘Managing Church Finances’, and ‘Church Resource Management and Diakonia’.

Sharing feedback on the programme, Rev. Pinto stated, “The biblical foundations of good governance have inspired us to reimagine our calling, pay serious attention to our experiences, and appreciate the resources we have. Although we may face problems relating to the management of assets and resources, we have learnt that being stewards is not the job of pastors alone but is the responsibility of the whole community.”

## **National Workshop on Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry**

*3-5 June | Kolkata, India*

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore Colleges (BTESSC) jointly organised a national workshop titled ‘Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry’. This workshop, held from 3 to 5 June, 2024, at the Senate Centre for Extension and Pastoral Theology Research in Kolkata, aimed to prepare future church leaders with essential skills and knowledge

for effective governance and stewardship in their pastoral roles.

The workshop saw the participation of around 30 final-year Bachelor of Divinity students from various theological institutions affiliated with the Senate of Serampore. These students represented a diverse cross-section of theological education across India, bringing varied perspectives and experiences to the workshop.



*Participants of the National Workshop on Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry in Kolkata, India*

The primary objective of the workshop was to equip ministerial candidates with practical skills and knowledge for effective governance and stewardship in parish ministry. The workshop aimed to integrate Christian values with essential management principles, preparing participants for leadership roles in their respective churches.

The first day of the national workshop commenced with an uplifting opening worship, setting a reflective and focused tone for the participants. The session began with welcome greetings and a round of self-introductions, allowing the participants to get acquainted and fostering a sense of community. Rev. Asigor P. Sitanggang, Th.D., led the first substantive session on 'Biblical Foundations on Good Governance and Stewardship'. He meticulously explained how biblical principles underpin the concepts of governance and stewardship, emphasising the scriptural basis for ethical leadership and responsible management within the church. His insights provided a robust theological framework that participants could relate to and apply in their future ministries.

Prof. Rev. Eleazar S. Fernandez delivered a compelling session titled 'Good Theology = Good Governance: Being

God's Stewards'. He drew connections between sound theological principles and effective governance, advocating for a leadership model grounded in theological integrity and ethical stewardship. Prof. Fernandez's profound reflections inspired the participants to envision governance as an extension of their theological commitments.

After lunch, Rev. Asigor P. Sitanggang, Th.D., returned to discuss 'Church Leadership Models and their Roots in Ecclesiology'. He explored various leadership models within the church, tracing their origins to ecclesiological principles. This session provided participants with historical and doctrinal contexts, enriching their understanding of different leadership approaches.

Rev. Dr Roger Gaikwad, the former General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, facilitating a session on 'Church as a Christian Organisation'. Dr Gaikwad highlighted the organisational aspects of the church, discussing its structure, functions, and administrative dynamics. The session underscored the importance of viewing the church not only as a spiritual entity but also as an organisational body requiring effective management. The final activity of the day involved participants presenting



and discussing their own church's organisational structures. This interactive segment allowed them to share experiences, compare different models, and engage in constructive dialogues on best practices and challenges. The discussions provided practical insights and fostered a collaborative learning environment, setting the stage for deeper engagement in the following days.

The second day of the national workshop began with a serene and contemplative session of 'Devotion & Biblical Reflection' led by Rev. Priscilla Papiya Durairaj. This initial session provided a spiritual grounding for the day's activities, allowing participants to centre their thoughts and intentions on biblical teachings and reflections pertinent to their ministerial journeys. Following the devotion, Rev. Dr Sunil M Caleb, a distinguished Professor of Christian Ethics at Bishop's College and the North India Institute of Postgraduate Theological Studies, Kolkata, delivered an enlightening session on 'Financial Stewardship, Transparency and Overcoming Corruption'. As the Principal of Bishop's College, Dr Caleb brought a wealth of knowledge and practical insights into ethical financial practices, stressing the necessity of transparency and integrity in church finances. His session addressed critical issues of financial management

and accountability, providing participants with strategies to combat corruption and ensure ethical stewardship.

Rev. Asigor P. Sitanggang, Th.D., resumed his role as a key resource person with a session on 'Integrity and Accountability in Parish Leadership'. He emphasised the importance of maintaining personal and professional integrity in pastoral roles and discussed practical measures to enhance accountability within parish communities. His insights underscored the vital connection between ethical leadership and effective church governance. The next session, led by Prof. Rev. Eleazar S. Fernandez, focused on 'Human Resource Management, Conflict Resolution and Peacemaking'. Prof. Fernandez drew on his extensive experience in theological education to offer valuable guidance on managing church personnel, resolving conflicts, and fostering a peaceful and cooperative environment within the church. His session provided participants with practical tools and techniques for effective human resource management in pastoral settings.

Following lunch, the workshop continued with Rev. Dr M. Peter Singh's session on 'Fostering Good Governance and Pastoral Leadership in Digital Spheres'. As a Professor in Communication at



Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary and former Vice Principal of Serampore College, Dr Singh offered a contemporary perspective on utilising digital platforms for good governance and effective pastoral leadership. His insights into digital communication and management were particularly relevant in the context of modern ministry, where digital engagement plays a crucial role.

The day concluded with 'Focus Group Discussions on Challenges in Contemporary Pastoral Ministry'. This interactive session provided a platform for participants to share their experiences and discuss the pros and cons of modern ministry practices. The focus groups delved into the practical challenges faced by pastors in their respective contexts, fostering a rich exchange of ideas and strategies. These discussions highlighted the diverse contexts and unique challenges of pastoral ministry, offering valuable insights and peer support.

The final day of the national workshop commenced with a session of 'Devotion & Biblical Reflection' led by Rev. Dr Rodinmawia Ralte. This spiritual session set a reflective and contemplative tone for the day, grounding the participants in biblical teachings and preparing them for the discussions ahead. Following the devotional session, Rev. Dr C. Vanlalhruaia, a distinguished Mizo theologian, presented on 'Contextual Values: Indigenised Management Principles'. Drawing from the rich cultural heritage of the Mizo tribes, Dr Vanlalhruaia shared indigenous wisdom passed down through generations on managing family, tribe, community, land, and natural resources. He highlighted how these traditional principles, deeply rooted in the Mizo context, could be effectively applied to church management, providing a unique perspective on integrating cultural values with ecclesiastical administration.

After a tea/coffee break, the workshop moved into a forward-looking session

titled 'Way forward/Feedback'. Participants were encouraged to express their intentions to apply the knowledge and skills gained during the workshop in their future ministries. They emphasised the importance of financial transparency, ethical governance, and servant leadership, which had been focal points throughout the workshop. Additionally, participants suggested incorporating more interactive sessions and practical problem-solving activities in future workshops to enhance learning and engagement.

The session was followed by a Vote of Thanks delivered by John Paul Devakumar from CCA staff. He expressed gratitude to the participants for their active involvement and to Rev. Dr Rodinmawia Ralte from the Senate of Serampore, the local host organisation, for their unwavering support and excellent arrangements. The workshop concluded with a Closing Worship, bringing the three-day workshop to a solemn and reflective end. This final worship session allowed participants to consolidate their learning and spiritual growth, preparing them to implement the principles of good governance and stewardship in their respective parishes.

Rev. Dr Rodinmawia Ralte, Professor and Dean of the Senate Centre for Extension and Pastoral Theological Research, commented, "These intensive workshops on Good Governance and Stewardship are essential means to instil both Christian values in church administration as well as right management skills for students who will join pastoral ministry after their theological studies."

The national workshop on 'Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry' was a resounding success, providing valuable insights and practical tools for future church leaders. The collaboration between the CCA and BTESSC exemplifies their commitment to nurturing well-rounded, effective leaders for the church and society.

## National Workshop on Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry

6-8 June 2024 | Kottayam, India



*Participants in a session at the National Workshop on Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry in Kottayam, India*

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), in collaboration with the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, a prominent institution of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, successfully organised a three-day workshop focused on “Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry.” The event, held at the Mar Thoma Syrian Theological Seminary in Kottayam, Kerala, India, from 6 to 8 June 2024, brought together 104 seminarians from seven theological institutions across India and faculty members of the Mar Thoma Seminary.

The primary objective of the workshop was to bridge the gap between theological education and the practical application of good governance and stewardship in parish ministry. The sessions were designed to provide seminarians with the tools necessary to identify and overcome challenges related to governance and stewardship in their future pastoral roles. Additionally, the workshop aimed to foster

a deeper understanding of how these principles could enhance the mission and witness of the church in contemporary society.

The workshop was inaugurated by Bishop Thomas Mar Timotheos of the Kottayam Kochi Diocese, who emphasised the critical need for instilling values of good governance and stewardship among future church leaders. In his inaugural address, Bishop Mar Timotheos highlighted the importance of these values in helping pastors navigate the complex challenges of ministry while maintaining integrity and ethical leadership.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, also addressed the participants during the inaugural session. He underscored the relevance of good governance and stewardship in the current context of Asian churches and ecumenical organisations. Dr Chunakara pointed out the alarming trend of declining adherence to these



*Participants of the National Workshop on Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary in Kottayam, India*

values in several churches across Asia and stressed the necessity of deliberate efforts to inculcate them at all levels of church leadership.

John Paul Devakumar, a staff member of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the coordinator of the programme, emphasised the collaborative efforts between CCA and the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary in organising the workshop. He underscored the importance of ongoing training for theological students in Asia, particularly in the areas of good governance, integrity in leadership, and stewardship in pastoral ministry. The Principal of the Mar Thoma Syrian Theological Seminary, Rev. Dr V S Varughese acknowledged the importance of the workshop in supplementing the academic training of seminarians with practical governance skills.

The keynote address by Prof. Dr M. H. Ilias from the School of Gandhian Thought & Development Studies, MG University, Kottayam, discussed the intersection of good governance and academic settings, drawing parallels between the principles of ethical leadership in academia and their application in church ministry. He argued for the integration of governance studies within theological education to better

prepare future leaders for the complexities of ecclesiastical administration.

Dr Anand Joshua's session on "Principles of Good Governance & Ethical Practices in Christian Ministry" offered a thorough exploration of the core principles of good governance and ethical practices, focusing on their relevance in Christian ministry. He provided practical examples and guidelines for maintaining integrity and transparency in church leadership.

The session titled "Hermeneutical Key to the Church's Mission and Witness Towards Sustainable Lifestyles and Creation Care" was facilitated by Rev. Fr Dr K M George, and examined the theological foundation for the church's mission in promoting sustainable living and environmental stewardship. Rev. Fr Dr George highlighted how these concerns were intrinsically linked to good governance and the ethical responsibilities of church leaders. The second session by Dr Anand Joshua on "Foundations of Christian Leadership: Insights for Pastoral Ministry" revisited the essential qualities of Christian leadership, focusing on how these can be nurtured and applied within the context of parish ministry. He emphasised the importance of a servant-leadership model and the role



of theological education in developing these qualities.

The Bible Study led by Rev. Blysu Varghese on 'The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)' reflected on the Parable of the Talents, drawing lessons on stewardship, responsibility, and the wise use of resources. Rev. Varghese urged future leaders to consider how their stewardship of both spiritual and material resources would impact their ministry and the broader church community. Rev. Dr John Philip facilitated a session titled "Guidance from Teachers of Faith - Patristic Wisdom for Modern Governance". This session tapped into the rich traditions of Patristic teachings, offering insights on governance from the early church fathers. Rev. Dr Philip highlighted how these ancient principles can guide modern church leaders in fostering ethical and effective governance.

A hybrid session led by Rev. Dr Bharat Patta on "Pastoral Ministry in the Context of Migration: Compassionate Crossings" addressed the pressing issue of migration and its impact on pastoral care. He discussed strategies for church leaders to offer compassionate support to migrants and refugees, emphasising the need for pastoral care that transcends borders and cultural differences.

The session on "Pastoral Leadership in Digital Space" had a two-person panel discussion by Rev. Sajeev Thomas and Rev. Bijoy Daniel, who discussed intriguing topics such as "AI and the Altar", and "Being Digital Shepherds". Rev. Thomas discussed the growing influence of social media in pastoral ministry, offering guidelines for ethical online conduct and the strategic use of digital platforms to enhance ministry outreach. Rev. Daniel explored the potential applications of artificial intelligence in church ministry, discussing both the opportunities and ethical dilemmas posed by this emerging technology.

The last two sessions at the workshop dealt with two important contemporary issues in Pastoral ministry and governance. Dr George Pati, in his session on "Enhancing Accessibility and Developing Disability-Focused Pastoral Care", highlighted the critical need for developing accessible pastoral care, particularly for marginalised and minority communities. He emphasised the importance of inclusivity in ministry and provided strategies for creating disability-focused pastoral programs. In the following session titled "Embracing Diversity - Perspectives on Pastoral Ministry among Sexual Minorities", Rev. Dr Mathew addressed the challenges and opportunities of pastoral ministry within sexual minority communities. He advocated for an inclusive approach to ministry, grounded in theological understanding and pastoral sensitivity.

Rev. Dr V. S. Varughese, Principal and Professor of Religions at the Mar Thoma Syrian Theological Seminary, remarked that the workshop provided an invaluable opportunity for students to enhance their capacities in areas not typically covered in their academic training. He emphasised that the themes addressed during the workshop would significantly contribute to the participants' understanding of the complex issues that can disrupt church ministry, mission, and witness.

The participants expressed their appreciation for the collaborative efforts of the CCA and the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary in organising the workshop. They found the sessions to be highly enriching, offering practical and effective solutions to the contemporary challenges faced in parish ministry. The emphasis on good governance and stewardship resonated with the seminarians, who recognised the importance of these principles in their future pastoral responsibilities.

## National Workshop on Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry

2-4 September 2024 | Bandung, Indonesia



*National Workshop on Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry, Bandung, Indonesia*

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), in partnership with one of its member churches in Indonesia, Gereja Kristen Pasundan (GKP), conducted a national-level workshop on “Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry” from 2-4 September 2024 at the Kantor Sinode Gereja Kristen Pasundan in Bandung, Indonesia. The three-day programme provided a unique opportunity for theological students from across Indonesia to gain deep insights into the ethical and managerial aspects of church leadership, focusing on integrity, transparency, and accountability. With 40 participants from various theological institutions across Indonesia, the workshop equipped future church leaders with essential skills and knowledge for integrating biblical principles into their pastoral responsibilities.

The workshop commenced with an opening worship service, followed by welcoming remarks and introductions. Rev. Magyolin Carolina Tuasuun, the Chairperson of GKP, greeted and welcomed the participants. In the opening session, Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang, the General Chairperson of Indonesian Bible Society and Asia President of World Council of Churches (WCC) presented on “Church

Leadership Models and their Roots in Ecclesiology”, where she highlighted how these leadership models were deeply rooted in biblical principles, tracing back to the early church, where leadership was communal and participatory. She pointed out that leadership within the church was not merely about governance or authority, but about serving the congregation as shepherds of God’s people.

Rev. Asigor P. Sitanggang, Th.D., Head of the Center for Biblical Studies at Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi Jakarta, led the session on “Biblical Foundations of Good Governance and Stewardship”. Rev. Sitanggang highlighted the scriptural basis for governance, emphasising how integrity, accountability, and transparency were vital components of Christian leadership. His session also explored stewardship not just in financial terms, but in the holistic care of the congregation and the environment. Rev. Indah Sriulina Ginting, Head of the Research and Community Service Unit at Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi Jakarta, conducted the session titled “Good Theology = Good Governance: Being God’s Stewards”. She encouraged participants to see governance as a theological imperative, linking effective



*Participants of the National Workshop*

management with spiritual responsibility and pastoral care. She emphasised that good governance started with self(ves) governance.

In another key session, Rev. Jimmy Sormin, Executive Secretary for Witness and Integrity of Creation at Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia (PGI), spoke on “Church as a Christian Organisation”. He shared insights on how churches were structured to serve their communities effectively while maintaining transparency and accountability. His discussion addressed the challenges of leading within an organisational context while staying true to the mission and vision of the church. This was followed by a group discussion facilitated by Rev. Rosiana Purnomo, Head of the Youth Bureau, Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia (PGI) leading the participants to critically examine and discuss on their own Church’s organisational structure and various administrative policies.

The final day featured an impactful session on “Contextual Values: Indigenized Management Principles” led by Rev. Adama Shitie, General Secretary of GKP. He emphasised the importance of contextualising governance and leadership practices to fit the Indonesian socio-cultural landscape. Rev. Shitie provided examples of how traditional wisdom

and values could be integrated into the management of church resources and ministries, fostering a sense of ownership and community among parishioners.

A key focus of the workshop was on preparing participants to face contemporary challenges in ministry. John Paul Devakumar, the CCA staff coordinating the workshop, delivered a presentation on CCA’s stand and efforts to combat corruption, fraud, and mismanagement of resources within churches across Asia. He also discussed the pressing need to develop a comprehensive theological pedagogy for good governance and stewardship, which could be incorporated into theological curricula across Asia to prepare future church leaders to lead with integrity and transparency.

Participants left the workshop with a deeper understanding of the theological and practical aspects of governance in parish ministry. The sessions fostered a collaborative environment where students could share their experiences and learn from seasoned church leaders. The participants expressed their enthusiasm for applying these governance principles in their respective churches after completing their theological studies and even starting to practise them in their student leadership roles within their seminaries and educational institutions.



## Asia Ecumenical Migrant's Advocacy Network (AEMAN)

### International Consultation on Asian Diaspora in Transition: Migration and Trafficking in Person to West Asia

31 May - 3 June 2024 | Dubai, UAE



*Participants of the International Consultation on Asian Diaspora in Transition:  
Migration and Trafficking in Person to West Asia, Dubai, UAE*

Asia plays a pivotal role in global migration, particularly as both a source and destination, with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman—absorbing a large share of migrants from South and Southeast Asia, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Driven by unemployment and poverty, this migration fuels significant socio-economic impacts but is also marked by exploitation, inadequate legal protections, and harsh working conditions. Migrant workers in West Asia often face health risks, social isolation, emotional trauma, and in some cases, human trafficking. These challenges, along with issues surrounding return migration and reintegration, continue to demand urgent attention.

In light of these challenges on migration and human trafficking in Asia, the Christian Conference of Asia organised an International Consultation on Asian

Diaspora in Transition: Migration and Human Trafficking to West Asia (Arabian Gulf) in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates from May 31 to June 3, 2024. A group of 40 delegates from CCA member churches in Asia, along with representatives from the Asian Diaspora congregations in the Arabian Gulf countries participated in the consultation. The three-day consultation served as a platform for CCA member churches and councils from sending countries, as well as the diaspora churches in the Gulf countries (West Asia), to deliberate on actionable measures to address the challenges encountered by Asian migrant workers in the Arabian Gulf.

CCA Moderator Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, in a Biblical-theological reflection, observed that cultivating a compassionate and empathetic attitude towards migration was the necessary first step to developing a loving response to it. He also emphasised that churches must fulfil their prophetic role and take a stand against issues that compromise people's dignity and rights.

## PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES

"Affirming God's Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia"



*Metropolitan Dr Abraham Mar Seraphim (India) and Rev. Sharaz Sharif Alam (Pakistan)*

Dr Ginu Zachariah, from the International Institute of Migration and Development, in a thematic address on “Sending and Receiving Countries’ Perspectives on Asian Migration to West Asia”, highlighted the need for sending and receiving countries to enact policies safeguarding the rights and welfare of migrant workers in GCC countries without jeopardising their employment opportunities.

Janejinda Pawadee, a social worker from Thailand, and Rupa Pradhan Chetri, a psychologist and activist working for rescuing trafficked people in Nepal, addressed the issues of trafficking in persons in Southeast Asia and South Asia, respectively. They proposed several ways to prevent trafficking in persons, including increasing awareness, ensuring economic opportunities for vulnerable communities, promoting fair labour practices, and fortifying legal frameworks to facilitate safe and legal employment globally.

Metropolitan Dr Abraham Mar Seraphim from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India shared a Biblical-theological reflection on the “Foundations of Pastoral Care for Migrant Workers”. He emphasised that providing pastoral care for migrant workers challenged the Church to be an advocate of grace, justice, and inclusivity.

A panel discussion on the “Situation of Migrant Workers in the Arabian Gulf” was

facilitated by Mark Aquino from Migrant Middle East, Arul Raj from Dubai, Rev. Michael Aron Pasia from the Evangelical Methodist Church in Doha, Qatar, and Rev. Rufus Samieullah Khokhar from the Church of Pakistan, Dubai. Common issues shared by the panellists included the migrant worker’s vulnerability to abuse and exploitation, economic insecurity, and lack of social and legal protection. Participants from the Arabian countries also presented experiences on the negative impact of the “Kafala” system, (sponsorship), which keeps a migrant worker’s immigration status legally bound to an individual employer or sponsor (kafeel) for their contract period.

Practical approaches for pastoral accompaniment for families separated by distance from their working member and pastoral care for migrant workers from a sending country were presented by Rev. Marie Sol Villalon from the United Methodist Church in the Philippines. She emphasised the need to connect with family members through various social media on a constant basis to build relationships and provide emotional support.

A solidarity visit was made to a labour camp to understand the challenges faced by the migrant workers and to think of ways to tailor the ministry of

*Group Discussion*

the church to enhance the quality of its accompaniment. A session on “Preventing trafficking in person and exploitation” was facilitated by Janejinda and Rupa Pradhan. They highlighted the need to strengthen legal measures and build awareness to provide correct information to families and communities.

Another important aspect of “resettlement and reintegration of migrants returned to home countries” was discussed. The importance of church and communities towards removing stigma and labelling for those affected, especially those trafficked, as well as the need for engaging experienced trauma counsellors in the home countries to deal with the psychological impact of trafficking was also discussed.

The theme on migrant rights advocacy was presented by Tey Shwu Yuan from

the Ministry for Migrants and Itinerants (MMI-Malaysia) and Mark Aquino from Migrante-Middle East. They highlighted the need for an effective advocacy tool towards migration and suggested churches as platforms for awareness and education.

The participants engaged in a planning session to explore feasible strategies for churches to promote the dignity, rights, and welfare of migrants. Recommendations to churches included raising awareness about migrants’ issues, conducting Migrant Sunday celebrations, providing counselling, pastoral care, and legal services to the migrants, and strengthening fellowship and coordination among CCA member churches in the Arabian Gulf countries as well as to collaborate on addressing migrant concerns and advocating for their dignity and rights.

## Ecumenical Diakonia

### Asia Regional Consultation on Ecumenical Diakonia for Church Leadership in Asia

29 April - 2 May | Medan, Indonesia

The Asia Regional Training Programme for Church Leaders on Ecumenical Diakonia and Sustainable Development was held from 29 April 2024 in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in

collaboration with the World Council of Churches (WCC), the training brought together 35 leaders and representatives of member churches and ecumenical councils across Asia. The capacity-building initiative aimed to strengthen





*Panel Discussion at the Asia Regional Consultation on Ecumenical Diaconia, Medan, Indonesia*

understanding of ecumenical diaconia in relation to sustainable development and the diaconal mission of churches in the region.

Through contextual biblical and theological reflections, sharing of experiences, and strategy development, the training enhanced the capacities of churches to contribute to the fullness of life for all in the Oikos. The programme also fostered the formation of a diaconia network among Asian churches, promoting a more systematic and collaborative approach to diaconal work that could benefit future generations of church and ecumenical leaders.

The General Secretary of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Dr Mathews George Chunakara emphasised that ecumenical diaconia can be developed in a more consistent, coordinated, and coherent manner without fragmentation within individual contexts or constituencies. He stressed the importance of working together through a common ecumenical platform for the benefit of all God's people. Dr Chunakara highlighted the alignment between Christian faith responses and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which encompass ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education, reducing inequality, addressing climate change, and promoting peace, gender equality, and partnerships.

Referring to the SDGs as a collective call to all concerned with human dignity and justice, he underscored that efforts to end poverty must go hand in hand with strategies that advance education, health, economic growth, and environmental preservation. The CCA General Secretary's opening address provided an overview of the theological development of diaconia, the evolution of ecumenical fellowship and movements, and the present-day challenges that churches must engage with. He called on churches to reflect, collaborate, and act as part of a shared commitment to sustainable development.

Dr Manoj Kurian, Director of the Churches' Commission on Health and Healing, welcomed the participants on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC). During his address, he referred to diaconia as a way of following Jesus and emphasised the need of capacity building in sharpening churches' witness through diaconia. He highlighted the expectations for the programme in the following days, describing it as an opportunity for community learning, developing a collective system through an established network, and embarking on a journey of collaboration.

The second day began with a deep biblical reflection on "Trinitarian perspectives on *Diaconia*" led by Rev. Akinibi Keita Hotere from the Methodist Church in

*Plenary Discussion*

New Zealand. As she expounded the bible verses from Philippians 2: 2-4, she urged that “a living theology in Asia must speak to the actual realities men and women in Asia have been asking in the midst of their dilemmas and hopes, aspirations and achievements; doubts, despair, and suffering.” Her contextual reflections on the need for Eco-Diakonia in churches were focused on “the rekindle the Vā of Papatūānuku” (Vā is a term used in Māori culture to denote space between, or relationship with, and Papatūānuku is te reo for Earth mother).

Rev. Dr Asigor Sitanggang from Jakarta Theological Seminary presented his insights on the topic “Agents of Transformation: Biblical and Theological Foundations of *diakonos and diakonia*”. He explained the theological basis for the role of the Church as Priest, Prophet, and Friend in the Public Space. His presentation answered the question why diakonia must not only be charitable, but must be charitable, reformatory, and transformative. Regarding the role of Christ in the Church’s diaconal endeavours, Rev. Asigor mentioned that without Christ at the centre of the Church’s diakonia, the Church’s diaconal work becomes just another philanthropist or social work organisation in the world; Christian diaconal mission is rooted in

the love of Christ which the Church is the witness in public space.

The session on “Diakonia – A Common Witness for Transformation in a Divided World” was led by Rev. Dr Asir Ebenezer, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). Drawing from his experience in interfaith diaconal missions, he offered valuable insights on collaboration beyond the Christian community for the common good. He stressed the importance of churches partnering with civil society organisations in their respective regions to foster more inclusive and effective diaconal engagement.

Dr Manoj Kurian facilitated the session on “Exploring the Study Document: ‘Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia’ and Its Relation to the SDGs.” He addressed the central question of how ecumenical diakonia relates to the Sustainable Development Goals and encouraged participants to reflect on their own communities’ contributions toward achieving these goals through diaconal work. During the panel presentation on “Regional Approach on Sustainable Development Issues: Learning & Sharing of Experiences,” three panellists—Rev. Henrek Lokra (Communion of Churches in Indonesia), Dn. Justice Mae Catacutan (Iglesia Filipina Independiente), and Dn.



*Participants of the Asia Regional Consultation on Ecumenical Diakonia, Medan, Indonesia*

Dr Anish Joy (Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary)—shared contextual presentations from their respective regions and churches. The presentations focused on each of their respective regions and churches they represented.

On the third day of the programme, sessions emphasised the significance of servant leadership, network-building, collaboration, and good governance as essential components in strengthening the diakonal mission of churches in Asia.

Rev. Dr Kim Minji from the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) offered a biblical-theological reflection on diakonia, framing it not merely as service to neighbours but as a continuation of the prophetic-apostolic tradition. She described it as the governance of Shalom—the peace of the Kingdom of God—embodied in entirely self-giving service to the least among us, referencing Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25. She highlighted the Eucharist and diakonia as parallel acts of self-offering for others, rooted in Christ’s command to “do this” in remembrance of him. She further reflected on discipleship as a prophetic act of love that challenges systems of domination, violence, and oppression through participation in Christ’s suffering. Rev. Dr Kim emphasised that diakonia is integral to the formation of Scripture and

Christian identity, urging the church to live as apostles of the Lord by practising the life and teachings of Jesus.

Rev. Dr William Premkumar Ebenezer Joseph of the Methodist Church Sri Lanka facilitated the session on “Relevance of Global Issues for the Local Diakonia Work”, where he spoke about the importance and parallels between global issues and local diakonia activity. He described the churches in Sri Lanka’s high reputation as a result of significant and unique diaconal manifestations advocating for workers’ rights, democracy movements, and interfaith cooperation. Rev. Dr Joseph defined real diaconal ministry as immersing oneself in the issues of the people, as the church must be there with those who are suffering. He also emphasised the risk and peril of diaconal ministry, recalling Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice, as well as the humble service demonstrated by washing the disciples’ feet.

In the session on networking and collaboration for collective impact, Rev. Mika Purba of the Christian Batak Protestant Church (HKBP) shared her church’s experience in partnering with local and international organisations for diaconal ministry. HKBP’s key focus areas include humanitarian aid distribution, environmental conservation, healthcare outreach, education and skill development,



student and coworker exchanges, and sustainable agriculture. She highlighted specific initiatives such as literacy programmes for children, the HKBP AIDS Ministry supporting people living with HIV and AIDS, women's empowerment projects, and food security efforts for low-income families.

Rev. Purba also spoke about the church's effective use of technology, including online platforms, social media, video conferencing, webinars, and mobile support, to enhance outreach, communication, and stakeholder engagement. She emphasised the importance of inclusive service, ecumenical synergy, alignment with the SDGs, community participation, and strategic partnerships as essential elements in strengthening ecumenical diakonia through collaborative action.

Rev. Genesis Mark Langbao of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines shared insights on the work of the Baguio City Ecumenical Council (BCEC), a grassroots ecumenical body comprising Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and independent evangelical churches in northern Philippines. He outlined three core values guiding BCEC: maintaining grassroots ecumenical ties, cultivating shared prayerful expressions, and addressing social, cultural, and ecological concerns. He highlighted various expressions of ecumenical diakonia, including the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Easter Sunrise Service, prayer breakfasts, fellowships, advocacy initiatives, and consistent engagements. BCEC has actively opposed gambling, promoted peaceful elections, celebrated Indigenous Peoples' Month, and launched the Season of Creation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it provided aid to ministers and organised a charity dinner to support a pastor's cancer treatment.

While acknowledging limitations, Rev. Langbao stressed that ecumenical diakonia can be strengthened through collaboration, calling the BCEC "an avenue to voice diakonia and work for the common

good." He also shared the Episcopal Church's involvement in supporting farmers through the Episcopal Church Action for Renewal and Empowerment (E-CARE), a programme that helped transport and sell produce from northern Philippine farmers in partnership with other churches and organisations.

Rev. Ch. John Nischal Kumar of the Church of South India (CSI) presented on the theme of networking and collaboration for collective influence in diaconal ministry, drawing from CSI's experience. He emphasised the interconnectedness of God, the earth, and humanity, while acknowledging the barriers that hinder meaningful connections. Rev. Kumar highlighted CSI's use of digital platforms as tools for effective networking and communication, particularly noting the significant role played by young people in these efforts. He also outlined the ecclesial and social objectives of networking, aiming to extend the church's mission into the wider community. However, he recognised the ongoing challenges in achieving these goals, such as overcoming differences in language, levels of expertise, financial limitations, and shifting priorities.

Bishop Steven Lawrence of the Evangelical Church in Malaysia led a session focused on deepening participants' understanding of good governance and stewardship in ecumenical diakonia. He identified three key aspects of governance: leadership, service, and accountability, and described Christian stewardship as a way of life rooted in faith and expressed through meaningful relationships with others.

During a group sharing session, participants reflected on the narrative of Jesus feeding the multitudes (John 6:1–14) as a biblical foundation for discussing stewardship and governance. Bishop Lawrence encouraged Asian churches to begin locally by building ecumenical diakonia networks that promote shared responsibility in addressing community issues. He cited the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM) and Malaysian

CARE's joint ministry to people living with HIV and AIDS—initiated through a Christian Conference of Asia consultation—as a successful example of such collaboration.

On the final day of the training programme, Metropolitan Mor Theophilose Kuriakose of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church reflected on the narrative of the feeding of the multitude, highlighting the integral relationship between diakonia and discipleship. He explained that this story portrays a dynamic between Jesus, his disciples, and the crowd, where Jesus challenges his disciples directly—“You give them something to eat” (Mt. 14:16; Mk 6:37; Lk 9:13)—prompting them into diaconal action. While it may seem that Jesus shifts responsibility to his disciples, the Gospel of John reveals that the concern lies with Jesus as well, when he asks, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”

Metropolitan Kuriakose further noted that the synoptic accounts show Jesus supporting his disciples by multiplying the bread, illustrating how diakonia flows from both divine initiative and human response. God recognises human needs, multiplies resources, and entrusts people to serve—those who respond to this call are disciples. He described the act of Jesus blessing and multiplying the loaves and fish as a significant diaconal event in Orthodox tradition, one that is continuously commemorated in the Holy Eucharist. Through this sacrament, the congregation is invited to participate in Christ's discipleship by embodying diakonia in their daily lives.

A workshop session facilitated in a hybrid format by Nadia Balgobin from WCC, made the participants identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) in their diakonia ministry from the experience of their churches, ecumenical organisations, and faith-based institutions. The SWOT analysis presented the following insights:

- Strengths emphasise the well-established organisational structures, existing networks, clear mission and vision, rich traditions, and community trust that churches leverage for their diaconal work. Collaboration with the government and recognition by communities further bolster their efforts.
- Weaknesses focus on internal issues such as lack of unity, underutilisation of resources, governance problems, and lack of focus. Additional challenges include language barriers, gender inequality, intergenerational gaps, dependency on external funds, and outdated methodologies, all of which hinder effectiveness.
- Opportunities present potential avenues for enhancing impact. These include promoting societal harmony in a multifaith context, strengthening collaborations, networking, community empowerment, resilience building, and engaging youth. These opportunities can help churches expand their reach and effectiveness.
- Threats highlight the external risks such as corruption, fundamentalism, sectarian manipulation, state interference, political instability, competition with NGOs, and cultural and technological challenges. These threats can impede progress and require strategic management.

By addressing weaknesses and leveraging strengths, churches can seize opportunities to strengthen their diaconal mission while mitigating threats, thereby sustaining and amplifying their impact on communities. The Asia regional training workshop on ecumenical diakonia provided a valuable learning space to enhance the churches' capacity to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within their local contexts.



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



## Capacity Building and Advocacy

### ATCHAA South-Asia Sub-Regional Training on Building Ecumenical Advocacy Networks for Combating HIV and AIDS

24-26 January 2024 | Colombo, Sri Lanka



*Participants of the Sub-Regional Training on Building Ecumenical Advocacy Networks for Combating HIV and AIDS, Colombo, Sri Lanka*

The Christian Conference of Asia's (CCA) South Asia Sub-Regional Training on 'Building Ecumenical Advocacy Networks for Combating HIV and AIDS' in Colombo, Sri Lanka, was held from 24–26 January 2024, and brought together over 30 participants including clergy, church workers, health professionals, health workers, shelter home carers, medical and social counsellors from church-related institutions as well as social activists, and members of NGOs working in the field of HIV and AIDS. The participants hailed from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

In his opening address, CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara highlighted the HIV epidemic in South Asia, which is exacerbated by stigma, discrimination, and denial. He stated, "Our biblical and theological conviction reminds us about God who animates, sustains, and protects life. This belief is grounded in a theology of life, affirming the dignity and

love extended to all humanity through God's redemptive love." Dr Chunakara discussed the significant rights violations faced by people living with HIV (PLHIV) in South Asia, including forced testing, breaches of confidentiality, harassment, and loss of livelihoods and homes. He also recognised the contributing factors to the epidemic, such as poverty, low literacy, migration, and inadequate healthcare systems, and stressed the need for a comprehensive, rights-based response to protect the rights and dignity of PLHIV.

Rev. Sujithar Sivanayagam, General Secretary of the National Christian Council in Sri Lanka (NCCSL), and Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, President of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka, welcomed participants. The Methodist Church in Sri Lanka and NCCSL were the local hosts and coordinators of the training programme. The training sessions, facilitated by Rev. Fr Philip Kuruvilla and others, covered a range of



*NCC Sri Lanka General Secretary Rev. Sujithar Sivanayagam welcomes participants at the opening session of the sub-regional training*

topics, including 'Health and Healing from the Perspective of Christian Mission and Witness,' 'Biblical-Theological Reflection on Inclusion of PLHIV,' 'Churches' Participation in Responding to HIV,' and 'Addressing Stigma and Discrimination: The Role of Local Congregations.' Workshop sessions focused on preparing agendas for establishing local advocacy networks in South Asian countries.

The training aimed to build the capacity of volunteers in advocacy and to create networks of churches and interfaith initiatives at the grassroots level. It also sought to deepen the contextual

theological understanding of health and healing ministry. Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, Coordinator of the CCA's Action Together in Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) programme, noted that Asia is home to an estimated 6.5 million people living with HIV and 300,000 new infections in 2022. He emphasised the importance of faith-based organisations in delivering health-related services, stating, "The training programme intends to maximise the capacity of churches and faith-based organisations to deliver care, treatment, and support to the most vulnerable populations affected by HIV."



*Participants at the sub-regional training*

## PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES

"Affirming God's Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia"

## National Capacity Building Training on Health, Healing and HIV in Lao People's Democratic Republic

Vientiane, Laos | 27-29 February 2024



*Group Discussion at the National Capacity Building Training on Health, Healing, and HIV in the Lao People's Democratic Republic*

The National Capacity Building Training on HIV in the Lao People's Democratic Republic was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in partnership with the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) from 27–29 February 2024 at the LEC headquarters in Vientiane. This training focused on building awareness of HIV, targeting church leaders and young people. A total of 26 participants from 17 different congregations and local organisations attended, representing both northern and southern regions of the country, including tribal areas.

The training began with a worship service led by the Lao Evangelical Church, followed by a welcome address from CCA and introductions from participants. The HIV situation in Laos was discussed, with a group discussion on the topic. The day concluded with a biblical reflection on HIV and the role of churches in addressing the issue.

On the second day, participants engaged in a biblical reflection before discussing key topics such as Health, Healing, and HIV, as well as the SAVE Approach—Safer Practices, Access to Services, Voluntary Counselling and Testing, and Empowerment. Rev. Khamdeng Kounthapanya, Executive President of Lao Evangelical Church, shared a biblical and theological reflection. Participants also shared personal testimonies and experiences. The first two days focused on foundational knowledge about HIV, while the final day emphasised how to apply this knowledge within churches and organisations.

On the last day, Pastor Sithon shared his personal testimony of evangelising while in jail. He highlighted the importance of sharing the knowledge gained during the training to protect others and adopt the correct attitude toward HIV. He also encouraged churches to be welcoming





*Participants of the National Capacity Building Training in the Lao People's Democratic Republic*

to people living with HIV. Ms Vivanh, an elder at Nakham Church, reflected on her experience, expressing that, as a mother, she had never encountered information about AIDS before and had assumed HIV was not an issue in Laos. Through the programme, she came to understand that many people in Laos are affected by HIV.

In the final session, participants were tasked with preparing action plans for their churches and organisations. During a 20-minute discussion, participants shared their ideas on how to effectively disseminate HIV knowledge. The first group of pastors emphasised their strength in “preaching” and planned to incorporate HIV education into their sermons. The second group, from the “Interwoven Vocational Training Center,” expressed their strength in “advice” and intended to offer quick, accurate information to women with HIV concerns. The third group, from tribal churches, planned to use drama as a method of communicating HIV awareness in remote mountain communities. The fourth group, consisting of women church elders, aimed to use their public speaking skills to advocate for HIV awareness in various public settings.

The Nakham Church representatives focused on teaching men to be more responsible at home through women’s labour, promoting family functionality.

After identifying each group’s strengths, participants used the Churches Assessment Framework to assess their attitudes toward HIV and AIDS. The results revealed that 54% of participants scored in the “Low Score” category, indicating a challenging societal environment for discussing HIV, with the tribal groups in mountainous areas facing the greatest difficulties. Using the framework, participants identified strengths and challenges in discussing HIV within their communities, and formulated specific actions based on the “4W1H” (What, When, How, Where) approach. Participants expressed gratitude for CCA’s visit and the meaningful training activities, noting that many pastors had previously only had a superficial understanding of HIV. They recognised that with more accurate knowledge of HIV and AIDS, church members would be more accepting of HIV-positive individuals, welcoming them with Jesus’ love and understanding of God’s love.

## Regional Consultation on “Let Communities Lead - Faith Perspectives to HIV Response”

5–7 April 2024 | Bangkok, Thailand



*Participants of the Regional Consultation on “Let Communities Lead - Faith Perspectives to HIV Response” in Bangkok*

The Asia Regional Consultation on “Let Communities Lead: Faith Perspectives on HIV Response” took place from 5 to 7 April 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand. The three-day consultation brought together approximately 60 participants, including leaders and representatives of churches, ecumenical councils, healthcare advocacy organisations, people living with HIV (PLHIV), social activists, and NGO workers from across Asia.

In his opening address, CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara emphasised the ongoing challenges faced by people living with and affected by HIV, particularly in the context of stigma and discrimination. He highlighted that poverty, low literacy, outbound migration, tourism, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and entrenched socio-cultural norms continue to impede effective responses to the HIV and AIDS crisis in Asia. Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, Programme Coordinator of CCA’s Action Together in Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA), called for a rethinking of theology and faith-

based responses to HIV. He urged faith communities to move away from narratives that associate disease with sin, and instead adopt compassionate, inclusive, and non-judgmental approaches that reflect the core message of the Christian faith—love, care, and acceptance for all.

Rev. Fr Rodolfo Vicente Cancino Jr. of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines emphasised that ministry with people living with HIV and AIDS serves as a powerful witness to the intrinsic dignity of every human being, regardless of physical condition. He stated, “Caring for those who suffer and are sick is not a burden but a gift—a sacred and significant vocation.” Rev. Fr Cancino, who is also a medical doctor, underscored the spiritual and moral responsibility of compassionate care.

On the second day, Rev. Jimmy Sormin of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia opened with a biblical reflection based on Galatians 4:12–14. He challenged participants to recognise the inherent

*Group Discussion*

worth and dignity of every individual as bearers of the image of God and called for compassion, empathy, and active expressions of Christ-like love. Rev. Shibu Samuel moderated the session.

Sessions under the theme Participation of Communities in Combating HIV and AIDS followed, facilitated by Michael Jesus Atis Mahinay (Philippines) and Dr Ajay Abel (India). Kousalya Periasamy of the Positive Women Network in India shared the story of her organisation's founding in 1998 and its role in providing safe spaces for dialogue, fostering linkages with other networks, and mobilising community and church-based support. Ines Sarmiento Lopes from Estrela+ Timor Leste spoke about her organisation's efforts to improve the quality of life for people living with HIV in Timor Leste, emphasising the need for financial and organisational support from partner institutions, journalist education, and rights-based advocacy.

Hiramani Sitaula from the Nepal National Association of PLWHA (NAP+N) highlighted ongoing coordination with government agencies to advocate for and provide health services for people living with HIV (PLHIV). Pyi Aung Hein from the Myanmar Positive Group, established in 2005, shared about the organisation's long-standing partnership with PLHIV

networks and its online counselling, care, and support services, including nutritional assistance and hospitalisation over the past 18 years. Maunel Ilogon Velasco from the Dawaw Mindanao Advocates Association Inc. in the Philippines introduced the ALTER Project, which aims to reach PLHIV who have discontinued treatment. He emphasised the need for a supportive treatment environment where no one feels left behind, and noted the use of social media campaigns and therapeutic activities to enhance outreach. Timotius Hadi Wijoyo from the Jaringan Indonesia Positif (Indonesian PLHIV Network) discussed community-led monitoring initiatives addressing mental health concerns among PLHIV. Natthakarn Laohacharoensombat (Ray) from the MPlus Foundation in Chiang Mai, Thailand, underscored the damaging impact of stigma and discrimination in limiting access to treatment. He urged church and ecumenical leaders to actively work toward eliminating barriers to healthcare services.

In a series of sessions under the theme Churches' Participation in Responding to HIV: Sharing of Experiences, church and ecumenical leaders presented testimonies from their local contexts. Rev. Dethsacda Aphayamath (Lao PDR) and Rev. Hinna





K. M. A. Praing (Indonesia) served as moderators.

Dr Rajni Herman from EHA Shalom in Delhi, India, shared about Shalom, a palliative care hospital established in 2001 to serve people living with HIV and AIDS. She described palliative care as holistic—addressing the physical, emotional, spiritual, and social needs of patients—and noted their expanding collaboration with churches, including the provision of livelihood programmes for PLHIV. Dr Chawnglungmuana from Shalom Aizawl, Mizoram, India, recounted how the organisation initially relied on foreign funding but later mobilised support from local churches. He emphasised that even small contributions can transform the lives of families affected by HIV and AIDS and urged faith communities to lead the response by integrating faith into collective action.

Deaconess Nadia Manurung presented the work of the Christian Batak Protestant Church (HKBP) through its HKBP AIDS Ministry (HAM). Their initiatives include social media campaigns, mobile clinics, brochure distribution, book publications, and the mobile app “Know Your Status”. She also highlighted efforts such as pre-marriage HIV testing, livelihood and food security programmes, and shelter

provision for children living with HIV and AIDS.

Rebecca Ang from the Malaysian CARE shared about the forging of partnership with her organisation and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia. She described the said ecumenical partnership as a means to bring forth reconciliation, rebuilding of lives of PLHIVs and reaching out those who are vulnerable and discriminated against. Rev. Francis Loh from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM) pointed out that the ministry to PLHIVs should not be an option but should be made as a priority for churches as an area of mission. He shared about their church having roundtable discussions with leaders from both Malaysian Care and the ELCM to address the misconceptions on HIV and AIDS.

Mahesh Somasundaram from the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka highlighted the significance of interfaith collaboration in their HIV and AIDS ministries. He shared that in Sri Lanka, the government provides medication for people living with HIV, while the Council’s work focuses on awareness-raising among school communities, churches, and interfaith groups to reduce stigma and promote testing. He noted that current efforts aim to deepen discussions

among interreligious leaders to enhance programme implementation and training.

Saw Lu Kar from the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) shared that their HIV and AIDS programme began in 1993 in response to high-risk areas. Churches were encouraged to raise awareness through initiatives that included information, education, communication, and shelter support for vulnerable children. He emphasised that interfaith cooperation—promoted by the CCA following an earlier consultation—has significantly strengthened MCC’s HIV and AIDS ministry over the past decade. Current activities include awareness training, a PLHIV forum and child gathering, referrals to health facilities, and pre- and post-test services.

Leya Bristy Mollick from the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh (NCCB) talked about the HIV prevalence in Bangladesh and the challenges faced by communities. She narrated that the NCCB had been making efforts to build awareness among the community through collaborative efforts with church leaders, engagement with nursing institutions, workshops done in churches and communities, the production of video campaigns, and the distribution of leaflets.

Prof. Sunshine Dulnuan, who represented the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), highlighted the ecumenical council’s experience in responding to the HIV pandemic. She mentioned the various mechanisms undertaken by the NCCP, which began by listening to the community and identifying their needs. From advocacy and awareness program campaigns to direct services and psycho-social support to PLHIVs and their families, and community-based HIV screening within faith communities, she also mentioned that the SAVE approach had been an integral part of the NCCP HIV and AIDS Project, which aimed at upholding the dignity of PLHIVs.

The third day began with a theological reflection by Prof. Sunshine Dulnuan from the Episcopal Church in the Philippines. She reflected on the narrative of the Samaritan woman, drawing parallels between her experience and the realities faced by people living with HIV and AIDS. Prof. Dulnuan highlighted how the Samaritan woman faced multiple layers of marginalisation—due to gender, race, and socioeconomic status—similar to the stigma and discrimination encountered by PLHIV. She urged participants to centre the stories and lived experiences of PLHIV in theology, biblical interpretation, and mission, rather than treating them as peripheral.

In a session on “Addressing HIV and Vulnerabilities, Stigma and Discrimination – Role of Church and Faith Organisations”, participants engaged with diverse perspectives. Facilitated by Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, the session included a presentation by Rev. Christopher Joseph San Jose of the Open Table Metropolitan Community Church. He shared that the church emerged in response to the lack of pastoral care for PLHIV, many of whom had experienced rejection and trauma from traditional churches. While acknowledging the painful stories of exclusion, he also spoke of resilience, joy, and transformation in the lives of PLHIV. Rev. San Jose challenged churches to engage heterosexual theologians and biblical scholars in conversations around liberation, feminist, and LGBTQIA+ affirming theologies, and to choose love when faced with conflicts between doctrine and compassion.

Arisdo Gonzalez from Yayasan Pesona Bumi Pasundan shared his experience under the theme Embrace Love Through the Lens: Love One Another. Once on the

path to ordination, Gonzalez recounted how his journey was disrupted due to his sexuality and the life-affirming theology he preached through online talk shows. He found a spiritual home within a faith community composed of LGBTQIA+ individuals and people living with HIV and AIDS. Gonzalez emphasised that silence and neutrality contribute to the persistence of stigma and discrimination, urging church leaders to stand in solidarity with the vulnerable, particularly PLHIV and other marginalised communities.

Dr Inba Ignatius from the Snegidhen and Snegidhi Trust—an organisation for transgender persons based in Chennai, India—shared insights into the daily

struggles of transgender individuals. She noted that many are forced into begging or sex work to survive, and highlighted the organisation's efforts to create livelihood opportunities. Dr Inba spoke about the establishment of a TransChapel to serve the spiritual needs of transgender people across denominational lines. She challenged participants to uphold transgender rights as human rights and called on churches to offer tangible opportunities for empowerment. She also appealed for friendship, support, and active efforts to build an inclusive society.

As a key outcome of the consultation, participants prepared a statement of affirmation and a set of recommendations.

## Regional Youth Motivation Programme for HIV Advocacy

*29 to 31 July 2024 | Chiang Mai, Thailand*



*Participants of the Regional Youth Motivation Programme for HIV Advocacy in Chiang Mai, Thailand*

The Regional Capacity Building Programme 'Strengthening the Voices of Youth for HIV Advocacy in Asia' was organised in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 28 to 31 July 2024 with over 70 participants representing churches from across Asia. The three-day capacity-building programme aimed to equip youth to be change-makers in their communities and respond effectively to the issues of HIV and AIDS.

In his opening address delivered online, CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara highlighted the capacity

building programme as an important milestone in CCA's ongoing efforts to combat HIV and AIDS. Dr Chunakara noted that HIV and AIDS had been a priority focus within CCA's programme areas and that CCA had initiated numerous skill-building and advocacy initiatives to develop HIV-competent churches and communities across Asia. Rev. Grace Moon, CCA Programme Coordinator, provided an overview of the Christian Conference of Asia, its history, structure, and vision, alongside its four main programme areas. Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, the Programme





*Participants engaged in group work*

Coordinator for ATCHAA, led an interactive session on the scientific understanding of HIV, using CCA-developed tools and emphasising the importance of updated knowledge and eliminating harmful language that perpetuates stigma.

The biblical reflection centred on the healing of the paralysed man from Mark 2, offering participants an opportunity to explore the holistic nature of healing. Discussions focused on the role of faith and compassion in the healing process, with participants recognising the importance of community support for those living with HIV. The reflection emphasised that, like Jesus' actions, the Christian community is called to reject stigma and judgment, offering forgiveness and understanding instead. This healing went beyond physical restoration, reinstating the man's dignity and his place within the community.

A key session on eliminating stigma and discrimination was led by Arceli P. Bile, CCA Programme Staff, who used the SAVE toolkit developed by INERELA+. The SAVE approach—standing for Safer practices, Access to treatment, Voluntary and confidential testing, and Empowerment—was presented as a comprehensive framework for combating HIV and AIDS, integrating medical, behavioural, and social strategies. Participants also had

the opportunity to engage with local organisations and people living with HIV (PLHIV), gaining firsthand insights into the realities of HIV advocacy and care.

A session on addressing HIV vulnerabilities explored critical issues, including sexual and reproductive health and rights. It was highlighted that knowledge about HIV prevention remains limited in the Asian context, underscoring the need for age-appropriate sexual health education from a Christian perspective. The session “Perspectives from the Margins” provided a safe, closed-door space for PLHIV to share their experiences, reinforcing the need for a more inclusive and understanding society.

Youth representatives from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines shared their national advocacy efforts, demonstrating how churches and youth initiatives are addressing HIV through awareness campaigns, HIV-related observance days, and incorporating HIV education into their existing programmes. The importance of youth leadership in promoting HIV testing and engaging communities was emphasised.

The programme concluded with participants developing action plans tailored to their church contexts. These included drafting policies on HIV, gender,



*Group Discussion*

and sexuality; establishing support groups for PLHIV; organising workshops for church leaders; and leveraging digital platforms to raise awareness and combat stigma. The programme ended with a united call to

action: “Know your HIV status, get tested. End inequalities and AIDS. Strive to achieve zero new infections and zero AIDS-related deaths. End stigma and discrimination. Break barriers and build bridges.”

## **Regional Consultation on “Towards Enhancing Social Protection Measures for HIV Affected Children and Teens in Asia”**

*29 November to 1 December 2024 | Chiang Mai, Thailand*

Focusing on the unique challenges faced by children and teenagers affected by HIV, over 46 participants—including medical professionals, social activists, community health workers, members of PLHIV networks, and representatives from various faith-based organisations—gathered at the CCA headquarters in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 29 November to 1 December 2024 for the Asian regional consultation on ‘Towards Enhancing Social Protection Measures for HIV-Affected Children and Teens in Asia’.

The three-day consultation aimed to address systemic barriers, stigma, and

inequalities while advocating for stronger policies and community-driven solutions to ensure equitable healthcare and support for children and teens in the region. Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, ATCHAA Programme Coordinator, opened the consultation by highlighting the neglect of children in the Asia-Pacific region’s HIV response. He stressed that discriminatory laws and social inequalities remain major obstacles to treatment access, hindering efforts to reduce HIV in the region. He called for a comprehensive strategy rooted in social justice, human rights, and community mobilisation, emphasising the



*Group Discussion at the Regional Consultation on “Towards Enhancing Social Protection Measures for HIV Affected Children and Teens in Asia” in Chiang Mai, Thailand*





critical role of faith leaders in reducing stigma and encouraging HIV testing.

The first day of the consultation featured discussions on the challenges of HIV treatment access and adherence for children and teens, with speakers sharing insights from diverse initiatives across Asia. Lucy Remruati Chhangte of Gan Sabra, Mizoram, India, highlighted the vulnerability of young children affected by HIV, worsened by poverty, substance abuse, and lack of awareness. Carina Teola Sajonia from Mindanao, Philippines, spoke on societal taboos and stigma that hinder interventions for vulnerable children, including those affected by sex trafficking,

and called for child participation in HIV strategies. Berlina Sibagariang of HKBP AIDS Ministry, Indonesia, presented a community-based care model focusing on family support, health check-ups, and skills training, advocating for stronger governmental and societal support. Elizabeth Thomas from Penang, Malaysia, addressed parental neglect, discrimination, and lack of affordable treatment for non-Malaysian children, urging for institutional and societal reforms.

The second day of the consultation featured presentations from Rebecca Ang of Malaysian Care and Piangta Chumnoi from the Baanjingjai Foundation, Thailand,



## PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES

"Affirming God's Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia"





on preventing HIV among teens and securing their future. Dr Glory Alexander of the ASHA Foundation, India, highlighted holistic support for HIV-affected women and children, including treatment, psychosocial care, housing, nutrition, and career development, calling for an end to job restrictions for HIV-positive individuals. Candice Ann Cindy Abraham Sering from the Salinlahi Alliance for Children's Concerns, Philippines, discussed limited healthcare access, cultural barriers, and rising adolescent infections, urging the recognition of HIV-affected children as changemakers. Rosiana Indah Purnomo of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) emphasised the role of churches in creating child-friendly programs, advocating for inclusive policies, and integrating Biblical perspectives to support HIV-affected children. Gracia Violeta Ross Quiroga of the World Council of Churches (WCC) highlighted WCC's focus on bridging the gap between church leadership and youth, ensuring that children and young people are heard and empowered.

The panel presentation on "Gender Justice and Asian Realities: Responding to Vulnerable Situations" featured experts addressing gender disparities, stigma, and

discrimination. Michael Jesus A. Mahinay of ALAGAD-Mindanao, Philippines, spoke about the HIV epidemic's impact on MSM and transgender women, discussing testing expansion and improved treatment access. Yuyum Fhahni Paryani from Indonesia highlighted global gender inequality, systemic discrimination, and economic barriers faced by women and girls. Dr Rajni Herman of Shalom Delhi, India, emphasised the importance of palliative care for transgender women living with HIV and the need for dignity and recognition in healthcare.

On the last day of the consultation, participants explored key strategies to improve social protection measures for children and teenagers affected by HIV. The discussions emphasised and recognised the unique role of the Church in providing counselling, psychosocial support, nutritional assistance, and healthcare access. Participants highlighted the importance of education, calling for comprehensive guidelines, age-appropriate modules, and catechism aligned with children's developmental stages. Awareness-raising initiatives were encouraged to utilise diverse media platforms, including social media, to effectively reach broader audiences. Baseline surveys and



*Participants of the Regional Consultation on “Towards Enhancing Social Protection Measures for HIV Affected Children and Teens in Asia” in Chiang Mai*

needs assessments were recommended to tailor educational content to specific needs. Community support and capacity-building efforts were prioritised, with recommendations to form peer-to-peer support groups and provide training for teachers, parents, and key stakeholders. The Training of Trainers (TOT) approach was suggested to strengthen capacity at multiple levels, supported by multidisciplinary teams offering holistic care and guidance.

The Regional Consultation concluded on the observance of World AIDS Day under the theme “Take the RIGHTS Path: My Health, My Right!” The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) reaffirmed its commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of individuals living with or affected by HIV, with a special focus on the rights of children and teens. The three-day consultation ended on 1 December with a special World AIDS Day worship service, reinforcing solidarity and advocacy for a stigma-free future.

### **Capacity Building on “Churches’ Effective Response to HIV in Mizoram”**

*28 December 2024 | Aizawl, India*

A one-day capacity building programme for church leaders was held by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) on 28 December 2024 at Hyve City Hall, Aizawl, Mizoram. The programme brought together 25 church leaders from various denominations and was organised in collaboration with the Gan Sabra Society and Love Positive Women Mizoram. Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, Programme Coordinator of the CCA, welcomed the participants and highlighted the relevance

of the programme, noting that Mizoram had the highest incidence of HIV per population in India. He urged churches to respond proactively to the growing trend of HIV in the state and stressed the continuing presence of stigma and discrimination, pointing out the vital role churches could play in addressing these issues.

Lucy Remruati Ralte, Director of Gan Sabra Society, shared an overview of the



*Participants of the Capacity Building Programme on “Churches’ Effective Response to HIV in Mizoram, India”*

situation in the state, noting that children infected and affected by HIV remained one of the greatest challenges, with many of them being orphans or in vulnerable circumstances. Dr Lalthanmawia presented the global, regional, and national contexts of the HIV epidemic, drawing attention to the heightened vulnerabilities of intravenous drug users and men who have sex with men. Local data from Mizoram were presented by Lalthanzuali Ralte of Love Positive Women Mizoram.

Dr Lalthanmawia also facilitated a participatory technical session that addressed common myths and misconceptions about HIV. This session provided a space for participants to raise concerns and seek clarification in an open and constructive environment. A contextual Bible study was conducted, focusing on the healing of the paralysed man by Jesus and reflecting on the holistic nature of healing. Participants shared insights from the text and related them to the current context, including

the stigma surrounding certain illnesses and the vulnerabilities experienced by youth and marginalised communities in Mizoram.

During the programme, participants were invited to identify the strengths and opportunities within their churches for a more effective HIV response. Using the Church Assessment Tool developed as part of the CCA training module “Churches’ Effective Response to HIV in Asia”, they assessed both the tangible and intangible assets of their churches. Many participants shared that this was their first experience of a participatory training programme, in contrast to previous awareness-focused efforts in the state. As a result of the training, participants developed action plans and committed to following up in their respective churches and institutions using the materials provided. They also expressed a willingness to assist in translating the materials into the Mizo language to ensure wider dissemination and application.



## Interfaith Action

### Advocacy Meeting in Cambodia

21 – 24 March | Phnom Penh, Cambodia

A visit was made to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, from 21 to 24 March 2024 for advocacy meetings with the Kampuchea Christian Council (KCC), Salvation Centre Cambodia (SCC), and other church councils and interfaith bodies. The main objectives of the visit were to plan a meeting for the national interfaith advocacy network on AIDS in Cambodia and to develop a youth leadership programme focused on HIV advocacy.

On 22 March 2024, a meeting was held at the Salvation Centre Cambodia (SCC) with Prum Thoeun (President), Sovann Son (Executive Director), Hun Socheat,

and Venerable Sothea (Project Managers) at the SCC head office in Phnom Penh. During the meeting, plans were made for cooperation and partnership to organise a consultation with the National Interfaith Advocacy Network on AIDS in Cambodia. SCC agreed to host the meeting in Phnom Penh in September 2024, and would bring together various faith communities from different provinces of Cambodia. It was also decided to involve the Head Monk from several Pagodas in the upcoming meetings of both SCC and CCA. The CCA would be responsible for mobilising other faith communities, including Christians, Hindus, and Muslims, in Cambodia.

### National Consultation on Interfaith Advocacy Network in Indonesia

26 to 28 August 2024 | Jakarta, Indonesia



*Participants of the National Consultation on Interfaith Advocacy Network in Indonesia*

The Action Together in Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) programme of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), in collaboration with the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) and the Indonesia Interfaith Network on AIDS (INTERNA), organised an interfaith consultation on HIV and AIDS from 26 to

28 August 2024, held at the headquarters of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) in Jakarta, Indonesia. Thirty participants representing various religious communities across Indonesia, including Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, and Muslim leaders, attended the consultation, marking a significant



*Participants presenting insights after group discussions*

step forward in addressing HIV and AIDS through interfaith dialogue and collaboration in Indonesia.

Rev. Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty, General Secretary of PGI, in his opening address, remarked that the challenge of addressing HIV and AIDS was not one that could be solved individually. He emphasised that responding to the widespread challenges of HIV and AIDS requires a united effort from all faith communities, who must come together collaboratively to combat and overcome this pressing issue. Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia, ATCHAA Programme Coordinator, and Dr Alphinus Kambodji from YMCA Indonesia updated participants on the current situation of HIV and AIDS in Asia and the Pacific regions.

Focusing on Indonesia, approximately 540,000 people were living with HIV, but only a few had access to treatment. The number of people newly diagnosed with HIV decreased by 3.6% in 2022, with 24,000 new cases. The most prevalent mode of HIV infection in Indonesia was sexual transmission, accounting for 89% of cases.

Participants acknowledged the stigma and discrimination that persist within faith communities and discussed the challenge of addressing HIV from a faith perspective, given its association with sin. Aan Rianto, founder of Jaringan Equals Indonesia, facilitated a session on responding to stigma and discrimination, highlighting the cultural, societal, religious, and legal

barriers that need to be addressed by faith leaders to create inclusive communities. The participants were introduced to the SAVE approach—Safer Practices, Access to Treatment, Voluntary Counselling and Testing, and Empowerment. Workshop sessions were facilitated to develop strategies for implementing the SAVE approach within faith communities.

Rev. Jimmy Sormin from PGI focused on identifying and overcoming barriers, and participants explored ways to break down these obstacles and build bridges within their communities. The lack of education on sex and sexuality was identified as a critical area where faith communities need to become more open and engaged. Organisations such as the AIDS Ministry of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) and YAKKUM shared best practices, and participants contributed their experiences and strategies.

The participants developed action plans aimed at strengthening interfaith initiatives and advocacy efforts, and they also underscored the need to revitalise the national faith-based network INTERNA and pursue strategic initiatives in the future. The consultation concluded with the adoption of a public statement, read by faith leaders from different religions. United in their commitment, they pledged to work towards combating AIDS and achieving the goals of zero new infections, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths.

## Regional Interfaith Conference on “Reversing the HIV Epidemic in Asia: Faith Based Engagements”

14 to 16 November 2024 | Phnom Penh, Cambodia



*Regional Interfaith Conference on “Reversing the HIV Epidemic in Asia: Faith Based Engagements” in Phnom Penh, Cambodia*

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) jointly organised a regional interfaith conference on Reversing the HIV Epidemic in Asia: Faith-Based Engagements from 14 to 16 November 2024 in Cambodia. Organised as part of CCA’s Action Together in Combating HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) programme and the Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS (AINA), the three-day conference brought together more than eighty religious leaders, representatives from the United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), medical practitioners, health workers, grassroots social activists, and health-focused NGOs from across Asia to identify priorities and strategies to combat HIV, address stigma and discrimination, and promote inclusion and acceptance of affected persons within diverse Asian communities.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of CCA, opened the conference with a thematic introduction, setting the tone for the three-day conference held at

the Sunway Hotel in Cambodia’s capital, Phnom Penh. The CCA General Secretary provided an overview of the CCA’s long-standing involvement in addressing HIV and AIDS in Asia since 1992, particularly at a time when very few faith-based organisations had taken the initiative in this area. He affirmed the CCA’s enduring commitment to taking action together in addressing issues related to HIV and AIDS.

Representing their respective faith communities, Venerable Lam Ngodup from the Commission for Religious Organisations of Bhutan, Swami Atmananda from The Art of Living Foundation (India), and Dr Citra Fitri Agustina from Nahdlatul Ulama (Indonesia) extended greetings to the gathering.

Stela Sacaliuc, Knowledge Management Officer of UNAIDS Regional Team for Asia and the Pacific, led a session on “The HIV Epidemic in Asia: Most Affected Groups, Most Successful Interventions.” She traced the HIV response timeline, from the first documented case in the USA in 1981 to





*Susan Chang (The Garden of Mercy Foundation, Taiwan) speaking at the plenary discussion*

the advanced interventions of today and provided updated statistics for the Asia-Pacific region. She further emphasised the need to scale up innovative interventions in Asia, customise HIV services across prevention and care, and expand Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) programmes beyond pilot stages to national levels, highlighting progress in countries like Cambodia and Thailand.

The session, titled “HIV and Healing: Interfaith Responses,” brought together Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, and Islamic faith leaders to explore how spiritual practices and faith-based initiatives can contribute to HIV awareness, support, and stigma reduction. Swami Atmananda of The Art of Living Foundation in India emphasised a holistic approach to HIV education, addressing the stigma surrounding the disease and advocating for social and governmental collaboration in awareness initiatives. He stated that sex was not the only reason for HIV and that numerous factors could lead to infection and that sexual behaviour was only one of them. Advocating for the use of social media apps and influencers, Swami Atmananda also suggested the development of technology to connect individuals living with HIV,

offering support, shared experiences, and spreading awareness.

Bishop Felician P. Tenchavez of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines presented the Church’s efforts and progress in combating HIV and AIDS, while also calling for renewed commitment to addressing stigma and discrimination within communities. She emphasised the importance of moving beyond a ‘self-survival mode’—a mindset focused solely on personal development and concerns—which can hinder one’s calling as a servant of God to engage with the wider community. She underscored that our calling and advocacy in ministering to our neighbours must include a deep eagerness not only to dismantle oppressive systems and forces of darkness, but also to actively build a community grounded in healing, love, joy, peace, and justice.

Representing the Buddhist community, Venerable Lam Ngodup of Bhutan voiced optimism about the collective goal of faith leaders to create positive change. He appreciated the gathering of different faiths here in the same room trying to achieve the same kind of goal—worrying or having the concern to make the world a better place. Reflecting on the Buddhist



*Panelists of "Challenges and Best Practices in HIV Treatment Access and Adherence"*

tenet of universal compassion, Venerable Ngodup underscored the importance of interfaith collaboration and self-reflection. He also emphasised the role of faith leaders as messengers of change—to try and put somebody on the path of positivity or goodness; we stand in a position where we have the opportunity to deliver.

Dr Citra Fitri Augustina, a mental health specialist from Indonesia and a member of the Islamic faith, discussed the role of compassion in Islam, particularly towards people living with HIV. She noted that while Islamic teachings emphasised the avoidance of actions that could lead to harm—such as promiscuity or drug use—there was also a strong focus on mercy and compassion. Muslims were encouraged to assist those in need, including people living with HIV and AIDS, without judgement. Citing the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, she stressed that Islam supported the pursuit of medical treatment. She referred to the Prophet's saying: "Make use of medical treatment, for Allah has not made a disease without appointing a remedy for it, except for one disease, namely old age."

Rev. Fr Rodolfo Vicente Cancino Jr. of the Catholic Bishops Conference of

the Philippines, in a presentation titled "Who is My Neighbour?", shared the Catholic Church's approach to supporting those affected by HIV through the Philippine Catholic HIV and AIDS Network (PhilCHAN). Reflecting on the Church's mission to embody the love of Christ, Fr Cancino emphasised the importance of compassionate community support and pastoral care. He stated that in order to bring hope, healing, and reconciliation, the Church needed to welcome people living with HIV into its homes and parishes. He concluded with a call to solidarity and love, identifying PLHIVs as "our neighbours, and the human face of Jesus."

The second panel of the first day, comprising representatives from the People Living with HIV (PLHIV) Network, introduced presentations on 'Challenges and Best Practices in HIV Treatment Access and Adherence'.

Maria Cristina Morales, a passionate advocate and HIV counsellor who served as a peer educator and the HIV volunteer programme coordinator with the Association of Positive Women Advocates, Inc. (APWAI) - a support group of women in the Philippines, expounded on the issue in the regional context. Wangda Dorji,



*Panel discussion on “Trends in HIV Prevalence Among Youth in Asia” in progress*

a founding member of Lhak-Sam, the Bhutan Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (BNP+), shared his insights and experiences in combating HIV and AIDS and supporting vulnerable communities in Bhutan. Thawdar Htun, Deputy Head of the Myanmar Positive Group (National PLHIV Network) shared the network’s role in the promotion of rights and prevention of stigma and discrimination towards PLHIV and key populations through collaboration with all stakeholders. Loon Gangte, founder of the Delhi Network of Positive People (DNP+) in India, recounted his work in HIV treatment access and patient rights, as well as his role as a prominent advocate for affordable healthcare and the rights of HIV-positive individuals. The Executive Director of Estrela+, an organisation committed to empowering, and supporting people living with HIV in Timor Leste, Ines Sarmento Lopes shared the inter-church efforts in supporting people affected by HIV.

During a panel discussion on ‘Trends in HIV Prevalence Among Youth in Asia’, four youth leaders from various faith communities in Asia shared insights into the challenges faced in addressing HIV and AIDS and proposed strategies to

strengthen regional responses. Ronan James Penuela, a medical nurse from the Philippines and Project Officer at Youth Voices Count, introduced the rising trend of HIV prevalence among Filipino youth, highlighting gaps in healthcare education. He noted that inadequate training led to healthcare professionals being insufficiently sensitised, which often resulted in discrimination and a lack of preparedness in managing HIV cases. Emphasising the significance of faith-based HIV treatment and care, James Penuela stated that medical care should complement faith-based care because this helped improve adherence to medication, well-being and mental health, and health-seeking behaviour, ensuring holistic care of the patient.

Pooja Mishra, National Youth Coordinator for Youth Lead Voices (YLV) and General Secretary of the National Coalition of People Living with HIV in India, outlined the situation of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in India. According to Ms Mishra, young Indians aged 15 to 29 comprised 31% of those affected in the country, and India had the second-highest number of people living with HIV (PLHIV) globally. She highlighted YLV’s flagship programme,





Panel discussion on “Addressing Vulnerabilities: Gender Justice and Asian Realities” in progress

Positive Speaking Training, which had trained over 300 young PLHIV in public speaking, storytelling, and communication skills to inspire change, combat stigma, and advocate for rights and policy reforms through social media.

Shedding light on the HIV and AIDS situation in Indonesia, Ria Claudia Watulingas, a National Committee member of the Indonesian Student Christian Movement, identified key factors driving high HIV prevalence among young Indonesians, including risky behaviours, limited knowledge, restricted access to healthcare, stigma and discrimination, and social and cultural influences. She further added that the trend of HIV prevalence among Indonesian youth was a serious concern, but not without hope. By addressing the root causes of HIV transmission and focusing on prevention, education, and access to healthcare, she believed significant progress could be made in reversing the trend.

Zooming in on the broader statistics, Dr Albertus Dimas Aji Putra, a young medical doctor and Director of Bungsu General Hospital in Bandung, Indonesia, provided a detailed account of the ground realities of HIV in the country. He identified

key challenges, including patients lost to follow-up during treatment, stigma rooted in cultural, religious, and societal taboos, and restrictive regulations that hinder early education and awareness. He also highlighted how lifestyle factors contributed to the heightened vulnerability of individuals to HIV. The panel emphasised the urgent need to tackle stigma, improve education, and promote interfaith collaboration to empower youth and strengthen HIV response efforts across Asia.

Sotheavy Srey, Executive Director of the Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT), and Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), delved into Cambodia’s tumultuous history, including the civil war, the peace negotiations initiated through international mediation, and the subsequent election processes that paved the way for democratic governance in the post-civil war period. During the session, the speakers highlighted Cambodia’s historical struggles, linking its tumultuous past to its battle against HIV and AIDS. They explained how the influx of foreign personnel during the 1990s transitional mission exacerbated the spread of HIV, which remained a



*Participants of the Regional Interfaith Conference on  
"Reversing the HIV Epidemic in Asia: Faith Based Engagements" in Phnom Penh, Cambodia*

significant issue for years before recovery efforts reduced prevalence rates.

In a specially dedicated session on 'Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges: Mental Health Perspectives', panellists analysed mental health issues and the challenges faith communities face in addressing the mental health needs of those affected by HIV. Dr Zahed Mohammed Masud, Director of AITAM Welfare and Community Medicine for Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS, shared experiences of people living with HIV in his home country, Bangladesh, highlighting the wide spectrum of mental health challenges they face. Dr Masud highlighted the significant impact of HIV on mental health, including cognitive impairments and emotional challenges like shame, isolation, and fear, which often deter individuals from seeking testing and treatment. He also noted that mental health issues affected not only those living with HIV but also caregivers, close family members, healthcare staff, key at-risk populations, and community-based HIV counsellors.

Dr R. L. Sanghluna, Director of Synod Hospital in Mizoram and a member of the Presbyterian Church in India, highlighted the high prevalence of HIV in Mizoram,

compounded by substance abuse, making it a significant public health challenge. He emphasised that Christian care should reflect unconditional love and compassion, urging churches to lead in supporting and empowering those affected with HIV and AIDS. He mentioned that like Jesus, "we were called to heal without judgment, always being available to those in need. We need to emulate Christ, not to condemn, but to redeem, offering unconditional, non-judgmental care, especially in this urgent time of need".

Rev. Dr Nezer A. Soriano, a pastor and medical doctor working on preventive and community health in the Philippines, highlighted critical gaps in mental health care in the country, particularly in rural areas, where access to healthcare and mental health professionals was limited. He also pointed out the high cost of psychiatric care and the cultural stigma surrounding mental health, which hindered open discussion. He stressed that bridging mental health care gaps involved promoting self-care, improving access to services, especially in rural areas, and seeking expert help when necessary.

The panel discussion on 'Addressing Vulnerabilities: Tourism, Human Trafficking,



*Members of the AINA Steering Committee presenting the communiqué*

and Migration’ explored how the intersection of HIV with other factors amplifies the vulnerabilities faced by affected individuals.

Mohd Nasir bin Mohd Alizaman, a health worker and human rights activist from Malaysia, shared the harsh realities faced by stateless and undocumented people living with HIV in Sabah, Malaysia. He explored how the intersectionality of being stateless, living with HIV, and not belonging to the majority religion resulted in multiple layers of marginalisation. He called for the implementation of the PLHIV Act, gender recognition, the adoption of SOGIESC policies, the amendment of citizenship rights, and enhanced protection for human rights defenders and activists, to uphold the dignity and rights of stateless people living with HIV.

Seum Sophal, a long-term HIV and AIDS activist in Cambodia, examined the realities and challenges faced by those living with HIV from a legal perspective. He highlighted that the lack of legal knowledge related to human rights, stigma and discrimination, low capacity to advocate for human rights, resource constraints, and cultural and social barriers continue to hinder access

to safe and healthy living. These persistent obstacles prevent individuals, particularly those affected by HIV, from enjoying their rights and achieving optimal health outcomes. He added that overcoming these challenges required more training on rights, empowering communities, and building capacity.

Aldrin Adjawie Ng, a trained HIV counsellor from the Philippines, expanded on the sexual exploitation of children, providing both local and international statistics. He detailed the enduring impacts of sexual exploitation on children, including physical harm, emotional and psychological consequences, behavioural and cognitive effects, social and relational challenges, long-term mental health problems, impacts on family and community, barriers to recovery, and adverse effects on education and future prospects.

The final panel discussion of the three-day conference, ‘Addressing Vulnerabilities: Gender Justice and Asian Realities’, featured speakers from India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Ajib Abdul Jabar from YIFoS Indonesia, in his presentation on ‘Stories of Change: Health and Pride in Medan’, highlighted the challenges in Medan, a city



in the North Sumatra region in Indonesia, where people faced challenges due to stigma and discrimination against PLHIV and the diverse SOGIESC community. He noted that fears of rejection and discrimination, coupled with limited access to inclusive healthcare and minimal policy attention, hindered progress. He stressed the importance of empowering youth organisations, eliminating discriminatory policies, and improving HIV services to enhance the health of young people, thereby improving overall regional well-being.

Prof. Justin Francis Bionat from the University of San Agustin in the Philippines highlighted that sexual education needed to be age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, ethical, and moral. While it may be challenging in faith communities to impart sex education, it could be done in a way that respected legal and moral boundaries. He also urged faith and religious groups to embrace the evolving changes in sexual health programming. He warned against unnecessary classifications of people, such as dividing them into categories like healthy and sick, clean and drug user, straight or gay, risky and non-risky, or in religious terms, sinful and divine. He argued that these binaries and hierarchies created division and hindered progress, making it difficult to achieve goals.

Dr Among Jamir, representing the Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India, emphasised that human beings were invariably embodied beings, and it was through the body that the divine gift of sexuality was experienced and expressed, regardless of gender or orientation. He acknowledged the vulnerabilities present in society, such as poverty, HIV and AIDS, human rights violations, war, and discrimination, which faith communities

must address to remain relevant. He also highlighted the prevalence of homophobia within religious institutions, where sanctuaries that should offer comfort often fostered hatred and prejudice, denying sexual minorities their basic human rights.

In a closing message, Garcia Violeta Ross Quiroga, Coordinator of the HIV and AIDS programme of the WCC, introduced four manuals produced by the WCC to guide faith-based communities in Asia and Africa. These manuals, focusing on topics such as HIV and mental health, migration, prevention, and youth engagement, aimed to inspire local action to produce global changes. She emphasised the adaptability of these resources, which included technical briefings, pastoral perspectives, and practical examples. During her presentation, she drew attention to several pressing issues, including the impact of mental health and the vulnerabilities faced by migrants and refugees in the context of HIV and AIDS, describing it as “possibly one of the biggest pandemics in the world”.

The communiqué adopted at the conclusion of the conference urged faith communities to strengthen efforts to ensure equitable access to care, prevention, and treatment while renewing interfaith teachings to address contemporary challenges. The communiqué highlighted the indispensable role of faith leaders and communities in fostering resilience, compassion, and solidarity in the fight against HIV. It emphasised that faith-based organisations continue to have a unique, relevant, and specific role to play in reversing the HIV epidemic in Asia. Echoing this sentiment, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the role of faith-based organisations in Asia to work alongside and support those living with and affected by HIV, providing unwavering care, support, and advocacy.

## National Interfaith Consultation on HIV and AIDS: Faith in Action

17 – 18 December 2024 | Chennai, India



*Participants of the National Interfaith Consultation on HIV and AIDS: Faith in Action in Chennai, India*

The National Consultation on HIV and AIDS: Faith in Action was organised by the Tamil Nadu Council of Churches (TCC) and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), in association with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). The consultation took place from 17 to 18 December 2024 in Chennai, India. The programme began with an opening prayer by Rev. Asir Ebenezer, followed by greetings and an outline of the session's objectives. Dr Esther Kathioli facilitated introductions, creating a participatory atmosphere for the consultation.

Dr Aiswarya Rao moderated the session on "The HIV Epidemic in India: Most Affected Groups and Most Successful Interventions". She provided a narrative overview of the HIV response over three decades, highlighting gender-specific risks—particularly among men engaged in high-risk behaviours and married women with limited awareness. Dr Janagiraman from the Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society (TNSACS) presented data on India's shift from a concentrated to a generalised HIV epidemic. He noted that sexual transmission accounted for 85% of cases, and needle sharing contributed 10–12%.

He also highlighted the vulnerability of gender and sexual minorities, emphasised the relevance of the Yogyakarta Principles, and discussed the concept of U=U (Undetectable = Untransmissible). He raised concerns regarding the potential impact of COVID-19 on the HIV response.

Rev. Dr Deva Jothi Kumar reflected on the historic role of Christianity in healthcare in India, citing contributions in public health and stigma reduction. He shared the example of Dr Paul Brand's work with leprosy patients at CMC Vellore, illustrating how medical care intertwined with social advocacy. George Vesly discussed HIV/AIDS policies at the synod and diocese levels, first developed in 2015 with expert input. He encouraged churches to engage in tangible support for people living with HIV (PLHIV), including nutritional assistance, access to education, and community awareness. He also noted the persistent stigma faced by Dalits and Adivasis in income-generation initiatives.

Beryl Logan presented the role and work of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UELCI) in HIV prevention, care, and support. She outlined UELCI's history since

1989, with a focus on creating a stigma-free environment for those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. Initially engaging only with member churches, UELCI later expanded its outreach to schools, colleges, hospitals, theological institutions, NGOs, and government agencies. Ms Logan reported that congregational sermons on acceptance and fellowship activities had encouraged increased treatment-seeking and ARV adherence. Support groups among people living with HIV (PLHIV) and livelihood programmes for adolescents were also instrumental. She noted the ongoing challenge of persistent stigma as a critical concern.

Rev. Solomon Raj shared the origin and work of Shelter Trust, established in response to the plight of HIV-positive orphaned children. Licensed by the Tamil Nadu government, the trust cared for 38 HIV-positive children, providing ART access and school enrolment. Additionally, it supported 11 HIV-positive individuals in marriage, fostering social inclusion. Despite facing allegations and resistance, Rev. Raj's continued efforts transformed local perceptions of the Christian faith and its commitment to service.

In a session on "Understanding Faith-Based Responses to HIV", Rev. Dr Deva Jothi Kumar emphasised the Christian community's role in challenging stigma and promoting public health. George Vesly of CSI SEVA elaborated on church policies addressing HIV and AIDS, noting initiatives such as the distribution of dry rations, counselling services, and public awareness campaigns. He highlighted capacity-building efforts through the training of pastors and women leaders, which contributed to a wider support network across South India.

Faith-based and civil society organisations jointly addressed the needs of marginalised communities such as Dalits and Adivasis, who often faced stigma and withdrew

from income-generating projects due to discrimination. Sensitisation and training programmes were underway to promote inclusion and participation. Youth engagement initiatives like the Red Ribbon Club (RRC) supported awareness campaigns and blood donation drives. Local churches collaborated with government programmes to provide testing and treatment to high-risk populations, including female sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM), and transgender individuals.

The session titled "Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges: Addressing Stigma among Faith Institutions" was moderated by Dr Christopher Baskeran. Dr Baskeran opened with a historical overview of HIV trends, highlighting the evolving role of churches in the response to the epidemic. He emphasised the importance of faith institutions in supporting people living with HIV (PLHIV) and confronting stigma. Kowsalya Periyasamy from the Positive Women Network (PWN) addressed the specific challenges faced by women and adolescents in accessing treatment and care. She highlighted widespread workplace discrimination, where companies were often unwilling to employ or even engage in dialogue about PLHIV. This exclusion extended to housing and broader societal interactions.

Dr Baskeran further elaborated on the discrimination faced by PLHIV in family, social, and healthcare settings. He noted that transgender individuals experienced intensified stigma, with many forced into sex work due to a lack of alternatives. Discrimination in healthcare services, including biased treatment and insensitive questioning, significantly hindered access to essential medications and support. He also discussed the physical side effects of certain HIV treatments, which could alter body shape and appearance, compounding the social stigma. Ms Kowsalya concluded by emphasising the



need for stronger legal protections and accountability mechanisms. She called for policies to address the multifaceted forms of stigma and discrimination, and advocated for strategic interventions to foster acceptance, inclusion, and rights-based healthcare.

A woman from Andhra Pradesh shared her story, describing the challenges she faced when her son was diagnosed with tuberculosis, pneumonia, and later cancer, during a time when access to antiretroviral therapy (ART) was limited. Despite these difficulties, she found support through churches, which provided critical assistance for her son's surgery, chemotherapy, and other treatments. Through consistent care and medical intervention, her son recovered from cancer and now leads a healthy life. He has built a successful career in the IT sector, demonstrating that with the right support, individuals can overcome even the most difficult challenges. Her story stood as a testament to the importance of community support, healthcare access, and resilience in the fight against HIV and its associated stigma.

The consultation also addressed the layered challenges faced by the transgender community, particularly in the context of HIV. Transgender individuals continued to experience significant social stigma and discrimination. A general lack of awareness and education contributed to widespread transphobia, and the media often portrayed transgender individuals negatively in both print and visual formats. They also faced frequent verbal, physical, and sexual violence and lacked basic facilities and safe spaces.

Educational barriers were also prominent. Many transgender individuals lacked family support and were denied access to formal education. Discrimination often began at the school level, leading many to drop out early, which in turn limited their

chances of pursuing higher education and sustainable employment. Economically, transgender individuals struggled to find stable livelihood opportunities. With limited access to jobs or financial support to start their own businesses, many were forced into begging or sex work. Even those with cultural talents, such as dance and theatre, often found it difficult to earn a steady income.

Legal recognition of gender identity remained a significant challenge. The absence of legal protection led to repeated violations of basic human rights, including access to education, employment, healthcare, marriage, child adoption, and property rights. Health challenges were further exacerbated by a high prevalence of HIV within the transgender community. There were no legal provisions for safe sex reassignment surgery (SRS), and traditional Thai-amma emasculation methods carried serious risks, including post-surgical complications like urinary tract infections. Additionally, many healthcare providers lacked the knowledge or sensitivity required to address transgender-specific health needs, creating further barriers to essential care.

The consultation highlighted a demographic shift in the HIV-positive population, with most people living with HIV (PLHIV) now above 60 years of age. The discussion underscored the growing need to develop specialised care strategies for elderly women living with HIV, whose challenges differ from younger cohorts. Mr Varadhan, a consultant from the Injection Drug User (IDU) community, shared his personal journey from drug experimentation in the 1980s to injecting drug use. He emphasised the importance of harm reduction, which focused on minimising health risks rather than punishing users. Strategies included providing clean needles and syringes to prevent the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C, and treating injection-related

wounds. He likened harm reduction to wearing a helmet—simple, preventive, and lifesaving. The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) had launched harm reduction programmes in five high-prevalence states, with a particular focus on Manipur. YRG's intervention in Tamil Nadu provided treatment for conditions such as oral candidiasis and, through advocacy, improved access to care for IDUs via evidence-based programmes.

In a session on sex education, Sudha Kalaimamani raised critical concerns about the absence of comprehensive sex education in both formal and informal education systems. She noted that topics such as puberty and sexual health remained largely unaddressed in schools, especially for young girls. Highlighting successful models from countries like Uganda and Nigeria, she called for similar awareness campaigns in India. She cited past initiatives, such as the "Pulli Raja" advertisement, as examples of effective public messaging. Ms Sudha advocated for the inclusion of sex education in school curricula and encouraged faith-based organisations to address the topic in churches to reach wider audiences.

Martin Philip spoke on the role of faith-based networks in community engagement and youth empowerment. Drawing from international experiences, he highlighted the daily struggles of PLHIV and the importance of solidarity, support, and inclusivity. He stressed the need to strengthen interfaith partnerships, promote access to antiretroviral therapy (ART), and build compassionate, stigma-free environments within faith communities to ensure that no one was left behind.

Rev. David Dinakaran highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced by children living with HIV, spanning health, education, economic constraints, cultural

barriers, gender discrimination, and legal issues. He stressed the importance of a comprehensive and integrated approach to address these challenges and provide better support systems for affected children. Sofia Priya Dharshini addressed the realities faced by sex workers in India, drawing attention to regional differences between North and South India. While she noted that South India demonstrated slightly more understanding, society as a whole remained largely unwilling to engage in dialogue around sex work. She emphasised the need for greater involvement from faith-based organisations to create inclusive and supportive spaces for marginalised individuals.

The final session involved group work, where participants reflected on key issues and shared recommendations. Rev. Dr Asir Ebenezer concluded the consultation by outlining a follow-up plan with core members. Insights from the participants, along with recommendations from group discussions, would be considered in shaping a forward-looking action plan. The overarching goal is to improve the quality of life for people living with HIV (PLHIV) and marginalised communities through strategic collaboration between the NCCI, government, private stakeholders, and interfaith networks at the national level.

Future actions proposed include strengthening advocacy efforts, improving access to education, pursuing legal reforms, ensuring better healthcare services, and enhancing capacity building within communities. Moving forward, it was affirmed that churches and faith-based groups must take responsibility for fostering supportive environments and promoting inclusion. Through sustained collaboration and continued advocacy, the collective commitment remains to leave no one behind in the fight against HIV and in addressing stigma in all its forms.

## National Interfaith Programme on “Empowering Youth: Interfaith Partnership in HIV Prevention”

December 27 - 28, 2024 | Dhaka, Bangladesh



*Participants of the National Interfaith Programme on “Empowering Youth: Interfaith Partnership in HIV Prevention” in Dhaka, Bangladesh*

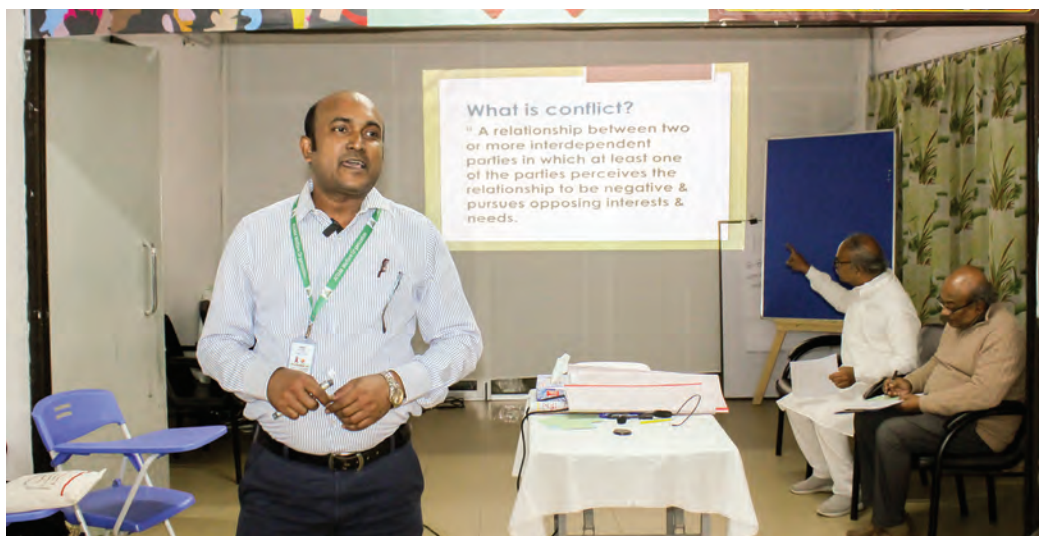
A follow up workshop to the Regional Interfaith Conference held in Phnom Penh in November 2024, “Empowering Youth: Interfaith Partnership in HIV Prevention”, was organised in Dhaka, Bangladesh from 27 to 28 December 2024 by AITAM Welfare Organization in collaboration with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA).

The workshop addressed the growing HIV vulnerability among young people in Bangladesh, particularly within the 18–35 age group. This demographic was identified as high-risk due to factors such as unprotected sex, drug use, limited education, and socioeconomic disadvantages. Migrant workers, especially young women, remained largely unaware of HIV risks and prevention methods. Participants recognised the challenge of effectively reaching and engaging youth—especially young women—with accurate information and support. Gender inequality, stigma, and social violence further hindered access to education, testing, and healthcare. It also highlighted

Bangladesh’s religious and ethnic diversity, noting the influential role of faith leaders in shaping community attitudes. Religious figures—trusted across Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and minority ethnic communities—were seen as key partners in promoting HIV awareness, reducing stigma, and fostering compassion toward those affected.

The primary goal of the workshop was to equip youth leaders with the knowledge, tools, and skills necessary to promote HIV prevention and care. It emphasised youth leadership, faith-based strategies, and interfaith collaboration. The sessions aimed to strengthen communication and counselling skills among young participants for more effective peer engagement. Participants were also provided with accurate and reliable information on reproductive health and HIV prevention. Another key focus was promoting cross-cultural and interfaith understanding to combat stigma and encourage collaboration across religious boundaries. The workshop also worked to enhance the capacity of development





practitioners partnering with faith-based organisations (FBOs), enabling them to better understand the role of FBOs in HIV prevention and to design collaborative strategies for halting the spread of the virus.

The workshop was attended by 28 youth participants and 10 resource persons representing NGOs, reproductive health organisations, faith-based communication centres, monasteries, religious education institutions, and university students. Participants came from diverse faiths, cultures, and gender backgrounds, fostering a rich and inclusive learning environment. The workshop began with participants sharing quotes from holy scriptures and traditional sayings from their respective communities, setting a reflective and respectful tone. Facilitators adopted a highly participatory and engaging approach, combining expert talks, small group discussions, and hands-on activities. This interactive methodology encouraged open communication, built confidence, and enabled youth leaders to develop practical skills. In addition to lectures, the workshop included participant-led presentations, group discussions, and feedback sessions,

ensuring dynamic engagement and deeper understanding of the issues.

The workshop featured several key presentations from experts across sectors. Dr A. Razzaqul Alam, Public Health Consultant, presented the current situation of reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. Dr Zahed Mohammad Masud, Consultant in Reproductive Health, shared AITAM's experiences in treatment and care, addressing stigma, discrimination, and the mental health impact on people living with HIV. Zakir Hossain, Executive Director of Nagorik Uddyog, spoke on HIV and human rights. Zedda Jahan Fatema, Lecturer at the Canadian University of Bangladesh, discussed youth leadership and interfaith approaches in HIV prevention. Dr Samar Kumar Hore, Assistant Professor at Gonoshasthya Medical College, addressed bridging youth and faith leaders in cross-cultural communities. Dr Razzaqul Alam also led a session on reducing stigma and discrimination through interfaith youth collaboration. Joyeeta Hossain, Project Coordinator at Nagorik Uddyog, spoke on violence against women and its link to HIV transmission. Sinthi Ghosh, Assistant Coordinator at BNPS, discussed the role of religious leaders in addressing gender-based violence and HIV. Saleem

*Group Discussion*

Samad, Senior Journalist and Ashoka Fellow, presented on youth leadership development and community initiatives. Dr Md Tariqul Islam, Director of the Centre for Public Health Research, shared a case study on youth participation in primary healthcare. Md Saiful Islam, Program Officer at AITAM, spoke on identifying and mitigating social conflict. Shah Azizur Rahman presented on developing digital content to support youth participation in HIV prevention.

The workshop included group discussions followed by presentations by the participants. The topics addressed were: social behaviours and practices – working scope of youth with religious leaders; sexual abuse in educational institutions and Madrasa education in Bangladesh; and working with ethnic, tribal, and cultural minority groups – youth initiatives. Each group engaged in detailed discussions and presented their findings at the end of the sessions. Group discussions were held on both days, with active participation and focus from the youth.

The workshop marked an important step in involving youth leaders in HIV prevention efforts in Bangladesh. Participants acknowledged that there is still a significant lack of knowledge and education regarding HIV transmission and care. Participants made several recommendations. They noted the limited presence of faith-based facilitation in community-level HIV prevention efforts and highlighted the lack of locally available communication and counselling training materials tailored to community stakeholders. They recommended developing workshop documents and training materials that involve youth, religious leaders, cultural leaders, and different faith groups. The participants also stressed the need for sustained efforts until both youth and the wider community are sensitised. The overarching goal is to facilitate a generation that is not only informed but also compassionate and ready to take leadership in HIV prevention and care within their communities.



## Appendices

### CCA Programmes and Activities in 2024

No.	Programme/Activity	Date and Venue	No. of Participants	Ref. Number as per 2024 Programme Plan
1	CCA Executive Committee Meeting	16 – 19 January Chiang Mai, Thailand	27	GS. 1
2	ATCHAA South-Asia Sub-Regional Training on Building Ecumenical Advocacy Networks for Combating HIV and AIDS	24 – 26 January Colombo, Sri Lanka	30	PD/ATCHAA
3	Christian Theology on Good Governance and Transparency – National Capacity Building Training	19 – 21 February Dili, Timor Leste	44	PD.1
4	National Capacity Building Training on Health, Healing and HIV in Lao People's Democratic Republic	27 – 29 February Vientiane, Laos	26	PD/ATCHAA
5	HIV & AIDS Advocacy Meeting in Cambodia	21 – 24 March Phnom Penh, Cambodia	10	PD/ATCHAA
6	Regional Consultation on 'Let Communities Lead' - Faith Perspectives to HIV response	5 – 7 April Bangkok, Thailand	50	PD/ATCHAA
7	Ecumenical Youth Programme on Eco-Justice and Care for Creation	29 April – 1 May Siantar, Indonesia	40	EF.2
8	Asia Regional Consultation on Ecumenical Diakonia for Church Leadership in Asia	29 April – 2 May Medan, Indonesia	35	PD.6
9	Programme Committee Meeting	2 – 6 May 2024 Medan, Indonesia	23	GS. 1
10	Asia Sunday	12 May	92+	EF.4



11	Youth Leadership Development Training in Laos / National Training Programme on Action Together in Combating HIV in Laos	16 – 18 May Vientiane, Laos	40	EF.2
12	Pastoral Solidarity Visit to Cambodia	16 – 19 May Phnom Pehn, Cambodia	5	GS.3
13	International Consultation on Asian Diaspora in Transition: Migration and Trafficking in Person to West Asia	31 May – 3 June Dubai, UAE	40	PD.3
14	National workshop on Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry	3 – 5 June Kolkata, India	32	PD.1
15	National workshop on Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry	6 – 8 June Kottayam, Kerala, India	104	PD.1
16	Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI-2024)	22 July – 17 August Chiang Mai, Thailand	25	EF.1
17	CCA Foundation Thailand Meeting	19 August Chiang Mai, Thailand	6	GS 1.
18	Regional Youth Motivation Programme for HIV Advocacy	29 – 31 July Chiang Mai, Thailand	70	PD/ATCHAA
19	National Consultation on Interfaith Advocacy Network in Indonesia	26 – 28 August Jakarta, Indonesia	30	PD/ATCHAA
20	National Workshop on Good Governance and Stewardship in Parish Ministry	2 – 4 September Bandung, Indonesia	40	PD.1
21	1700 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea Commemoration and Inauguration of the Tenth Congress of Asian Theologians	24 Oct Zion Cathedral ELCM, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	240	MU.2

**PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES**

“Affirming God’s Vision for Justice, and Enduring Love in Asia”



22	The Tenth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS-X)	24 – 29 October Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	122	MU.2
23	CCA Finance Committee Meeting	29 October	6	
24	CCA Executive Committee Meeting- II	29 – 31 October Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	22	GS. 1
25	Regional Interfaith Conference on 'Reversing the HIV Epidemic in Asia: Faith Based Engagements'	14 – 16 November Phnom Penh, Cambodia	80	PD/ATCHAA
26	'Gender-Based Violence and Forced Migration of Women: Towards Strengthening Gender Justice Advocacy'	19 – 21 November Bangkok, Thailand	32	BP.3.1
27	International Conference on 'Towards a Global Advocacy for Democratisation, People's Security, and Peace with Justice in Myanmar'	22 – 25 November Bangna, Bangkok, Thailand	60	BP.1
28	Regional Consultation on 'Towards Enhancing Social Protection Measures for HIV Affected Children and Teens in Asia'	29 November – 1 December Chiang Mai, Thailand	46	PD/ATCHAA
29	National Interfaith Advocacy Consultation on HIV and AIDS: 'Faith in Action towards Strengthening Advocacy on HIV in India'	17 – 18 December Chennai, India	55	PD/ATCHAA
30	Empowering Youth: Interfaith Partnership in HIV Prevention	27 – 28 December Dhaka, Bangladesh	38	PD/ATCHAA
31	Capacity Building on 'Churches Effective Response to HIV in Mizoram'	28 December Mizoram, India	25	PD/ATCHAA

## Report of the General Secretary to the CCA's Executive Committee Meeting

16 – 19 January | Chiang Mai, Thailand

It is a unique opportunity for me to present a report to the newly constituted Executive Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), which is now meeting for the first time after the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. I am privileged and honoured to present the General Secretary's report to a new Executive Committee which begins its mandate in the post-Assembly period. This is possible now mainly due to the fact that unlike in the past several years or decades, the same General Secretary who coordinated and facilitated the General Assembly, is still continuing in his second term of office. Among the ten General Secretaries of CCA so far since 1957, only two other General Secretaries had the privilege of continuing in their general secretaryship for a second term and serving beyond one Assembly. In this new Executive Committee, which was elected at the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, all members, except two from the immediate past Executive Committee, are new. It is precisely for this reason that my task here is to update you with several past and present developments related to the ongoing mission and witness of the CCA.

We need to focus our attention on different areas in the post-Assembly period and find ways to evolve new strategic directions. We need to examine the emerging trends and situations in which we must anchor our ecumenical boat and decide whether it will continue moving in the same direction or re-orient itself on a different path. There are manifold issues and themes that we must by and large focus on, respond to, and address from our faith perspectives in the broader contexts of ecclesial, ecumenical, social, economic, and political milieus in Asia.

### The Relevance of CCA Amidst Emerging Asian Situations

The purpose of CCA has been articulated by our forefathers while they envisioned this first regional ecumenical organisation in the world: "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, the CCA exists as an organ and a forum of continuing cooperation among the churches and national Christian bodies in Asia within the framework of the wider ecumenical movement". In addition to the promotion and strengthening of the unity of the Church in Asia, and the fulfilment of the mission of God in Asia and throughout the world, several objectives and purposes have been outlined. It is in this context that CCA has been trying to fulfil its tasks of development and promotion of effective Christian responses to the challenges and stimulation of initiatives and experiments in "dynamic Christian living and action". It is with this commitment and faith that the CCA has been trying to be obedient to its assigned tasks of participating in God's mission in this world.

The rise of Asia has been a focus of discussion for years. The West has been talking about the rise of Asia in terms of its massive future potential. But the time has come for the rest of the world to assess the potential of advancement, as the future has arrived even faster than expected. One of the most spectacular advancements of the past thirty or forty years has been emerging Asia's increasing consumption and its integration into global flows of trade, capital, talent, and innovation. In the decades ahead, Asia's economic development will go from participating in these flows to determining their contour and direction. The



question is no longer how quickly Asia will rise, but rather, how Asia will take the lead. It is really hard to generalise or predict such vast trends of the world, as the global situation is ever evolving and is compounded by complex crises.

Despite achievements or progress in various areas, several Asian countries remain caught in protracted cycles of conflict, violence, and various forms of threat to peace and security. Conflict and violence in different parts of Asia make Asian countries some of the most entrenched and complex places in the world despite the economic and technological advancements that we tend to project as major achievements in Asia. Several countries in the Asian continent have been battered by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and are now facing the climate crisis with severe constraints on access to food, energy, medical care, finance, and other basic amenities needed for day-to-day lives. The war situations in the Middle East and Ukraine have exacerbated the global economic crisis. Geopolitical divides are threatening Asia's peace and security, triggering new conflicts, and making it increasingly difficult to end old ones. The risk level is growing as the global economy will be divided into two, led by the two biggest economies — the United States and China. A divided global economy, with two different sets of rules, two dominant currencies, two internets, and two conflicting strategies on artificial intelligence, would undermine the capacity to respond to the dramatic challenges humanity faces. Asia is not exempt from this vulnerable situation the world is generally facing now: poverty, inequality, rising unemployment, an uneven and uncertain global economic outlook, and escalation in the climate emergency marred with ongoing conflicts and violence. Human rights and human dignity are under assault, worsened by widening economic and social gaps, and especially under the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Shrinking civic space, the rapid spread of mis- and disinformation and rising hate speech and misogyny are pushing people in Asia apart at a time when we need unity and solidarity more than ever. In Asia, we face the highest levels of geopolitical mistrust and competition in decades. Sharp divisions are growing within Asia.

It is a generally accepted fact that since the end of the Cold War, Asia's economies are experiencing rapid growth in gross domestic product (GDP). However, such economic growth which relies on mining and industrialisation neither guarantees protecting the human dignity of the majority of the people nor are a vast majority achieving economic justice. Rapid urbanisation, pollution, deforestation, and the destruction of biodiversity are the hallmarks of unsustainable economic growth in Asia. Due to dispossession and marginalisation, many have become internally displaced persons, refugees, or migrant casual labourers within Asia and may also be trafficked outside of Asia.

Authoritarianism, state-sponsored violence, armed conflicts, and religiously motivated terrorism are increasing in Asian countries. The issue of peace with justice and human security has been a major concern in Asia in the emerging geopolitical context. For example, the conflict in the Northeast Asia region, especially in the Korean peninsula, has been a serious concern. In addition to those maritime territorial disputes, growing militarisation and the growing sphere of influence of certain Asian countries are other issues and reasons that threaten human security and peaceful coexistence in this region. The Asia region holds seven of the ten largest armed forces in the world, and five of the seven of US' mutual defence treaties—with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and Australia. With the US now explicitly refocusing its strategic attention on Asia, it is expected that a major historical shift is underway which will have wider repercussions in Asia's strategic security realms and potential for conflicts.

Militarisation and escalation of arms build-up have been on the increase in Asia. The increase in defence spending has now become a wider Asian phenomenon. Despite the negative impact of the global financial crisis, almost every country in Southeast Asia is now involved in arms build-up, which makes it one of the fastest-growing regions for defence spending in the world. China, Japan, India, and South Korea accounted for more than 80 percent of total Asian defence spending, and Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam were all investing in improving air and naval capacities. The shifts in policies of purchasing most modern arms, lead to a situation where the Asia region is sliding into an arms race. Today, among the nine countries that have nuclear weapons, four are in Asia—China, India, Pakistan, and North Korea. With India and Pakistan testing nuclear-capable ballistic missiles, close on the heels of North Korea's test launch of a long-range rocket, Asian neighbours are living in the shadow of strategic mistrust that is holding back nuclear disarmament. Owing to this mistrust among Asian countries, the future of extended nuclear deterrence in East Asia, as well as the nuclear disarmament push in Asia, has stalled.

### **Challenges to Christian Witness in Asia**

Christian witness in Asia faces enormous challenges. Religious intolerance and religious conflicts are increasing in most countries in Asia and some of the worst forms of such conflicts spill over to different countries. For example, ethnic conflicts and sectarian violence in many parts of Asia are examples of racial and religious intolerance in recent years, and the politicisation of religion has become a way for political parties to take law and order into their hands. Minority religious communities live in a state of fear and terror. Ethnic and religious conflicts and violence causing the deaths of people, in the name of religion and ethnicity, have become a common trend in several Asian countries. Discrimination of people on the basis of caste and denial of their human dignity continue to cause social deprivation and marginalisation.

The number of Asian countries affected by conflicts has increased during the past quarter of a century. The present situation in Asia hampers efforts of peacebuilding and poverty reduction and leaves the Asian countries in more fragile and vulnerable conditions. Over the past twenty years, there have been twenty-six subnational conflicts in South and Southeast Asia, affecting half of the countries in this region; often lasting for multiple generations, and for more than 40 years on average. Sri Lanka, West Papua, Myanmar, Mindanao, Southern Thailand, and Bangladesh are examples of such subnational conflicts in Asia.

The Christian Conference of Asia has been committed to accompanying its member churches and councils as they move ahead with their work in conflict resolution. CCA has stood in solidarity with churches and communities and accompanied them in situations of crises in South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, East Timor, and Nepal. The CCA is still committed to accompanying the churches and communities as they continue to address the decades-old struggle for peace and unification in the Korean peninsula, reconciliation in Sri Lanka, the struggle of Japanese people against rearmament and militarisation through the change of Article 9 of the peace Constitution of Japan, militarisation and human rights violations in the Philippines, ethnic conflicts and right to self-determination of West Papuans, etc. As these struggles persist, CCA as a regional fellowship of Asian churches has the responsibility of continuing to be in

solidarity with churches in these countries and accompanying them in their initiatives of building communities of peace.

### **Religious Intolerance, Religious Minorities, and Freedom of Religion in Asia**

Religious extremists and fundamentalist groups operating in the name of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian religions as well as sectarian and extremist violence are causing growing alarm in the region. Interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence of people and communities are affected in countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Southern Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Freedom of faith is now under mounting pressure.

Recent trends indicate that in Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and other parts of Asia, fanatic religious fundamentalists spread reactionary political ideologies that patronise communal polarisation and violence. Targeted killings of violent extremists have claimed many victims, including Christian minorities. In Pakistan, religion-inspired terrorism has spread throughout the country and suicide bombers kill and injure innocent people. In India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, persecution of Christians is often driven by religious extremism and ultra-nationalism. The ethnic violence that erupted on 3 May 2023 in India's north-eastern state of Manipur between the Meitei people, a majority that lives in the Imphal Valley, and the Kuki-Zo tribal community from the surrounding hills, killed 175 people. Christians in both tribes, Kuki and Meitei, which are involved in the clash, have been disproportionately targeted. Since the violence broke out, more than 120 Christians have been killed, while 4,500 buildings and homes belonging to Christians, together with some 400 churches, have been destroyed. Around 50,000 believers have been displaced.

Christianity is quite often branded as Western and connected with the West, especially with the US. In several Asian countries, Christians are being hated and exposed to violence. Fostering interreligious dialogue, commitment to religious freedom, and denouncing the political abuse of religions are all potential pathways toward a solution.

### **CCA's Programmes**

Based on the experiences of the previous quinquennium and the discussions for setting future directions, CCA normally identifies certain programme priorities. The Constitution of CCA was revised at the 2015 General Assembly. A new programme structure was adopted by the Executive Committee starting in 2016 with four core programme areas: Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology (MU), Ecumenical Leadership Formation 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. Subsequently, based on four programme areas, a five-year Strategic Programme Plan also was introduced, initially for a period of five years. You might recall that the report presented at the Kottayam Assembly, 'From Jakarta to Kottayam', shared detailed information about the programmes and activities. The General Secretary's Report to the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly highlighted the salient features of those programmes.

Although the Strategic Programme Plan was originally envisaged for five years, the mandate was extended from five years to eight years, given the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown situations. It was reported at the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly



that during the past eight years, a total of 224 programmes were organised through four programme areas in which 9,693 people from various Asian countries attended. Participation of women and young people in CCA programmes has increased during the past eight years. The number of programmes and the total number of participants also did not include the participants of five pre-Assembly events held in Kottayam prior to the General Assembly. This total number of participants did not include the large number of participants who became part of major events such as the CCA's 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 from numerous local congregations. Similarly, the large number of participants who attended the opening session of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly as well as the Asian Ecumenical Festival (AEF) held in conjunction with the Assembly were not included in the total number reported at the Assembly.

### **What Should be CCA's Programme Thrusts for The Next Five Years?**

The programme and organisational structure currently in place was adopted in 2015–2016. We were able to successfully implement the programmes without many problems for five years, at least until early 2020. During the COVID-19 lockdown period, almost all programmes were conducted online. Based on our experiences, we can testify that the current programme structure has been effective and viable for CCA, and we can focus on these thrusts at least until 2028, till the 16<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. If we could agree upon the continuation of the current programme structure and the programme thrusts, we can then identify the priorities and directions for programme implementations under this structure in the coming five years.

Growing trends of religious intolerance, sectarian strife, persecution against religious minorities, ethnic and religious conflicts, human rights, struggle for democratisation, peace, and security, freedom of religion in Asia, the impact of artificial intelligence in Asia, changing family values, strengthening of Asian ecumenical diakonia, ecumenical leadership formation, interreligious dialogue, eco-justice and care for creation, women and youth, migration, human trafficking, and statelessness in Asia, health and healing, mission and witness in a pluralistic Asia, good governance and stewardship are just some of the areas where CCA needs to focus attention and invest time and resources for organising programmes as well as engaging CCA member constituencies in the next five years. Ongoing conflict situations and problems haunting people in different parts of Asia such as in Pakistan, Iran, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, West Papua, southern Thailand, Korean peninsula, are major concerns that also need to be addressed. Several or most of these areas are part of the ongoing programmatic thrusts.

### **Myanmar: A Forgotten Country Needing Urgent Attention**

Since staging a coup on 1 February 2021, after the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Myanmar military has carried out brutal nationwide crackdowns across the country. The security forces are responsible for mass killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence, and other human rights violations that amount to crimes against humanity. Expanded military operations have resulted in numerous war crimes against ethnic minority populations in Kachin, Karen, Karenni, and Shan States. Christian villages, churches, and church-run institutes including schools, convents, and clinics in Christian-

majority areas have been targeted with airstrikes and artillery shelling since the February 2021 military coup.

The airstrikes on 7 January 2024 by Myanmar's military on a village under the control of the pro-democracy resistance in the country's northwest have killed at least seventeen civilians, including nine children who were gathered in a church building for Sunday worship service in Kanan village in Sagaing region's Khampat town which, also wounded about twenty people. At least 29 people including thirteen children were killed and 56 others were wounded in a military strike in Mung Lai Hkyet camp near Laiza town, bordering China, on 9 October 2023.

The Myanmar military has long defied international calls for accountability, including for atrocities and crimes committed against the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities. The junta's ineptitude and mismanagement of the country's economy since the coup have heightened the suffering of the population and entrenched a climate of fear and insecurity. As the political, security, human rights, and humanitarian situation in Myanmar is sliding ever deeper into catastrophe, the UN has been condemning the escalating levels of violence and the appalling human rights situation in Myanmar. ASEAN's initiative of the five-point consensus (5PC) signed in an emergency meeting held in Jakarta in April 2021, has not made any impact. The crisis in Myanmar has been a difficult regional issue that has caused open fissures in ASEAN.

The ongoing problem of Rohingyas of Myanmar is another grave humanitarian crisis. There are currently more than 980,000 Rohingya refugees and asylum seekers from Myanmar in neighbouring countries. This includes more than 200,000 Rohingya who had fled Myanmar in previous years, primarily through boat smuggling. These Rohingya and Bangladeshi "boat people" were landing on the shores of Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Thousands of Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants were feared stranded in boats in the Andaman Sea after their crews deserted them. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand had, in several instances, turned away the migrant boats.

Has Myanmar remained a forgotten concern for the churches and ecumenical movement? I have been in discussion with the World Council of Churches (WCC), Myanmar churches, and some other ecumenical partners about the possibility of organising an international ecumenical advocacy to respond to the Myanmar crisis. We proposed that CCA and WCC jointly organise an international Consultation on 'Democratisation and Peace in Myanmar' with the participation of not only church and ecumenical leaders, but also with the participation of diplomatic representatives from various countries in the world who can exert certain pressures on the Myanmar military junta. I am hoping that this matter will be discussed in detail at the forthcoming meeting of the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), of which I am the current moderator.

## **Migration of Asian Christians: Emerging Trends**

Migration is nothing new in human history. We find many stories in the Bible about the movement of people, their departures and arrivals in new or unknown lands. There were various reasons and contexts for such migrations or exoduses. A call to emigrate features early in the story of the people of God. "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" (Gen. 12:1). Jacob and his family migrate to Egypt because of economic pressures and experience life as "aliens in the land" (Gen. 47:1–6). The people of Israel are rescued by

God after suffering oppression and an attempted ethnic cleansing (Exod. 1:8–22). For a generation, they are a people in transit (Deut. 29:1–6), then, having been established in their own land for centuries, they suffer the upheaval of military conquest and forced relocation to a new existence as vulnerable outsiders in other countries (2 Kings 17:5–6; 25:1–21). For some, there is, later, the mixed experience of returning to the land of their or their parents' memories (Ezra, Nehemiah).

Today we observe the migration of Asians, more specifically the Asian Christians to other countries due to various reasons—economic reasons, better prospects, education opportunities, religious persecutions, ethnic cleansing, or permanent settlements. As far as the churches and Christians are concerned, migration of Christians to the West or elsewhere is now leading to a situation of “decline” of Christianity. Christians, for one reason or another, in larger or smaller numbers, are now leaving their countries, which practically creates more vacuums in local congregations. When Christians represent much lower proportions of the populations of almost all countries in Asia except the Philippines and East Timor, an increasing level of emigration of Christians outside of their own countries will have wider impacts. One may say that the migration of Asians beyond Asia has been nothing new, but what we have experienced in recent years is unprecedented. It is a reality that the growing presence of Asian immigrant Christians can make an impact in some other Asian countries such as New Zealand or Australia, where Christianity was predominantly the religion of the people of Anglo-Saxon descent as also of other European-Celtic settlers in New Zealand, but an increasing number of such Australians and New Zealanders now tend to state that they belong to no religion. In their place, the new immigrant Asian Christians are filling up the pews in the churches during Sunday Services. A recent study showed that the largest of the “Asian religions” in New Zealand is in fact Christianity.

On the one hand, the changing demography and the nature of the family in Asia are causing drastic reductions in the Christian population. At the same time, the recent phenomenon of Christians migrating to other countries for permanent settlements creates serious problems for the Asian churches. Asia is the birthplace of Christianity. However, Christianity is not usually seen as an Asian religion, but it has a Western-branded identity. Today, an emerging concern is whether Asia will become the least Christianized region of the world soon, given the fact that the population is ageing and young people are migrating to the West. If the changing demography among Asian Christians continues one can expect a decrease in the Christian population.

CCA has been focusing on the issue of migration and the Asian diaspora from different perspectives. CCA programmes in this area have been addressing the concerns of the rights of migrant workers. A Consultation was organised in Kottayam as a pre-assembly event in September 2023. As a follow-up, another Consultation will be organised in April 2024, with a focus on Asian migrants and the diaspora in the Arabian Gulf countries.

### CCA's Programme Evaluation

As you might recall, a report on the evaluation of CCA programmes was shared at the Assembly. The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly received the Evaluation Report circulated earlier and authorised the Executive Committee to review the recommendations and take any necessary follow-up. We have requested the external evaluators to be available for



online consultation, if possible, when the Evaluation Report will be discussed during this Executive Committee meeting.

### **CCA Headquarters Location and Its Future**

The longstanding issues of the construction of the headquarters of the CCA and the practical difficulties we are facing now in Chiang Mai were shared by the General Secretary at the Assembly. The General Secretary suggested the need to “evaluate whether Chiang Mai should continue to be the place where we should be anchored or located in the coming years”. Even though the previous Executive Committee made certain decisions and plans for constructing the CCA headquarters and training institute in Chiang Mai, nothing worked out in the end due to various reasons and all those aspects were shared at the Assembly.

The 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly also made certain decisions regarding this. The General Assembly authorised the Executive Committee to: (a) take into account matters related to employment visa restrictions, currency exchanges, and transactions overseas, and develop a comprehensive process through which to assess suitable locations for the CCA office; (b) include in the process a transparent assessment tool that makes clear how each possible location meets the pre-determined selection criteria, e.g., an assessment grid; (c) ensure the selection criteria include, but not be limited to, national regulations on the registration of international NGOs, national finance regulations, and visa requirements for staff; (d) consult with member churches and councils on the question of where the CCA office should be located; (e) take into account the reports of the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly. The Assembly’s working group that addressed this issue also suggested making the decision about the location of the CCA office and related matters, and implementing appropriate decisions by the new Executive Committee. Well, these matters cannot be decided within such a short span of time or overnight.

Let us hope that this Executive Committee will look into these matters carefully from now onwards. In order to proceed, I suggest that this Executive Committee think of agreeing to a Terms of Reference and appointing a Task Group to bring a proposal.

### **Finance and Financial Sustainability**

The General Secretary’s Report to the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly as well as the Report of the Treasurer explained quite well about the current financial situation of CCA and the need for ensuring sustainability. I explained from my own experiences the financial support CCA could avail from the non-Asian church and ecumenical partners in the past, and now the shrinking resources from the same partners. I was also sharing about the encouraging trend of increasing financial support from member churches. I reported at the Assembly, “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 been increased.” The financial support and in-kind contributions from member churches to CCA also has been increasing in recent years. The most recent example is the financial support received from CCA member churches which hosted the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Kerala. Five member churches of CCA from the Kerala region generously supported and hosted the last Assembly. I would gratefully acknowledge that this kind of generous support has been received from other member churches in some other countries, especially from Indonesian and Taiwanese churches during the past eight years, which helped CCA to organise some of the major events between the Jakarta and Kottayam Assemblies. As

I mentioned, all indications we are receiving from our traditional partners are that we cannot simply expect support from outside of Asia in the future. It is high time that we think about and discuss the sustainability of this valuable ecumenical instrument in Asia.

### **Programme Committee and Sub-Committees**

As per the constitutional stipulations, the Executive Committee shall appoint the members of the Programme Committee, which will consist of the Chairperson and up to twenty members. This system of having only one Programme Committee instead of the earlier three separate Committees with a total of 45 members and three Chairpersons was introduced when a new Constitution was adopted at the Jakarta Assembly in 2015. The Programme Committee, which is normally supposed to meet three times between two Assemblies, will have an advisory role. In our experience, it has been proved that the previous Programme Committee has not been as effective as was expected. This was mainly because some of the members who were appointed to serve on that Programme Committee by and large did not have the interest or the capacity to contribute. In this situation, we need to look into other models of forming Working Groups with mandates for guiding specific programme implementations as well as Committee members taking key roles in implementing programmes and activities in different countries in coordination with the programme staff. These Working Groups could be more effective as we can identify suitable persons who have interests and expertise in specific issues and themes of CCA's programme areas (for example, human rights, peace and reconciliation, health and healing, HIV and AIDS advocacy, migration and human trafficking, good governance, children, gender justice, diakonia, interreligious dialogue, UN advocacy, etc.).

Two other sub-Committees that this Executive Committee will consider appointing are the Finance Committee and a Sub-Committee for dealing with the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) of the Roman Catholic Church. In addition to these, the Executive Committee will have to appoint members of the CCA Hong Kong Company Director Board, CCA Investment Committee—Hong Kong, and members of the Board of the CCA Thailand Foundation. The nominations procedure for the formation of various Committees as well as the recommendations of names for consideration will be shared and discussed at a later stage of this meeting.

### **Strengthening of Asian Ecumenical Diakonia**

Diakonia is one of the most important areas of Christian life and witness. We express in our day-to-day life the witness of the church more tangibly and visibly. Almost all Asian churches are deeply involved in diakonal mission. For us, diakonia is not merely an involvement of Christian agencies in the area of emergency and humanitarian relief or aid assistance. Asian churches' large-scale involvement as part of their diakonia is visible and can be assessed in terms of social, humanitarian, medical care, and educational institutions run by churches and the day-to-day activities undertaken even at the congregational levels. Whether the churches in Asia are located in rich or poor countries or areas, the diakonal mission of Asian churches is widely spread at the grassroots and is extended to all in society, for all God's people. It is a reality that most Asian churches lack the capacity to equip its local parishes and members to be involved in diakonal missions in their local context with a holistic vision of diakonia beyond its institutional expressions. Asian churches need to reiterate our vision and mission of diakonia as the continuous sharing of God's gifts and love with our neighbours. This is what Jesus taught his disciples

that they should become servants: “You should do as I have done to you”. (John 13:15). This mandate entrusted with the Apostles was fundamentally one of living diakonia to God, to the neighbour, and to the world at large. Diakonia is not a welfare service besides or outside the church. Nor is it simply the emergency relief support at the time of natural disasters like earthquakes or typhoons extended by Western development agencies. As Catholicos Aram I of the Armenian Orthodox Church succinctly points out, “Diakonia is the ecclesial action of the ekklesia in the world and for the world. It is the sacramental action of the whole church for the whole of mankind, for the whole creation. As such, diakonia is not a matter of church policy but of faith. Diakonia is not a human initiative but God’s grace (*charis*), love (*agape*), and mercy (*eleos*) in action. In diakonia, the church reflects the life of the Trinity and reveals her true identity. Diakonia both constitutes and expresses the ekklesia. It has an ecclesiological foundation, cosmic dimension, and implications.”

As we believe in affirmation, Asian churches need to be equipped for being systematically involved in diaconal mission. Now some Asian churches are deeply involved in diaconal missions beyond the borders of their countries and even beyond the Asia region. Several member churches of CCA in South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Indonesia, India, and Thailand are now involved in diaconal mission outside of their respective countries. Sometimes, these churches approach CCA for advice and to identify partners for extending support. However, CCA has no capacity or human resources to coordinate such diaconal missions or humanitarian work coordination. The Asian Church and Ecumenical Leaders’ Conference (ACELC) held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in May 2023 discussed some of these aspects. The participants expressed their suggestions to initiate an Asian ecumenical diaconal network. Well, this is not a new idea discussed by Asian churches for the first time. I remember that a similar proposal was seriously discussed by Asian churches in 2005 at a Consultation organised by the CCA Justice and Development programme area in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This was immediately after the tsunami catastrophe in Asia in December 2004. Presently, CCA has been engaged in jointly organising certain capacity-building programmes for Asian churches. We have already organised three programmes, and one more may be organised in 2024.

In order to follow up on the recommendations of the ACELC and the earlier consultations, it is proposed that the Executive Committee and the new Programme Committee constitute a Sub-Committee to bring a proposal for CCA to initiate Asian churches’ diaconal network for better coordination and concerted efforts in future for diaconal involvement in Asia.

### **Election of the New General Secretary and New Staff Appointments**

I reported at one of the last sessions of the Assembly that my term as the General Secretary will end in 2025 August. At the outset of this report, I mentioned that I have had the privilege of serving a second term as CCA General Secretary. It is the task of the Executive Committee to initiate the process of identifying and electing a new General Secretary, for which a process needs to be initiated by the end of this year. We will have to schedule one more meeting of the Executive Committee this year as we need to address several other important matters, especially after the new Programme Committee meets and decides about the five-year Strategic Programme Plan (SPP) as well as for filling up new staff positions.

We have provisions for four Programme Coordinators who are appointed in accordance with a recruitment process. Now we have two Programme Coordinators and four Programme

Associates. In addition to that we have three interns who are also assisting us in organising programmes. This is not an adequate staff strength for a regional organisation like CCA which has a large constituency from Iran to Japan, and from Nepal to New Zealand. We are unable to recruit more staff due to severe financial constraints. The term of contracts of some staff will be ending soon, and we need to advertise the positions and appoint new staff before the end of this year, for which the Executive Committee will have to meet again this year. We may be able to discuss more about this in the closed-door session later.

### **Has the Ecumenical Movement a Future? Our Tasks Today**

As the newly elected Executive Committee members, all of you, as responsible stewards in the Asian ecumenical movement, have enormous tasks ahead of you. Once ecumenism was promoted and propagated as a Western idea which started originally in the mission fields of Western churches in order to promote better coordination among competing missionaries. The National Missionary Councils constituted as a follow-up of the Edinburgh Conference decision were serving the purposes of mission board coordination and to a certain extent unity of churches in the mission fields. During the past 75 years ever since the formation of the World Council of Churches, the ecumenical movement emphasised not only the ecclesial but also much wider issues towards the unity of all God's creation. The ecumenical movement sensitised churches, and gave new impetus for uniting them in common action of witness and service. When the CCA, the first and oldest regional ecumenical organisation in the world, was founded in 1957, such initiatives of our forefathers were discouraged and opposed by the then-global ecumenical leaders. They travelled to Prapat with a message that there should not be a regional ecumenical fellowship in Asia. The reason was out of mere fear that an international regional ecumenical body like CCA (then East Asian Christian Conference or the EACC) would weaken the WCC; it was only nine years prior to the formation of EACC/CCA in 1957, that the WCC was founded in 1948.

Now a regional ecumenical organisation like CCA has gained strength during the past 65 years of its existence in Asia. The journey of CCA has not been that easy. Still, it exists amid the fragmentation of the ecumenical movement in various ways. This is most evident in the lack of coordination among multiple ecumenical organisations, external interventions of non-Asian ecumenical bodies especially certain mission agencies who have much money to spend in Asian soil and parade in Asia as counter-ecumenical agencies, and financial support extended to churches and related institutions to organise "Asian ecumenical events". I have described this trend in one of the CCA General Secretary's Reports to the previous Executive Committee as the creation of "ecumenical archipelagos". As long as this trend continues, the Asian ecumenical movement will be weaker or less effective. It is our common task that we need to be concerned about this trend and be vocal in echoing our concerns.

"Is the ecumenical movement suffering from institutional paralysis"? and "Has the ecumenical movement a future?" were the questions raised in the 1960s and 1970s. More than half a century later, these questions are being repeated about the future of ecumenism and the ecumenical movement.

Today, some in the ecumenical circles propagate the need for alternative models of ecumenism and the ecumenical movement. Sometimes I think that these are mere jargons or fashions to project themselves as new "avatars" in the ecumenical or ecclesial arena.



We live in an era of “Post Normal Times” (PNT) in which the future is not emphasised as such, instead, the present is emphasised as the future. The distinction between the present and the future has become so diffused that it is now hard to differentiate when the present ends and the future begins. It is interesting to listen to the argument that the future seems to be omnipresent. It is also argued that “the category of the ‘future’ is losing much of its attractiveness” and if so, why must we bother with the ‘future’ when the ‘future’ is already here? When the Toyota car company introduced its new car some time ago, the advertisement was: “Dear Future: So Good to See You”. The idea they tried to inculcate among their prospective buyers was that their particular brand of the car had all ‘the goods’ the future could possibly offer. If the future is already here, then what is the point in talking about alternative futures?

As we realise the potential of the future, which is already present in our midst, the ecumenical movement can realise more and more fully that the Lord gathers his people in order that they may be a light to the world. The future of the ecumenical movement is already in God’s hand and draws its life and light from the heart of the Gospel. We need to realise and recognise that the Holy Spirit is working among us, taking us and our churches, driving us and binding us together, and thus enabling us to carry out the task renewal and restoration in the world.

As elected members of the CCA Executive Committee, friends, I would like to remind you and request you to invest and contribute at least part of your time and energy to build up CCA and its ongoing mission in your local contexts, as well as at the sub-regional or regional level. Your efforts, however small they may be, will have a much wider impact as you are chosen as “Ambassadors of CCA” from your countries and national contexts. In fact, you can contribute in various ways to strengthening ecumenism and the ecumenical movement. Whatever you do in your local context will have a much wider impact these days, in these Post Normal Times, especially when the world is not only moving faster but is also becoming a “smaller” place. Any small event today has the potential to make a global impact. A small, localised event can take place across large territories and on opposite ends of the globe at great speed. We have seen how air travel and international movement can spread a virus from a village and transform it into a global pandemic in a matter of weeks and days. 24-hour news broadcasts happening in one part of the world, and the messages carried across through social media, can turn an insignificant piece of localised news into a global spectacle in a matter of minutes. A simple tweet can have global repercussions. That is the speed of our times. Five years will disappear so fast. I find it hard to believe that I have been with CCA for eight years now. So, the five years ahead of you to serve CCA needs to be counted with the sense that you are already living in the future and CCA has all the goods the future could offer. As the ingredients for shaping the future of CCA are in your hands, and since the future is already here, let us walk together. Has the ecumenical movement a future? This question may be repeated while we walk together.

“Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.” (Proverbs 23:18)

Mathews George Chunakara  
*General Secretary, CCA*

17 January 2024

## Report of the General Secretary to the CCA's Executive Committee Meeting

29-31 October 2024 | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

It has been almost ten months since we met as members of the new Executive Committee of CCA. I am pleased to share with you some of the most relevant updates about CCA. Where are we now since last the Executive Committee meeting? I am sure you may want to raise this question to me to understand the developments in the life and witness of CCA since we met in Chiang Mai in January this year. Almost ten months ago, we met, discussed various matters, and delegated and mandated follow-up on certain matters. We have tried to address those matters and are now back with progress reports, as well as suggestions for further discussions and decisions.

At the last ExCom meeting, I reported about the process of unpacking the assembly decisions and proposals based on the deliberative sessions at the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. We discussed different options to come up with a realistic programme structure with thematic thrusts and programme areas to be introduced for the next four years. Subsequently, we accepted the proposal of the General Secretary to continue the current programme structure and mandated the new programme committee to review the proposals and present a realistic plan for strategic programme priorities.

### Relocation of CCA headquarters

In the earlier discussions, since the pre-15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly period, and during the Kottayam General Assembly, as well as in the last meeting of the Executive Committee held in Chiang Mai in January 2024, we discussed the General Assembly's proposal to investigate the potential relocation of the CCA headquarters. However, we have not followed up on this matter, nor have we reached any conclusions. We have also been unable to convene a meeting of the task group constituted by the Executive Committee to look into the relocation matters. Meanwhile, I have received a message from the GKI, Indonesia that they would be able to offer a space at their headquarters, but we need to look into various aspects before we respond to anything.

### Programme Committee meeting and proposals

The newly constituted programme committee met in Medan from 2 to 5 May 2024, which was hosted by the HKBP. After three days of deliberations, the programme committee has made proposals for a programme structure to be adopted by the Executive Committee. Based on the recommendations and various other inputs received, a small group of programme committee members met with staff to identify priority concerns and priority programme areas. A detailed presentation about the proposed programme structure for the period 2025 to 2029 has been worked out and will be presented to you for adoption.

### New programme structure and thrusts

Based on discussions and careful analysis, it is proposed that the four programme areas remain in place to effectively carry out programmes in the current Asian context. The

Programme Committee discussed and looked into the possibility of limiting the programme areas from four to three. However, considering various factors and filtering the issues and themes relevant to the current ecclesial and ecumenical contexts as well as emerging geo-political, geo-economic, and geostrategic situations in Asia, it is imperative to be operational in programmatic thrusts and framework of four programme areas. As the strategic programme thrusts, issues, and themes continue to be addressed, the thematic focus of all four programme areas has been identified with a similar strategic approach.

We could have added more issues to this list, given the innumerable problems we are facing in Asia. However, in a situation of shrinking financial and human resources, we are unable to proceed with unrealistic ambitions and inflated ideas to implement programmes in the vast Asia region. I am not sure whether this is a very realistic approach and plan. You will hear more details in the next session when we will present the strategic programme plan for the next four years, from 2025 to 2028. It is proposed that continue to operate with four programme areas over the next four years: Mission in Unity (MU), Ecumenical Formation (EF), Building Peace (BP), and Public Witness and Advocacy (PW).

As 'Mission in Unity' is foundational for churches and the ecumenical movement, not supplemental, the primary focus of our programme thrusts needs to continue, with focus on unity, as it is vital for the effective and efficient witness of Christian faith. In the Asian context, this unity we envisage transcends cultural, ethnic, confessional, and denominational barriers, and brings the transformative power of the Gospel to diverse contexts. This approach entails integrating a contextual methodology in theology, addressing a spectrum of social, political, economic, religious, and ecological issues, thereby hoping to unite churches in their mission. The CCA's programme area MU intends to respond to the challenges and realities of Asia. With that understanding, this programme will focus on addressing the current Asian context through initiatives in mission and witness, promoting interreligious cooperation amidst religious intolerance, and revitalising the Asian ecumenical movement. This response is guided by a call for authentic discipleship, seeking renewal and restoration in a world facing volatility and fragmentation.

Ecumenical Formation, with primary focus on leadership development, plays a crucial role in fostering unity within the Church and realising the shared vision of oneness articulated in Jesus' prayer for unity. As ecumenical formation is essential for equipping churches and councils, as well as instilling a sustained ecumenical spirit across diverse roles within the Church, it transcends doctrinal and denominational barriers, especially in the current Asian ecclesial and ecumenical context where too much denominationalism and confessionalism increase and threaten ecclesial unity. Such situations warrant the active involvement of individuals within ecclesial structures, aiming to break down barriers and promote unity and active participation. The ecumenical movement has always recognised the strategic importance of leadership formation, which is essential for Christian unity and has been a central focus since the early days of CCA's formation. In the post-Jakarta assembly period, when we introduced a new strategic programme plan, we gave importance to systematising ecumenical formation and leadership development, especially among young people and women. This strategic approach needs to be continued.

Building Peace (BP) should be considered a priority area in CCA. I need not convince any one of the important role CCA has to play in this direction. The emerging issues and problems in Asia, along with the attention and intervention warranted by churches in several situations, call us to be involved in peace building and the mission of reconciliation across diverse Asian contexts. The current Asian situation, marked by unrest and the greed of the powerful leading to wealth accumulation and exploitation, contradicts the peaceful vision of universal security. In Asia, peace is jeopardised by religious and ethnic violence, civil wars, international tensions, and the denial of fundamental rights. The underlying factors leading to tensions persist, and various issues, including armed conflicts, poverty, inadequate healthcare, environmental degradation, militarisation, ethnic and religious conflicts, and challenges to democratic governance, impede peace and security in Asia. Churches are called to collaborate with other faith communities and ideologies, advocating for individual and communal rights and the protection of the earth, striving to create societies where all life thrives harmoniously.

The focus of the fourth programme area suggested is Public Witness and Advocacy (PW). The same programme thrust in earlier strategic programme plans was known as Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy. As we know, prophetic witness, rooted in Old Testament traditions, urges the church to challenge societal injustices, embodying justice, rights, truth, reconciliation, and healing. While the modern world may not readily accept these traditions, the church's responsibility as a prophetic witness remains crucial for advocating change, especially at the grassroots level. Through Public Witness and Advocacy, coordinated efforts to address the root causes of injustice through awareness building, analysis, human rights education, and public advocacy, etc., must be initiated. Simultaneously, diakonia emphasises practical love and care for those in need, with prophetic diakonia prompting a deeper examination of structural injustices and their root causes. This form of diakonia aligns with the gospel's liberating power, fostering peace with justice, human rights, and dignity.

Asian churches must actively engage in advocacy as part of their prophetic role, focusing on political, economic, cultural, and social issues at local and international levels. Ecumenical advocacy should extend to congregations, community ministries, and individual members, empowering them to be advocates for justice and dignity. The continent grapples with threats to human security, including poverty, inadequate healthcare, economic exploitation, environmental degradation, armed conflicts, and political unrest. Discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, and caste has been exploited by governments to consolidate power, diminishing freedom of expression and democratic spaces. The shrinking of political diversity and suppression of dissent underscore the urgency for Asian churches to live out their Christian witness at local and regional levels amidst these challenges. The role of CCA in this context is to equip Asian churches to be a prophetic witness in a broken world marked by injustice. However, more practical application of our faith and commitment needs to be demonstrated.

The Executive Committee already decided last time to initiate an Asian Ecumenical Diakonia Forum. The Programme Committee discussed this decision. However, the guidelines and modalities need to be worked out for initiating the Diakonia Forum.



## Implementation of Programmes

As per earlier decisions, we have been following the same Strategic Programme Plan (SPP) from previous years for 2024. This arrangement was agreed upon so that the new programme committee could work on a new SPP for adoption by the Executive Committee. This is also one of the reasons that the Executive Committee is meeting this time.

Following the earlier SPP, we have continued with the same SPP for 2024. Starting from January this year until now, we have organised 16 programmes, including the month-long Asian Ecumenical Institute; Youth Leadership Development Training in Laos; Ecumenical Youth Training on Eco Justice and Care for Creation in Indonesia; Good Governance and Stewardship Training in East Timor, Kolkata, India, Indonesia, and Kottayam, India; International Consultation on Asian Diaspora in Transition, held in Dubai, UAE; Regional Consultation on Ecumenical Diakonia in Medan, Indonesia; three trainings for theological students on Good Governance in Parish Ministry and Integrity Leadership; ATCHAA-related programmes in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Jakarta; and the most recent ones such as the CATS-X and Nicaea-1700 Anniversary Commemorative event.

Each programme has its own value and merit. Our constituencies benefitted immensely from these programmes and enriched their capacities. Each programme also gives us the opportunity to make new contacts, renew relations in our fellowship, and bring new vitality. If we are not live through our programmes, we risk alienation from our constituencies. We have been trying our level best to ensure that CCA remains a vibrant ecumenical body in Asia. This effort has been proving effective, and in several contexts, our strategy has helped foster more ecumenical engagements.

### CATS-X and Nicaea-1700 commemoration

We have just successfully concluded the Tenth Congress of Asian Theologians, which began with a grand inauguration and the commemoration of the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Nicene Council of 325 AD. Those who were part of this special occasion will always recollect and cherish it as a solemn historic moment in our ecumenical journey. This occasion became especially significant with the participation of diverse ecclesial traditions from across Asia. When the century-old Zion Cathedral of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia became the venue for the profound and dignified ceremonial inauguration of CATS-X and the Asian commemoration of the 1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea, it was witnessed by a galaxy of church and ecumenical leaders from across Asia, representing various ecclesial traditions.

Unlike many other ecumenical events, which often involve only a limited number of church traditions by and large from Protestant denominations, the Nicaea-1700 commemoration and CATS-X became inclusive, representing a broad spectrum of Christian denominations in Asia, including Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Reformed, United and Uniting Churches, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Mar Thoma, Independent, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Assyrians or Church of the East, and others. This unique summit underscores CCA's ongoing commitment to providing a platform for theological dialogue across denominational lines.

With the participation of more than 100 Asian theologians, CATS-X became a unique ecumenical event organised by the CCA, marked by rich deliberations and the involvement

of theologians not only from CCA member churches but also beyond. This programme was held in a country where CCA has not been active in terms of implementing its activities for some time due to certain past incidents that affected CCA's organisational and missional involvements, as some of you are aware. I am pleased that CCA was once again able to establish strong relations with its member churches in Malaysia, including the Diaspora member churches that have been functional in this country for almost 90 years. About 35 participants were able to worship in a diaspora congregation at the St Thomas Mar Thoma Church in Klang, a city one hour from KL, which is the home parish of CCA Vice Moderator Dr Anna Alisha Simon Mathew, last Sunday, especially as the local parish celebrated its 88<sup>th</sup> parish day. Participants also attended worship services in various other churches last Sunday, including Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Mar Thoma, Orthodox, and Korean churches, giving us more opportunities to strengthen our Asian ecumenical fellowship and allowing CATS participants to experience the ground realities of Asian churches' witness and life together.

It has truly become a remarkable gathering of Christian theologians, marking the most diverse summit of Asian theologians that the CCA has organised and facilitated so far. The holding of CATS-X in Malaysia was in the spirit of ecumenism in the diverse Asian context, which was witnessed and experienced more precisely in the Malaysian context. The Church in Malaysia is by and large composed of diasporic members, whose membership encompasses various ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religious identities. They have been traditionally Chinese and Indian ethnic groups, and now there are more churches with other Asian ethnic groups from Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The spirit of ecumenism challenges and motivates us to have the courage to walk together in Asia in diverse contexts.

### **Financial situation and contribution**

I have repeatedly reported to the Executive Committee about CCA's financial situation, noting that it has not been stable enough to meet the requirements of CCA, as contributions from ecumenical partners have been drastically reduced. Some of the traditional ecumenical partner agencies have already indicated to us about the reduction in their funding levels. However, it is heartening that support from Asian churches has been increasing over the past years, and in-kind support from member churches have increased in recent years. The financial support we received from CCA member churches in Kerala for the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly was substantial and encouraging. In Kuala Lumpur alone, CCA member churches' diaspora congregations (two Mar Thoma congregations and one Orthodox church, along with well-wishers from the Mar Thoma and Orthodox churches in Malaysia) contributed more than US \$22,000 towards CATS-X expenses. Additionally, 15 local congregations covered the expenses for facilitating the visits of CATS participants to various local parishes on Sunday, 27 October. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia wholeheartedly supported CCA with financial and human resources, particularly in hosting the Nicaea-1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorative event at the Zion Cathedral and covering expenses of hosting this event at the headquarters of the ELCM on 24 October. All these are encouraging signs and part of activating CCA in local contexts. This unique experience of mutual learning and new opportunities for widening networks and

ecumenical fellowship is helping CCA be lively in an ecumenical spirit in its constituencies across Asia.

What CCA needs at this stage is a sense of ownership from its member constituencies. If we achieve this target, I am sure CCA will be able to generate more income from its own constituency in Asia. In my nine-year tenure, I have observed that, by maintaining a sustained interest in connecting closely with our constituencies, we can generate more financial and human resources from CCA's own constituencies in Asia. Unlike in the past, we have been receiving generous support from our member constituencies. In recent years, both before and after the COVID-19 period, a number of programmes were sponsored by CCA member churches in several countries, especially different churches in Indonesia, Myanmar, India, and now in Malaysia. However, we currently face a lethargic response from CCA member churches in Asia's economically advanced countries, where churches are vibrant and with the capacity to extend financial support to CCA. It is not an encouraging sign that CCA has not been adequately supported by its member churches and councils in wealthy Asian countries. For CCA's long-term financial sustainability, we need to foster a stronger sense of ownership among CCA member churches and councils.

### **Ecumenical response to ongoing and emerging issues**

One of the most pertinent Asian issues currently warranting CCA's response is the conflict situation in Myanmar. We have previously discussed Myanmar's ongoing conflict situation. Myanmar is currently divided into two main areas: those under military control and those controlled by ethnic armed groups. It remains to be seen if these ethnic armed groups can successfully oust the military. The international community must explore ways to assist in this situation. The National Unity Government (NUG) plays a crucial role in uniting the ethnic armed struggle against the military. Meanwhile, the ongoing civil war highlights the need to ensure the safety of civilians and provide essential humanitarian aid, particularly for those displaced from their homes. International humanitarian assistance is necessary to mitigate the suffering of displaced communities.

Myanmar will require strengthened global support to achieve a stable and sustainable democracy where peace and justice prevail. It is essential to communicate globally that Myanmar is in the midst of a democratic revolution with widespread support from its people. The situation in Myanmar mirrors the divisions seen in other countries facing severe conflicts. The revolution shows no signs of stopping and is evolving in various forms. As the people endure immense hardships, including daily survival challenges, climate change impacts, and economic decline, the international community is urged to provide assistance and support for a swift resolution to the conflict. The churches in Myanmar are entirely incapacitated to openly respond to this crisis as their members live in extremely vulnerable situations. In recent months and weeks, three different groups of church representatives visited CCA headquarters and had discussions and fellowship with CCA staff.

We have been exploring different options to engage the Asian and global ecumenical movement in global advocacy. Several times we postponed our plan of organising an international conference on Peace and Reconciliation in Myanmar due to financial

constraints. Now, we have finally decided to organise this international conference, which will be held in Bangkok from 22 to 25 November 2024. About 50 participants from different Asian countries, as well as from Europe and North America, will attend. The participants will be drawn from diverse backgrounds including church and ecumenical organisations, representatives from diplomatic mission/embassies, academicians specialising in Myanmar, social and human rights activists, journalists, and others.

The international conference on Myanmar aims to address Myanmar's urgent issues of human rights, democratisation, and people's security by promoting dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among various stakeholders at the international level. The goal is to assist the people and communities to achieve justice, sustainable peace, and stability in Myanmar. The conference will serve as a platform at the Asian level, involving faith-based organisations and civil society movements, with support from other international partners concerned about Myanmar's deteriorating situation. It will facilitate constructive discussions to better understand the complex and evolving realities in Myanmar. It is also expected to provide a platform for stakeholders to examine the current situation and explore options to support a just and peaceful transition to democracy which guarantees inclusive governance as well as protects the rights of all Myanmar citizens, including all ethnic groups. Overall, the outcome of the conference is expected to be a tool with the participation of FBOs and civil society movements in Asia, along with international partners, actors, and representatives of diplomatic missions of various countries who are interested in fostering international solidarity through concerted efforts to address the crisis in Myanmar. This is part of CCA's prophetic witness and engagement.

In a similar way, we are now engaged in preparations for other programmes at the Asia regional and national levels in the coming two months including a regional conference on ecumenical women's action against violence, a regional consultation on health and healing in the context of HIV/AIDS vulnerability, regional conference on children and HIV/AIDS in Asian countries, and a national training programme in India for pastors and church workers on HIV/AIDS advocacy. We have already scheduled certain programmes in the first quarter of 2025, two of which are in collaboration with WCC – Pilgrimage of Justice Reference Group meeting and South Asia Consultation, and an international consultation on Inclusive Citizenship. We shall be scheduling several other programmes for 2025, but it will depend on the availability of funds.

### **CCA Programme Evaluation**

The ongoing evaluation process and its findings were reported at the last Executive Committee meeting. Prior to that, the draft evaluation report was presented to the delegates of the CCA Assembly in Kottayam. The last meeting of the Executive Committee received the Evaluation Report and resolved to appoint a three-member committee to follow-up on the recommendations. Now that we have reached the final stage, the Executive Committee has to finally adopt the Evaluation Report which will be shared externally soon. Several recommendations have been made by the two external evaluators who undertook the extensive tasks of evaluation which was started in September 2019, halted during the pandemic, and subsequently resumed and completed. It has been a



long process as the evaluation process had to cover CCA's large constituency across Asia. We are thankful to Mr Leo Bhashyam, former Asia Pacific Director of the Christian Aid in UK, and Ms Helen Monisha Sarkar, a development consultant, evaluator, and current National General Secretary of YWCA Bangladesh. Our deep appreciation goes to both evaluators.

### **Human Resources in CCA**

More substantial details about personnel matters will be shared later in the closed-door session. However, let me also report that CCA's human resources are shrinking due to financial constraints. This will affect the implementation, efficiency, and quality of our programmes and activities. I am extremely glad that CCA has a very committed, young, and energetic staff working now. Some of them began their work and collaboration with CCA as interns, while some others became involved in CCA as participants of different programmes. Over the years, they have gained experiences and are now serving CCA. They are an asset for the Asian ecumenical movement and will become the future church and ecumenical leaders in Asia.

There have been changes in staff roles in the past months since our last Executive Committee meeting in January, and there will be more changes in the coming months as some senior programme staff will end their contracts with CCA. In other words, CCA will have to recruit new staff at different times next year. We need to begin the process of recruiting and appointing new programme staff and a new General Secretary; the process will have to begin from now on. In terms of staffing matters, it is going to be a crucial period. The transition process will need to be initiated and planned at this meeting. We shall be discussing some of these matters later.

### **Challenges ahead**

On numerous occasions during the tenure of the previous ExCom, I tried to articulate the challenges in the ecclesial and ecumenical arena in Asia. I may be able to present a long list of these challenges, and different churches and ecumenical bodies could come up with their own observations and perceptions about them. A recent observation by the Roman Catholic Church, in the context of synodality, needs attention as an emerging challenge of Asian churches in general, and it cannot be applied solely to the Roman Catholic Church. It was highlighted that clericalism is a stumbling block to the Church in Asia. Thomas P. Doyle, a Canon Lawyer, stated, "Clericalism refers to the radical misunderstanding of the place of clerics in the Catholic Church and secular society. This pejorative 'ism' is grounded in the erroneous belief that clerics constitute an elite group and, because of the powers as sacramental ministers, are superior to the laity. These spiritual powers have historically led to a variety of social privileges, which in turn, have regularly resulted in different levels of corruption." Here, clericalism is seen in the context of corruption and power in the name of spirituality.

This morning at the last thematic plenary session of CATS, Prof. Eleazar Fernandez from the Philippines stated that the need for ecumenism should shift towards empowering local communities and grassroots movements rather than centered on clericalism. What

he meant was churches should facilitate bottom-up initiatives where lay people, not just clergy or theologians, are involved in ecumenism rooted in doctrinal convergence.

The pressing challenges of today require a shift towards collaborative action across denominations. CCA, in its mission witness, tries to achieve this goal. Innovative and creative strategies are needed to address emerging issues through collaborative ecumenical actions. There is a need for an accurate and balanced assessment to take place within both the church and the community, with a more candid approach and spirit. Considering the many challenges we face today, it is imperative to search for new paradigms to strengthen the ecumenical movement and enhance the unity of all God's creation. We must journey together, exploring new possibilities for unity as Christ prayed and commanded us to do. The call to unity is not an option; it is imperative as it is the very desire of Christ and the heart of the Gospel's message. Let us move forward as we continue our ecumenical journey in Asia.

Mathews George Chunakara  
*General Secretary, CCA*

29 October 2024

## CCA Executive Committee Members (2023–2028)

### Officers

#### *Moderator*

Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, United Church of Christ in the Philippines

#### *Vice Moderator*

Dr Anna Alisha Mathew Simon, Council of Churches of Malaysia

#### *Treasurer*

Rev. Chan Kwok-Keung, Hong Kong Christian Council

#### *General Secretary*

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India

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Rev. Dethsacda Aphayamath (Laos Evangelical Church)

Archbishop Dikran Sebouh Sarkissian (Armenian Orthodox Church of Iran)

Dymeas Sovy (Kampuchea Christian Council)

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(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 Takerngangsarit (Church of Christ in Thailand)

Su-Hong Lim (Presbyterian Church in Taiwan)

Tirudia 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)

Dr Kuriakose Theophilose Metropolitan  
(Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church/Chairperson of Programme Committee)

### CCA Programme Committee Members 2023–2028

Metropolitan Dr Kuriakose Theophilose, Chairperson of Programme Committee  
(Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church)

Rev. Ebenezer Joseph (Methodist Church of Sri Lanka)

Rev. Jimmy M Immanuel (Protestant Church in Western Indonesia)

Rev. Keita Hotere (Methodist Church in New Zealand)

Ma Kay Cathrine Almario (National Council of Churches in the Philippines)

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Rev. Oshima Kaori (National Christian Council in Japan)

Rev. Reuben Qamar (National Council of Churches in Pakistan)

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Tirudia Hutabarat (Protestant Christian Batak Church)

Nuttee Kunlacharnpises (Church of Christ in Thailand)

Bishop Melzar D. Labuntog (United Church of Christ in the Philippines)

Patrick Yuen (Hong Kong Council of Churches of Christ in China)

Dr Mathews George Chunakara

(CCA General Secretary, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India)



## Asian Ecumenical Committee

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Rev. John Charles Gilmore (National Council of Churches in Australia)

H.G. Dr Abraham Mar Seraphim Metropolitan (Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church)

Rev. Jung Eun Grace Moon  
(CCA Programme Coordinator/ Presbyterian Church in Korea)

Dr Mathews George Chunakara  
(CCA General Secretary/ Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India)

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Rev. Eric So (Hong Kong Council of Church of Christ in China (HKCCCC))

Rev. Po Kam Cheong (Hong Kong Council of Church of Christ in China (HKCCCC))

Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza (CCA Moderator/United Church of Christ in the Philippines)

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Dr Mathews George Chunakara  
(CCA General Secretary/ Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India)

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Mrs Supaporn Yarnasarn (Member/Church of Christ in Thailand)

Dr Sompan Wongdee (Member/Church of Christ in Thailand)

Dr Prawate Khid-arn (Member/Church of Christ in Thailand)

Rev. Thaworn Sutyka (Member/Church of Christ in Thailand)

Ms Janejinda Pawadee (Member/Church of Christ in Thailand)

Dr Mathews George Chunakara  
(CCA General Secretary/ Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India)

## CCA Staff Members 2024

### General Secretary

Dr Mathews George Chunakara

### Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology

Rev. Jung Eun Grace Moon

### Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Ecumenical Spirituality

John Paul Devakumar

Jacob Trent Ngileb (from March)

### Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts

Ruth Mathen

Hnin Wai Thi Aung, Mary

### Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy

Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia

Arceli Pepito Bile

Klein Fausto Emperado

### Communications

Navya Dinah Saji (from July)

Sha Mgwe La Ah Tha Pa

Yu-Ting Chiu, Amy

### Finance and Accounts

Friona Kallyani Sarker

Nathi Schumann

Della Lee

### Administration, Library, House Service

Netnapa Rattanajiamrangsri

Arpa Yai-Chid

Pakakrong Srikhamfan (from September)

