

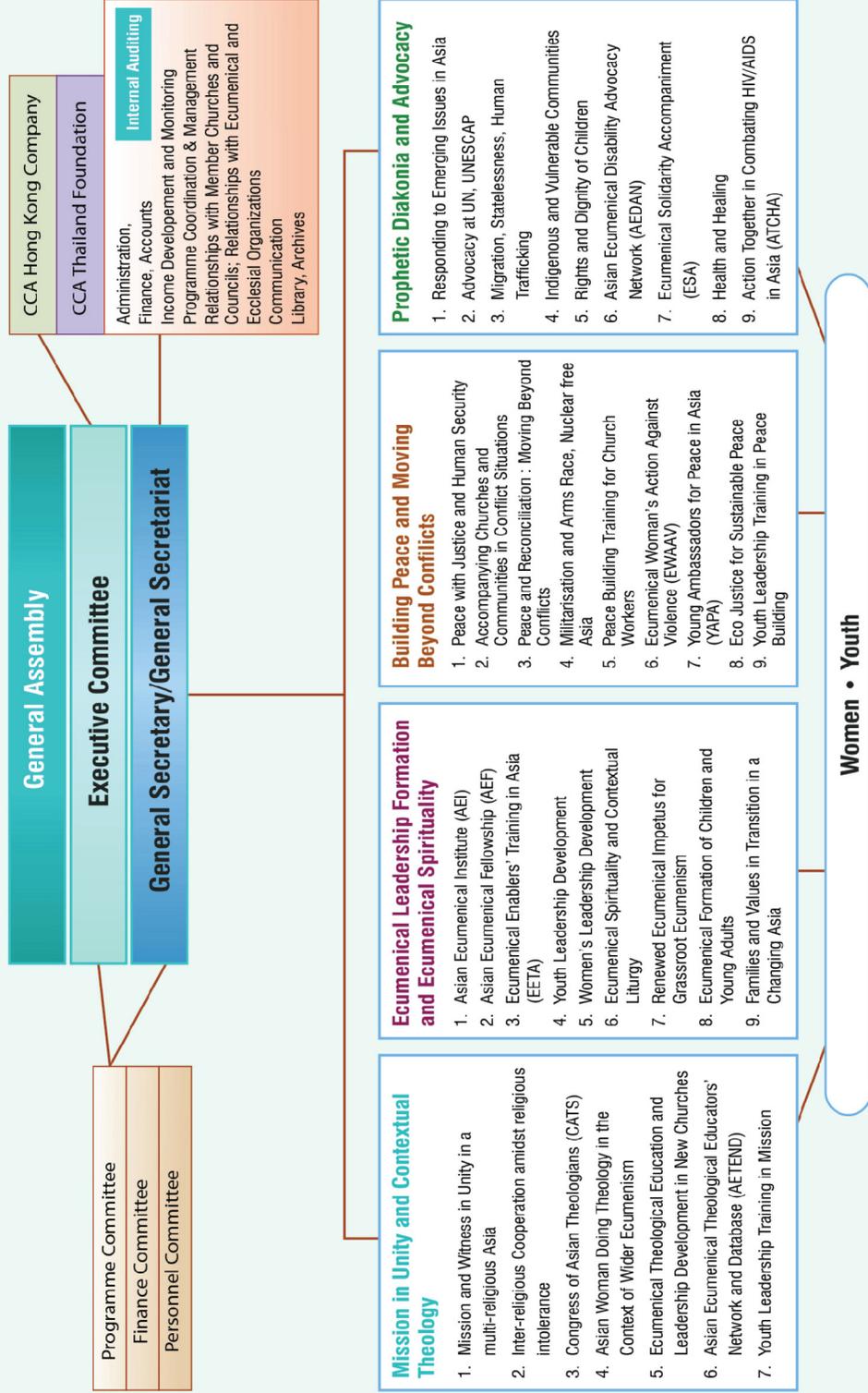


Christian Conference of Asia

# PROGRAMME REPORT 2021

*'Affirming God's Healing for Peace and Security'*

# CCA Programme Structure 2015-2021



## FOREWORD

As COVID-19 continued to devastate the lives of millions of people, the world has been facing multiple crises during 2021 too. Asia has not been an exception to these crises. The world saw how quickly years of development and progress gained could be erased due to the impact of COVID-19 within such a short span of time. The alarm bells rang across the world in early 2020 slowly started disappearing towards the end of 2021, but during most part of 2021 too we witnessed a situation in Asia where the impact of COVID-19 had not totally disappeared. Despite the worsening pandemic situations, CCA was able to initiate, organise, and facilitate programmes and activities in 2021 within the overall programme thrusts on 'Affirming God's Healing for Peace and Security'. Although CCA headquarters was closed for a substantial time during the year 2021, and most of CCA member churches and councils also could not be functional, CCA staff tried their level-best to be in contact with its constituencies and undertook the tasks of implementation of 24 activities, mostly virtual programmes.

This Annual Report–2021 provides a snapshot of the programmes and activities implemented and the objectives achieved even amidst the worsening situations. The five-year Strategic Plan introduced in the post-14<sup>th</sup> Assembly period and started in 2016 should have been ended by the end of 2020 with the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly scheduled to take place in September 2020. However, the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly had to be postponed, first to 2021 and subsequently to 2023, due to the wide spread of COVID-19 and its ongoing effects in most Asian countries. Such a situation warranted a context to implement the activities with same programme thrusts until a new strategic programme plan will be in place based on new programme reviews. The closure of church and ecumenical offices in many parts of Asia as well as restricted movements of people within and beyond the borders of their respective countries became impediments to smooth functioning and implementation of planned activities. In the midst such experiences, when I look at what we, together, with our constituencies and networks, have achieved, I am motivated and hopeful, as well as grateful, to all our member churches and councils, ecumenical partners, and other well-wishers who have helped us to organise various programmes and activities during the two most difficult years in our common history. I thank them profoundly for their accompaniment with us during the crises we have undergone.

I hope that this narrative report included in this publication will be helpful for the readers to understand the veracity of each programme, and the context and priorities of those programmes that have been identified and implemented.



Mathews George Chunakara  
General Secretary, CCA

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# GENERAL SECRETARIAT (GS)

## Coordination of Administration and Programmes

The General Secretary, who is responsible for the overall coordination and supervision of the implementation and monitoring of all programmatic areas of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), provided leadership in the coordination of, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all of the CCA's programmes and activities in 2021.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the migration of the CCA's usual style of functioning from in-person meetings to online meetings, the General Secretary helped the implementation of 24 virtual programmes throughout the year. The different

programme areas of the CCA continued to strengthen digital communications of their activities, making strong use of the CCA's online presence through the CCA website and other social media channels.

As the General Secretary's responsibilities include strengthening relationships with member churches and councils, liaising with the governing board and advisory bodies, and building relationships with governments and intergovernmental organisations, the General Secretary continued all the regular tasks of maintaining and strengthening relations even during the prolonged pandemic months.

## Liaison with Governing Board and Advisory Committee

### CCA Foundation Thailand Meeting

The CCA Foundation Thailand, a legal entity, registered in Thailand, under which the CCA office based in Chiang Mai functions, had its meeting on 18 March 2021. The CCA Foundation sponsors the visa and work permit applications of the international staff working at the Chiang Mai office. The Foundation has a committee which consists of the CCA General Secretary as

well as representatives of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), the latter being Thai citizens. At present, the following members serve on the CCA Foundation Thailand: Rev. Dr Pradit Takenrangsarit, Rev. Dr Chuleepran Srisoontorn, Dr Prawate Khidarn, Ms Sompan Wongdee, Ms Supaporn Yarnasarn, Mr Thaworn Suteeka, and Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

### CCA Executive Committee Meeting



Virtual Meeting of CCA Executive Committee

The Executive Committee of CCA met virtually this year as international travelling and meeting in person were not possible. This was the second time in the history of CCA that the meeting of the governing board of CCA was held on an online platform. The members of the Executive Committee met for two consecutive days from 9 to 10 August 2021.

The Executive Committee received and discussed reports on CCA's programmes and activities, financial sustainability, and updates on the situations in different regions in relation with the General Assembly plan.

Given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and slow vaccination processes in most Asian countries as well as international and domestic travel and mobility restrictions, the Executive Committee, which is the highest decision-making body of the CCA in between General Assemblies, decided not to conduct the next Assembly any sooner than mid-2023. The new venue of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly was considered and shortlisted to be held either in Indonesia or Thailand, with a final decision expected to be taken when the Executive Committee reconvenes.

It was reported that most of the CCA programmes, including the month-long Asian Ecumenical Institute, the ten-day long Institute on Human Rights, and the virtual Asia Sunday worship service, had to be conducted online as the COVID-19 outbreak restricted international travel.

### **Finance Committee Meeting**

The Finance Committee of the CCA met in conjunction with the Executive Committee meeting, which was on 9 August 2021. Attended by Rev. Diana Tana (CCA Vice-Moderator), Augustine Dipak Karmakar (CCA Treasurer), Dr Mathews George Chunakara (CCA General Secretary) as well as Finance Committee members Israel Paulraj (Church of Ceylon), Nuttee Kunlacharnpises (Church of Christ in Thailand), and Patrick Yuen (Hong Kong Council of Churches of Christ in China), the Finance Committee reviewed the current financial situation of the CCA in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, revised the budget for the year 2021 and approved the framework budget for the year 2022. The Committee also received the Report of the Investment Committee in Hong Kong.

### **Officers' Meeting**

CCA Officers met twice in the year 2021. The members comprised Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata (Moderator), Rev. Diana Tana (Vice Moderator), Dr Mathews George Chunakara (General Secretary), and Mr Augustine Dipak Karmakar (Treasurer). The Officers met to prepare for the Executive Committee meeting, and also to discuss and deal with organisational and administrative matters of the CCA.

### **CCA Investment Committee Hong Kong Meeting**

The CCA Investment Committee met several times in Hong Kong to review the investment plan and to discuss reinvestment-related matters.

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## **Church and Ecumenical Relations**

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### **Relations with Member Churches and Councils**

The General Secretary and other staff members joined and participated through the online mode in several programmes and activities as well as in special events of member churches, councils, related

ecumenical organisations, regional, and global ecumenical organisations.

- Preparatory Meeting of WCC Pre-Assembly of Women and Men on 22 January, 2 April, and 29 June 2021
- WCC-REO Monthly Communication Meeting on 3 February, 3 March, 6

- April, 3 May, 2 June, 22 June, 7 July 2021
- Preparatory Meeting for WCC Assembly's Ecumenical Conversations on Gender Justice (Just Community of Women and Men) on 9 December, 7 April, 6 May, 25 June
  - Webinar series organised by Faith and Belief Forum UK – Relating FoRB to multiple aspects of identity (9 February); Promoting FoRB for all at the local level (25 February); FoRB in Practice: Ways of working together well (9 March 2021)
  - Panel presenter at the WCC's Webinar on 'COVID-19 Vaccination and Stateless people' on 15 March 2021
  - Webinar on 'Migration and HIV in the context of COVID-19: The role of Faith Leaders and Communities' organised by WCC-EAA on 8 April 2021
  - WCC Asia region Ecumenical Officers meeting on 20 April 2021
  - Greetings at the 66<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan on 22 April 2021
  - Webinar on 'Asian and Asian American Feminist Theologies' conducted by Candler Foundry of Emory University and PANAAWTHM (Pacific, Asian, and North American Asia Women in Theology and Ministry) on 19 May, 26 May, 2 June, 9 June, 16 June 2021
  - International Conference on 'Teaching Ecumenism in the context of World Christianity' from 2-4 June 2021
  - Panel presenter at 'Workshop on Health and Healing' organised by WCC Health and Healing working group on 10 June 2021
  - Statelessness Summer Course 2021 organised by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, Netherlands, from 12–23 July 2021
  - Mission21's training on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) from 21–23 July 2021
  - Greetings at the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Church of Jesus Christ in Indonesia on 26 July 2021
  - Receptions with President, UAICC Acting Chair and General Secretary of the Uniting Church in Australia on 28 July 2021
  - Webinar on 'Stop the Flow: Let's End Human Trafficking' organised jointly by WCC and LWF on 30 July 2021 – World Day against Trafficking in Persons
  - Greetings at the 106<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) on 28 September 2021
  - Greetings at the 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Toraja Church in Indonesia on 18 October 2021
  - Greetings at the 20<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB) on 29 October 2021
  - Greetings at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly of the Evangelical Church in Halmahera (GMIH) on 14 November 2021
  - Greetings at the Thanksgiving Service for the leadership of the LAC of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CCA on 4 November 2021 in Medan, Indonesia
  - Greetings at the centenary of the International Missionary Council on 17 November 2021
  - Online Missiological Conference: The Centenary of the International Missionary Council on 16–18 November 2021
  - Greetings at the 70<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK) on 22 November 2021
  - World AIDS Day 2021 online service of World Council of Churches on 1 December 2021

## Relations with Ecumenical Partners

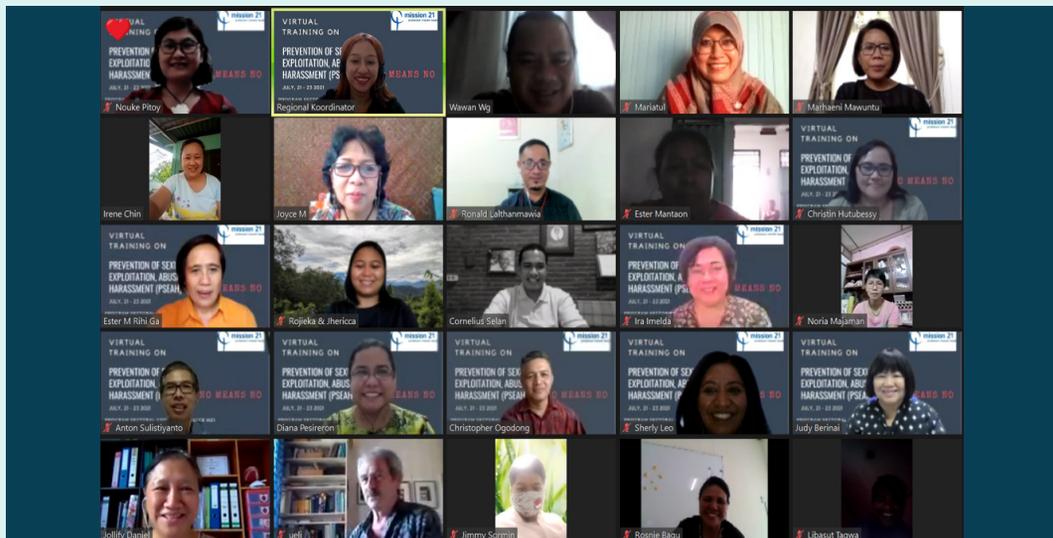
### Relations with the United Church of Canada

The CCA and the United Church of Canada (UCC) had a virtual consultation on 8 June 2021 to discuss the ongoing and upcoming programme plans in 2021 and to share the updated news on the present situation in Asia under the COVID-19 pandemic. Patti Talbot and Josefina Forcadilla from the UCC and Dr Mathews George Chunakara, Rev. Grace Moon, Jay Roy Tipayan, and Ruth Mathen from CCA attended the meeting.

### Relations with the Evangelische Mission Weltweit

The CCA and the Evangelische Mission Weltweit (EMW) had a virtual meeting on 7 December 2021. Rev. Dr Eckhard Zemmrich and Constanze Ennen from EMW and Dr Mathews George Chunakara, Rev. Grace Moon, and Rosiana Purnomo from CCA attended the meeting. The recent situation in Asia, CCA's activities during the pandemic time, and future partnership between EMW and CCA were discussed at the meeting.

### Relations with Mission21: CCA Staff at Mission21's training on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH)



CCA Staff at Mission21's training on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH)

Two staff members, Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia and Rosiana Purnomo, attended the training on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH), which was organised by Mission21 Asia Regional Office. The training was conducted virtually from 21 to 23 July 2021. The main objectives were to raise

awareness about the occurrence of SEAH and to establish mechanisms to prevent SEAH in Mission21's partner organisations. Various topics were addressed across three days of sessions, which covered theological perspectives, leadership culture, PSEAH policies and procedures, and also complaints mechanism and case handling.

### **Relations with Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA)**

The CCA and the FTESEA had a virtual meeting on 22 October 2021 to discuss the project of developing the digital library of CCA's theological resources and historical documents and the coordination of theological education and training in Asia in future. Dr Dorcas Gordon, Dr David Esterline, and Dr Henry Wilson from the FTESEA, and Dr Mathews George and Rev. Grace Moon from CCA attended the meeting.

### **Relations with Ecclesiastical and Confessional Bodies**

#### **Relation with the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC)**

The online ICFLC meeting was held on 20 April 2021 and attended by 10 delegates of the ICFLC's constituency member organisations and partner organisations and was organised to amend the Constitution

of ICFLC and to discuss the progress of ongoing projects funded by FLC.

The 41<sup>st</sup> ICFLC's annual meeting was held virtually from 18 to 23 October 2021 and was attended by all the representatives of its eleven member organisations. The main agenda of the meeting was to discuss the allocation of block grants to the members as well as to screen the project grants and scholarship grants. Given the shortfall in FLC offering and lack of ownership in FLC's prayer movement, a special meeting would be convened to elaborate on the future direction of FLC's programmes and the sustainability of its prayer movement.

The Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC), initiated in 1956, and linked to CCA for the first several years, is now a worldwide ecumenical fellowship of prayer of Christian women for justice, peace, and reconciliation. Rev. Grace Moon is attending to FLC matters on behalf of CCA.

***"We need to learn more readily to accept that this world is no heaven, and perhaps go one step further and see pain and suffering as evidence, probably a sort of precursor, of something better that is yet to come. We need to place our trust in God and hold on to our faith in God. Our faith in God, with the hope of reaching the destination in our journey, must sustain us. We need to find strength to face the ups and downs in this arduous journey, and it is through these ups and downs that we will grow in faith. If God allows pain, he will give us the strength to go through it, and he will show us the way out of it. Isaiah 41:10 can serve as a reminder to us all: 'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand'."***

***- Dr Mathews George Chunakara  
General Secretary's Report to  
CCA Executive Committee Meeting-2021***



## **MISSION IN UNITY AND CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY**

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To accompany churches in Asia to strengthen the Church's mission and witness in multi-religious contexts.
- To assist member churches and councils of the CCA in revitalising and nurturing the unity of churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia.
- To develop contextual theological undergirding for mission and witness, while addressing emerging issues in Asia.
- To strengthen collaboration and cooperation among churches and various ecumenical actors in Asia and from other parts of the world who are engaged in mission and witness in Asia.
- To initiate, facilitate, and strengthen ecumenical theological initiatives in Asia.

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## Congress of Asian Theologians

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### Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS)-X Advisory Committee Meeting

9 April 2021

CCA organised the CATS Advisory Committee meeting via an online platform on 9 April 2021. The Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS) was initiated in 1997 with the purpose of stimulating theological thinking among younger Asia theologians and to help articulate Asian theologies and to cultivate new methodologies of doing theology in the Asian context.

The main objectives of the meeting were to brainstorm and develop a relevant theme and the sub-themes, to identify issues and themes for workshop sessions related to the theme and the emerging and challenging issues in Asia. The Committee discussed the present pandemic situation in Asia and the emerging theological agendas in the pandemic and the post-

pandemic era. The Committee proposed that the theme of CATS-X highlight two main topics, which are 'Will of God' and 'Healing and Restoration of Community', related to the theme of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of CCA, "God, Renew us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation".

The CATS-X will be scheduled to be held in advance of the CCA Assembly bringing together 100 selected Asian theologians, theological educators, research scholars, and especially young theologians.

The Advisory Committee of CATS consists of representatives of CCA, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Association of Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA), the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC). The meeting was attended by Bishop Dr Daniel Thiagarajah, Rev. Prince Devanandan, Dr Sawako Fujiwara, and Dr Estela Padilla from FABC.

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## Education Theological Education and Leadership Development in New Churches

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### Contextual Theology Training for Faculties of Bible Schools in Burmese Refugee Camps



Online Contextual Theology Training for  
Faculties of Bible Schools in Burmese  
Refugee Camps

For the last several years, the CCA has conducted theological training programmes for the faculty members of bible schools situated in the refugee camps along Myanmar-Thailand borderline in Thailand. The aim was to cater to those who have not had opportunities to undergo systematic theological education. There are 812 students and 121 teachers in different refugee camps in Thailand. In collaboration with the Theological Education department of Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Church (KKBC), the CCA assisted them to organise contextual theology training for the bible school teachers.

The training focused on assisting the teachers in biblical interpretations leading

to contextual theological education, promoting relevant pedagogy method and curricula, exchanging faculty members among the bible schools, and developing teaching materials on Karen theology. Due to travel restrictions and lock-down situation in Thailand, Training was held virtually from 18–19 October 2021 and was attended by around 42 faculty members from eight bible schools. On 15–16 November 2021, the teachers of KKBBSC at Maelah refugee camp organised an in-person follow-up meeting to share all

that had been discussed with other bible schools in the October training and to have workshop on teaching curriculum for the coming semesters. Rev. Dr Saw Alwyn, the director of KKBC–Theological Education Department, in his closing remarks, commented, “We really appreciate the CCA and its friends who support our ministry to develop theological education programmes of eight bible schools and to nurture our Karen youths as our future leaders. We really expect great things from God, attempting great things for God.”



Participants (partial view) of the Contextual Theology Training for Faculties of Bible Schools in Burmese Refugee Camps

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### Scholarships and Exchange for Theological Education

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The CCA scholarship is for theological students from countries where there is a lack of theological education facilities and to equip pastors and young leaders for a holistic ministry by creating opportunities of furthering their theological study or joining short-term academic course.

In 2021, the CCA Scholarship was awarded to two theological students from the Protestant Church in East Timor for their study at Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Abdiel in Indonesia. Rev. John G. Mathew, studying for his doctoral course at Yonsei University, Korea was supported for his dormitory fee and travel back to his home country.



## **ECUMENICAL LEADERSHIP FORMATION AND ECUMENICAL SPIRITUALITY**

### **OBJECTIVES**

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

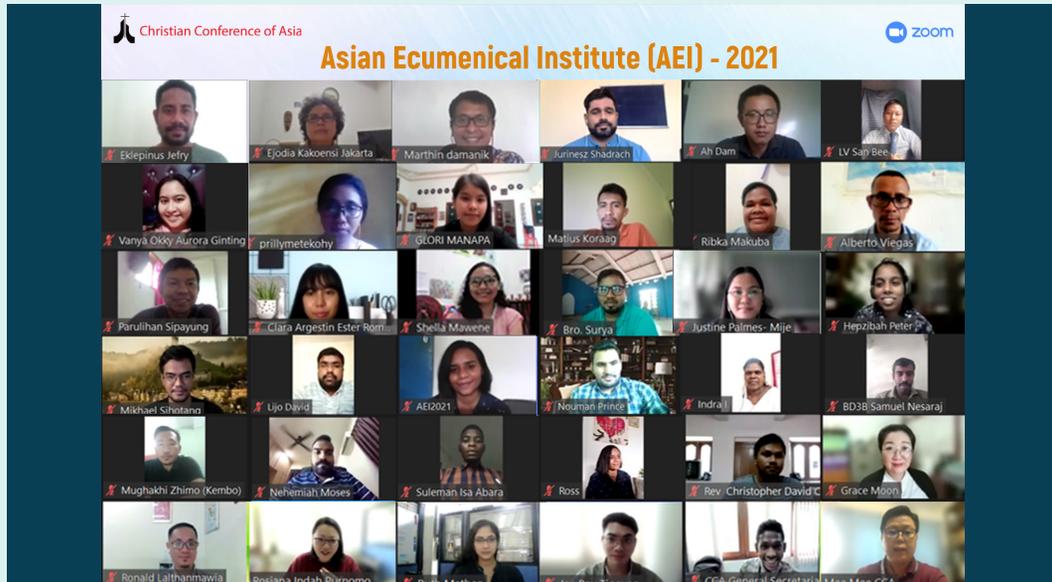
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## Asian Ecumenical Institute

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### Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI)-2021

18 October–19 November 2021



Students of the Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI)-2021

The Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI), the ecumenical formation and leadership development training programme conducted annually by the CCA, was held online this year under the thematic thrust 'God's Assurance of Healing and Restoration'. Twenty-six students selected from CCA's constituencies came together in order to be equipped with greater clarity and commitment to ecumenism and to increase their awareness of emerging realities and issues in Asia with a biblical theological undergirding so as to be able to respond effectively and contextually to the emerging concerns in Asia in a wider ecumenical perspective.

The faculty members of the AEI-2021 included renowned ecumenists, theologians, and social practitioners. They were Rev. Dr Joas Adiprasetya (Professor, Jakarta Theological Seminary, Indonesia), Dr

Wesley Ariarajah (Emeritus professor, Drew University, USA), Dr Sharon Bong (Associate Professor, Monash University, Malaysia), Dr Mathews George Chunakara (General Secretary, CCA), Rev. Dr Prince Dibeela (former general secretary, of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa), Fr. Dr K.M. George (Principal, Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kottayam, India), Rev. Ejodia Kakoensi (humanitarian worker, Indonesia), Rev. Dr Joseph Komar (Professor, Seminari Theoloji Malaysia), Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia (Programme Coordinator, CCA), Rev. Dr Arulampalam Stephen (Professor, Theological College of Lanka, Sri Lanka), Rev. Dr Tik-Wah Wong (Bishop, Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia), and Rev. Dr Ji Zhang (theologian at the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia).

The course for AEI-2021 was divided into three major parts: the first was focused on ecumenism and ecumenical movement in Asia which were grounded in biblical and theological bases, the second part covered several topics and issues on the specific thematic thrust, and the last one was on leadership development training. The students were given the opportunity to present and share the challenges and concerns faced in their national contexts and the way the churches and national ecumenical bodies respond to them.

Towards the end of the training course, the students were given the opportunity to make their individual presentation on a specific topic of their preference, in which they also shared their plan of action to address specific concerns in their local context. All AEI-2021 students also joined the three-day programme of CCA's Consultation on Asian Churches Building Good Governance and Accountability in Serving Humanity, as part of their leadership development training.

The poster for the Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI)-2021 features the following elements:

- Logo:** Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) logo.
- Dates:** 18 OCTOBER - 19 NOVEMBER 2021.
- Zoom:** Zoom logo.
- Website:** www.cca.org.hk (vertical text on the left).
- Title:** Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI)-2021 'GOD'S ASSURANCE OF HEALING AND RESTORATION'.
- Faculty Members (17 portraits):**
  - Dr. Mathews George Chunakara
  - Dr. Wesley Ariarajah
  - Dr. K.M. George
  - Bishop. D. Thiagarajah
  - Dr. Prince Dibeela
  - Dr. Henriette H Lebang
  - Dr. Fernando Enns
  - Supaporn Yarnasarn
  - Dr. J Adigrasetya
  - Dr. Sharon Bong
  - Shirin Samuel
  - Dr. Tik-Wah Wong
  - Dr. Ji Zhang
  - Stephen Arulampalam
  - Dr. Joseph Komar
  - Grace Moon
  - Dr. R Lalthanmawia
  - Rosiana Purnomo
- Application deadline:** 28 September 2021.

#### Faculty of the Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI)-2021

A special event was held for the students on Thursday, 28 October 2021. The CCA specially invited some prominent ecumenical leaders in Asia to have an interactive dialogue with the students. Rev. Dr Daniel Thiagarajah (CCA's Programme Committee member), Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang (former CCA's General

Secretary), Shirin Samuel (former president of ICFLC), Supaporn Yarnasarn (former President of CCT Women, currently a member of CCA's Executive Committee), and Rev. Jimmy Immanuel Sormin (AEI-2017 alumni, currently PGI's Executive Secretary) came and shared their longstanding ecumenical experiences to motivate and

encourage the young ecumenists. Designed as an intergenerational conversation, the students were given the opportunity to share their concerns and challenges which were then responded to by the leaders, thus making the ecumenical dialogue a platform to exchange learning and experience.

The students of the AEI-2021 opined that the course helped them in many ways: develop their own theology and perspective, be more sensitive to the

struggles of other fellow creations and be respectful and inclusive. The students also affirmed God's assurance of healing and restoration to all creation, therefore re-affirmed their call as co-workers in God's oikos.

The AEI-2021 concluded with a valedictory session on 19 November 2021. The students prepared and led the closing worship which included various expressions of their commitment and reflections.

## Women Leadership Development

### Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly Follow-up meeting

4 December 2021



Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA) Follow-up Meeting

Twenty-two women from across Asia and beyond who attended the Asian Ecumenical Women's assembly in Hsinchu, Taiwan in 2019 met again after two years to share updates, experiences, and support. The meeting was held virtually through the Zoom platform on Saturday, 4 December 2021.

Ms Supaporn Yarnasarn, a member of the CCA Executive Committee, welcomed the

participants on behalf of the CCA. In her welcoming remarks, Ms Yarnasarn drew a link to the second week of Advent, which would be a moment to remember Jesus' incarnation and the fact that He incarnated himself in order to be with human beings. She encouraged the attendees to always remember the time and day we experienced with Jesus that made us who we were – a witness of the love of God to all creation.

The participants then met in small groups to discuss different topics. The small group discussions/workshops were led by the participants.

Vivi Wangka (Hong Kong) facilitated a discussion on migrant and gender norms. She shared about the way the pandemic was an added burden to migrant workers, including an increase in cases of sexual violence. She also shared some challenges faced by migrant workers who experienced violence, such as their hesitancy to report their traumatic experiences out of fear of losing their jobs. She also pointed to the churches' failure to speak up for migrant workers' rights. She encouraged churches to review their theological outlook on migrant domestic workers so as to provide contemporary perspectives on domestic work and domestic workers.

A conversation on Asian women leadership was facilitated by Dr Eun-ha Kim (Korea). She revisited the life and witness of Henriette Visser't Hooft and highlighted the importance of developing sisterhood

among women missionaries and women in different areas of ministries. She reaffirmed the imperative that women should always support women, and not themselves become hindrances to each other.

Dr Tan Swee Bee (Malaysia) facilitated a workshop on doing missions today. She shared today's situation in which major activities were shifted online. She also shared challenges arising from this shift, such as internet and connectivity access, and how people grew more individualistic. In the context of church and its mission, she brought to attention the need for young people to be engaged in discipleship through creative channels. Lastly, the group called the churches to pay more attention to the mental health aspects of their members.

The participants testified that the meeting was a meaningful experience in which they were given the opportunity to rejuvenate, share real issues and experiences, and also empower and accompany each other in spirit and prayers.

## Ecumenical Spirituality and Nurturing of Contextual Liturgical Traditions

### Asia Sunday–2021

16 May 2021



Asia Sunday–2021

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) facilitated a virtual Asia Sunday worship service on 16 May with the participation of people across Asia and beyond. Remembering the promise given to all God's people in Exodus 15:26, the Asia Sunday-2021 virtual service focused on theme, "I am the Lord Who Heals You and Restores Your Health".

A specially prepared liturgy was used for the online worship service, which was led by 30 ecclesiastical and ecumenical leaders from 27 countries and regions in Asia where the CCA's member churches, councils, and partner organisations are based. The worship service was viewed by the faithful, who participated in it through the virtual platforms and social media pages of CCA and related networks from around the world.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of the CCA said at the beginning of the observance that we were coming together once again to beseech God's divine intervention as COVID-19 continues to aggravate the vulnerabilities of humanity, amidst the crucial conditions that we were undergoing, and reminded everyone to reflect on the fragility of human life.

The homily during the service was delivered by Bishop Dr Daniel Thiagarajah from Sri Lanka. Bishop Thiagarajah noted in his sermon that we were being called to new possibilities for the church's ministry in Asia so that we could be fruitful in tough times when we faced our fears, knowing that Christ was with us and that Christ would make his comforting and forgiving presence known to his people in Asia in new ways.

Bishop Thiagarajah continued, "The gift of Christ's abiding love calls us to 'listen carefully' to God's statutes, and to open

our hearts and minds. Jesus' promise is that whatever fears you have that are barriers to receiving the fruitfulness of God's love will be taken away, and your life will be opened to new possibilities so you and the church can bear much fruit. Then as you face the frightening reality of COVID-19 in your nations and in the Church, you will hear Jesus' words of resurrection life spoken to you: 'My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples' (John 15:8)."

The worship service started with a liturgical prayer by Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata, the Moderator of the CCA, and concluded with the benediction which was pronounced by His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan from the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church of India.

The facilitators representing the member churches and councils of the CCA at the Asia Sunday-2021 online worship service were: Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata, Moderator of the CCA, from the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan in Indonesia; Rev. Dr Chang Sang, World Council of Churches President from South Korea; His Beatitude Dr Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan, Metropolitan of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India; Bishop Melzar Labuntong, United Church of Christ in the Philippines; Bishop Dr Daniel Thiagarajah, Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India in Sri Lanka; Bishop I Nyoma Agustinus, Protestant Christian Church in Bali; Rev. Fakafo Kaio, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand; Rt. Rev. Dushanth Rodrigo, Church of Ceylon in Sri Lanka; Very Rev. Philip Thomas Cor Episcopa, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in Malaysia; Rev. Terence Corkin, Uniting Church in Australia; Rev. Stephen Hsin Te Hsu, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan; Rev. Dr Khamdeng Kounthapanya, General

Secretary of the Lao Evangelical Church; Rev. Aiman Singh Gurung, President of the National Council of Churches in Nepal; Rev. Po Kam Cheong, Hong Kong Council of the Churches of Christ in China; Rev. Rungtiwa Mamo, Church of Christ in Thailand; Rev. U-Peng Lee, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan; Sotheavy Srey, Alliance for Conflict Transformation in Cambodia; Nargus Azhar, Church of Pakistan; Gregg Nicholson, Asian Evangelical Alliance; Babet Julie Aurelie, Anglican Church in Mauritius; Tandin Wangyal, National Council of Churches in Bhutan; Yusmiati Vistamika Wangka, Centre for Migrant Domestic Workers in Hong Kong; Jun Sumimoto, National Christian Council in Japan; Julmia Lamhot da Silva, Protestant Church in Timor Leste; Ani Christy Manvelian, Armenian Orthodox

Church in Iran; and Kappia Morales, Philippines Independent Church.

Asia Sunday services were offered at the congregational levels in different Asian countries on 16 May: in Pakistan; Asia Sunday service was conducted by the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan at the Foreman Christian College Chapel in Lahore; in South Korea at the Hanshin Presbyterian Church (PROK), organised by the National Council of Churches in Korea; and in Indonesia by the Gereja Kristen Injili di Tanah Papua.

Asia Sunday is observed each year on the Sunday before Pentecost, and it coincides with the anniversary of CCA's founding in 1957.



Asia Sunday–2021

## Strengthening Family Values in a Changing Asia

**Regional Consultation: 'Family Life and Family Values: Transitions from Tradition to Modernity'**  
3–5 August 2021

The CCA initiated an online regional consultation/symposium on 'Family Life and Family Values: Transitions from

Tradition to Modernity' to enable the CCA's member constituencies to reflect upon the modern demands and stresses upon the family today, and to develop new insights and intergenerational strategies to increase pastoral attention and engagement with all members of the family.

**Christian Conference of Asia**

Virtual Symposium

Register now!  
<https://bit.ly/cca-family>

**Asia Regional Symposium**

**'Family Life and Family Values:  
 Transitions from Tradition to Modernity'**

Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup>  
 to  
 Thursday 5<sup>th</sup>,  
 August 2021

13:00-17:00 PM  
 (1-5 PM) Bangkok  
 (Thailand ) Time

www.cca.org.hk

Facebook LIVE  
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Dr. Mathews George Chunakara  
 CCA

Tanta Wrespati  
 Indonesia

Dr. Youn Joo Lee  
 South Korea

Vijula Arulanantham  
 Sri Lanka

Fr. Emmanuel K Rozario  
 Bangladesh

Dr. Sarala Samuel  
 India

Dr. Wuu-Fu Wang  
 Taiwan

Dr. Havilah Dharamraj  
 India

Speakers of the Regional Consultation on 'Family Life and Family Values:  
 Transitions from Tradition to Modernity'

The symposium was held virtually through the Zoom platform from Tuesday to Thursday, 3–5 August 2021, with the participation of 50 specially invited representatives comprising clergy, lay leaders, pastoral counsellors, social workers, and family healthcare providers from CCA's constituencies across Asia.

Addressing the participants of the Symposium at the opening session, the CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara, said that the changes taking place in the world today had enormous impacts on our lives, communities, and societies, the family being one such area where such changes were evidenced in manifold ways. He highlighted that the concept of family had changed and this had been affecting family formation, household structure, marriage, work-life balance, and the wellbeing of all its members, especially the care given to elderly in

the family. Dr Mathews George further mentioned that these changes that have happened in family life – increased divorce and separation, domestic violence, inter-generational conflicts, social problems, and drug abuse – indicated the family's inability to cope with the pressures of the modern life. The General Secretary hoped that the symposium would provide a platform for exchanging ideas and learning from each other's experiences on how families could best be supported during the time of crisis.

On the first day of the symposium, Dr Youn Joo Lee, Director of LPJ 'Maeum' Psychiatric Clinic in Seoul, Korea, delivered a presentation on 'Changing Family Values in Asia: tradition versus modernity, diversities in family values'. Dr Lee drew parallels between the unit of the family and the Trinitarian model of unity and oneness. She encouraged families to adapt such a model since it would encourage the preservation

of the uniqueness, individuality, and autonomy of each member, while also promoting support, empowerment, and full actualisation of all family members. She further stated that it could be achieved by focusing on communication and positive cooperation, mutual respect and trust, autonomy, and freedom.

The second thematic plenary session was on 'Families in Transition in Asia: Marriage, Divorce, and Legal Bases', which was delivered by Vijula Arulanantham, an attorney at law from Sri Lanka. Attn. Arulanantham's presentation enabled the participants to discuss the role of churches in preventing the breakdown of marriage and the support required by families. She also suggested post-marital counselling and revisiting of certain obsolete traditional or cultural codes that no longer aligned with the teachings of the church. She encouraged the participants to reconsider the church's approaches to divorce and remarriage.

A biblical-theological perspective on family life and values was presented by Dr Havilah Dharamraj, a professor of Old Testament at the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, to mark the start of the second day of the symposium. Dr Dharamraj explained the Biblical perspective on the resolution and reconciliation of familial concerns and conflicts by analysing and interpreting the context of 2 Samuel 14 which covered the dysfunction between David and his son, Absalom. She highlighted that unwillingness and delay in reconciliation could lead to bigger tragedies, and thus it was important to resolve discord and contentions among family members.

Following the biblical theological reflection was a comprehensive overview of '*Amoris Laetitia*'. Fr. Emmanuel K. Rozario, Executive Secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) Office for Laity, elucidated upon 'The Papal Exhortation on Love in the Family: "*Amoris Laetitia*"

(The Joy of Love)', while demonstrating its lessons for pastoral ministry and care for families. He recommended that the pastoral approaches could include long-term and short-term preparations and counselling to accompany married couples and families. He reiterated that the purpose of '*Amoris Laetitia*' was to encourage families and bring hope to those in difficult situations, help Christian families to persevere with fidelity and patience, and experience God's love.

Co-addressing the theme on 'Challenges of digitalisation in family life: Parenting and Isolation', Sr. Rhodora Asuncion Alarcon from the Philippines shared the pressures upon parents who had to take up greater responsibility considering the education of their children amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. She also highlighted the urban-rural divide and disparities in household wealth which gave rise to two new classes, namely the "information haves and the information have nots", and she shared the challenges of digitalisation for parents on either side of the divide. She concluded her presentation by sharing strategies for "positive digital parenting" which included open communication, regular interest in the children's online activities, and active protection of children's digital identity and privacy.

Tantu Wrespati, a psychologist from Indonesia, spoke about the six essential qualities of the family, namely commitment, appreciation and affection, positive communication, enjoyable time together, ability to cope with stress and crises, and spiritual well-being. He also addressed the issues of miscommunication and misunderstandings caused due to "generation gaps" among family members.

A concern on the impact of changing healthcare on family in tradition and modernity was addressed at the symposium as well. Dr Wen-Fu Wang, a neurologist from Taiwan, whose presentation titled 'Healthcare for the

elderly and advanced medical care', shared the best practices followed in his medical centre for addressing the health and wellness of the aged. Dr Wang emphasised the necessity of comprehensive long-term care systems that would engage hospitals and churches in strategic partnerships to cater to the critical needs of the elderly populace. Hospitals, especially Christian hospitals, had the mission to provide health promotion programmes and case management for elderly patients. He further added that community members must be actively engaged in looking out for the elderly, as frailty and dementia could be prevented through early detection and aggressive intervention.

Speaking from traditional medical care perspective, Dr Sarala Samuel, Senior General Manager of Kerala Ayurveda Pharmaceuticals in India, deliberated on the value and the effectiveness of traditional medicine and its extensive accounts of use and experiences from generation to generation in the Indian context. Dr Samuel shared several traditional medicinal practices in India and the scientific bases

for the efficacy of traditional medicines that benefit the physical, physiological, sensorial, and spiritual health of all family members irrespective of their age.

On the third and last day of the symposium, challenges for different age groups and the best practices of ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic were shared. Rev. Dewi Agustina (from Pasundan Christian Church in Indonesia) and Supaporn Yarnasarn (President of the Asian Christian Women's Committee from Thailand) were the speakers at the panel discussion on 'Tradition and Values in Transition: Intergenerational Relations with the Aged Family Members'. Rev. Agustina shared the importance of classifying different generations of the population as a basis for mapping the right models of ministry, which varied according to the demography of the congregations. Speaking of family values in the cultural context of GKP, she highlighted respect and responsibility, religious and cultural tolerance, courtesy and hospitality, solidarity and kindness, and clan associations.



Participants of the Regional Consultation on 'Family Life and Family Values: Transitions from Tradition to Modernity'

Ms Yarnasarn shared anecdotes and instances of how family members tended to support each other, and focused on respecting the individuality of family members, caring for all persons, and being responsible for each other's wellbeing. She also spoke about the gap between the elderly and grandchildren, saying that grandparents longed to spend time with the younger ones, who were instead preoccupied with their gadgets. Thus, the passing on of traditional wisdom and learning was hindered.

The session on 'Churches' role and engagement in accompanying families' invited rich sharing and discussions from among the participants. Rev. Jenne Jessica Pieter from the Protestant Church in Maluku, Indonesia, spoke about family service and ministries in her church. She shared the different strategies adopted at both the synod and congregational level for the spiritual growth and development

of all members. She also shared the special measures taken for children and youth, such as dedicating ten percent of the church's income to focus on children, and youth engagement strategies such as podcasts and other online means. Other topics discussed included issues of unemployment and economic insecurity, domestic violence in newly married couples and new families, the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children, and the necessity of establishing welfare desks.

The General Secretary of the CCA, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, in his closing remarks said that the symposium was an opportunity to reflect on the scenario of what has happened to the family in the last few decades, and how such societal changes are affecting families, especially the children, new generations and working parents as well as aged parents and grandparents.

***"The gift of Christ's abiding love calls us to 'listen carefully' to God's statutes, and to open our hearts and minds. Jesus' promise is that whatever fears you have that are barriers to receiving the fruitfulness of God's love will be taken away, and your life will be opened to new possibilities so you and the church can bear much fruit. Then as you face the frightening reality of COVID-19 in your nations and in the Church, you will hear Jesus' words of resurrection life spoken to you: 'My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples' (John 15:8)."***

***- Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah  
Homily on Asia Sunday-2021***



## **BUILDING PEACE AND MOVING BEYOND CONFLICTS**

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To analyse the context of conflicts and develop methodologies of churches' participation in peace building; and,
- To assist churches in their initiatives in responding to conflict situations and raise awareness through inter-religious platforms to contribute and sustain peaceful societies.

## Peace with Justice and Human Security Accompanying Churches and Communities in Conflict Situation

### 'Overcoming Challenges of Inequality in Asia: Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in the context of COVID-19 Pandemic': WCC-CCA Joint Regional Consultation

4 June 2021



Speakers of the WCC-CCA Joint Regional Consultation on 'Overcoming Challenges of Inequality in Asia: Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in the context of COVID-19 Pandemic'

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) jointly organised a Regional Consultation on 'Overcoming Challenges of Inequality in Asia: Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic' on 4 June 2021. It was organised specifically to bring out the myriad challenges caused due to the surge of the coronavirus and highlighted major issues in Asia such as vaccine inequity, gender-based violence, injustice against indigenous people, and insecurities among youths.

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP) is a church accompaniment programme that was initiated after the WCC's 2013 Assembly in Busan, Korea. This year's

Asia Regional PJP was held as part of an ongoing series of online consultations and collaborations of the WCC and Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REOs) in Africa, Latin America, North America, the Caribbean, the Pacific, and Europe.

Rev. Dr Sang Chang, the WCC President for Asia, delivered the opening remarks. She said that the ecumenical movement had called on the churches to live out their journey of faith through the PJP, which had taken on added dimensions of complexity in the past eighteen months. "Churches in Asia must commit with one heart and mind our solidarity for those who are suffering, and move towards more practical ways of living out justice and peace. We must

continue to bring hope, faith, and solidarity in fellowship around the world," said Dr Chang.

Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri, the WCC Deputy General Secretary, shared insights gleaned through similar conversations held in other continents and said, "Inequalities of health and wealth are evident around the world. However, we need to learn from each other, support each other, respond in solidarity in a timely manner with compassion and empathy as one body of Christ to overcome this crisis."

Dr Jacob T. John, an eminent virologist in India, shared the challenges related to vaccine distribution in Asia. He said that health and healing was an integral component of our faith and duty, and that the aspirational goal of eradicating the 'nasty visitor' permanently was feasible and possible with enhanced global cooperation which would ensure real vaccine equity and access, despite the economic status of countries.

Hanbeet Rhee, from South Korea, spoke on the issues of women, girls, and gender-based violence. Highlighting best practices, she shared some ways in churches and the ecumenical movement in Asia were 'comforting, encouraging, and empowering women by inviting them into the public sphere' through support programmes and provision of safe spaces.

Beverly Longid of the International Indigenous Peoples' Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation elaborated upon how the rights of indigenous peoples and communities were curtailed as lockdown and containment led to fewer provisions for communications among

peoples' networks and movements, which resulted in increased militarisation and authoritarianism in Asia. She provided examples of how different countries had misused the pandemic to consolidate their own absolute power while undermining the rights and dignity of indigenous people and ethnic minorities.

Fr. Rony John, an ordained minister from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India, provided the youth perspective on the threat to livelihoods, the rise of unemployment, and issues of mental health amidst the grave chaos and disorder caused by the pandemic.

Dr Manoj Kurian from the World Council of Churches shared his views on the direction of moving forward in togetherness said that it was our moral and ethical imperative to support each other, and mobilise together to challenge the existing inequalities in our society.

In his closing remarks, Dr Mathews George Chunakara said, "Although the inequity that persists in many forms is worrying and of great concern, we must continue to preserve our hope and move forward."

Encapsulating the focus of the consultation, Dr Mathews George Chunakara said, "As the surge of COVID-19 continues to cause serious concern, we are hard-pressed but not distressed, we are perplexed but not destroyed. Let us strengthen our collaborations and accompaniment at every level—among churches and councils, CSOs and FBOs, states and non-state actors—as we move forward towards recovering and rebuilding from the worst effects of the global pandemic."

## Freedom of Religion, Rights of Religious Minorities, and Constitutional Guarantees in Asia

### Asia Regional Consultation on Freedom of Religion, Rights of Religious Minorities, and Constitutional Guarantees in Asia'

5–8 October 2021



Participants of Asia Regional Consultation on 'Freedom of Religion, Rights of Religious Minorities, and Constitutional Guarantees in Asia'; in centre, Dr Fernand de Varennes, UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues

The Christian Conference of Asia organised a four-day Asia Regional Consultation on 'Freedom of Religion, Rights of Religious Minorities, and Constitutional Guarantees in Asia' from 5–8 October 2021, which was attended by over 50 participants from across the region.

"The respect for the right to freedom of religion is a common good and political virtue, and it is a fundamental prerequisite for a just, peaceful and humane society. The right to freedom of religion or belief is often violated by governments as well as individuals, acting either on their own

behalf or as members of majority groups. Widespread and grievous violations of this freedom affect the stability, security and adversely impact the daily lives of individuals, families, and communities, especially their peaceful coexistence and the overall wellbeing of society', stated Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the CCA General Secretary, in the thematic address at the opening session of the Asia Regional Consultation.

"Although the international community has been taking significant initiatives to protect the freedom of religion, religious

minorities in several countries are becoming targets of discrimination; the religious minorities in several countries in Asia face acts of violence or hostility and even persecutions, merely because of their faith being different from that of the majority religions as well as owing to their adherence to a certain religion," added Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

Dr Chunakara outlined a detailed history of the evolution of the legal processes leading to the drafting of the right to freedom of religion and belief (FoRB), international declarations, conventions, and accords, and an overview of the constitutional guarantees of FoRB as currently prevalent in different Asian countries. He also explained the substantial contributions of the ecumenical community to the discourse around the drafting of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which deals with freedom of religion.



Basil Fernando of the Asian Human Rights Commission in the second session on 'The Politicisation of Religion and the Religionisation of Politics,' stated that religion was manipulated to legitimise those in power. He analysed the different types of repression that prevailed in different Asian countries.

"Religious fundamentalism acts as a camouflage for other deeper sociopolitical realities. In actual fact, there are no religious conflicts but rather conflicts in the name of religion, such as struggles for power, control, or ownership of resources. Ideology must be distinguished from religion as a limited political end, manufactured to support narrow ideas or to claim certain things," stated Basil Fernando.

Mr Fernando, known as a doyen of human rights defence in Asia, shared examples of how religion was manipulated to legitimize those in power and analysed the different types of repression that prevailed in different Asian countries.

"The concept of cooperation is at the heart of various influences and forces, and religion, among these, is what has contributed most idealistically and comprehensively to humanity," said Mr Fernando. He called upon the participants to re-assert their Christian identity as being rooted in 'the love of the other, the love of the neighbour'.

'Combating Resurgence of Religious Extremism in Asia: Role of Religions' was the focus of the thematic discussions on the second day.

Faith leaders belonging to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity affirmed in unison through their presentations that exclusivism was the precursor to extremism, and that hospitality, respect, and acceptance formed the essence of the values and ethos of all four major religions. The panel suggested different forms of joint action and mutual cooperation to defeat extremist tendencies.



Swamini Brahmajprananda Saraswati, a Hindu nun from India, referred to the historical respect and acceptance that Hinduism had accorded to other religions. “Hinduism is a vision of the interconnectedness of all beings and their underlying oneness. We recognise that all religions do not function in the same way, but are valid forms of worship; and that people have the freedom to practice their own religion,” shared Swamini Saraswati. She also shared the challenges of religious extremism, terming the emergence of certain new strands of nationalism and fundamentalism as a ‘push-back reaction’ against societal discord and conflict.

The Venerable Napan Santibhaddo Thawornbanjob, a Buddhist monk from Thailand, shared a practical overview of how the power of religious leaders could be harnessed for social good: “We share a message of coexistence—not only during periods of difficulty but also during periods of normalcy.” The Venerable Thawornbanjob spoke of the role of Thai Buddhist monks at the grassroots during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as opening up temples for isolation and medical help, and preparing and distributing food to the affected—at times even breaking customary rules to save lives. He also provided examples of how the monks had

leveraged social media and online forums to nourish their followers with ‘spiritual food’.

Alissa Wahid, an Islamic leader from the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia with over 60 million members, differentiated between religious exclusivism and religious extremism, stating that the former was a precursor to the latter. “The mainstreaming of religious exclusivism is a worrying trend... this must serve as a wake-up call for us. We must be as aware of religious exclusivism as we are of religious extremism, as exclusivism can spiral into extremism,” shared Ms Wahid.

Ms Wahid, who also represented the Gusdurian Network in Indonesia, offered the models of several best practices for sustainable and structural change as implemented in her country. One approach was the ‘Integrated Strategic Approach’ which involved ‘Rights-based (public policy)’, ‘Respect-based (power of CSOs and FBOs)’, ‘Resilience-based (grassroots/people level)’, and ‘Faith-based (theological frameworks)’. She also provided a conceptual framework for religious moderation.

Yamini Ravindran, the Executive Director for the Asia Evangelical Alliance’s (AEA) Religious Liberty Commission, shared the Christian justification for the pursuit of religious freedom, which included the differentiation between religious and political authority, the idea of conscience (as seen in Romans 14:5), Imago Dei, and Jesus’ use of persuasion rather than coercion, and the renunciation of armed protection.

Ms Ravindran, who also serves as the Associate Secretary-General of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) further shared the Christian vision of religious pluralism and elaborated upon ‘confronting the extremism within’.

"Christian mission leaves no room for sentiments of supremacy or an attitude of triumphalism. Rather, it extends grace, hospitality, and a welcome that removes cause for religious animosity and violence, and even more specifically, aggressive or unethical modes of evangelism, which continue to be an allegation made against Christian communities operating in the contexts of multireligious settings," said Ms Ravindran.

The panel collectively affirmed the necessity of developing stronger interfaith networks and alliances to promote better understanding and relations at the macro level while engaging and strengthening the role of faith leaders as agents of change at the micro-level.

The focus of the third day of the Asia Regional Consultation was on constitutional guarantees in Southeast and South Asia. "Although a majority of Asian countries have strong constitutional provisions and guarantees to secure their citizens' freedom of religion and belief (FoRB), there are severe shortcomings in interpretation and implementation, or in upholding such principles in practice," observed two legal experts on the third day of the Asia Regional Consultation.



Eugene Yapp, Senior Fellow, Religious Freedom Institute's Southeast Asia Team, presented the Southeast Asian perspective on constitutional guarantees for freedom of religion.

"In order for FoRB to be secure, enhanced, and applicable to all human beings, we must comply with constitutional provisions and be consistent with international declarations. If constitutional guarantees are to be meaningful, there is a need for more contextualized or localized approaches based on ground realities—such as cultural particularities and contingencies of a local nature," said Mr Yapp, who was the Secretary-General of the Evangelical Alliance of Malaysia.

Mr Yapp also elaborated upon the role of the Church and its missional calling, stating that the Church must seek concrete expression for the flourishing of a diversity of cultures in social engagement and creative dialogue for the wellbeing of everyone, i.e., the common good.

"We become the expression of God's grace by bringing development and wellbeing to everyone. When people see the Church doing this, FoRB is cherished; and when FoRB is cherished, common religious, spiritual, and moral values will undergird inclusiveness for peaceful coexistence with a healthy respect for diversity. This allows for public institutions and agencies to be recalibrated for efficient deliveries and adequate protection—FoRB is then no longer viewed with suspicion, and constitutional guarantees become more meaningful," Mr Yapp pointed out.

Dr Faustina Pereira, an Advocate at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh delivered the South Asian perspective on constitutional guarantees for freedom of religion.

With examples from the Constitution of Bangladesh, Dr Pereira explained the presence and intersectionality of hidden spaces within constitutional provisions for action: "In our founding documents, what some may see as limiting caveats, we see as the opportunity in these articulated and unarticulated spaces within which we can find greater protections and flourish creatively...We can find answers within our constitutions, including negotiated unspoken spaces. This is where we can enact strategic advocacy."

Mr Yapp and Dr Pereira further shared sets of steps and recommendations for advocacy.

Dr Pereira recommended actions such as appropriately situating religious freedom within the complex web of competing and complementing freedoms, identifying those freedoms that are most directly under threat (such as freedom expression, thought, conscience) and exploring critical alliances across freedom movements (such as those combating the shrinking space for civil society, suppression of dissent, mal-development, etc.), exercising introspection within our own communities, recognizing sub-minorities within minority communities (i.e., those voices that are being left out or left behind), and pairing national platforms and tools (affirmative action, quota representation, etc.) with global frameworks (such as the UN's SDGs), among others.

Mr Yapp proposed the idea of dialogical engagement to enhance relationships, build trust, and identify common opportunities for solution-making. Such an approach did not insist on one's own rights but rather identified corresponding duties for a balanced, middle-ground position.



Speaking at a plenary session on the final day of the four-day consultation, a panel of experts comprised of Members of Parliament, legal luminaries, human rights defenders and religious leaders suggested the need for multi-pronged strategies for wider coalitions towards the common goal of the protection and promotion of the rights of minorities in Asia.

Grounded in their experiences and perspectives, the panellists outlined the hindrances to the protection of freedom of religion and rights of religious minorities and proposed effective ways to build relationships with other stakeholders.

M.A. Sumanthiran, a Member of Parliament from Sri Lanka, said that the closest allies present in our struggle to secure minority rights were, in fact, other minority groups themselves. Communities that were smaller in number tended to band together to defend common minority rights.

Mr Sumanthiran, a top human rights and constitutional lawyer in the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, further shared a strategy to dilute extremist tendencies in communities: "We have thought of pre-empting extremist situations by bringing together religious leaders in the country. Young people are involved in this

process, they visit different towns, bring leaders together, and encourage them to work together as a pre-emptive step to preventing any religious extremist attacks on any group or any particular incident from happening. We can tap into existing networks and revitalize such relationships at the grassroots.”

Shunila Ruth, a Member of Parliament from Pakistan, proposed new ways of dialogue saying, “Through a rights-based approach, we must pursue new ways of dialogue focusing on the integral development of all communities and going beyond theological discussions. Religion, culture, politics, and economics are not separate and must all be taken into account for constructive dialogue.”

Ms Ruth shared examples of certain initiatives taken by the current Pakistani government to robustly work on the resolution of religious conflicts, adding that it was the implementation of the laws that were a challenge, and not the laws themselves. “We don’t need more laws but need to change mindsets with greater awareness; religious leaders, especially the churches in Pakistan, can become allies in educating our own people”, stated Ms Shunila Ruth.

Prof. Syafiq A. Mughni, the Special Envoy of the President of Indonesia for Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation, talked about the existing challenges and interreligious tensions in his country. “Religion is not used as a moral foundation for political development or guidance for political interest, but as a vehicle to monopolise power at the expense of people from other religions,” said Prof. Mughni.

Prof. Mughni, who also serves as the Chairman of the Muhammadiyah Central Board in Indonesia, emphasised the

importance of trust and respect in interfaith dialogue for enhanced cooperation. He provided positive examples of how education was used to empower religious leaders and religious institutions in conflict-prone regions in Indonesia.

Andrew Khoo, Solicitor in the High Court of Malaya, Malaysia, shared the five marks of mission that could serve as guiding principles for the Church to more relevantly engage in FoRB work. He also shared non-traditional and alternative strategies for faith communities or FBOs to expand their work.

“The Church needs to look within and try to be a different, counter-cultural voice. If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem. Is the Church part of the institutionalized power structure, or the voice of the people, or somewhere in between? Is the Church protector or perpetrator?” asked Mr Khoo during his presentation.

John Dayal, a human rights activist and journalist from India, with five decades of experience, spoke of the barriers of extremism as well as of the decline of institutions that was further isolating minority groups in his country. He broke down the existing socio-political climate and called upon the Christian minority in India to refrain from playing into narratives of polarization and divisiveness, or pitting oneself against other minority groups in a tokenistic way in order to gain favour from those in power.

“What we seek from those in authority, the state, is a re-empowerment of the Constitution and our institutions, reviving and strengthening them with the power and the mandate to act without fear or favour,” said Dr Dayal.

The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Dr Fernand de Varennes, encouraged Asian churches to increase their engagement with the UN as part of their advocacy to promote minority rights.

Dr de Varennes provided an overview of the development and origin of human rights after the horrors of World War II, saying that humanity was then convinced 'that the rule of the majority has to answer to the greater moral and ethical authority of international human rights systems. He was of the opinion that 'the rulers, or majority in states could not be allowed to cross a certain line to commit genocide, atrocities, or other violations of human rights which were fundamentally against dignity, equality, justice, and peace'. However, Dr de Varennes also noted the massive increase in global violence against those belonging to religious minorities.

"We have reliable data that indicates three-fourth or more victims of hate speech and hate crimes are members of religious, ethnic, or linguistic minorities. At the same time, nationalist majority rhetoric has taken a sharper edge with politicians instrumentalising widespread fears and uncertainties in an unstable world for short-term political gain, to demonise and scapegoat minorities as the enemies, as criminals, as threats to social order," he said.

"The main threats and challenges to peace and the drivers of instability usually involve non-respect for the human rights of minorities, particularly practices which are discriminatory or deny fundamental rights, such as the freedom of religion," Dr de Varennes emphatically stated while referring to the disproportionate victimisation of the Rohingya Muslims in

Myanmar, the Shia in Yemen, the Hazara in Afghanistan, the Kashmiris in India, and the Muslims and Christians in Sri Lanka.

Speaking of the interrelations between the trampling of minority rights and statelessness, Dr de Varennes informed the participants that 75 percent of the world's stateless people belonged to minority groups and that despite the UN's campaign to eradicate statelessness by 2024, the opposite was happening.

Dr de Varennes pointed out how digital spaces and online media were unequal spaces and were becoming 'angrier, violent, and toxic places for minorities'.

"Algorithms create rabbit holes, amplifying prejudice, and the COVID-19 pandemic is escalating this violent rhetoric. The unfortunate and unhealthy side of social media is that harmful and misinformative content can go viral in a matter of minutes to spread to millions of people before platform owners can act to mitigate effects. What is not sufficiently explored is that minorities are most vulnerable on social media and so are easily outnumbered, flooded, and threatened. Social media operates in favour of the largest number, encouraging majority extremism—rewarding the greatest number of shares, clicks, likes, and so on," he said while adding that social media had played a widely acknowledged role in atrocities and the attempted genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar, against the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka, and had contributed to the increase in mob lynching in India.

The UN Special Rapporteur further reviewed the endeavours of the UN towards the protection of minorities.

"Currently, there is a very noticeable reluctance on the part of the UN to talk

about minorities. Several initiatives of the UN are not very demanding and are only advisory. We need to have our voices heard as often as possible at UN platforms and contribute our understanding and knowledge in this hostile context.”

“Immediate engagement would be timely as we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in 2022. There are several activities to launch a number of initiatives, including a regional forum for Asia and the Pacific to be held in Malaysia in 2022. Such international mechanisms

are needed more than ever,” concluded Dr de Varennes.

During a plenary session, the participants debated the links between violent extremism, politics, and religion; they called for an increase in engagement with young people through promoting positive youth resilience and youth-led activism against extremism and advocated for the development of counternarratives to encourage critical thinking and self-reliance as well as to raise awareness, foster key relationships, and discredit extremist ideologies and propaganda.

### Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence (EWAAV)

#### 'Transformational Leadership of Women in a Post-COVID-19 World': Webinar on International Women's Day-2021

8 March 2021



Speakers of Webinar on International Women's Day

The CCA organised a webinar on 'Transformational Leadership of Women in a Post-COVID-19 World', in conjunction with International Women's Day on 8 March 2021. The virtual event, which was

led by panellists representing UN Women, Asian churches, and women's organisations echoed the message, "Instead of seeking to 'get back to normal', we need to 'build back better', by recognising women's leadership

and promoting the empowerment of women in all sectors of society.”

“The need to empower women’s leadership has never been more evident and important as now. It is critical to promote women’s transformational leadership that builds capacity and resilience and brings people together. Women must be recognised as co-partners and co-workers with God to bring peace, freedom, and justice in church and society,” observed the panellists.

The panel, constituted by renowned women faith leaders and women’s rights advocates, further affirmed, “We must create an enabling environment for the next generation of women leaders, promote and expand on women’s networks that are already in place, and work through multi-sector approaches.”

Fanny Arendt (UN Women), Rev. Romella Robinson (Pakistan), Bishop Genieve Blackwell (Australia), Rev. Irene Umbu Lolo (Indonesia), Hanbeet Rhee (South Korea), and Rev. Hazel J. Salatan (Philippines) comprised the panel. The webinar was moderated by Nancy Lin (Taiwan).

Nancy Lin of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, who moderated the session, said that transformational leadership was characterised by four commonly agreed-upon factors, namely “idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration”.

Ms Lin, a former President of the Asian Church Women’s Conference (ACWC) said that women demonstrated all four of the aforementioned factors in their work, which was marked by collaboration, teamwork, communication, and cooperation.

Fanny Arendt, an analyst for Governance, Peace, and Security from UN Women, spoke about how the leadership of women was evident and transformational in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia. She said that despite the disproportionate

impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and their wellbeing, women were often first responders to the crisis, leading and helping their communities from behind the scenes.

The UN Women official further opined that society as a whole benefitted when women were meaningfully included in all types of decision-making. Although insufficiently documented and recognised, the COVID-19 pandemic had demonstrated that when women lead, strategies to strengthen community ties and build peaceful societies were often transparent and inclusive across economic, religious, political, and gender identities.

Bishop Genieve Blackwell, who heads the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, spoke about the impacts of the ‘shadow pandemic’ of domestic violence in Australia. “The pandemic has aggravated already existing inequalities between men and women in society. The unequal treatment of women as compared to men in our society has been identified as the key driver for violence against women. In other words, violence is driven by a culture which condones it,” Bishop Blackwell explained.

Bishop Blackwell, who works extensively for the prevention of violence against women, shared advocacy and collaboration strategies which included training clergy and lay leaders in the church, encouraging advocacy at local levels (appointing ‘Family Safety Champions’), as well as peer learning, securing funding, and putting in place policies, procedures, and guidelines to support such work. “Education and employment are key for women and men to contribute positively to our societies in the post-COVID-19 era,” concluded Bishop Blackwell.

“Preventing violence against women is about men and women coming together to achieve equal access to opportunities, and about living without fear of violence in whatever form. In other words, it is a very

real opportunity for the church to model what it means to believe that women and men are both made in the image of God," stated Bishop Blackwell.

Rev. Romella Robinson, an ordained minister from the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, spoke about how women of faith had provided leadership in Pakistan, steered the response and recovery to fight the pandemic in her country, and shared concrete and practical examples of the work women of faith were doing at the grassroots level in Pakistan.

Rev. Robinson, one of the youngest Christian clerics in majority Islamic Pakistan, also laid out strategies and principles for different stakeholders. She said, "Church leaders must learn to share scarce resources, particularly with women who are bringing about change. The mission of churches must be 'Together towards next steps', where men and women work alongside each other for planning, implementation, and evaluation. Empowered women empower women, and so intergenerational action is required to train and uplift newer generations of women leaders."

Rev. Irene Umbu Lolo, a pastor from the Christian Church of Sumba in Indonesia, shared the Indonesian perspective on women's transformational leadership in overcoming difficult situations. She spoke of the work of the Association of Theologically Educated Women in Indonesia (ATEWI), whose members included pastors, lecturers, researchers, and activists across the country. Collaboratively, these women of faith were leading through advocacy and campaigning for gender equality and human rights especially during the pandemic, through workshops, webinars, trainings, protest marches, vigils, and other actions.

Rev. Lolo, who is also a lecturer at the Sumba theological seminary, also shared the experiences of Christian women leaders in Sumba and their struggles to stop sexual

violence against women. Through advocacy, capacity-building, and networking, the women of Sumba were mobilising local, regional, and national support groups to work with the government, police, and church leaders to prevent such atrocities from occurring.

Rev. Hazel Joyce Salatan from the United Methodist Church in the Philippines shared the experiences of three fierce women leaders in the Philippines who fought the 'War on Hunger', the 'War on the Poor', and the 'War on Drugs'. These women were Nanay Miriam, a leader of organised peasant farmers; Katkat, a teenager from Lumad who was a spokesperson for indigenous people; and Deaconess Norma, who has been at the forefront of relief operations for the most vulnerable in Filipino society.

The young pastor who serves at the Union Theological Seminary said, "Asian women make up one-fourth of the world's population. In other words, we, all the Asian women in this forum, represent 25 percent of the world's peoples. We need to own this fact. We need to remind the rest of the world of this fact. One of the best ways to do this is to share our stories—let us not forget, Paul was a theologian, and Jesus was a storyteller. It is the storyteller who is the better teacher."

Rev. Salatan also added, "Women have always been leaders. Women have always been strong. Women have always been what we imagine them to be. It is not women who need transformation. What needs transformation are systems, structures, and cultures that perceive women as objects, as second-class, as weak, as sinners, and as property."

Hanbeet Rhee, a member of the Commission on Youth for the World Council of Churches (WCC), shared the innovative and creative leadership practices of Korean women in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. "Women ministers in the

Korean Church were considered the least important and were the first to be fired when the pandemic struck. In the face of this reality, Korean women leaders were the first to start thinking creatively with an inclusive attitude. We continued to create collectives of women's solidarity (such as through organising virtual feminist worship services and operating small women-owned businesses) and established new networks in this era of disconnect and distancing," she said.

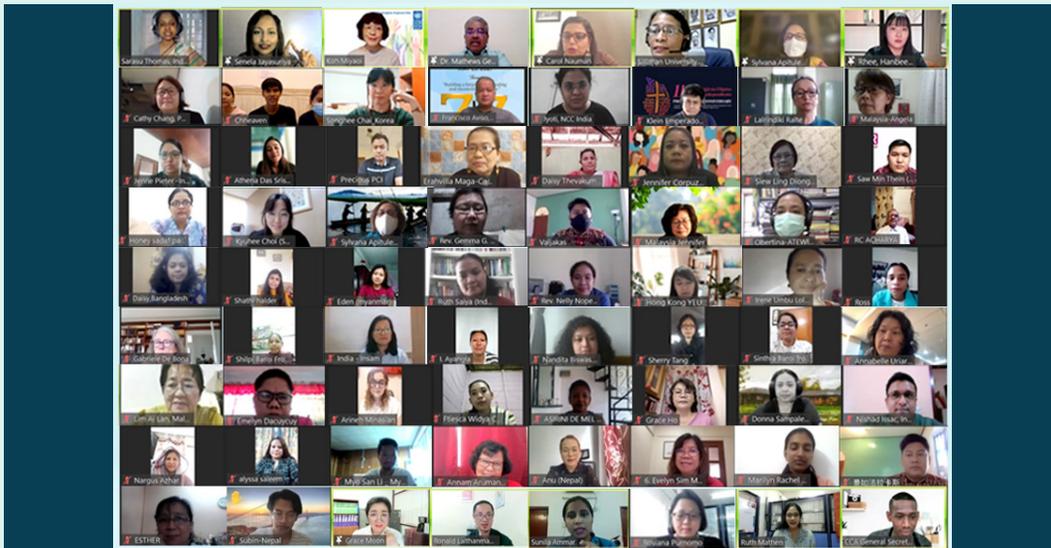
Ms Rhee further shared the challenges posed specifically to the leadership of young women, and said that young women were held to higher standards than men, with greater repercussions when they faced failure. She affirmed the need to prevent the restrictions on women's experiences and advocated for opening as many spaces

as possible for women to stand as leaders. "Through diverse, repetitive, and several experiences as leaders of all forms, we can strengthen women's leadership and nurture a new generation of young women leaders in Asia," observed Rhee, the young ecumenist.

The comments made by participants placed emphasis on increasing the political participation of women, best practices to enhance women's leadership in churches, theological reflections on the resilience of women, and the establishment of leadership and networks in the absence of technological connectivity. The panellists collectively responded to the questions and said that normative change was needed to challenge the perception of the role of women in society.

### Regional Consultation on 'Ensure Gender Equality; Empower Women and Lift Up Humanity'

8–9 July 2021



Participants of Regional Consultation on 'Ensure Gender Equality; Empower Women and Lift Up Humanity'

The CCA organised a two-day online Consultation on 'Ensure Gender equality; Empower Women and Lift Up Humanity',

which affirmed that instilling hope and positive attitude for gender equality was a way to build a just society and empower

women and men, and also asserted the need for stronger commitments from every corner of society to promote the empowerment of women through "attentive solidarity and radical inclusion".

The online Consultation, held on 8 and 9 July, was attended by over 70 participants.

The participants collectively expressed, "We must unite and stand with the disenfranchised women who are undergoing multiple forms of oppression during the COVID-19 pandemic." They further noted that the involvement and increase of women's participation in decision-making within churches was the best strategy for churches and church-related organisations to address gender equality and prevent other forms of discrimination.

The participants, who represented a wide cross-section of organisations across Asia, opined that special efforts were to be supplemented with the nurturing of women cadres among church leaders, re-interpreting certain texts of the Bible, and transforming cultural traditions or social norms that prevented women from being able to exercise their leadership to the fullest of their potentials and capacities.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of the CCA, in his opening address stated that, "Gender equality is a fundamental human right, which is an imperative for strengthening and empowering women; and lifting up humanity for a just and peaceful world. Ending all forms of violence, discrimination, and injustices against women and girls is a multiplier on all development issues in the world."

Describing the focus of the consultation outlined in the context of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represents a unified commitment by the world community, the CCA General

Secretary told the participants that the CCA would aim at deliberating on the importance of investing in gender equality and promoting women's role to accelerate the effective implementation of the UN SDG-2030 Agenda as well as to look at the contributions the faith communities, especially churches in Asia, can make.

Dr Sarasu Esther Thomas, a Professor of National Law School University in India (NLSUI) who heads the Centre for Women and Law at the NLSUI, delivered the keynote address on the theme of the Consultation, 'Achieve Gender Equality; Empower Women to Lift Up Humanity'.

Dr Sarasu Thomas analysed the term "empowerment" and its true connotations, elaborating upon the relations between right-duty and power-liability. "We cannot expect women to be resilient and fight back or reclaim power themselves; there is no question of empowerment of women or sharing of power without reducing the power concentrated in other hands. We need to consider the varied layers of intersectionality that may prevent women from standing up for themselves," she said.

Koh Miyaoi, Gender Advisor at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Asia Regional Hub, and Hanbeet Rhee, Coordinator of Gender Equality programme of YWCA in South Korea spoke at a panel discussion session on 'Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Goals: Eliminate Violence Against Women'.

Ms Miyaoi, an experienced expert on gender equality and women's rights issues, stated that along with the health crisis, women were facing a care crisis, an economic crisis, and a shadow pandemic.

The UNDP official further analysed the neglect of women's challenges in designing pandemic recovery and stimulus packages and highlighted the dismal participation of women as leaders in COVID-19 taskforces

across Asian countries. "If we do not see women in decision-making bodies determining what stimulus packages are given and when, deciding what services are essential and how we must re-open, then issues faced more by women than men are not going to be addressed or countered," said Ms Miyaoi.

Ms Rhee, who works on gender equality and climate change issues, outlined recommendations and best practices in the work of NGOs for the empowerment of women amidst the reality of the pandemic; these included gender governance, monitoring, material assistance, education programmes, and the need for influence and advocacy at the national level.

#### Speakers of Regional Consultation on 'Ensure Gender Equality; Empower Women and Lift Up Humanity'

Rev. Dr Jeaneth Faller, the Dean of the Divinity School at Siliman University in the Philippines, who led a biblical-theological reflection on 'Towards Violence-Free Lives for Women' shared the suffering and despair of Rizpah of the Old Testament as a synonym for the common struggle of Asian women today.

Rizpah represents the abusive subordination that so many women in Asia suffer in our cultures, which have failed to undo the economic and social disparities among our peoples. However, her story ends in redemption not just for one woman but for all—as she looked up from despair and found the courage to use the small and limited spaces available to act rather than to conform, to rise up rather than remain bent down, explained Dr Faller.

Senela Jayasuriya, the CEO of Women Empowered Global from Sri Lanka, in her presentation on 'Achieving Gender Equality through Economic Justice' shared the necessity for developing and promoting aspirational narratives that challenged poverty mind-sets, and for shattering the 'inner glass ceiling' of women.

Ms Jayasuriya, an award-winning leadership coach and public speaker, further added, "We need to build an equitable space that recognises the value and dignity of a woman that respects her freedom to fulfil her potential. To do this, we need to address the narratives of what it means to truly advance women in our societies. How can we make an equitable and unbiased environment for her to feel safe, and ready to develop her potential?"

Let us break down barriers and create more inclusive opportunities in our community, our workplaces, our supply chains and distribution."

A session on 'Ensuring Gender Equality through Developing Capacities and Providing Opportunities for Leadership' was led by Rev. Sylvana Maria Apituley, the Vice President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and Carol Tabassum Nauman from the Pakistan Mission Society.

Rev. Apituley, who was the Chief of Staff for the Executive Office of the President of Indonesia, focused her presentation on feminist leadership and substantive gender equality. "The challenges of a patriarchal culture in all areas of life, the intersection of gender discrimination with other aspects, and a lack of political will on the part of our leaders have been proven to have hampered the achievement of substantive gender equality and gender justice. The

opening of opportunities for women to be elected as leaders at the national/ synodal level is not a result of the church's systematic or strategic work but are fruits of individual struggles," she added.

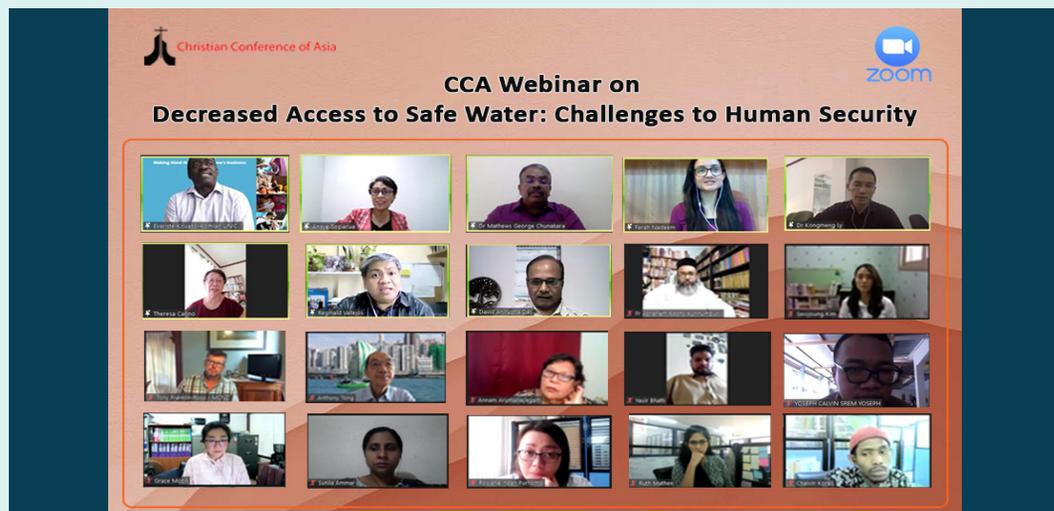
Ms Nauman spoke of the importance and value of cementing notions of the equality of the sexes right from childhood, through education and schooling. She shared different strategies for building the capacity of women as leaders, such as through mentoring and counselling, skills and resilience development, scholarships and other opportunities, and small business loans or microfinancing.

The consultation organised by the CCA was part of its Ecumenical Women's Action against Violence (EWAAV) programme and was an opportunity to deliberate upon and emphasise the varied challenges that continue to prevent the full achievement of gender equality.

## Eco-Justice for Sustainable Peace in the Oikos

### Webinar on Decreased Access to Safe Water: Challenges to Human Security

22 March 2021



Speakers and participants (partial view) of Webinar on 'Decreased Access to Safe Water: Challenges to Human Security'

CCA organised a webinar on 'Decreased Access to Safe Water in Asia: Challenges to Human Security' in conjunction with the *World Water Day*, which falls on 22 March 2021. It was conducted virtually and reached 70 participants all over Asia and the Pacific. The speakers in the webinar are the representatives from United Nations (UN) agencies such as UNICEF, UNDP and inter-governmental and development bodies such as Mekong River Commission, World Wide Fund for Nature.

In Asia, water-related problems have become increasingly acute with worrying implications. The threats of climate change, rampant urbanisation, and unplanned development have placed great stress upon the region's water resources. In recent times, water scarcity has triggered reduced food production, supply chain blockages, loss of land and livelihoods, large-scale migrations, and has even exacerbated economic and geopolitical tensions.

The panel of experts affirmed, "Community engagement and awareness is the need of the hour to defend the right to water for all people. Churches together with other faith-based organisations and civil society movements can play a major role in raising awareness on the global water crisis. We need to share stories and best practices to improve what we are doing, join information networks, and work to change individual and corporate behaviours with respect to water conservation and pollution."

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of the CCA, who moderated the session, said in his opening remarks, "Water is the essence of life and safe water is indispensable to sustain life and health. The right to water cannot be interpreted in an abstract perspective but must be grounded in the framework of human security. Human security fundamentally is freedom from fear and freedom from want; and its interrelatedness with right to water is significant and obvious."

"The right of access to water, which entails sufficient, safe, accessible, affordable water for personal and domestic use, is a matter of increasing concern in the Asia region today," added Dr Chunakara.

Evariste Kouassi-Komlan, Regional Advisor of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) at the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, spoke of the specific challenges of rapid growth, urbanisation, and climate change in Asia and its impact on water, sanitation, and hygiene. He specifically mentioned the urban-rural gap in water access and explained, "Waste water management is a bottleneck in the sustainable development of the region, and this has huge impacts in terms of health. It is also a major challenge to ensuring higher quantity and quality of water in rural areas, as there are scant waste water systems available in remote areas." The UNICEF officer further shared four specific perspectives to address water scarcity in the region. This included water governance as a revolutionary and interregional management system, innovation and financing to improve the efficiency of water use and reusability of water, capacity-building of the water sector, increased data information availability and resource sharing with reliance on artificial intelligence for modelling and predictions.

Dr Ansye Sopacua, Technical Adviser of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for UNDP Indonesia, highlighted the specific issues hindering access to safe, sufficient, and affordable water in Asia. She broke down the right to water into three components and outlined the regional challenges to be overcome by each of them. These three were that the individual need of water averaged 50–100 litres per day, that water sources needed to be within 1000 metres of one's residence, and that the expenditure of a household on water should not be more than three percent of income. She noted that in many areas, water scarcity prevailed due to a lack

of physical access to water especially in dry seasons or where water was brackish and non-potable. Lack of reliable infrastructure, lack of funding and finance, and issues of mismanagement contributed to decreased access to safe water. At times, water was available but either not safe (due to chemical run-offs or high salinity) or not affordable (especially as the poor had to purchase water every day given limited access to municipality water systems and associated subsidies).

Dr Kongmeng Ly, Water Quality Officer from the Mekong River Commission (MRC), an intergovernmental agency in the Mekong sub-region of South East Asia, provided examples of trans-boundary cooperation over shared water resources. He said that the member countries of the lower Mekong basin jointly established many procedures on the use of water and the protection and conservation of the river's resources, which included joint cooperation in the management and monitoring of water quality. Although the onus was on states to enforce the protocols, the MRC provided monthly assessments of water quality and quantity, which helped in assessing development projects across the basin.

Dr Theresa Carino, Senior Adviser and Research Consultant to Amity Foundation in the People's Republic of China, spoke about the specific issues of water access caused by uneven economic development in the country. "In villages, competition for water undermines social cohesion," she said, while explaining the impact of poor water quality on the health of rural residents. She further added that the lack of water in rural areas was a threat to the dignity of women and the fight for equality, as many women were kept from schooling and were forced to fetch water, a chore that took between two and four hours a day. She also elaborated on the wide range of health problems, including cancer and arsenic poisoning, caused by the consumption of polluted and unsafe

drinking water. Dr Carino emphasised the necessity of water committees that were locally elected and were represented in the design, planning, and operation of water systems. She insisted on having women equally represented on such water committees and suggested measures to ensure accountability and transparency.

Prof. Reginald Vallejos, spokesperson for Water for the People Network (WPN) in the Philippines, observed that eight regions in the country faced acute water stress. As there was no access to water and sanitation measures, many still practiced open defecation. Several preventable diseases that were related to limited water access were responsible for the high infant mortality rate. He further affirmed the necessity of strengthening partnerships at the grassroots, building solidarity, and expanding knowledge through education and discussion on natural resources and their management. He pushed for a democratic sustainable water agenda and affirmed his solidarity with water resource defenders in the region.

Farah Nadeem, Coordinator of the Freshwater Programme at World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Pakistan, shared the current challenges to water availability for all in her country. "Are we managing our resources in an equitable manner?" she asked, highlighting gaps in infrastructure and participation of all stakeholders. She proposed integrated water resource management as a potential and viable solution to mitigate unequal access to water.

"If we want to change perspectives on water management, users need to be aware and sensitised to the fact that water is a scarce resource," said Ms Nadeem, as she spoke about community initiatives to circulate information among consumers, corporates, agricultural workers, and religious groups to the issues of water scarcity.

Rev. David Das, Asia representative to the International Reference Group of the Ecumenical Water Network hosted by the World Council of Churches, explained the factors that complicated access to safe drinking water in Bangladesh. Although the country had many rivers, they were often contaminated due to weather-related events, such as floods, landslides, river bank erosion, cyclones, and typhoons. "Such events have turned people into internal refugees with no access to drinking water," shared Rev. Das.

He later concluded "Water has now become a complex trading commodity like gold and oil. Churches must prioritise urgent, relevant, and affordable programmes and be in partnership with various groups for a multi-pronged solution to the water crisis. It is up to faith groups to answer several pressing questions regarding the sustainability of our current lifestyles for the future,".

The panellists collectively proposed suggestions for actions of churches on the issue of equitable water access. This included speaking about decreased access

to water from the pulpit, developing specific Sunday School modules and curriculum on water and the care of creation, releasing publications on biblical-theological perspectives on the importance of water conservation, implementing efficient and affordable rain-water harvesting systems, promoting water-consciousness, and implementing 'Green Church' policies. Given that churches had large grassroots networks, such networks could be leveraged to spread information on the importance of water and its links to human dignity.

In his concluding remarks, Dr Mathews George Chunakara said, "The numerous challenges posed to human security in Asia today are exacerbated by lack of access to safe water in Asia. The CCA has been educating, encouraging, and empowering its constituencies to work for the wellbeing and prosperity of all God's creation in this world and to be engaged in a prophetic mission, loudly and boldly advocating for the right to water; as well as respond to the increasing challenges to human security in the region."



**Christian Conference of Asia**

**'Decreased Access to Safe Water in Asia  
Challenges to Human Security'**

**22 March 2021**  
**12:00-2:00 pm (Bangkok Time)**

**REGISTER** 

**Virtual Conference**

Speakers and participants (partial view) of Webinar on  
'Decreased Access to Safe Water: Challenges to Human Security'



## **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

The CCA responded to emerging issues in Asia and accompanied those constituencies that needed support on specific occasions or were caught up in certain situations. The following are summaries of statements and letters of solidarity that were issued in 2021:

### **UN Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons** *21 January 2021*

The CCA endorsed an interfaith statement on 'The Entry into Force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons' (TPNW) and joined with many other renowned faith-based organisations from around the world in signing the interfaith statement.

The United Nations (UN) Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), a legally binding instrument, is a decisive step towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons. It includes a set of prohibitions and undertakings that prevent the development, testing, acquisition, possession, stockpiling, use, or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

The TPNW was adopted with the support of 122 states in 2017 and is set to come into force on 22 January 2021. To mark the historic and ground-breaking moment, several interfaith organisations released a joint statement that reaffirmed the moral, ethical, and theological imperatives and importance of the global disarmament movement.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of the CCA, stated, "The CCA has expressed deep concern about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. The rush to develop and procure such weapons

anywhere in the world is incompatible with the desired goal of achieving genuine standards of a humanitarian polity. As the world grapples with the task of addressing even the most basic of human needs, the tendency to divert precious resources towards the acquisition and maintenance of nuclear weapons has grave ramifications."

The CCA General Secretary lauded the Treaty for representing the commitment of the nations and the willingness of many heads of states to make a significant shift from the ever-escalating arms race to a period of peace, justice, and wellbeing.

"The mandate on States to uphold the Treaty is in keeping with the life-affirming proclamation that envisions security in our world and future. It endorses the right to protect the world for future generations and validates the principle of stewardship," observed Dr Mathews George Chunakara.

### **CCA-WCC Joint Pastoral Letter to Churches and the Council of Churches in Myanmar** *3 February 2021*

The General Secretaries of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) issued a joint pastoral letter addressed to churches and the Council of Churches in Myanmar, following the development of the army toppling Myanmar's elected government, and arresting its de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

The joint pastoral letter issued by the WCC General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca and the CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara conveyed a message of profound concern on the current developments, "especially the abrupt resumption of military rule, the

overturning of the outcome of elections on 8 November 2020, as well as the detention of key political and pro-democracy representatives and the escalation of the national situation which has led to the current declaration of a state of emergency.”

The joint pastoral letter affirmed “support for the churches and communities of Myanmar in prayer and solidarity,” as they sought to “provide counsel and comfort for their people in this time of deep anxiety and uncertainty for the future.”

The WCC and CCA voiced their concern regarding the future of the country and its people, stating, “We urge a swift and peaceful return to the path of democracy, and appeal for the human rights and freedoms—including the freedom of religion or belief—of all Myanmar’s people to be fully respected and protected.”

### **CCA-WCC Joint Statement on Situation in Myanmar 4 March 2021**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) General Secretaries condemned the deteriorating law and order situation and violence in Myanmar, especially the killings of people by Myanmar security forces during protests against the military coup.

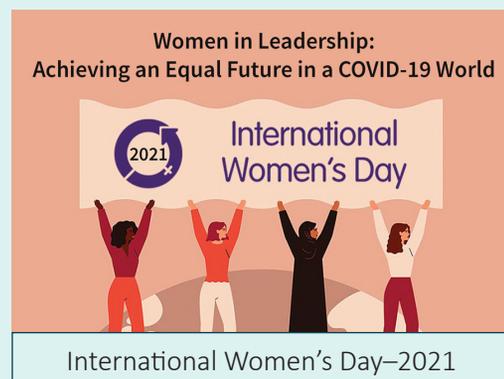
Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, General Secretary of the WCC, and Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of the CCA, in a joint statement expressed great distress and concern over the continued lethal actions against the people by the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw), which overthrew its democratically-elected government on 1 February 2021.

The leaders of the global ecumenical bodies stated that the democratically elected

civilian government reflects the aspiration of the people. The will of the people and the outcome of the elections have to be respected and democratic processes must be restored in Myanmar.

“As we believe that the rule of law and democracy must be the cardinal parameters for ensuring peace with justice, we firmly denounce the military coup which has now returned full power to the generals,” added Rev. Dr Sauca and Dr Chunakara in their joint statement on behalf of the international ecumenical organisations.

### **International Women’s Day 8 March 2021**



CCA General Secretary released a statement on the occasion of International Women’s Day–2021, titled, “Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a COVID-19 World”.

Commenting on the importance of the annual theme, the General Secretary said, “The focus of this theme hails the remarkable contributions by women in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic...The leadership of women should be recognised as “transformational” given its role in developing and inspiring change for the good of all. Qualities of empathy, authentic communication, and teamwork, coupled

with resilience, respect, and enthusiasm are the hallmarks of the leadership of women. Such leadership promotes cooperation and collaboration rather than command and control, benefitting not a select few but society as a whole.”

The CCA called upon its member churches and councils to recognise the gifts of women and enhance their leadership and decision-making capacities. The CCA also encouraged all its member constituencies to put in place those practices and systems that enable women to demonstrate their leadership.

### **Denouncing Extrajudicial Killings in The Philippines**

*12 March 2021*



The General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Dr Mathews George Chunakara, released a statement denouncing the extrajudicial killings and arrests in Southern Tagalog, in the Philippines.

On 7 March 2021, nine social workers and human rights activists were killed by the Philippines National Police (PNP) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines in a series of raids against suspected “communist insurgents” in Southern Tagalog. All nine activists who were killed belonged to organisations that had been ‘red-tagged’ by the government.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara in the statement said, “The CCA denounces all

human rights violations, decries injustice, and calls upon the Philippines government to protect and safeguard human lives... It is the CCA’s firm conviction that the states which terrorise people through extrajudicial killings are guilty of arbitrary deprivation of their citizens’ right to life.”

In the statement, the CCA General Secretary further observed, “The killing of the nine social and human rights activists and the arrest of six other community workers in the Southern Tagalog region is most brutal and an assault on human rights. While expressing grief and solidarity with the families and communities of the victims, the CCA reiterates its commitment to accompany the Filipino people in their struggle.”

### **CCA-WCC Joint Statement on Continuing Deterioration of Situation in Myanmar**

*31 March 2021*

In a joint statement on 31 March, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) expressed profound dismay at the ongoing violence and the brutal attacks by military and security forces against peaceful protesters in Myanmar.

“The opposition to the coup is supported by a large section of people across the country who lived in freedom in a relatively peaceful situation for a decade,” read the statement. “People from all walks of life such as civil servants, students, working class as well as religious leaders, including Buddhist monks, became part of nationwide protests and a mass campaign of civil disobedience ensued against the junta.”

The appeal called on the UN Security Council and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to promptly act and to hold the military regime accountable for

protecting the dignity and human rights of the people of Myanmar.

“The people of Myanmar need help from the international community to overcome their painful situation,” the statement reads. “The international community needs to act urgently with constructive actions to ratchet up pressure on Myanmar military to disengage and withdraw from barbarous acts. We believe that it is absolutely essential to release all prisoners, and to respect the results of the elections, and make possible a democratic transition in the country.”

“May international solidarity, with prayer and action, be the sign of hope, inspired by the risen Christ, to liberate the people of Myanmar from oppression and pain,” concluded the statement.

### **World Health Day–2021**

*7 April 2021*



In a statement released on the occasion of the observance of World Health Day–2021, the CCA General Secretary, Dr Mathews George Chunakara said that churches in Asia should promote health-seeking behaviour and take on more responsibilities in their mission and witness towards health and healing.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara also highlighted the role of churches in building trust in the COVID-19 vaccine, shattering myths and misconceptions surrounding pandemic responses, and providing and amplifying correct information from medical authorities during the pandemic. “We must equip ourselves with relevant information and theological reflections of our social and moral obligations to each other in order to eliminate fear, hesitancy, and misinformation regarding vaccines,” said the CCA General Secretary.

Elaborating on the theme of World Health Day–2021, “Building a fairer, healthier world”, the CCA General Secretary spoke of the health concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic: “As COVID-19 vaccines begin to be rolled out gradually, there are alarming disparities in access to them across the world. Although the scientific development of the vaccine in record time is a great achievement, it remains to be seen if global political will and moral commitment would supplement the science in bringing about the end of the pandemic.”

Condemning the surge in the global trend of vaccine nationalism, Dr Mathews George Chunakara stated that the issue “served as a snapshot of global inequality and was representative of all the forces that prevent the realisation of equality, fairness, and justice”.

### **Recognition of Armenian Genocide**

*28 April 2021*

The CCA joined with millions of Armenians all over the world, especially the Armenian diaspora scattered across Asia, who welcomed the US government’s decision to recognise the massacre of about 1.5 million Armenians in 1915 as genocide.

The Armenian churches uniquely represent the Armenian people in the international

ecumenical family and have been expressing their concerns, anguish, and pain consistently; they have persistently been demanding recognition of genocide and reparation.

The General Secretary of the CCA Dr Mathews George Chunakara stated that although late, the decision of the President of the USA now recognising the massacre that took place more than a century ago as genocide is an honour for those Armenians who perished in the Armenian genocide.

"President Biden's decision is a good gesture of reminder to the international community about the pain of millions of Armenian descendants around the world. The Armenian Genocide has serious implications for the Armenian people and the international community ever since the massacre took place. It is also a great opportunity for the international community to renew their commitment to combating atrocities in this troubled world, as well as to work for healing and reconciliation," said the CCA General Secretary.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara further added that the Armenian Church, consistent with its role in the Armenian communities across the world, is the natural vehicle and interpreter of the Armenian protest against the 1915 genocide and of the Armenian demand for justice. However, the history and plight of the Armenians were not known widely among the churches in different regions including in Asia. The decision of the US authorities would be helpful in prompting the international community and Turkey to acknowledge the Armenian genocide.

**CCA-WCC Joint Pastoral Letter to Churches and the National Council of Churches in India**  
5 May 2021

In a pastoral letter, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Christian Conference

of Asia (CCA) expressed their concern, grief, and prayerful solidarity with the churches in India as COVID-19 surged in South Asian countries.

"We stand with you in solidarity and prayer in the midst of the suffering and loss of thousands of lives in India," read the letter. "We grieve with you before God, for the loss of so many family members, friends, pastors, teachers and healthcare workers who have been taken by this pandemic."

The letter also expressed grief for the pain of those who are sick and suffering. "It is our hope and prayer that during this period of crisis, God Almighty will continue to accompany you, as you uphold each other in the struggle for healing and recovery," read the letter. "We particularly lift up and pray for the healthcare personnel, hospitals, clinics and community health initiatives of the churches which are being overwhelmed and stretched to their limits, serving and caring for the flood of sick and suffering people."

"We are also encouraging the members of the global ecumenical fellowship—individuals, communities and institutions—to mobilise resources and to extend support for the work of the churches in India in accompanying and healing the coronavirus-affected people and communities," read the letter. "In a situation like this, where we all live amidst fear, anxiety, and uncertainty, may our faith and spiritual values sustain us to live with hope in God's abundant mercies, love, care and protection."

**World Refugee Day—2021**  
20 June 2021

In a message issued on World Refugee Day—2021, the CCA General Secretary Dr

Mathews George Chunakara said, "It is only when the dignity and lives of refugees are protected that their human rights will be affirmed; then we can truly begin to 'together heal, learn, and shine'. Let us remember the refugees in our midst and see to it that they are not forgotten entities."

"We must strive to overturn the negative narratives surrounding refugees in public spaces in Asia by campaigning and advocating for them, humanising them, and highlighting their lived experiences. Developing lasting solutions that are tailored to the contexts of refugees requires more concerted efforts aimed at pressurising concerned Asian governments and at campaigning for a climate of respect for human rights," said the CCA General Secretary.

**World Day Against Trafficking in Persons—2021**  
30 July 2021



World Day Against Trafficking in Persons—2021

"The responses of churches to trafficking must be survivor-led and trauma-informed. Churches must also continue to honour and amplify the voices of survivors as part of effective and comprehensive anti-trafficking strategies that advance prosecution, protection, and prevention efforts," said the Christian Conference

of Asia's General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara, in a message released on World Day against Trafficking in Persons.

Trafficking in persons, or human trafficking, is one of the gravest violations of the fundamental rights and dignity of people, which corrupts their identity as being made in the image of God and instead considers them as commodities or objects, read the CCA General Secretary's statement.

"Let us clear the way for the leadership of survivors through whom God can work despite their tragedies in the fight against trafficking. Let us hear the cries of our fellow beings who continue to be oppressed and exploited because of human trafficking; let the Asian churches continue to pray for the protection and deliverance of all victims of trafficking around the world, while also answering God's call for justice and true compassion in our work," concluded the statement.

**World Mental Health Day—2021**  
10 October 2021



World Day Against Trafficking in Persons—2021

A statement released by the CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara on the occasion of World Mental Health Day—2021 called upon Asian churches to ensure the provision of mental healthcare for all amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on people's mental

health and this pandemic has disrupted or halted critical mental health services in most countries worldwide...Spikes in heavy psychosocial burdens, anxieties around virus transmission, the psychological impact of lockdowns and involuntary self-isolation, loss of employment, financial worries, and social alienation have collectively contributed to increasing levels of mental health problems during this pandemic," read the statement.

The CCA General Secretary also elaborated on the role of the church in addressing mental health within the community. "Misconceptions around mental health and the stigma that is attached by the Church and its leaders are not uncommon. A greater understanding on the holistic nature of mental health is needed for the Church in Asia to provide vital psychosocial support and care for those with mental illnesses and their families."

"On the occasion of World Mental Health Day, the CCA urges its member churches and councils to address mental health in an effective and efficient manner by providing and facilitating mental healthcare for all, and make it a reality," concluded the statement.

### **World Children's Day–2021** *20 November 2021*



World Children's Day–2021

On the occasion of World Children's Day–2021, the CCA General Secretary,

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, issued a special statement calling upon member churches and councils to "monitor and be vigilant about the physiological and psychological needs of children as they begin to return to school, paying close attention and extending full support as they re-adjust to daily life amidst strict protocols".

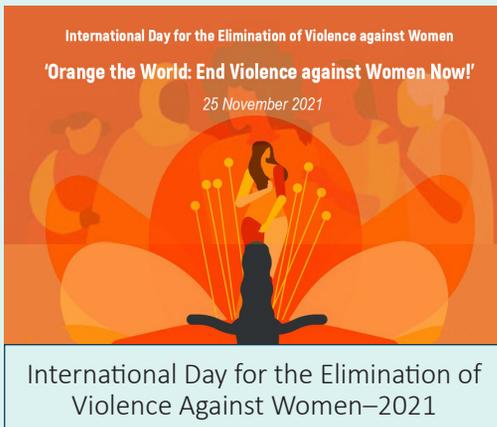
"Such times are calling upon us to develop, prepare, and implement clear recovery plans to minimise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the several dimension of children's growth and development—plans that are not just technical or practical approaches to resolving the pandemic's challenges, but that represent a promise and pledge made by the current adult generation to the upcoming generations to invest in their health, education, and overall wellbeing," read the statement.

The General Secretary further noted that vaccine rollouts for children and young people had prompted governments to reopen schools and educational institutions, which was a 'hopeful sign that the education and socialisation processes of children are being restored' after COVID-19 had disrupted such 'familiar and comforting life patterns'. He added, "Churches must also build trust and encouragement in vaccines, as vaccine hesitancy has a profound impact on the ability of society as a whole to overcome COVID-19".

Elaborating on the annual theme of World Children's Day, 'A Better Future for Every Child', Dr Mathews George Chunakara called upon member churches and councils to 'ensure that God's nurturing love and concern is reflected in all attitudes and actions within children's ministries' and 'support and affirm children's rights to self-

expression and participation by listening to, and taking into account, their experiences, feelings, and stories through Sunday School and children's fellowships'.

### **International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women–2021** *25 November 2021*



The CCA General Secretary released a special statement on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. In the statement, the CCA General Secretary said, “Asian churches must become ‘first responders’ in the efforts to combat all forms of gender-based violence.”

The CCA General Secretary further called upon 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 of activism”, in keeping with the annual theme of the year, ‘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.

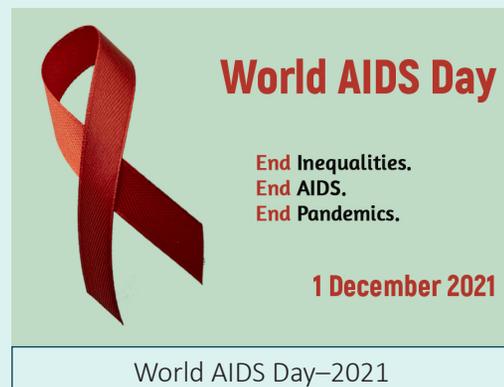
“There is an urgent need in our Asian Christian communities to revisit and reinvestigate episodes of violence—physical, sexual, and psychological—

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,” read the statement.

The statement further continued, “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.”

“The church is one of the first places that survivors of violence reach out 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,’” concluded the statement.

### **World AIDS Day–2021** *1 December 2021*



In a statement released on the occasion of World AIDS Day, the CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara observed,

“Without bold action against inequalities, the world risks missing the target to end AIDS by 2030, alongside the objective of ending the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic and spiraling social and economic crises.”

The theme for the year, “End Inequalities. End AIDS. End pandemics” was “an urgent call for everyone to address the inequalities that drive HIV and AIDS, and other pandemics,” read the statement.

“Tackling inequalities pertaining to HIV will not only address HIV concerns themselves but will also contribute to finding solutions on the broader societal issues of public health, economic security, and social well-being. It will advance the human rights of all people and can better prepare societies to overcome COVID-19 and other epidemics as well as supporting economic recovery and stability. Fulfilling the promise to tackle inequalities will save millions of lives and will benefit society as a whole,” noted the CCA General Secretary.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara also called upon Asian churches to “walk hand-in-hand with all stakeholders and revive national and regional networks to commit in action, promote inclusive social and economic growth, and eliminate discriminatory laws, policies, and practices in order to ensure equal opportunities and reduce inequalities”.

### **International Day of Persons with Disabilities–2021** *3 December 2021*

In a statement released on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD)–2021, the General Secretary of the CCA, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, encouraged member councils and churches to be mindful of and concerned about the special needs of people with disabilities: “It is the responsibility of churches and members



#### International Day of Persons with Disabilities–2021

of each congregation to uphold the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities and recognise them as children of God as well as to work for the implementation of rights-based approaches in services for them.”

Elaborating on the theme of the year, “Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities towards an inclusive, accessible, and sustainable post-COVID-19 world”, the CCA General Secretary stated, “In a world where the challenges for persons with disabilities continues to increase, we must acknowledge harsh realities such as the limitations related to restrictions of movement, interaction, and physical support...The COVID-19 pandemic has put the spotlight on the various challenges in access to treatment, care, and support services for persons with disabilities. They continue to face barriers in their participation as equal members of society.”

“With the leadership and participation of persons with disabilities in our congregations and communities, Asian churches are called to mobilise, sensitise, be engaged with, listen to, and learn from the experiences of persons with disabilities as well as from their creativity, which should be used to advocate for their rights, to create more inclusive environments, and thus to ensure the full participation

of people with disabilities in the journey towards an inclusive, accessible, and sustainable post-COVID-19 world," concluded the statement.

### Human Rights Day–2021

10 December 2021



In a statement issued on the occasion of Human Rights Day, the CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara called upon the CCA's member churches and councils to be 'the moral compass of the world today and demonstrate radical commitment to loving and serving one another'.

Elaborating on the theme of the year, 'Equality – Reducing Inequalities, Advancing Human Rights', the CCA General Secretary stated, "The cardinal principle of human rights, as stipulated in Article 1 of the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) which pertains to equality, states this simple and undeniable truth: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. However, this affirmation is not fully realised, even today...The human rights standard of equality holds up the vision of a free, just, and peaceful world, setting the bar for how individuals and institutions treat other people."

The CCA General Secretary further said that it was 'our spiritual obligation to sustain

attention on inequality as an immediate crisis rather than a crisis to be eliminated across 10-, 15-, or 30-year windows'.

The statement continued, "Being made in God's own image, we know that each person possesses an intrinsic God-given dignity, and that no one has more of God's image than anyone else. We must thus direct our attention and resources to serving the least among us, empowering them and protecting them—and this dedication to the uplift of the marginalised and disadvantaged must serve as a barometer of the effectiveness of our diaconal mission in reducing all forms of inequalities that exist today."

### International Migrants Day–2021

18 December 2021



On the occasion of International Migrants Day, which falls on 18 December, the CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara called upon Asian churches to recognise migrants as the "moving body of Christ".

"While recognising the fact that the Church stands on the side of all who work to defend the right of people to live with dignity, the CCA encourages all member constituencies to commit to addressing the needs and capacities of migrants in

sending, transit, and receiving countries through increased communication, cooperation, and collaboration between churches in Asia and the Asian diaspora. Churches must provide safe spaces for positive self-identification of migrants and offer a network of support and security in the face of other challenges," read the statement.

"The annual theme of International Migrants Day–2021, 'Harnessing the Potential of Human Mobility', is reflective of a global optimism about the role and impact

of migration, specifically international migration, in development. Migration is realised as a powerful driver of sustainable development for migrants and their communities in countries of origin, transit, and destination...However, migration does not automatically lead to development. To truly 'harness the potential of human mobility', it is vital to reflect upon some key challenges that affect migrant populations or transnational populations and proactively engage with any vulnerabilities," said the CCA General Secretary.

### Asian Churches Building Good Governance and Accountability in Serving Humanity 9–11 November 2021



Participants of Asia Regional Consultation on 'Asian Churches Building Good Governance and Accountability in Serving Humanity'

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) organised a three-day Consultation on 'Asian Churches Building Good Governance and Accountability in Serving Humanity' from 9 to 11 November 2021. It was conducted online and was attended by 48 participants including Church leaders representing the CCA's member churches, Christian institutions as well as 25 students

of the ongoing Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI) 2021.

The three-day programme aimed to equip the representatives from the member churches with the principles of stewardship and accountability, so as to strengthen the systems within the church for good governance and make the churches exemplary in their practices of leadership

and servanthood, probity, honesty, integrity, generosity, and love.

Opening remarks were addressed by Dr Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary. He stated that governance is a common concern in all aspects of life and society and is also applicable to churches. Good governance is an emerging concern for the churches in Asia within a stringent environment with the expectations of compliance with international standards of regulation and at the same time, it is a fundamental Christian value. Governance must not be viewed as merely a concept with secular applications; it is highly relevant to and essential for churches to promote better stewardship. He further added that when the Church leaders often point their fingers against bureaucrats and political leaders to challenge the prevailing injustices, corruption, and mismanagement of resources, they should also examine the fairness and quality of the systems and structures within their churches as well as their leadership styles before they speak out against the issues in politics and governance; it is a moral and ethical parameter for them to present their integrity and credibility as responsible church leaders. He mentioned that churches in Asia must ensure that the spiritual dimension of governance is valued and recognised by secular societies, for which the churches and their leaders themselves must be role models.

Rev. Dr Yusak B. Setyawan, from the Satya Wacana Christian University in Indonesia, gave his presentation on 'Biblical-Theological Reflection on Good Governance as the foundation for the whole discussion for the consultation. He began the biblical discussion with the narrative of creation. He shared that the creation narrative is the starting point of our rationale to build good governance. God created everything as good. This ideal of goodness cannot be maintained due to failed decision-making by human beings. This further leads to the emergence of sin,

which is the tendency of using or abusing one's power. He offered three theological inspirations for good governance, namely, Jesus' movement, Kingdom of God and Ecclesia. Jesus' movement emphasised the right of everyone to receive teaching and education, teachers are no higher than followers (walk together), the equality of the leader and the followers, and the spirit of compassion of serving others rather than one's own self-interest. 'Ecclesia', too, was re-interpreted as wholeness and inclusiveness within and outside the community. Good governance, thus, became a means for the good of not just human society but also for the benefit of all creation (Oikos).

Rev. Abraham Varkey from the Christian Agency for Rural Development conducted the session on 'Christian Leadership Values in Management: Accountability and Stewardship'. Rev Varkey emphasised the role of the manager as a steward-servant leader, the importance of the personal growth of employees, which was directly correlated with the growth of the organisation, and the incorporation of biblical values of love, honesty, integrity, and justice in all decision-making and actions. He further elaborated on the implementation of human rights standards and justice in the area of labour and employment. He went on to say that human resource management through the lens of Christian values helps us to faithfully view our work as something entrusted to us by God and creates a healthy organisational environment that considers employees as the cornerstone of the organisation and as valuable assets rather than dispensable tools.

Marthen Sumual, from PT Top Konsep Indonesia, gave a presentation on 'Leadership Development: Human Resource Management. He noted that as the main objective of human resource management was to achieve organisational success through its people, this requires the hard and soft skills competencies of

the people which the organisation utilises for its benefit. The organisation is thus accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions and direction of action. Therefore, human resources management is a vital aspect of implementing good governance. It is a continual process where each person is recognised as a valuable asset and plays an important role in the development and growth of the organisation.

Dr Sanjay Patra, from the Financial Management Service Foundation in India, led the session on 'Accountability of Financial Resources'. Dr Patra shared two checklists for maintaining accountability at the personal level and the organisational level. At the personal level, this included being familiarised with approval mechanisms, clarity of rules and regulations, application of internal policies to all irrespective of organisational hierarchy, and elimination of favouritism. The organisational level checklist contained clear and straightforward budget monitoring processes and approvals, compliance with external grant conditions, the establishment of and compliance with internal control systems, independence of external auditors, and qualifications of persons handling the organisation's finances.

Rev. John Asihua, from Majelis Sinode of the Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis (Kalimantan Evangelical Church in Indonesia) in his presentation, focused on 'Code of Conduct: Assuring Safety at the Workplace'. Rev. Asihua said that an institution's code of conduct was a policy that outlined principles and standards that all members of the institution and others acting on behalf of the institution were required to follow. This policy was a reflection of the organisation's mission and core values. He further outlined the benefits of having a code of conduct policy in place: it helped define the institution's work culture, it set standards and expectations for the behaviour and work ethic of the members,

and it established healthy relationships with external partners given its transparency and clear definitions.

Rev. Ira Imelda, from Gereja Kristen Pasundan (Pasundan Christian Church in Indonesia), led the session on 'Complaint Mechanisms in Faith-based Organisations'. She highlighted that a church's complaint mechanisms are based on its code of conduct policies and other rules and regulations. These mechanisms must be undergirded with the theological understanding of respect which creates an enabling environment for the safety of all members. Although churches tend to be reactive in cases of misconduct, such as corruption or sexual harassment, they must be proactive in the prevention of such incidents in the first place by having code of conduct policies and complaint mechanisms in place. Member awareness and education is an important part of this process.

Anand Joshua, from the Christian Institute of Management in India, shared a presentation on 'Goal-Setting: Developing Strategic Planning'. He explained in detail how strategic planning involved accountability, stewardship, compliance, responsiveness, and transparency. These factors need to be considered as the mission to discern God's plan and a sacred journey to listen to God's voice. It also enabled the clear envisioning of goals and objectives with clarity and ownership at all levels. Mr Joshua subsequently shared that highly effective strategic leadership was grounded in the mission, vision, and core values of the organisation, effective communication, accountable governance, was people-centred, shared ownership, and relied on feedback and learning.

Prof. Dr Christoph Stueckelberger, from the Globethics Foundation in Switzerland, conducted three sessions on 'Good Governance Leadership Models in Context', 'Analysis of Resources of Churches and Related Institutions', and 'Assuring Accountability Structures:

Monitoring and Reporting Instruments'. He mentioned that leaders are found at every level: from the local/congregational to the international. Leadership in good governance is characterised by integrity and an adherence to the set rules, rooted in stewardship, discipleship, and in the commandment of loving God, and others as oneself. Integrity changes the focus from 'me' (individual) to 'we' (community).

Speaking of the assets of the church, he encouraged the attendees saying, "The main goal of asset-mapping is to discover the wealth of the existing diversity of resources, such as financial, organisational, spiritual, and human. The Church also has many intangible assets that remain underutilised. We must develop strategies for the efficient use and development of resources, just as the Biblical parable in Matthew 25:14–30 calls us to use God-given resources in the best way possible rather than complaining that not enough is available."

Dr Stueckelberger, whose presentations were replete with numerous case studies and personal experiences, further shared different planning and monitoring instruments to help ensure the stability of the management structure. He stated that

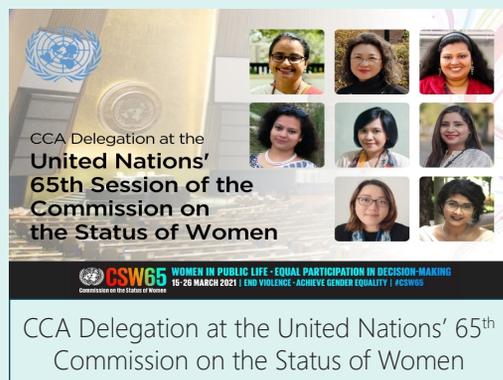
the goal of accountability, transparency, monitoring and reporting is to build trust in the institution. Churches and related institutions must respect international reporting standards that are meaningful instruments of accountability and future planning, and not of exaggerated control. Reporting should be consistent with planning, monitoring, and evaluation steps.

At the end of the three-day Consultation, the participants discussed various opportunities in their contexts for the applications of the learnings from the different sessions and suggested steps for the establishment of good governance systems in churches. They also put forth recommendations for collaborative action for the way ahead, which were (i) A way forward for CCA to accompany its members in building good governance through training from congregational, national, and regional levels, targeting church leaders and young people in Asia, and (ii) CCA to be the resource centre for churches in Asia in providing materials and related writings on Good Governance. The participants further affirmed their commitment to good governance in their own capacities and resolved to adhere to such principles in their mission and diaconal work.

## Human Rights in Asia and Advocacy at the United Nations (UN)

### CCA Delegation at the United Nations' 65<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women

15–26 March 2021



An eight-member delegation representing the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) participated in the 65<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women (CSW-65) of the United Nations (UN) from 15–26 March 2021.

The CCA has been accredited with the UN's ECOSOC since 2003. This enables the CCA to represent its member churches in Asia at different UN events from time to time.

As the COVID-19 pandemic restricted physical/in-person gatherings, the

CSW-65 was conducted entirely through virtual platforms this year. The virtual official deliberations and parallel events enabled the participation of accredited representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations from across the world, making it the largest CSW ever to be held.

The CCA delegation attended different sessions of the meeting as well as parallel events throughout the two weeks of the CSW.

The CCA delegation to the CSW-65 comprised Rev. Kyrie Kim (Chairperson of the CCA's Programme Committee from the Anglican Church in Korea), Prof. Dr Susan Thomas (Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in India), Rev. Astrid Bonik Lusi (Christian Evangelical Church Timor in Indonesia), Rev. Moumita Biswas (Church of North India), and Ms Nandita Biswas (National Council of Churches in Bangladesh), and CCA staff members Ms Sunila Ammar, Ms Rosiana Indah Purnomo, and Ms Ruth Mathen.

The events and meetings that the CCA delegation participated were centred on gender-sensitive policymaking; women's political representation; ending violence against women in public and private spheres; empowering adolescent girls; combating child, early, and forced marriage; addressing migration and trafficking; ecofeminism and climate change; ethnic conflict and community violence; and faith action for gender equality.

The priority theme of CSW-65 was "Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls". The deliberations helped to analyse and discuss the theme in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Focal points for many of the discussions prioritised the concerns on marginalised

women and girls, especially in programme planning and resource allocation, the increasing of women's access to power and decision-making positions, and the promotion of gender equality education, along with the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.

Key conclusions derived by the CCA delegation from their participation at the CSW-65 include:.

1. *Better recovery from COVID-19*: the resilience and special gifts of women for strong leadership through and out of the pandemic must be valued and encouraged;
2. *Increased church engagement*: On the part of the churches, partnership and solidarity with women and young people must be affirmed, strengthened, and practiced in all spaces and levels;
3. *Increased dialogue and collective action*: constructive and meaningful dialogue, which includes listening and sharing across genders and generations, must be fostered;
4. *Stronger partnerships and collaboration*: nurturing and supportive environments that encourage the leadership of women must be created and strengthened by churches in collaboration with other actors of goodwill;
5. *Empowering young people*: a shift from youth "participation" and "engagement" or tokenism to young people in active decision-making must occur;
6. *Increased decision-making positions*: women must be entrusted with decision-making authority as they currently continue to remain underrepresented in leadership;
7. *Transformation of structures and systems*: barriers to access, especially those that are gender-insensitive or gender-blind, must be identified and challenged.

The CSW is a global intergovernmental body that focuses exclusively on the promotion of gender equality and the inclusion of women in all walks of life. The body, officially formed in 1946, meets annually to deliberate upon the global progress made to further gender equality, identify and address challenges, and set the standards for gender-inclusive policymaking around the world.

**CCA Statement at UN ECOSOC High-level Segment–2021**

13–16 July 2021

The written statement of the CCA, an accredited NGO in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN, was published as part of the documentation for the 2021 ECOSOC High-level Segment (HLS).

The HLS convened around the theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: Building an inclusive and effective path

for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.”

The statement served as a unique opportunity for the CCA to contribute to issues of critical concern for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and provided a platform to discuss the long-term impact of current trends in the economic, social, and environmental areas on the realisation of the SDGs.

The statement focused on SDG 3, ‘good health and wellbeing’, and recommended that UN member states (1) uphold and prioritise prior commitment made to fully realise SDG 3 by ensuring that health as a human right is protected for all, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable; (2) act collectively and collaboratively to boost vaccine access throughout the world by resisting from hoarding and engaging in sharing; and (3) engage with affected peoples and communities, civil society and faith-based organisations to leverage potentials and resources for pandemic recovery.

**Institute on Human Rights (IHR)–2021**

17–28 May 2021



Speakers and Participants of Institute on Human Rights (IHR)–2021

The CCA initiated an intensive two-week training programme, the Institute on Human Rights (IHR)–2021, which was designed to cover a wide range of human rights topics including the principles of human rights and human dignity from Christian theological perspectives, as well as international human rights instruments and protection mechanisms.

The IHR–2021, focusing on the theme 'Being Defenders of Human Rights and Human Dignity', was a new initiative of the CCA for training young church workers and budding theologians in human rights advocacy as well as in understanding the bases and principles of human rights and human dignity.

The IHR–2021 was facilitated by fifteen resource persons comprising internationally acclaimed human rights educators, human rights defenders, social scientists, and legal luminaries who have specialised in international human rights laws, human rights protection mechanisms, and international human rights advocacy.

Prominent members of faculty included Prof. Vitit Muntarbhorn (UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok); Prof. Faizan Mustafa (Vice-Chancellor, NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, India); Basil Fernando (former UN human rights education trainer in Cambodia, and Director of Asian Human Rights Commission, Hong Kong), Prof. Dr Sarasu Esther Thomas (Registrar, National Law School of India University, Bangalore, India); Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza (Theological educator and General Secretary, National Council of Churches in the Philippines); Sr. Elaine Seow (Verbum Dei Missionary Fraternity of the Roman Catholic Church in Taiwan); Norma Dollaga (Kasimbayan Ecumenical Centre for Development, Philippines); Dr Matthias Reuss (UNHCR, Bangkok Regional Office); Nicholas Booth (UNDP, Asia Regional Office, Bangkok); Doreen Buettner (UN

Women, Asia Pacific Regional Office); Jennifer Philpot-Nissen (Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, World Council of Churches in Switzerland); Prof. Dr Reynaldo Racaza Ty (Professor of Political Science); Beverly Longid (International Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self Determination and Liberation, Philippines); Attorney John Pattiwael (Child Rights Activist); and Dr Mathews George Chunakara (CCA).

25 students of the IHR–2021 who attended the IHR online from across Asia, Latin America, and Europe expressed that they were challenged by the lessons they gleaned from the IHR, which enabled them to broaden their perspectives, and that they were refreshed in their understanding of the defence of human dignity and human rights as a Christian duty.

The students collectively made a commitment to "follow in the footsteps of Christ, who incarnated 'good news to the poor, freedom to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom from oppression, and the year of the Lord's favour'" and further affirmed "the image of God in every person encountered, recognising the 'neighbour' in the other."

The students attended a variety of sessions, studying and reflecting on the Christian and interreligious notions on human rights and human dignity; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other standards of human rights from the global to the local contexts; human rights mechanisms in the United Nations, and regional and national institutions focused on human rights work; victories and challenges for human rights advocacy and action in the Asia-Pacific; prospects for human rights defence in Asia-Pacific; specific rights of women, of children, of the family, of refugees, migrants, and stateless persons, and of minorities and indigenous peoples; and the role of the church and the ecumenical movement in promoting the rights and dignity of all people.

## Rights and Dignity of Children

### Regional Consultation on "Upholding the Dignity and Rights of Children in a New Normal Era" 29–30 April 2021



Participants (partial view) of Regional Consultation on  
'Upholding the Dignity and Rights of Children in a New Normal Era'

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), through its Asia Advocacy Network on Dignity and Rights of Children (AANDRoC) conducted a virtual consultation on 29–30 April 2021 addressing specific concerns and issues related to the rights and dignity of children in the new normal context.

Thirty-eight people from 11 different countries across Asia and beyond attended the virtual meeting representing CCA member churches and councils, theological colleges, regional and national bodies such as South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC), Voice of the Children Malaysia, Salinlahi Alliance for Children's Concerns, Children's Rehabilitation Center in the Philippines, the Association for the rights of Children in South East Asia (ARCSEA), and also international bodies such as UNICEF and World Vision International.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of the CCA, welcomed

the participants and thanked them for taking part in the CCA's new way of having programmes and activities. He said that the COVID-19 pandemic had taught the CCA and its constituencies many things in day-to-day life, and it was calling for further reflection as we were facing uncertainties. Further, he said that the COVID-19 pandemic had to be recognised as a human crisis, as it had devastating effects on our lives. He highlighted the fact that churches' spiritual life and ministry had changed, but at this crucial moment, churches' ministry should be considered as a priority for Asian churches. Dr Chunakara also wished that a guideline or recommendation could be released at the end of the consultation for a common reference for churches in Asia to respond to the 'new normality' challenges.

The first session on "Challenges to child rights protection in the new normal era"

was presented by UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office's Child Right Lead, Lucio V. Sarandrea. He said that it was critical to enforce child safeguarding mechanisms to respond to the crisis, improve current circumstances, and prevent such deteriorations from reoccurring in the future. This was to ensure that no child was left behind. Sarandrea highlighted the challenges faced in the context of children's education and he also suggested updating means of remote assistance from old-fashioned child hotlines to leveraging social media as spaces to reach out, provide psychological support/assistance, and even as a means to report abuse. At the end of his presentation, he emphasised that "Children are our present; they face today's realities. Children must be taken seriously and must be listened to." As children's rights could not be exercised fully at the moment – as a child's right to health and life was conflicting with the right to play and leisure – he recommended limiting the exercise of the latter as there would be a greater benefit from the former.

World Vision International representatives Alodia Santos and Eu-Lee Chng conducted a joint session on "Child rights protection and challenges to children's education in a safe environment in a new normal era". They stated that the constant flux of "lock and lift" scenario added to the stress children were feeling under the pandemic. They pointed out that children from poorer families, children with disabilities, adolescent girls who took on more caregiving roles and/or at risk of early marriage, and children from more marginalised groups were the most affected groups. They also suggested a "triangular ecosystem approach" with collaborations among community leaders, educational institutions, and parents. The key priorities and areas of focus suggested by Santos and Chng included opening schools as safely as possible when restrictions ease; ensuring all children (especially the most vulnerable) return to school; helping children with

learning loss; determining most effective means of distance learning; and continuing the empowerment of homes as venues of playful and child-centred learning.

The first day of the consultation was ended with a sharing session. Two students from the Philippines and a school principal from India shared their experiences and the challenges they faced. Aaliyah Haban, a student from an urban setting, and Catherine Mandacawan, a Lumad student, shared their struggle of having remote learning. Basanti Biswas, a principal in Kolkatta, India, identified several challenges, such as: economics-related situation, young children's inability to handle online learning with their untrained parents, and teachers' difficulties to do assessment due to technological gaps.

The second day of the consultation began with a theological-biblical reflection led by Rev. Fr. Biju P. Thomas from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India, which was based on the Gospel of Luke chapter 2:40–52. He shared three points: 1) Jesus' balanced and complete growth as a child (physical, mental, spiritual, and social growth), thus giving the right model for child mentoring; 2) Jesus was teachable- he knew that the prerequisite of teaching was being teachable; and 3) Jesus obeyed his parents - Jesus' submission to his parents shows that submission was not about fighting for one's rights, instead becoming the right person, and that submission to others was not because they knew more but because God had called us to submit ourselves.

With this ground, the deliberation of the consultation was continued with a session on "Pastoral ministries in a new normal context among children and families", led by Pastor Hazel J. Salatan from the Union Theological Seminary in the Philippines. She shared that external stresses caused by the pandemic could result in domestic abuse, violence, and behavioural issues that children could potentially face in

their homes. She also shared her studies in which she created some stories as a means of pastoral ministry for children in her context of ministry. Pastor Salatan concluded by saying that every child had a story to tell, so (we have to) listen to them; thus emphasising the obligations to contextualise responses for children and communicating with them in their own 'language'.

Rev. Dr Justitia Vox Dei Hattu from the Jakarta Theological Seminary in Indonesia conducted a workshop on "Developing a child-friendly curriculum". She shared the principles of curriculum architecture, such as grounding the content in the needs of children; prioritising relevant content while also being flexible as different children had different capacities; providing spaces for children to connect with themselves and others; involving parents/guardians; and being holistic and inclusive.

The participants agreed that the unique challenges and needs that children and their families are facing given the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis must be identified and addressed through special church ministries, pastoral care, and psycho-social support. Such pastoral care must entail the creation of safe spaces for children to share their stories and experiences through different mediums. Pastoral care must also be extended to strengthen the relationships between children and their parents/caregivers by intervening in cases of domestic violence, abuse, and conflict under the extreme stress caused by the pandemic. Special considerations and accommodations must be made for children with no access to technology under lockdown and children with disabilities.

The participants of the consultation offered the following detailed recommendations for the active engagement of Asian churches in ensuring the dignity and rights of children during and after the global COVID-19 pandemic:

- Realising the right to life for all children under the maximum extent of survival and development: children's health, safety, and lives must be prioritised when lockdown measures are relaxed and public spaces (including churches and schools) are reopened.
- Fulfilling the right to education for all children by accelerating innovative educational programmes: churches must reach and support the most vulnerable children experiencing learning loss, such as children from poor families with no access to education/technology; children with disabilities; adolescent girls who are at risk of early/forced marriages and take up the role of caregivers; children from marginalised ethnicities, castes, or language groups; and children in violent/conflict situations.
- Supporting the right to self-expression and participation: as full members of the body of Christ, children must be considered an integral part of the community entitled to fundamental rights of expression and have the right to be heard. Their experiences, feelings, and stories expressed through their evolving capacities and potentials must be listened to and accounted for through the creation of a "culture of trust" in churches.
- Protecting children's right to privacy: as more and more children spend time online (given virtual modes of learning and the shift from in-person socialisation to virtual socialisation), children's identities and privacy must be protected, respected, and safeguarded from exploitation, abuse, and bullying.
- Securing collaborative, meaningful, and holistic partnerships: churches

must pool resources (human and financial) with related agencies and those invested in children's wellbeing so that children thrive physically, socio-emotionally, and spiritually.

**National Follow-up Consultation in India on "Towards an Ecumenical Advocacy for Upholding the Rights and Dignity of Children in India"**

*26-28 November 2021 | Bengaluru, India*

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Christian Service Agency (CSA), National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) Women and Children Concern and All India Sunday School Association of India (AISSA) came together to address and reflect upon one of the most urgent and pressing issues of Christian ministry related to children in church at the Ecumenical Christian Center in Bengaluru, India from 26–28 November 2021. Twenty-one participants attended the in-person meeting, which consisted of pastors, educators, and church activists from NCC India's member churches. During the two-day consultation, the participants discussed and reflected on issues and concerns faced by children in Indian context under the light of the theme "Towards an Ecumenical Advocacy for Upholding the Rights and Dignity of Children in India".

Rev. Dr Asir Ebenezer, the general secretary of NCC India, welcomed the participants. In his address, Dr Ebenezer challenged the participants to the need of Child Safeguarding and advocacy and how they could get involved in upholding rights of children in their churches. He further reminded them that children held more than 25percent of the total strength of the church today, therefore, churches must put their efforts and attention to children.

Dr Rohan Gideon from the United Theological College Bangalore presented the biblical-theological bases of dignity and rights of children. He mentioned that the need for rights and dignity of Children

was a mandate by Jesus to let the little children come to the presence of God and to bless them. He also explained about the solidarity in advocacy and upholding of the dignity of children.

A presentation on "Upholding the Rights and Dignity of Children in India: Towards an Ecumenical Advocacy" was delivered by Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the general secretary of CCA. Dr Chunakara highlighted the role of churches in advocacy, especially in advancing the rights and dignity of children. The participants also had discussions on policy practices.

Halin Justin Dev, programme executive for development of the Church of South India, explained what the practical difficulties in drafting and applying the policy on children and how to overcome the hindrances. He shared some concrete examples from the field and also a suggestion to incorporate local laws in the policy.

Basanti Biswas, the Principal of a senior secondary school In Kolkatta, shared the psychological and emotional impacts of child abuse on children's growth. She also encouraged the participants to be sensitive at reading the signs that a child is abused in school, home, or any other places. She shared her knowledge on what they could do upon receiving reports, including how to talk to the victim and guardians.

Following that session, Angelious Michal from All India Sunday School Association shared about the measures they could take to safeguard the children in various ways.

The last part of the consultation was focusing on making draft policy on child safeguarding.

Dr Ebenezer suggested that children be involved in deliberations about their welfare, thus recognising their voices and perspectives.

Rev Jyoti Singh facilitated the discussions and shared comparative and contextual

policy drafting tools. NCC India through its Women's desk, along with their partner, announced that they would be proceeding with the policy drafting even after the consultation ended.

### **National Consultation on Children in Indonesia**

*14-16 December 2021 | Bogor, Indonesia*

Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) together with the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia/PGI) through its Women and Children Bureau, Youth Bureau, and Intergenerational Commission conducted a joint national consultation on children from 14–16 December 2021. The participants comprised of pastors, Sunday School teachers and children from age 8. Twenty-five participants attended the programme in-person at Pondok Remaja PGI in Bogor, Indonesia, while 125 others joined through the Zoom platform from their respective places.

Focusing on the theme "I am the Alpha and the Omega" and the subtheme "Digital Literacy for Ministry of Children", the consultation aimed to provide a common platform for child activists to share the common issues, challenges and concerns they have been facing in accompanying children and their families amid the pandemic time and the consequent digitalisation, and also to encourage churches in Indonesia to be proactive in advocacy and activities to support child rights protection.

The opening worship on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> was facilitated by the Pasundan Christian Church (GKP), with participation of children in the order of worship. A biblical reflection, based on Matthew 18:1–5, was delivered by Elder Marcel Meruntu (GMIM). Elder Meruntu offered an open invitation for churches to review and rebuild their theological understanding on children and encouraged churches to be open to critics while doing the theological reconstruction.

He concluded by reaffirming that 'Gereja Ramah Anak' (or, Child-Friendly Church – PGI's initiative on child protection in church setting) stood for the church's absolute support for children.

Rev. Jacklevyn F. Manuputty, the general secretary of PGI, officially welcomed all participants. In his opening remarks, he highlighted the issue of digital transformation, the need for adaptation, and change of perspectives, moving from seeing it as a challenge towards viewing it as an opportunity. In this context, Rev. Manuputty also emphasized the role of adults and child's caretakers in the digital sphere, since children are exposed and vulnerable to content in the digital sphere that depict violence and exploitation. He called upon churches to intensify the communication and cooperation with parents and families. He also reminded all participants that the ministry of children was always meant for the best interest of a child.

Speaking on the theme and subtheme of the consultation, Rev. Manuputty affirmed that God took part in the vulnerability of human beings. He motivated churches' actions in overcoming crisis by saying, "Do not let the Covid-19 pandemic become an epidemic of despair."

Ridayani Damanik (Women and Children Bureau, PGI) and Beny Lumy (Jaringan Peduli Anak Bangsa/ national child care network) co-facilitated the first session. Ms Damanik revisited the journey of Gereja Ramah Anak, 'From Grha Oikoumene PGI to Pondok Remaja PGI', and Mr Lumy presented the guidelines to child right fulfilment with Child-Friendly Church approach. In the session after, the participants were invited to share their experiences, lessons learnt and best practices in doing their ministry to children and their families during the pandemic time.

On the morning of day 2, Rev. Dedanimrod Simatupang (GKP) delivered a biblical

theological reflection on how to be rooted and built up in Christ Jesus, which was based on the Colossians 2:6-8. He encouraged churches to keep learning and initiating innovations. "Faith grows from security – the feeling of safe and protected. Churches need to renew and develop themselves into a church that gives children a sense of security, both in physical and virtual spaces," concluded Rev. Simatupang.

The first session on the second day was co-facilitated by Rev. Gomar Gultom (chairperson of PGI) and John Pattiwael (CCA-AANDRoC coordinator).

Rev. Gultom delivered his presentation on 'Towards Child-Friendly Church: Children Ministry in Digital Era'. He revisited the world's history of revolution and highlighted that there was always a tendency of reluctance to change, even from the priests in the Old Testament history. Saying that digital era brought the future to present time, he presented four notions: first, digitalisation changed many things and many ways, things were becoming outdated rapidly; second, digitalisation brought tomorrow's phenomenon to the present; third, digitalisation had the power to break a long-standing and long-built civilisation; and fourth, whether (digital) disruption was a movement.

A presentation on 'Upholding the dignity and rights of children in Asia' was delivered by John Pattiwael. He emphasized that children were not the future of a church, thus church should not postpone any efforts and activities to address the needs of children. Mr Pattiwael elaborated church documents on children – WCC's commitment to children and CCA's communiques on child right protection. He also brought into attention the findings on Out of the Shadow Index, highlighting the importance of churches to build a strong networking with related bodies to foster the research findings. Mr pattiwael also recommended churches to start raising awareness to children about their

rights, to initiate church-based reporting mechanisms, and to build cooperation and collaboration with other agencies.

The second session of the day was co-facilitated by Rev. Krise A. Gosal (deputy general secretary, PGI) and Sony Mongan (Siberkreasi, unit of Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Communication and Information Technology).

Speaking on 'Prevention of Sexual Violence in the Ministry of Children', Rev. Gosal shared some of PGI's initiative in mainstreaming sexual abuse and violence prevention and challenges that had been faced by PGI. She further elaborated upon some forms of sexual violence and the main responsibility of churches. She affirmed, "Churches exist as a community of healers, restorers, and defenders of life."

Delivering a presentation on 'The role of information and communication technology in digital literacy', Sony Mongan shared four pillars of digital literacy: digital skills, digital ethics, digital culture, and digital security. He strongly advocated that children had to learn digital skills properly so that they were equipped to access, filter, and use every single data and information correctly.

A small-group discussion was held at the end of the second day for the participants to discuss and share on what their churches had done and were doing in the light of implementing Gereja Ramah Anak and digital literacy, to identify what they can do in their church context and together as a communion of churches. Rev. Ampilas Aritonang led the closing prayer of day-2. In his reflection, he invited all churches to implement the child-friendly church at the earliest and to be digitally literate, in order for churches not to lose the children, let alone seeing them become victims of violence.

The discussions on the last day of the consultation were focused on formulating

the consultation's recommendations. The participants of the consultation give specific recommendations to 3 related bodies: one, to PGI as an institution/organisation; two, to synod level and PGI's representatives at regional level; and lastly to local churches. The recommendations were as follows: to review and adopt child protection policy at all levels, to advocate and promote the implementation of *Gereja Ramah Anak* and Digital Literacy for all church members, and to build networks with relevant bodies including local government.

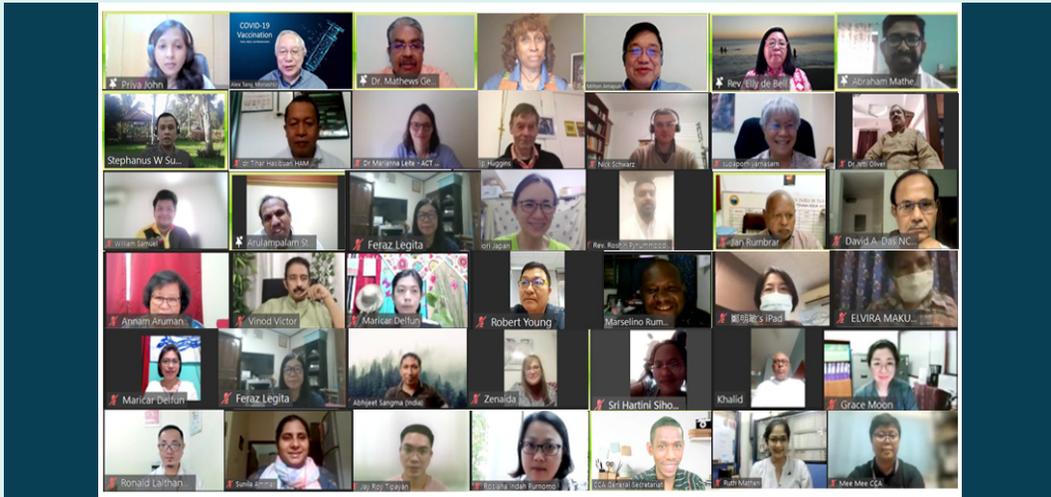
The participants said that the consultation had become a platform where they were

able to share their common struggle and take inspiration from others. The participants also shared that the consultation had opened their eyes to the realities faced by children, thus encouraged them to do better for their children. They were equipped with knowledge and experiences of others, and they were looking forward to synergize with each other in the best interests of the children. Rev. Krise Gosal said in her closing remarks, "Let us walk hand-in-hand. When we are walking together, God will help us strive for the Child-Friendly Church and child protection."

## Health and Healing: Churches' Response to Health, Healing and Wholeness in Changing Contexts in Asia

### Consultation on 'Towards Vaccine Equity amidst COVID-19 Surge in Asia'

20 July 2021



Participants of Consultation on 'Towards Vaccine Equity amidst COVID-19 Surge in Asia'

This Online Consultation was held on 20 July 2021 and was attended by over 50 participants representing different church and church-related organisations from the CCA's member constituencies and ecumenical partner organisations. It witnessed rich discussions on various

facets of the challenges and path ahead to global vaccine equity.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of the CCA, moderated the session. In his opening remarks, he underscored the need for such a

Consultation and stated that the prevailing inequitable distribution of vaccines is leaving millions of people vulnerable to the COVID-19 disease. In responding to such a crisis situation, national governments normally tend to follow their own interests rather than a globally coordinated approach. The present situation is one where countries are pushing for first access and are holding up key components of some aspects of production, a trend that is being labelled 'vaccine nationalism', with negative consequences for how well the global pandemic is managed and contained; not only in the long term but with immediate effect. He stated emphatically that everyone in our region must have knowledge, access, and resources to advanced research and development so as to be able to make the vaccines locally.

Dr Milton B. Amayun, a Global Health expert from the Philippines, discussed universal health coverage (UHC) in the context of access to the COVID-19 vaccine. He mentioned that the goals of UHC were comparable to vaccine equity in terms of access, sufficient quality, and financial protection. He also emphasised that the pandemic should be addressed broadly in preventing further transmission, protecting the delivery of essential health services, promoting mass vaccinations, expanding access to new rapid diagnostics and treatments, ensuring that future COVID-19 vaccines are a global public good with equitable access for everyone everywhere, and addressing the spread of misinformation and fake news about vaccine safety.

Rev. Dr Angelique Walker-Smith from Bread for the World USA addressed the participants and shared the advocacy initiatives of faith communities in North America to persuade the leaders of the developed world for global vaccine equity by means of speedily and urgently sharing

vaccine stockpiles, approving the WTO TRIPS waiver for vaccines, treatments, diagnostics, and other medical equipment, and supporting the global vaccine plan of inoculating all the world's population by April 2022.

Dr Alex Tang from Monash University in Malaysia gave the scientific perspective on vaccines and vaccinations to demystify the myths and misconceptions. He mentioned that the creation of the COVID-19 vaccine was possible in a short duration due to similar outbreaks in the recent past that had provided scientists with the knowledge, expertise, and the technology to produce COVID-19 vaccines. He also emphasised that the vaccine may not prevent one from contracting the infection but played a great role in reducing the severity of the disease, which was to be considered as an important factor in the efficacy of the vaccine. He highlighted the need to understand the scientific background in order to change the perspectives of faith communities towards vaccine.

Dr Priya John, General Secretary of Christian Medical Association of India, in her presentation stated that the role of faith-based institutions in vaccine equity was to complement the initiatives of the government, which involved addressing fear and hesitancy, providing services using their resources, and reaching out to the most remote and inaccessible communities in terms of geographic locations or various sections of the society. She mentioned that the strength of the Christian hospitals was the mandate and commitment of the staff and the trust that communities had in such institutions. She also emphasised that it was important to leverage potentials towards equitable vaccine access and availability, and dialogue with governments to recognise the contribution of Christian hospitals.

Mr Abraham C. Mathews, advocate of the Supreme Court of India, presented the challenges in access to vaccines from the perspective of regulation and laws related to the production, procurement, and import of raw materials to produce vaccines. He mentioned that even if countries could produce vaccines, there were regulations that needed to be addressed for companies. Compulsory licensing had been granted for countries, especially developing countries, to produce for their consumption, but the limits set regarding the quantity that could be produced was a hindrance amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which renders the whole global population vulnerable. He also said that patency was one of the many factors in the production of vaccine and that the need for stronger commitments from the governments, allocation of financial resources, and distribution remained a challenge for many countries.

Rev Dr Elly D. Pitoy-de Bell from Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB) presented a model of churches responding to scaling up vaccination processes and linking services with the government and other providers. She mentioned that in its

vision, GPIB saw itself as a church sent by God to the world to present the signs of God's Kingdom, namely love, joy, and peace. In accordance with this vision, GPIB was called to act in real time amid the screams of human suffering. The church was able to vaccinate more than 7000 persons in two weeks from different provinces in a joint effort with the Government of Indonesia. She said that the beneficiaries were from all faiths and that there was an effort to reach out to the entire community and not exclusively to the members of the church.

The participants emphasised the need for faith communities to support and amplify the need for international sharing of vaccines and enforceable frameworks for vaccine development and distribution, which is managed by established forums and institutions. He mentioned that countries must be bound by agreements rather than arbitrary limits which maximise profits of a few and everyone must be treated equally. Short-term thinking must not focus only on the privileged few, but the real aim must be the benefit of all God's people in the long run.

***“The creation narrative is the starting point of our rationale to build good governance. God created everything as good. This ideal of goodness cannot be maintained due to failed decision-making by human beings. This further leads to the emergence of sin, which is the tendency of using or abusing one's power. Jesus' movement emphasised the right of everyone to receive teaching and education, where teachers are no higher than followers, and the spirit of compassion of serving others rather than one's own self-interest. Ecclesia, too, is re-interpreted as wholeness and inclusiveness within and outside community. Good governance, thus, is a means for the good of not just the human society but for the benefit of all creation (oikos).”***

***- Rev. Dr Yusak B. Setyawan  
Asian Churches Building Good Governance and  
Accountability in Serving Humanity***



## **ACTION TOGETHER IN COMBATting HIV AND AIDS IN ASIA (ATCHAA)**

HIV and AIDS has been a special focus of CCA programme priorities. Several skill building and advocacy programmes have been initiated by CCA to address the concerns along with efforts to build an HIV competent church and community in Asia.

In order to effectively respond to HIV and AIDS with the member churches and councils, CCA is continuing its journey in building the capacity of its members to become inclusive and relevant for people living with HIV and AIDS through its Action Together to Combat HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) programme.

Asia-Pacific is the region with the second highest number of people living with HIV in the world – an estimated 5.1 million in 2015. (UNAIDS 2016 The Prevention Gap Report).

In order to contribute to the initiatives of global, national and local bodies to combat the alarming trend of increase of number of HIV and AIDS affected people, CCA will join together with governments and UN agencies such as UNAIDS. CCA is engaged in working with and through its member constituencies in Asia at national and local levels.

The specific objectives developed by CCA include

1. To Build the Capacity of CCA members by training facilitators at regional, sub-regional and local levels with exchange of learning and experiences.
2. To scale up the Advocacy initiatives among CCA member constituencies targeting member churches, governments and UN agencies.
3. To strengthen existing Faith based Networks and initiate new networks of faith-based groups in Asia in order to address the consequences of HIV and AIDS.
4. To play its role in an effective, efficient, responsible and sustainable way of addressing the problem of HIV and AIDS.

The expected outcomes are

1. CCA programmes make significant contributions towards the global HIV and AIDS goals of 'getting to zero': zero new infections, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths within Asia.
2. CCA member churches and councils work more actively in solidarity with interfaith partnerships in advocacy

for addressing care, support and treatment including Anti-retroviral Therapy.

3. CCA member churches and communities will be more competent in responding to HIV and AIDS and related issues, including human sexuality, Sexual Orientation Gender Identity (SOGI), reproductive health and human rights, based on faith values and inclusive principles.

## STRATEGIES

- Capacity Building of Facilitators within CCA Network.
- Self-Assessment of Churches inclusiveness by using Appreciative Inquiry Methods.
- Exchange of learning and sharing of resources within CCA and Inter-faith Network.
- Addressing factors governing HIV vulnerabilities including Human Sexuality and Gender.
- Documentation of good practices and building resources for models of intervention within the network.
- Motivating Youth as change agents.
- Specific Advocacy related to prevention, care, support, and treatment to global and concerned organization, development agencies and governments regionally and locally.
- Dissemination of learning at national and international forums based on first hand research.
- Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS (AINA): Inter-faith network will be strengthened at each country for exchange of learning, expertise and linkages for care and support within faith-based communities and organisations in Asia.
- Provides and facilitates interfaith platforms to address HIV and AIDS issues.

## Capacity-Building/Capacity Enhancement

### Providing Care and Support: A Regional Capacity Building Training on HIV and AIDS Advocacy in time of COVID-19 Pandemic

15–17 June 2021



Participants of Regional Capacity Building Training on HIV and AIDS Advocacy

The regional capacity building training on HIV and AIDS advocacy amidst the COVID-19 pandemic under the theme 'Providing Care and Support' was held from 15 to 17 June 2021 and was attended by forty registered participants from ten Asian countries. CCA maximised the use of the online platform (Zoom) to conduct the training, as several travel related restrictions were still in place, and for the safety and health of the participants. The facilitators of the consultation included representatives from UNAIDS, faith-based organisations, and civil society organisations involved in HIV and AIDS advocacy.

The three-day training was part of the CCA's ongoing programme, Action Together in Combatting HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA). The CCA's training programme was facilitated at a time when the impact of COVID-19 on key populations (KPs) has not yet been properly quantified. As key populations were at an elevated risk of

exposure to COVID-19, there was a more urgent need to effectively respond to the challenges they faced.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of the CCA, gave his opening remarks and stated that the CCA's ATCHAA programme was formed five years ago to empower churches to better respond to the HIV and AIDS crisis. He further affirmed that the CCA would continue to sustain its efforts in building HIV-competent churches and communities, and journey towards addressing emerging issues of the AIDS epidemic in Asia.

Session one was presented by Dr Ye Yu Shwe, the Regional Advisor for Epidemiology and Response Monitoring of UNAIDS Asia-Pacific Regional Office. His presentation focused on the overview of HIV and AIDS in Asia and the Impact of COVID-19. Dr Shwe mentioned that Asia and the Pacific was

seeing a rise in new infections in several countries and the numbers were increasing with the COVID-19 pandemic. He said that the pandemic had exacerbated existing inequalities, generated new complexities, and created additional setbacks. This had pushed the AIDS response, especially access to medicines, treatments, and diagnostics, further off track, thus widening fault lines in a deeply unequal world and exposing the dangers of under-investment in public health, health systems, and other essential public services for all.

Session two on 'Stigma, Shame, Denial, Discrimination, Inaction, and Mis-action (SSDDIM)' was led by Mr Wangda Dorji, executive Director of Lhak-Sam (Bhutan Network of Positives). Mr Dorji, a grassroots community leader, highlighted various factors leading to SSDDIM including scientific, legal, and policy procedures, religion and culture, social factors, government responses, and involvements of partners and donors. He emphasised the fact there was a cycle to how SSDDIM has become systematic, and all factors are interconnected. Each of these had contributed towards an unfavourable environment, and thus there was a greater need to effectively address each aspect. He also highlighted need for providing universal health coverage, changing the punitive laws and legal barriers, contextual interpretations of religious texts, developing a human rights approach in addressing HIV and AIDS, and enhancing advocacy initiatives towards a stigma-free society.

After the first two sessions, participants were put into break-out rooms for a workshop on SSDDIM. The workshop involved discussions on identifying and analysing the root causes of stigma from their own context and how they can address it.

Rev. Tony Franklin-Ross, Acting Director, Methodist Church in New Zealand and

Chairperson-Ecumenical Relations, World Methodist Council gave a theological reflection on 'Creating and Enabling a Congenial Environment for People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV)' for session three on Day 2 of the training. He underlined the importance of being cognisant of the personal, political, relational, and spiritual experiences of PLHIV, their families, friends, and allies. He further encouraged the participants to articulate hermeneutics in such a manner as to develop an authentic understanding of religion and Christian tradition and theology by learning from the embodied experiences of trauma, exclusion, grace, and love. He ended his session by stressing the need for creating a sense of community and building openness and welcoming space.

Session five was the workshop on SAVE tool approach (Safer practices, Access to treatment, Voluntary counselling and testing, Empowerment) for addressing HIV and AIDS for religious leaders. It was led by Rev Carleen Nomorosa, the HIV Programme Coordinator of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). The SAVE toolkit is an alternative approach from the traditional HIV responses which is limiting and sometimes discriminatory. It is holistic and innovative in its nature, aiming to address prevention, treatment, and education for communities on the topic of HIV and AIDS.

Mr Loon Gangte shared the PLHIV community experiences and perspectives during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr Gangte is the Founder and President of Delhi Network of Positives, India and the Regional Coordinator for International Treatment Preparedness Coalition. He pointed out that continual and uninterrupted treatment was crucial for PLHIV to ensure that their viral load remained undetectable. This would in turn lead to non-transmissible HIV. He

pushed for advocating for the sustained supplies of the life-long medication for PLHIV. The challenges of lockdown and hindered access to antiretroviral drugs was shared and emphasised the PLHIV community.

After all the inputs and learnings shared by the resource speakers, participants were then encouraged to form regional groups to discuss the challenges in their own context. The assessment tool towards inclusiveness, developed by CCA, was used as basis of discussion.

The participants then made action plans for national and sub-regional follow-up programmes. The plans made by the

participants focused on capacity building and training, and advocacy and networking. They stressed that although in some context, they were more advanced in their HIV responses, they should not forget to always include the basic element, namely, continued education and awareness-raising to counter stigma and discrimination.

It also highlighted the need to use differentiated service delivery models for testing and treatment, including digital, community-led, and community-based services that overcome challenges such as those created by the COVID-19 pandemic by delivering treatment and related support services to the people in greatest need, wherever they were.

### National Capacity Building Training on HIV and AIDS Advocacy in Indonesia 1–3 September 2021



Participants of National Capacity Building on HIV and AIDS Advocacy in Indonesia

The Christian Conference of Asia together with the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia) organised a 3-day virtual national capacity building training to strengthen HIV and AIDS advocacy in Indonesia from 1–3 September 2021.

Forty participants, from different member churches of CCA and PGI all over Indonesia, joined the training. Resource Persons of the consultation included representatives from faith-based organisations, PLHIV organisations and civil society organisations dealing with HIV and AIDS advocacy.

PGI General Secretary Pdt. Jacklevyn F. Manuputty welcomed the participants and extended his gratitude to the CCA for the programme. He then said that strengthening advocacy efforts in prevention, treatment, and support to PLHIV should be a priority of churches in Indonesia and that churches should build inclusive care services that include the social and spiritual aspects. Let us be of service to one another, especially to the marginalized communities in this time of the pandemic, he continued.

Session 1 was presented by Daniel Marguari of Spiritia Foundation, an organisation that provides quality support and care and upholds human rights for people living with HIV in Indonesia. He provided the HIV and AIDS situation in Indonesia and the barriers that prevent the progress of HIV advocacy, such as access to treatment and lack of government support as well as the societal stigma and discrimination.

A workshop on the myths and facts regarding HIV followed and was facilitated by Berlina Sibagariang of HKBP AIDS Ministry and Panduarti Prissabat of CD Bethesda. The participants were divided into breakout rooms to discuss the myths about HIV and AIDS in their local contexts and how they contribute to stigma and discrimination. Participants observed that advocacy and education of the general public is still the key to counter the myths of HIV and AIDS and stigmatization.

The workshop was then followed by the testimony of two PLHIV from Jaringan Indonesia Positif (Positive Indonesian Network). They shared their struggle as PLHIV in the time of the covid-19 pandemic. They highlighted their experiences of difficulty accessing services because of restrictions related to covid-19. They emphasized that PLHIV are vulnerable to covid-19, therefore access to prevention, vaccine, testing, treatment and assistance related to violence and mental health should be prioritized. They then ended with a call to action leading to non-

discriminatory and integrated health service and care for PLHIV.

The second day of the training focused on HIV language that contributes to stigma and discrimination, presented by Aan Rianto of Jaringan Equals Indonesia. This was followed by a presentation entitled 'Vulnerabilities of HIV in terms of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics.' The presenter of the latter was Slamet Rahardjo of GWI-INA, a network of community-based organizations (CBOs) working on HIV, health and human rights issues in Indonesia. The speakers emphasized the use of correct language and sharing of the right information to counter misinformation that contributes to HIV stigma. Slamet Rahardjo added the imposition of the Yogyakarta principle in responding to HIV and its vulnerabilities as it serves as a guide to international principles relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. He emphasized the fact that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that sexual orientation and gender identity are integral to every person's dignity and humanity and must not be the basis for discrimination or abuse. The presenters then encouraged the participants to educate their local communities and their leaders so that they are well informed about the issue. The participants were then challenged by the resource speakers in building an inclusive and welcoming community and advocating for all people regardless of their HIV status and orientation in their communities. On the last day of the training, the participants were equipped with tools and perspectives on how to eradicate stigma and end HIV.

Rev. Stephen Suleeman provided a theological perspective in HIV and Sexual Orientation in church services. He highlighted the role of the church in bringing good news to all without discrimination. It is about time that the

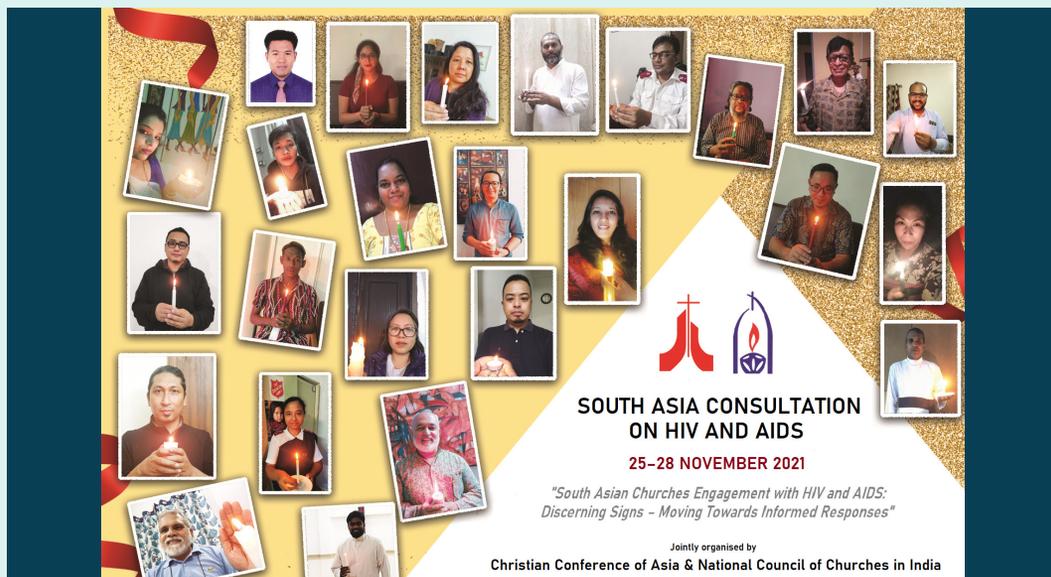
churches let go of their prejudices and start embracing everyone regardless of their HIV status and gender orientation, he added.

Towards the end of the training, Baby Rivona Nasution of Ikatan Perempuan Positif Indonesia-IPPI (Association of Indonesian Positive Women) gave practical information on the current HIV prevention

strategies that can be replicated by churches and communities. Such strategies include the ABCDE prevention, the S.A.V.E approach, PrEP and PEP, ARV treatment and Undetectable=Untransmittable. Action plans and follow-up consultations were undertaken by the participants in their bid to continue working in HIV and AIDS Advocacy.

### South Asian Churches Engagement with HIV and AIDS: Discerning Signs - Working Towards Informed Responses

25–28 November 2021



Participants of South Asia Consultation on HIV and AIDS

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) together with the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) organised a four-day South Asia Sub-Regional Consultation on 'South Asian Churches Engagement with HIV and AIDS: Discerning Signs – Working Towards Informed Responses' from 25–28 November 2021.

The Sub-Regional Consultation, which was organised virtually, saw the participation of 27 clergypersons, healthcare professionals, and activists from the CCA's member churches and

councils in the South Asia region, namely, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and India. The 15 resource persons for the programme represented different faith-based organisations, church medical ministries, PLHIV (People Living with HIV) organisations, as well as UNAIDS.

The NCCI General Secretary Rev. Asir Ebenezer extended a welcome and further added that it was important for the church to return to HIV ministries to cater to people with HIV through the full gamut of interventions.

Rev. Among Jamir from the Nagaland Baptist Church Council in India shared a biblical-theological reflection on Mark 2:1–5 and John 10:10.

The keynote address was delivered by Rev. J.P. Heath, Policy Advisor on HIV, Human Sexuality, and Theology, Church of Sweden, and Co-founder of the International Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV (INERELA+). He emphasized that it is the job of the Church to bring people to wholeness. He also highlighted that a recurring challenge is the inability of the Church to deal more positively with sex and sexuality, since a significant section of the Church continues to associate HIV and AIDS with sin, stigma, and ultimately death.

The session on 'Mapping the Context of HIV in South Asia' was delivered by Dr Salil Panakadan, Regional Advisor, UNAIDS Asia and Pacific Regional Support Team. He shared key data and insights from the region. He observed that there was highly unequal progress, with some countries faring much worse than others, which had led to only a 50 percent fulfilment of the "90-90-90 by 2030" target. At this point of time, he recommended building competencies and increasing engagement with vulnerable communities through innovative approaches (such as virtual interventions as was done during the COVID-19 pandemic), as the gains made could be lost and progress further stalled if national/stakeholder commitments waned.

A panel discussion on 'Exploring a relevant theology on HIV and AIDS for our times' saw discussions among three speakers, Dr Zohmangaihi Rokhum from the Council for World Mission (CWM) and Tahan Theological College, Myanmar, Rev. Among Jamir, Nagaland Baptist Church Council, and Aneleh Fourie-le Roux, Executive Director, Christian AIDS Bureau for Southern Africa (CABSA). It was moderated by Lalbiakhlui (Kuki) Rokhum of the Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission

on Relief (EFICOR). Dr Rokhum proposed a "living theology", a theology of wholeness that was people-centered, proclaimed the fullness of life rather than the fear of death, and was restorative and healing. Rev. Jamir described a "theology of the body". He said that churches tended to dichotomize the soul and the body, according more superiority to the former while considering the latter as bad and sinful. Ms Fourie-le Roux talked about the Channels of Hope course that was facilitated by CABSA, which "was not a new theology but goes back to core messages of the Bible" and "rephrases Biblical truths".

The presentation on 'Key Issues in the Context of Corona' was delivered by Loon Gangte, the Founder and Executive Director of Delhi Network of Positive (DNP+) and Regional Coordinator, ITPC-South Asia. He shared three main challenges faced by PLHIV during the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, their physical health was compromised due to interrupted ART (anti-retroviral) treatments. The real impact of such interruptions of ART adherence, missed doses, and impeded treatments would only be felt in a few years' time with cases of drug resistance. Secondly, many PLHIV who worked in the unorganized sector or who relied on daily wages suddenly found themselves out of work, which affected their incomes, nutrition, and even the wellbeing of their families who depended on them. Finally, PLHIV suffered severe mental stress and trauma due to the anxiety surrounding the pandemic, the fear of drug resistance, and the guilt of being unable to adequately provide for their families.

A panel discussion on 'Gender and Sexuality and Vulnerability in the context of South Asia' saw presentations by Santa Khurai from Solidarity and Action Against the HIV Infection in India (SAATHII) and All Manipur Nupi Maanbi Association (AMaNA), Dr L. Ramakrishnan from SAATHII, Rev. Manu

Abraham from the Mar Thoma Church in India, and Rev. Samuel Koilpalli from the Church of South India. Ms Khurai, who is an indigenous transwoman, said that indigenous alternate sexualities were "lost in translation" when trying to be included within the spectrum of the LGBTQ community and that such misnomers affected allocations of funds and other resources for indigenous empowerment. She questioned the labelling of key populations and termed it as regressive with no rationale, as it had led to further stereotyping and ghettoization while advancing harassment and stigma and failing to address the main intention of inclusion. Dr Ramakrishnan identified the lag between legal and social change. He addressed the continuum of discrimination that exists against non-conforming people, from childhood bullying to physical violence and death. Rev. Abraham shared the experiences of the Navjeevan Centre in Mumbai, India, which was established by the Mar Thoma Church for commercially sexually exploited women and their children. Rev. Koilpalli spoke about the ongoing work with HIV and the trans community in Vilipuram, India, under the Church of South India. As part of this initiative, outreach programmes, comprising tailoring classes, medical camps, condom distribution drives, and prayer and counselling sessions, were organized for transpeople.

The session on 'Church Responses to HIV: Examples from South Asia' saw three presentations from Dr Priya John, General Secretary of the Christian Medical Association in India (CMAI), Dr Vijay Aruldas, from Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore, India, and Dr R.L. Sanghluna from the Mizoram Synod, Presbyterian Church of India. Dr John proposed the fellowship and network model that ensured constant engagement and ownership. Dr Aruldas shared the lessons from years of experiences in the field and said that the Church had the potential to impact the

infected and the affected, influence social perspectives and worldviews, and partner with national, international, and interfaith agencies in their HIV and AIDS ministries. Dr Sanghluna shared the model of the Synod hospital in Mizoram that provided special services for PLHIV and also adopted a multi-stakeholder approach and intervened with different segments of the community such as children, youth, women and men, and the elderly for coordinated responses to HIV.

The final session on 'Understanding model approaches and their relevance in Asia: SAVE Approaches' was taken by Rev. Carlene Nomorosa from the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). Rev. Nomorosa introduced the SAVE (Safer practices, Access to treatment, Voluntary Counselling and Testing, and Empowerment) approach to the participants. Developed by INERELA+, the model was a response to the need for a more comprehensive approach to addressing HIV and provided religious leaders and other HIV practitioners with the tools and strategies necessary for transformation. She also highlighted aspects of sexual health, located HIV in the matrix of an unjust social order with intersections of class, and advocated for a systemic upheaval to end AIDS and all inequalities.

In the concluding session, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the CCA General Secretary, shared ongoing and parallel initiatives of the CCA in the Asia region, and lauded the commitments of South Asian church leaders and other key representatives to renewing and fortifying existing HIV and AIDS networks.

The participants of the four-day Consultation developed plans of action for their own churches and ministries, while also recommending further steps for national councils of churches and the CCA itself. This included increasing training and capacity-building programmes, identifying

gaps and funding concerns, promoting research, facilitating networking, furthering interfaith collaborations, and engaging with national and international organisations. The participants also developed a Commitment, which reaffirmed commitments to revive and strengthen vigorously ministries pertaining to HIV and AIDS and placing PLHIV at

the centre of holistic ministries, offering churches and their competencies for the care, protection, uplift, and empowerment of PLHIV, practicing stigma- and judgement-free theologies, bolstering interfaith action, exploring more avenues of cooperation with existing government and secular programmes, and partnering with global initiatives to meet 2030 targets.

## Advocacy / Leadership and Advocacy

### Inter-Faith Residential Advocacy Training Workshop on HIV and AIDS Prevention in Sri Lanka

26-28 February 2021 | Colombo, Sri Lanka



Participants of Interfaith Advocacy Training Workshop on HIV and AIDS Prevention in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is considered to have low prevalence of HIV with high-risk behaviours and according to the HIV Surveillance Data, it is estimated that there are approximately 3200-6200 adults and children living with HIV. This includes around 200 new cases reported in 2019 and around 200 deaths. The ratio of HIV positive cases among men to women stands at 1.4:1 with the number of women estimated at around 1400. Most of the cases are reported in the Western

and Northern Provinces of Colombo, Gampaha, and Jaffna districts.

The predominant mode of transmission in Sri Lanka is heterosexual behaviours. Recent studies reveal an estimate of 50,000 commercial sex workers in Sri Lanka and this is mainly attributed to the displacements of communities, war widows, and the challenge for survival following the nearly three decades of war in the country. In addition, migration

of women for employment also pose as potential factors for sexual abuse and HIV transmission. It should also be noted that the repercussions of the COVID 19 pandemic, especially the economic factor, has become a huge threat. Cultural factors limiting open discussion of sex, lack of awareness of safe sex in rural areas, and high-risk groups pose obstacles for preventive programs.

A total of nineteen participants attended the advocacy training from different faith communities in Sri Lanka on 26–28 of February 2021. The advocacy training workshop was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka and organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka (NCCSL). The number of participants were limited in compliance with the rules and restrictions with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fr. Maxwell Doss, General Secretary of NCCSL opened the training with a prayer and welcomed the participants. He explained the background of the workshop, the National and International organisers, and the rules regarding health and safety that were to be followed by participants during the three-day workshop. The participants were then encouraged to interact with others and presented their expectations from the training programme. It was emphasised that HIV and AIDS must be addressed in Sri Lanka as there was a rise in the number of cases and the COVID-19 situation would also disrupt services and awareness programmes.

The first day's sessions include health and sexual health, various determinants of health, myths, attitudes and beliefs towards sexuality and communication skills. The workshop was facilitated by Rev. SLW Pathmasiri, Mr Sarath T. Peiris and Ms Kanthi Abegkoon. On the second day, Dr Chandani Jayahodi, Consultant from the National HIV and AIDS Control Programme – Ministry of

Health, mentioned the need for public and private partnership in addressing HIV and AIDS prevention. She also emphasised the need to talk about sexual and reproductive health. Behavioural change was key for prevention and therefore the need to help others understand all factors connected to HIV are necessary.

The session on reducing the stigma and discrimination caused by HIV and AIDS focused on ensuring a human rights-based approach. Several experiences of stigma and discrimination were also shared. The session was interactive and included a testimony from a person living with HIV. He spoke of treatment and care, stigma and discrimination, human rights violations, as well as positive support he received from different sectors of the society. Some participants had never met a PLHIV and it was an eye-opening experience that helped them to reflect on their own possible biases. Participants were moved by the testimony and gave the PLHIV their heartiest compliments and encouragement.

The last day of the workshop focused on communications. It was highlighted that the words we use contribute highly to stigma and discrimination and we should be all careful and think before we speak. Identification of risky sexual behaviours and issues on human sexuality was also discussed. Participants emphasised the need to respect one another regardless of sex and race and to continue having a dialogue with these issues so they can understand each other's perspective and work together towards prevention and change of behaviours for those involved in risky behaviours.

The participants also prepared action plans which they would implement in their own setting. The change in knowledge and attitude was measured by pre- and post-test during the workshop.

## Strengthening Networks and Collaborators/Interfaith Solidarity

### Asia Regional Consultation on Strengthening Interfaith Actions in HIV Response 21–22 September 2021



Participants of Asia Regional Consultation on Strengthening Interfaith Actions in HIV Response

The Christian Conference of Asia's Action Together in Combatting HIV and AIDS in Asia (CCA-ATCHAA) held a two-day Regional Consultation on Strengthening Interfaith Actions in HIV Response on September 21-22, 2021 through the zoom platform. Thirty-seven various faith participants joined from within Asia and beyond.

The consultation began with a welcome address by Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the General Secretary of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), who observed that religious leaders had been at the forefront when it came to taking care of those infected and affected with HIV ever since the epidemic started. Mentioning the examples of the Buddhist monks in Cambodia and Muslim leaders in Indonesia, he pointed out that faith leaders have shown compassion, care and have acted even before governments started their programmes.

Ms Stela Sacaliuc, Executive Officer of the UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Asia

and Pacific mentioned that there were increasing incidences of new infection in Asia and the faith communities have positions of trust at the heart of communities and their missions to serve communities equip them to provide services and support that extend beyond the reach of many conventional services and systems. The global strategy acknowledges the distinctive and extensive contributions of FBOs and faith communities in providing HIV services, care and support to the key populations and affected communities.

The next session discussed breaking the barrier of stigma and discrimination in the society towards HIV and the strategies for faith-based organisations. Mr Wangda Dorji from Lhak-Sam (Bhutan Network of Positives) emphasised that people make the nation and religion and set norms which can be changed only by the people themselves. He told the participants that

stigma and discrimination can be reduced if we put others before us.

Dr Kezevino Aram from Shanti Ashram, India presented the challenges and opportunities of faith-based organization in HIV response and particularly in time of COVID-19. She mentioned that there are learnings from the response to HIV in time of COVID-19 pandemic and that faith-based organisations have always been crisis managers. Their approach must focus on science, understanding the vulnerabilities, impact on socio-economic realities and restrictions related to the pandemic. Faith-based communities can become role models in responding and increasing the ability of others to respond. This is not the time to run business as usual but rather break the culture of silence and advocate for the most marginalized and vulnerable.

Ms Izza Annafisatad Daniah from the Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia shared the experience of the women Muslim faith leaders in Indonesia in responding to HIV and AIDS issue. She mentioned that the faith-based communities and organization must complement the work of the government and related agencies and use the same strategies and policies to ensure a complementary action rather than disintegrated ones. There are difficult topics like sex and sexuality within the faith communities, but the level of response can be right from home to change the mindset of people.

To understand the role of faith in HIV response in next decade, Dr David R Barstow, a long time AIDS activist from the United State and author of the HIV and AIDS in 2030: A choice Between Two Futures presented the strategies of the Global Interfaith network. The strategies have recommendations at local congregational

level to national and international forum. Faith can be both helpful and harmful and those who are regularly associated with religious events play a crucial role in changing the attitude of others and the communities around them.

Rogeselle B. Monton from the Philippines shared his perspective as a person living with HIV and how the faith communities can be a bridge between the government programmes and the community, especially the general population and not only the key affected population. He also heightened the challenges in many healthcare facilities where unethical practices continue for PLHIVs and vulnerable communities.

The consultation ended with a session on creating an inclusive and enabling environment for PLHIV and key affected population and a call to action by Dr Manoj Kurian, Coordinator of the WCC – Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance. He highlighted a different perspective for faith-based institutions and organizations to respond to HIV and AIDS. He emphasized the fact that response required looking at public health, human rights, voices from the margin, pastoral, and moral perspectives. Faith can build bridges between the marginalized, affected and infected persons with HIV on the one hand and the community at large on the other and this can be achieved only when we see divinity or God in others.

The participants highlighted that serving others is the foundation of religion and faith communities should be a safe and sacred space for all, irrespective of their HIV status and vulnerabilities. It is a journey towards justice for every human being and towards peace and harmony in the community, without stigma and discrimination.

## Appendices

### CCA Programmes and Activities in 2021

No.	Programme/Activity	Date	No. of Participants	Ref. Number as per 2020/2021 Programme Plan
1	Inter-Faith Residential Advocacy Training Workshop on HIV and AIDS Prevention in Sri Lanka	26–28 February	19	HIV.1.
2	'Transformational Leadership of Women in a Post-COVID-19 World': Webinar on International Women's Day–2021	8 March	7 facilitators + 1,300 views	BP.3.3.
3	Advocacy at the UN – delegation at the United Nations' 65 <sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women	15–26 March	8	PD.2.1.
4	Webinar on Decrease Access to Safe Water: Challenges to Human Security	22 March	8 facilitators + 70 participants	BP.6.1.
5	Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS-X) Advisory Committee Meeting	9 April	5	MU.2.
6	Regional Consultation on Upholding the Dignity and Rights of Children in a 'New Normal' Era	29–30 April	38	PD.5.1.
7	Asia Sunday	16 May	30 leaders + 1,350 views	EF.6.1.
8	Institute on Human Rights (IHR)–2021	17–28 May	25	PD.2.2.
9	'Overcoming Challenges of Inequality in Asia: Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in the context of COVID-19 Pandemic': WCC-CCA Joint Regional Consultation	4 June	300	BP.1.
10	Providing Care and Support: A Regional Capacity Building Training on HIV and AIDS Advocacy in time of COVID-19 Pandemic	15–17 June	40	HIV.2.

11	Regional Consultation on 'Ensure Gender Equality; Empower Women and Lift Up Humanity'	8–9 July	70	BP.3.1.
12	Consultation on 'Towards Vaccine Equity amidst COVID-19 Surge in Asia'	20 July	50	PD.8.
13	Regional Consultation on 'Changing Family Values in Tradition and Modernity in Asia'	3–5 August	50	EF.7.1.
14	Executive Committee Meeting	9–10 August	30	GS
15	National Capacity Building Training on HIV and AIDS Advocacy in Indonesia	1–3 September	40	PD. SP. ATCHAA
16	Asia Regional Consultation on Strengthening Interfaith Actions in HIV Response	21–22 September	37	PD. SP. ATCHAA
17	Asia Regional Consultation on Freedom of Religion, Rights of Religious Minorities, and Constitutional Guarantees in Asia'	5–8 October	50	PD.1.1
18	Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI)	18 October – 19 November	26	EF. 1.
19	Contextual Theology Training for Faculties of Bible Schools in Burmese Refugee Camps	18–19 October	42	MU. 4.1
20	Asian Churches Building Good Governance and Accountability in Serving Humanity	9-11 November	48	PD.1.2
21	South Asian Churches Engagement with HIV and AIDS: Discerning Signs- Working Towards Informed Responses	25-28 November	27	PD. SP. ATCHAA
22	National Follow-up Consultation in India on "Towards an Ecumenical Advocacy for Upholding the Rights and Dignity of Children in India"	26-28 November	21	PD. 5.1
23	AEWA Follow-up meeting	4 December	22	EF. 5.1
24	National Consultation on Children in Indonesia	14-16 December	25	PD. 5.1

## Report of the General Secretary to CCA Executive Committee Meeting – 2021

It is with great joy that once again I am presenting the General Secretary's report to the Executive Committee. Since we met last year, many changes have taken place in every corner of our respective countries. The dreadful situation that started affecting the world since the outbreak of COVID-19 in late 2019/early 2020 still continues. For a while we assumed that this awful situation would end soon, but we could not imagine that since the Executive Committee met online last year in November 2020, the situation would continue to hound us in a more serious way.

Now that we are together again, for a second time, through this online meeting of the Executive Committee, I am extremely grateful to each one of you for making this online meeting a priority in the midst of the ongoing unprecedented crisis.

### **The Impact of COVID-19 Crisis in Asia**

The COVID-19 pandemic so far has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health and our existence on this planet. The colossal damage that has affected every sphere of our lives, especially the economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic, is devastating. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people have died. Millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty. Millions more face existential threats. Half of the world's global workforce of 3.3 billion people is at risk of losing stable means of livelihoods.

Almost every South and South East Asian country is experiencing ravaging situations since the COVID-19 outbreak began. Informal economy workers in Asia are particularly vulnerable because the majority of them lack social protection and access to quality health care. Without the means to earn an income during lockdowns, many in Asia are unable to feed themselves and their families. For most, no income means no food, or, less food and less nutritious food. Border closures, trade restrictions, and confinement measures have been preventing the normal life activities of millions of Asians, particularly the most marginalised populations, which include small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples.

The people in Myanmar are facing the ravaging hit of COVID-19 along with battling an unstable political situation. Myanmar, which borders countries that are home to about a third of the world's population, risks becoming a "super-spreader state", according to a UN expert on Myanmar. Even with limited testing facilities in Myanmar the proportion of tests that return positive results has exceeded 35 per cent since mid-July, which suggests widespread and uncontrolled community transmission. Myanmar is counting around 360 deaths due to COVID each day. This is one of the world's highest fatality rates, relative to population. Yet it is probably an undercount, something which the military junta has implicitly acknowledged: it is building ten crematoria in Yangon, which will be capable of dispatching more than 3,000 bodies a day. After the coup in February this year, testing, contact-tracing, and treatment of COVID-19 ground to a halt. Public hospitals were emptied of medical workers, thousands of whom joined protests against the coup. Shortages of

oxygen have been exacerbated by a rule banning the sale of the life-saving gas to residents of Yangon unless they got permission from local officials appointed by the junta.

In Thailand, the daily COVID-19 cases and deaths both set records again last Saturday, as the country fights its worst surge in infections driven by the highly contagious Delta variant. Daily case tallies in the country have continued to rise sharply in July despite the imposition of tougher restrictions like curfew and partial lockdown in its most affected provinces. Local media reported on 1 August that the soaring cases had prompted the authorities to consider extending the current restrictive measures for another two weeks.

Generally speaking, Asian countries that led the way in controlling COVID-19 last year have now become laggards in the battle against the virus as their efforts to vaccinate their populations fall behind other countries in the world. The problems with vaccination rollouts vary from country to country, but across most of Asia one factor is constant: a lack of vaccines to administer. Having failed to develop or produce vaccines at home, many Asian countries must wait for vaccine deliveries from other countries, leaving them at the back of the queue. In most Asian countries, the vaccination process is very slow. It is a reality that most Asian countries were unable to control the spread of the virus in time, and at the same time, governments did not invest in vaccines with the same urgency as seen in Europe or the US. This trend will not help the Asian countries to fight the pandemic or reach even some semblance of normalcy.

The suffering and agony of millions of people in this world and the loss of lives of many pastors and church leaders in various Asian countries causes great pain to us. However, the Asian churches have been incredibly resilient and responsive during the pandemic.

Now is the time for global solidarity and support, especially with the most vulnerable in our societies, particularly in the emerging and developing world. Only together can we overcome the intertwined medical, social, and economic impacts of the pandemic and prevent its escalation into a protracted humanitarian catastrophe. The world must recognise this opportunity to build back better, and we need to be committed to pooling our expertise and experience to support countries in their crisis response measures.

### **Programmes since the Last Executive Meeting in November 2020**

Last year I reported about how CCA had been functioning in the context of the “new normal”. At that time, I reported that starting from the end of March to June 2019, the CCA office in Chiang Mai was under lockdown and we followed the Thai government’s instructions and guidelines. For some months now, the office has been functional on a part-time basis, but we are still not fully back to normal. Ever since the outbreak of COVID-19 started affecting us, our movements have been restricted. However, we have been making efforts to organise programmes and trying to implement the planned activities.

Since we shared information about the programmes and activities at the last meeting of the Executive Committee in November 2020, we have been able to organize 16 programmes online including a month-long training of Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI), and Institute on Human Rights for church workers, which lasted for 10 days. In terms of preparations for each programme, staff members have to engage themselves fully and devote the same

level of time and effort, or even more. Although the online programmes imply a reduction in programme costs, we certainly miss and keenly feel the lack of the added value of having the presence of numerous participants across Asia and facilitating each programme with in-person participation. More details and narrative programme and activities reports will be shared by my colleagues at this EC meeting.

### **Ecumenism and Ecumenical Movement in a Digitalised World**

The restrictions imposed by the pandemic and strict controls by governments pushed the CCA to accomplish many things in unique ways. The most significant adaptation was the enhanced use of virtual platforms and social media for our programmes and communication. Even though we prefer to meet together in person, we see a future in the digitalised world, and advanced communication methodologies provide new opportunities for our ecumenical engagements. The pandemic allowed us the scope for greater communication with member churches and partners.

Asia Sunday this year was facilitated virtually, and this special worship service held on 16 May with the participation of people across Asia and beyond was another specific example of our meaningful engagement during this pandemic. Remembering the promise given to all God's people in Exodus 15: 26, the Asia Sunday–2021 was observed in a virtual service focused on theme, "I am the Lord Who Heals You and Restores Your Health". A specially prepared liturgy was used for the online worship service, which was led by 30 ecclesiastical and ecumenical leaders from 27 countries and regions in Asia where the CCA's member churches, councils, and partner organisations are based. The worship service was viewed by the faithful, who participated in it through the virtual platforms and social media pages of CCA and related networks from around the world. It was attended or viewed by over 1,600 people.

We are also trying to revive our communication skills. New computers and accessories needed for faster communication techniques have been introduced. The present CCA website designed and launched in 2016 will have to be redesigned and updated. We have engaged external consultants for redesigning our website. In order to facilitate the registration process for the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and related communications, additional provisions in the new website also will be introduced soon.

### **Strategic Programme Plan (2016-2020)**

You might recall that we adopted a five-year strategic programme plan in the first meeting of our Executive Committee in 2015 October and started implementation of the programmes since January 2016. I am pleased to report that we were able to organise over 90 percent of the programmes and activities we had planned and scheduled as part of the five-year strategic programme plan. In addition to these programmes, we initiated several additional programmes from time to time based on some emerging issues and concerns. The CCA's five-year strategic plan continues to guide our work, although we need to plan further for a new strategic programme plan for the new post-Assembly period.

### **Programme Evaluation**

The Executive Committee mandated to arrange a programme evaluation as decided in its 2019 meeting. The EC approved the terms of reference for CCA programme evaluation and

appointed two external evaluators – Mr Leo Bashyam and Ms Helen Monisha Sarker. The evaluation process commenced on 30 September 2019. The survey has been progressing well for some time with the original plan of presenting the draft report to the EC and the GA in 2020 September.

The evaluators attended various programmes of CCA and directly interviewed and interacted with the participants. The review of all relevant documents—including annual Programme Reports, Minutes of various meetings since 2015, Finance Reports, and CCA policies and guidelines—was completed. They have prepared a tentative report and are planning to discuss it with the staff initially. The new situation has stalled the evaluation process for a while, but it will be resumed soon.

### **CCA Property Development**

Our discussions in the past Executive Committee meetings as well as our earlier decisions to commence the construction of the CCA office building and complex have not yet borne fruit due to various reasons.

The Executive Committee meeting in November 2020 had resolved to support the recommendations of the Finance Committee to develop property on 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the land owned by CCA in Chiang Mai and authorised the General Secretary to develop plans for the office building. As the COVID-19 situation is not congenial for any new initiative now, we have not followed up this matter. However, we will need to pay serious attention to it once the situation improves.

### **Update on CCA's 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Preparations and the New Situation**

The 2019 Executive Committee's decision to hold the Assembly in 2020 was revisited last year. In the context of the spread of COVID-19, the Executive Committee in its meeting in November 2020 agreed that the proposed dates and venue would have to be determined in lieu of the travel restrictions, mandatory quarantine or isolation requirements, and the health and safety of all delegates while they travel. The Executive Committee noted the inability to hold the Assembly in 2020, as per the EC 2019 resolutions, and authorised the General Secretary to make the necessary inquiries with the view to hold the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in May–June 2022, possibly in Indonesia.

I have made several enquiries regarding this. I had initial discussions with the churches in Indonesia with the help of CCA Moderator Bishop Simarmata. I contacted the Governor and Vice Governor of North Sulawesi and conversed with them directly over phone. Bishop Simarmata spoke with CCA member churches in North Sumatra. We have different possibilities now as churches in North Sumatra as well as in North Sulawesi have expressed their willingness to host the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, including their generous offer of bearing the costs of board and lodging.

Although we decided that the date of the Assembly be tentatively fixed for mid-2022, the prevailing situations and predictions raise the question of whether it would be really possible to hold the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly by mid-2022.

The number of infected people in most Asian countries has been increasing drastically and the government restrictions with regard to international travels, airlines operations, and other health-related warnings are still in place. Proof of vaccination or of recovery from infection is increasingly being demanded, not just for international travel but also within countries. It cannot be said that there are any substantial improvements in the COVID-19 situation in most Asian countries.

Foreseeing the possibility of a major Asian gathering in any Asian country which involves international travel is unrealistic at this stage. This warrants the need for us to think about changing the date of the Assembly from mid-2022. We may need to consider two options; either in early December 2022 or by April 2023. This might also give us more time for proper preparations. As it was originally planned, Bible studies have been prepared based on the Assembly theme. The first draft of the main study document on the Assembly theme and sub-themes has also been developed as an outcome of a preparatory workshop we had organised by the end of 2019 in anticipation that the GA would take place in 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 situation, we could not progress as expected in our preparations.

### **Finding Hope and God's Abundant Mercies amidst the Crisis**

This period of trial that we are currently undergoing is at a scale that perhaps none of us has ever experienced. We are cut off from one another, passing our days in varying degrees of isolation. Worries about our health, finances, and the future we had planned dominate our thoughts. Out of desperation, in moments of crisis like the present, we may find ourselves wondering, "Where is God in all this?" It may feel to some that God is simply absent. We have to accept the fact that we live in a fallen and broken world. The present pandemic is a crisis delivered by nature. Here, we must accept the simple truth that we suffer largely because of our own mistakes as a species.

We need to learn more readily to accept that this world is no heaven, and perhaps go one step further and see pain and suffering as evidence, probably a sort of precursor, of something better that is yet to come. We need to place our trust in God and hold on to our faith in God. Our faith in God, with the hope of reaching the destination in our journey, must sustain us. We need to find strength to face the ups and downs in this arduous journey, and it is through these ups and downs that we will grow in faith. If God allows pain, he will give us the strength to go through it, and he will show us the way out of it. Isaiah 41:10 can serve as a reminder to us all: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Mathews George Chunakara  
*General Secretary, CCA*  
9 August 2021

## In Memoriam

In 2021, the CCA received news about the sad demise of several prominent leaders in Asia, and the General Secretary issued statements expressing condolences and recognizing their contributions to churches and ecumenical movement in Asia:



*Rev. Dr Ngur Liana*, a former CCA staff member who coordinated the Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology programme division of the CCA from 2017–2020, passed away unexpectedly on 8 April 2021 in Tahan-Kalaymyo, Chin State, Myanmar, at the age of 61.

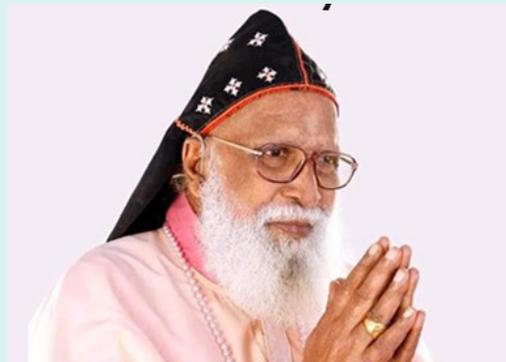
Rev. Dr Liana had co-organised several programmes and major events at the CCA, such as the Asia Mission Conference in 2017 and the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS)–IX. He was an ordained minister of the Methodist Church and had held key positions in his native Upper Myanmar Methodist Church and had also served as the Principal of the Myanmar Theological College in Mandalay, Myanmar.

*Rev. Dr Prof. M. Emmanuel Thathapudi*, Secretary of the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore Colleges (BTSSC), passed away on 24 April in Bangalore. An ordained minister of the Canadian Baptist Mission (CBM) Church



in Andhra Pradesh, Dr Thathapudi was a distinguished Professor of Old Testament.

He was the former Principal of the Andhra Christian Theological College in Hyderabad. As a representative of theological educational institutions in India, Dr Thathapudi had been a member of the Working Group of CCA's Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS)–IX and had participated in it when it was held in Medan, Indonesia, in 2019.



*His Eminence Dr Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan*, the former head and Emeritus Metropolitan of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India, passed away on 5 May at the age of 103. Mar Chrysostom, the 20<sup>th</sup> Mar Thoma, was at the helm of ecclesiastical and ecumenical movements in Asia for

over seven decades. Considered to be the longest-serving Bishop in the world, Mar Chrysostom was a widely respected religious dignitary with a global vision for humanity and was the only Christian bishop in India to be awarded the *Padma Bhushan*, one of the highest civilian awards of honour by the Government of India. Dr Philipose Mar Chrysostom provided leadership in the CCA through its Church and Society division in the 1960s and 1970s.



*Dr Soritua Albert Ernest Nababan*, a former Ephorus (Archbishop) of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) in Indonesia, passed away on 8 May at the age of 88. He was a prominent Asian ecumenical leader who had long been a major figure in the global ecumenical movement and was known for expressing his views and opinions fearlessly and candidly at international ecumenical forums, often questioning the dominance of Western churches in the ecumenical movement and critiquing missionary paternalism. Dr Nababan's association with the CCA dates right back to the founding Assembly of the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC), the forerunner of the CCA, which was held in Prapat, Indonesia in 1957 where he had served as a youth representative of the local organising committee. He became the first youth secretary of CCA in 1963 and continued until 1967. He was a

member of the CCA Presidium from 1990 to 1995. He had served the World Council of Churches (WCC) in various capacities as President of WCC (2006–2013); Vice-Moderator of the WCC Central Committee (1991–1998); Moderator of the Council for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the WCC (1968–1985); and a member of the WCC Central Committee (1983–1991). He served as Moderator of the Lutheran World Service from 1970 to 1977 and was Vice President of the Lutheran World Federation from 1984 to 1991. His ecumenical contributions and leadership in Indonesia included his services as the General Secretary of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) from 1967 to 1984, and as its chairperson from 1984 to 1987.



*His Holiness Catholicos Moran Mar Baselios Marthoma Paulose II*, the Supreme Head and Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 2021. The ecclesiastical leader was unassuming and had always been concerned about the poor and needy in society. His Holiness had initiated special philanthropic services and took special interests to motivate the congregations and faithful of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, providing new dimensions to the diaconal ministry of the church. His Holiness was ordained as a priest in 1973 and consecrated as a bishop in 1985.

Following the abdication of his predecessor His Holiness Basellos Marthoma Didymus I, he was enthroned on 1 November 2010 with the name Basellos Marthoma Paulose II, thereby becoming the Catholicos of the East. His Holiness took a special interest in the past years in enhancing bilateral relations with heads of various Orthodox churches in other parts of the world such as the Ethiopian, Armenian, and Russian Orthodox churches, as well as with the Roman Catholic Church.



*Rev. Stephen Suleeman*, theological educator and professor of the Jakarta Theological Seminary passed away on 8 November 2021. He had been known for tenaciously articulating his convictions on faith and praxis, and the need for developing a culture of tolerance and

inclusivity in church and society. He was actively involved in the CCA's HIV and AIDS programmes, and is remembered especially for his contributions during study sessions on gender and sexuality as well as for his participation at various theological summits of the CCA's Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS), including most recently the CATS–IX held in 2019. As an ordained minister of the Gereja Kristen Indonesia (GKI), Rev. Suleeman taught at the Jakarta Theological Seminary for 27 years. Rev. Suleeman lived by the principle of 'Memberikan suara kepada yang dibungkam', or 'giving a voice to the silenced'. Throughout his life, he strove to support and uplift the weak and marginalised, and those who had been ostracised by society. He was a strong ally of the LGBTQI community in Indonesia and was responsible for introducing sexuality studies in the formal education and training of new pastors and theologians in Jakarta, also coordinating the Field Education Programme that sent students to interact with LGBTQI communities in order to better understand them and promote inclusion in churches. He has translated over 50 theological books from English to Bahasa and was also a former member of the PGI's Christian Religious Education curriculum team.

## CCA Executive Committee Members 2015–2021

### Officers

#### *Moderator*

Archbishop Willem T.P. Simarmata      Huria Kristen Batak Protestan

#### *Vice Moderator*

Rev. Diana Tana      Te Runanga Whakawanaunga I Nga Nahi O Aotearoa

#### *Treasurer*

Augustine Dipak Karmakar      Church of Bangladesh

#### *General Secretary*

Dr Mathews George Chunakara      Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India

### Members

Rev. Arshad Gill	Church of Pakistan
Rt. Rev. Dhiloraj Canagasabey	Church of Ceylon
Huang Shin-Yi	Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
Ithrana Lawrence	Council of Churches in Malaysia
Rev. Kim Jong-goo	Korean Methodist Church
Rev. Kingphet Thammavong	Lao Evangelical Church
Rev. Moises Antonio da Silva	Protestant Church in Timor Leste
Nirmala Gurung	National Council of Churches in Nepal
Bishop P.C. Singh	National Council of Churches in India
Rt. Rev. Reuel Norman Marigza	United Church of Christ in the Philippines
Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian	Armenian Orthodox Church in Iran
Dr Sawako Fujiwara	National Christian Council in Japan
Supaporn Yarnasarn	Church of Christ in Thailand
Rev. Terence Corkin	Uniting Church in Australia
Dr Tong Wing Sze	Hong Kong Christian Council
Win Htut Thar Kyi	Myanmar Baptist Convention
Rev. Kim Kyrie	Anglican Church in Korea

## CCA Programme Committee Members 2015–2021

### Members

Rev. Kim Kyrie (Chairperson)	Anglican Church in Korea
Agatha Abrahamian	Armenian Orthodox Church in Iran
Chhoden Tshering	National Christian Council in Bhutan
Rt. Rev. Dr Daniel S. Thiagarajah	Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India
Rev. Dr Henny William Booth Sumakul	Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa, Indonesia
Rev. Evelyn Ruth Bhajan	Church of Pakistan
Kaythi Min Din	Myanmar Council of Churches
Bishop Kuriakose Mar Theophilose	Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church
Lizette Galimia Tapia	United Methodist Church in the Philippines
Prof. Martha Mary Marwein	National Council of Churches in India
Mary Thomas	Council of Churches in Malaysia
Rev. Dr Mery Kolimon	Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor
Molina Karmaker	Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha
Bishop Philip Huggins	Anglican Church of Australia
Rev. Prince Devanandan	Methodist Church in Aotearoa New Zealand
Dr Sawako Fujiwara	National Christian Council in Japan
Srey Sotheavy	Kampuchea Christian Council in Cambodia
Rev. Dr Stephen Arulampalam	Church of Ceylon
Tso Hiu-tung, Jessica	Hong Kong Christian Council
Victor Wan Chi Hsu	Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

## CCA Staff Members–2021

### **General Secretariat (GS)**

Dr Mathews George Chunakara

### **Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology (MU)**

Rev. Jung Eun Grace Moon

Chalvin Kores Tehuayo

### **Ecumenical Leadership Development and Spirituality (EF)**

Rosiana Purnomo

### **Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts (BP)**

Sunila Ammar (until August 2021)

Ruth Mathen

### **Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy (PD)**

Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia

Jay Roy Tipayan (until December 2021)

### **Communications**

Hlaing Yadanar Htun (Meemee)

### **Finance and Accounts**

Friona Kallyani Sarker

Nathi Schumann

Della Lee

### **Administration, Library, House Service**

Netnapa Rattanajiamrangsri

Arpa Yai-Chid

Wittaya Makasuk





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**“We need to learn more readily to accept that this world is no heaven, and perhaps go one step further and see pain and suffering as evidence, probably a sort of precursor, of something better that is yet to come. We need to place our trust in God and hold on to our faith in God. Our faith in God, with the hope of reaching the destination in our journey, must sustain us. We need to find strength to face the ups and downs in this arduous journey, and it is through these ups and downs that we will grow in faith”.**

*(excerpts from the CCA General Secretary’s Report to the Executive Committee–2021)*

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