



Christian Conference of Asia

• Payap University, Muang, Chiang Mai 50000 Thailand
Tel: +66-(0)53-243906, 243907 Fax: +66-(0)53-247303

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CCA's Statement on International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women—2021

Violence against women and girls remains one of the most widespread and chronic human rights violations. Most often, it goes largely unreported given the persistent stigma and shame attached to such occurrences. Violence against women and girls occurs in physical, sexual, and psychological forms at any point in a woman's life, and often has devastating and long-term impacts, remaining a significant barrier to the full realisation of the dignity and rights of women. The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is observed each year on 25 November 2021 and marks the beginning of 16 days of activism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened such risks for violence. The sudden losses of livelihoods and the entrapment of millions of people in poverty has created an environment that is ripe for toxic gender stereotypes and harmful social norms to thrive. This has even led to what is called the 'shadow pandemic' of gender-based violence. United Nations (UN) Women has estimated that 11 million girls may not return to school because of COVID-19, thus increasing their susceptibility to child, early, or forced marriage. About 47 million more women and girls have become vulnerable to extreme poverty, which further derails the progress towards full equality. The most marginalised women, such as those with disabilities or chronic illnesses, or those who are refugees or trapped in humanitarian and crisis situations, are at disproportionate risk and face even more significant challenges.

The theme of the year is 'Orange the World: End Violence against Women Now!'. The colour orange represents a brighter and transformed future which is free of violence against women and girls. The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) calls upon its member churches and councils to break the silence, speak out, and most importantly, read the Bible through an 'orange lens' throughout the upcoming 16 days.

In the face of the pervasiveness of violence against women and girls today, which, as per UN reports, has not declined over the past decade, we are tasked with interpreting and challenging texts in the Bible that appear to support violence. There is an urgent need in our Asian Christian communities to revisit and reinvestigate episodes of violence—physical, sexual, and psychological—against women in the Bible. If we ignore or consciously refuse to engage with the issues of gender-based violence in the Bible by taking neutral or aperspectival stances, we may run the risk of reinforcing or buttressing such problematic power dynamics. Gender inequality is often understood to be intrinsic to structures, institutions, and human relationships. However, this can be challenged through the 'transformative' empowerment of women, and one way to accomplish this is through reading the Bible through an 'orange' lens.

Additionally, in church ministries that cater to women, the focus must be on victim-centred services that place the wellbeing of women at the heart of pastoral care and counselling. It is understood that perpetrators of violence may use myriad methods or resources to exert power and control over their victims—including the distorted, misused, or twisted use of religious scriptures, beliefs, and practices to accomplish these objectives—and blame the victim for the abuse that is happening. Survivors themselves may fall back on such misinterpretations of the Bible and internalise the blame or abuse that occurs against them. At times, even those in charge of providing care for survivors of violence may employ the scripture to minimise, deny, or even condone such abuse. It would not be possible to eliminate or even reduce violence against women unless the violent behaviour of the perpetrator is addressed as well.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the CCA reaffirms its own commitments to accompany its member churches and councils in concerted efforts to fully eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The CCA also encourages its member churches and councils to identify and call out signs and symptoms of gender-based violence in their communities by understanding the dynamics of abuse and prioritising the safety and wellbeing of all women and girls, and also realising that reporting instances of gender-based violence is not an attack on religion itself. In fact, the church is one of the first places that survivors of violence reach out to in order to get help.

Asian churches must become 'first responders' in the efforts to combat all forms of gender-based violence. Together, let us 'Orange the World'.

Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary, Christian Conference of Asia