

1. Foreword

2. Preface

3. Introduction to Gender Justice Consultation

Hope S. Antone

Wongsanit Ashram, in Nakhon Nayok, Thailand – a Buddhist intentional community for simple living, engaging in social action and spiritual practice, which is about an hour outside of Bangkok [depending on the traffic] – was a perfect place for the “inter-religious consultation on gender justice and genuine partnership of men and women.”

A group of 24 women and 6 men – representing the four religions of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam – gathered in the ashram as participants cum resource persons on 14-19 May 2004.

We came from eight countries: India, Pakistan, Laos, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia. Among us were two Buddhist monks, two Buddhist nuns, a Catholic nun, teachers, ecumenical and church workers, activists and workers with grassroots and NGOs.

The consultation was a follow-up to an earlier consultation on Inter-religious Cooperation in April 2003. It was planned in response to a recommendation from the April consultation that in order to live our faiths in community – seeking justice and peace, there is a need to “examine the patriarchal theologies, structures and practices of our religions and cultures in order to empower women by developing alternative educational resources for the promotion of equal partnership between women and men.”

Getting to the ashram across a canal on a wooden raft [that one has to pull using a rope hung overhead from bank to bank] enabled us to reflect on the kinds of baggage we carry – and whether they are necessary to get to the “other side” of life – where hopefully there would be more justice for all.

“You cannot change the world if you cannot even wash your own dishes,” was one motto of the ashram. So participants washed their own utensils after meals and cleaned their own cottages.

The consultation began with personal storytelling – a sharing about one’s self and the web of relationships that shape who we are. For while we are born either male or female, we get caught in the social constructions of gender or what it means to be masculine or feminine. Each one’s family, culture, class, and faith contribute to the shaping of the self. As we heard our personal stories, we saw how each mirrored the other in many ways – the burdens of gender injustice and the continuing struggle to break the cycle of oppression.

We also had a session of national storytelling – during which many stories were heard, told from different social locations. Weaving through the stories were some common threads:

- That we are all influenced or shaped by and socialized into a patriarchal mindset, behavior and way of life in the family, culture, religion, and society.
- Patriarchy makes us think in hierarchy that puts the male at the top, privileged or superior position.
- Patriarchy makes us think in dualism that puts one side [all those associated with the male] in a positive light and the other [all those associated with the female] in a negative light.
- Patriarchy has been so ingrained in our lives that we often do not question it anymore; we think it is simply the normal or natural way.
- The socio-economic and political systems of our Asian societies also reflect patriarchy. Globalization being the new form of colonization has led to further objectification and commodification of our Asian cultures, natural resources, women and children.
- Although our religions speak of equality of women and men, they also reflect patriarchal teachings and practices that inscribe or re-inscribe the domination of certain groups and the oppression of others. All our religions are after all patriarchal; the founders, keepers and interpreters are also men.

We therefore recognized patriarchy, which is embedded in our cultures and religions, as the root cause of the issues that we confront now and which manifests itself in:

- Prohibition of women from access to power and decision making in social life and structures;
- Relegation of women in the domestic sphere that undermines women's full realization of their potentials;
- Misinterpretation of sacred texts and traditions to perpetuate the marginalization and violation of women;
- Justification of traditions and practices which are oppressive to women to maintain the interests of the powerful and the rich represented by elite men in communities;
- Ignorance, which has kept Asians in the dark of oppression and hindered them from realizing their full human potentials;
- Globalization and its evil effects that has kept majority of Asians in the depth of poverty and exploitation.

Surprisingly, as Asians, steeped in a plurality of spirituality and religiosity, we hold on to our various faiths, and seek their liberating aspects for both women and men, even as we critique or question their oppressive aspects.

Hence, the consultation included panel sharing by representatives (a man and a woman) of each faith community sharing attempts at reinterpreting some religious texts and de-constructing traditions and practices that have been oppressive to women. We realize how such voices are still few – especially when for some of us, the religious texts are not even easily accessible – and that we therefore need to do more in this area.

In a workshop session, we tried to envision alternative Asian communities where:

- women and men are treated equally as full human beings.

- men and women are equal partners in decision making in all spheres of human life – in the economic, social, political, religious and domestic spheres.
- the marginalized and the oppressed are liberated and empowered.

We positively acknowledge the liberating themes and efforts that are emerging around Asia:

- Building of inclusive communities that
 1. promote interrelatedness, mindfulness and loving kindness among all created beings;
 2. support women’s participation in all areas of life and genuine partnership with men;
 3. encourage the voiceless to speak towards genuine dialogue;
 4. critique practices and traditions that negate the dignity of human beings.
- Women’s attempts at reading and interpreting sacred texts in context and recover its liberating, empowering and transforming themes

As our commitment to addressing the problem of gender injustice in Asia, we clustered and prioritized the following issues and brainstormed on possible strategies, which include the following:

1. Violence against women – awareness building, outreach and service to victims, advocacy and mobilization.
2. Gender participation – advocacy for equal participation in policy and decision-making, legislation and implementation.
3. Gender justice in religious education – interfaith critique of education materials, development of interfaith curriculum that promotes culture of peace, and re-reading of religious texts.
4. Globalization and consumerism – contemplative retreat to reclaim women spirit, promotion of value-based products and fair market in religious establishments and communities, training in sustainable economy and fair market analysis and feminist religious perspective.

We ended the consultation with an interfaith worship, receiving and giving blessings in Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian ways, and bonding ourselves in commitment to start transforming ourselves and our faith communities to help build our envisioned Asian communities.

4. Statement

STATEMENT

Inter-religious Consultation on Gender Justice and
Genuine Partnership of Men and Women
Wongsanit Ashram, Nakhon Nayok, Thailand
14 – 19 May 2004

WE

Participant List
May 2004

Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian women and men coming from India, Pakistan, Laos, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia

living our faiths in community and celebrating the richness and diversity of our cultures and traditions here at Wongsanit Ashram, Thailand on 14-19 May 2004,

having honestly reflected and humbly consulted each other on Gender Justice and Genuine partnership of Men and Women,

and acknowledging our common victimization and complicity to patriarchy in varied manifestations in our Asian context,

pronounce the following:

Towards attaining our envisioned Asian community where

- women and men are treated equally as full human beings
- men and women are equal partners in decision making in all spheres of human life – in the economic, social, political, religious and domestic
- the marginalized and the oppressed are liberated and empowered;

we recognize patriarchy embedded in our cultures and religions as the root cause of the issues that we confront now and manifests itself in

- Prohibition of women from access to power and decision making in social life and structures
- Relegation of women in the domestic sphere that undermines women's full realization of their potentials
- Misinterpretation of sacred texts and traditions to perpetuate the marginalization and violation of women
- Justification of traditions and practices which are oppressive to women to maintain the interests of the powerful and the rich represented by elite men in communities
- Ignorance, which has kept Asians in the dark of oppression and hindered them from realizing their full human potentials
- Globalization and its evil effects that has kept majority of Asians in the depth of poverty and exploitation.

In this context, we positively acknowledge the liberating themes and efforts that emerge around Asia:

- Building of inclusive communities that
 1. promotes interrelatedness, mindfulness and loving kindness among all created beings

2. supports women's participation in all areas of life and genuine partnership with the men
 3. encourages the voiceless to speak towards genuine dialogue
 4. critiques the practices and traditions that negates the dignity of human beings
- Women's attempts at reading and interpreting sacred texts in context and recover its liberating, empowering and transforming themes

We believe that we can take actions to address the issues we have named. Therefore, towards a genuine partnership of women and men, we commit ourselves to do the following:

On Violence Against Women

Awareness building on the issue

Outreach and service to victims

- Legal and paralegal assistance
- Economic support and empowerment
- Shelter for victims

Advocacy and mobilization

- Organize public pressure and support
- Document cases
- Research and publication, documentation to expose issues
- Generate support from religious authority figures (e.g. Islamic scholars)
- Organize women's groups and support groups

On Gender Participation

Advocate the equal participation of women in policy and decision-making bodies

- Equal participation of men and women in the revision and implementation of legislation towards equal representation (include HR experts, NGOs, rep from all religions of communities)
- Awareness programs (Campaigns, workshops, seminars, literature, media, consultation, dialog, training)
- Re-reading and re-interpreting all sacred texts by men and women

On Gender Discrimination in religious education

- Publication of inter-religious materials
- Inter-faith critique of education materials to identify to identify gender discrimination and to do re-reading of texts
- Interfaith development of curriculum for religious education that promotes culture of peace
- Inter-faith efforts of doing justice and sharing in interfaith consultation
- Networking of inter-religious educators
- Dialogue between cultures and religions

On Globalization and consumerism

- Publications (for awareness building)

Participant List

May 2004

- Contemplative mind retreat (to reclaim women spirit)
- Promote and educate value-based product and fair market in religious establishments and communities
- Trainings on feminist religious perspective
- Seminar on “sustainable economy and fair market analysis”

We ended the Consultation in prayer and hope that in our return to our respective communities, we are able to start transforming our selves and our faith communities towards attaining our envisioned Asian community.

May divine wisdom fill us and enlightenment guide our path. So be it.

19 May 2004

5. Gender Justice - A Theological and Cultural Perspective

By Naeem Shakir

Feminism has been heterodoxy. The patriarchal theologies, structures and practices have been promoted under unjust orders that were sanctified in religion and were made sacrosanct. This discriminatory phenomenon got permeated in the social fabric under the theological lore as a divine order especially till the scientific revolution ushered in the seventeenth century.

In today’s scientifically advanced world, feminism is still treated heterodoxy even in the technologically industrialized west. Whereas in Asia and especially in South Asia, women are treated like chattels under feudal and tribal systems. And religion is used to perpetrate the oppression of repressive cultures, traditions and practices.

The humankind has traversed a long journey and has under gone a hard process from one civilization to another and from one system of production to another. And now has reached an era of enlightenment. However, under corporate globalization that thrives on cheap labor, woman is still used as an object on huge billboards to attract people for the goods of the multinationals and to develop culture of a consumer society. The technological advancement has certainly opened vistas of a New World. This enlightenment is abundantly reflected in the joint ventures of the comity of nations in framing of the legislation that relate to status of women. This legislation include Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international treaties and conventions like International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, the International Covenant on Civil and political Rights of 1966, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women of 1979 and the Beijing Declaration of 1999.

These international declarations and conventions have rejected the medieval norms, practices and traditions that promoted patriarchal social orders and have advocated and promoted the concept of gender justice. And it is important to note that framing of this international legislation was done by state representatives belonging to different religions, creeds, doctrines, culture and traditions. However, despite such social developments women are still subjected to oppression and repression under feudal and tribal setups that find sanction under religion. They are treated women as the property of man. They are subjected to subhuman conditions.

Participant List
May 2004

This is a serious issue. Half of humanity consists of women- nay, our mothers, grand mothers, daughters, grand daughters, sisters and aunts. The process of development retards rather ceases to move forward if half of humanity is not involved and provided with an opportunity to utilize their potential and play their role in a befitting manner. What are the factors, norms, practices, cultures, traditions, theologies and structures that do not allow half of the humanity to enjoy equal status in socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic sphere?

Before examining the state of gender justice and injustice in the context of scriptures it is important to examine what is gender justice.

Discrimination against women on the basis of sex is gender injustice. Gender justice includes, sharing in every issue of life, involving in decision making, providing opportunity of opinion in conflict resolution, providing equal opportunities to explore and develop, providing an atmosphere wherein women feel safe, confident and encouraged, providing right to choose a life partner, providing right to choose profession or any calling or assignment, providing respect and honor and precisely providing equality and justice.

There is no denying the fact that we find a patriarchal and medieval society in the Old Testament that treated woman as a property. We find stories of Gospel similar to our society and the land of Gospel stories are similar to ours that was male dominated. Therefore the text of the Scriptures is to be read and understood in its historical perspective and sticking to literal meanings would land one in a mess. We find the Scriptural message in metaphors and similes. Those who insist on the text in an orthodox manner practically generate fundamentalism. They refuse to listen to reason. Those who claim that the ultimate truth is in their possession and are not prepared for any dialogue actually promote theocracy. The approach to read Bible not in its historical perspective but in a theocratic and orthodox manner brings in injustice in the name of faith and religion. They sanctify social ills, vested interest, exploitation and discrimination in the name of God. And thus try to justify the class society. Christ spoke about kingdom of God. That kingdom of God is not an institution but enshrined with love and peace and that is within us. Behold kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:21). Christ's Sermon on the Mount eloquently provides parameters of the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20). The establishment of the kingdom of God depends on charitable and liberative acts and not on sermons and rhetorical litany.

Let's examine the Scriptural text that is used as base for perpetrating oppression, repression, discrimination and exploitation in the name of religion especially in the context of gender injustice. The following are a few examples to that effect.

"To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in child bearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule you." (Genesis 3:16) These verses are used for showing secondary position of women. The Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of the prevailing situation of sinful society. How house women were used to save one's self from sin would be interesting to find. "They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you to night? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them" "Lot went out side to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and

you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

There is another event recorded in chapter 19 of Judges of the Old Testament, where man offers his woman for gang rape to save himself. The woman serves as man's property. He therefore protects her. At times she serves as his honor. But at times she is sacrificed at the altar of his honor.

Saint Paul appears to speak with prejudice about women when he does not provide equal status to women, when he is not prepared to give right of speech to women and thinks that she will defile church if she enters during her periods. And as far as women ministry is concerned St. Paul categorically forbids woman to teach. In his letter to Corinthians (1 Corinthians 14:34-35) St' Paul says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also says the law. And if they will learn any thing let them ask their husbands at house; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

In 1-Timothy 2:11-14, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."

This is a crude reflection of the medieval society that existed at the time of Jesus.

But we also find St. Paul in Galatians 3:26-28 saying, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed your self in Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. In Galatians 5:1, Paul writes, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Paul writes about freedom and over throwing the yoke of slavery and some theologians call it 'freedom manifesto'.

The Church is still not prepared to accept woman as church leader. The people of our church still find it difficult to accept a female preacher in the church. They forget that it was a woman who was the last at the cross. Mark 15:47, first at the tomb. John 20:1, and brought the good news of the risen Lord from the dead and claimed resurrection. Mathew 28:8.

The Church of Pakistan made history by ordaining its two women deacons despite opposition of a minor group of fundamentalists from within and a civil court action initiated by another church. This happened in a church in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan which has about 2% Christians out of about 140 million Muslims. The Church of Pakistan is a union of Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans inaugurated in 1971. The Rt. Rev. Bishop Azariah, the Moderator, Church of Pakistan took the courage to open the ranks of clergy to women in Pakistan which otherwise is considered to be a country known for religious fundamentalism and obscurantism. The two women were Khushnood and Rohama who were ordained along with two churchmen. There was no official opposition from main line churches. The ordination ceremony was simple and somber. The Thanksgiving ceremony however reflected sanction of the church in Pakistan along with the support of the international church partners. Religious leadership in Pakistan representing different denominations attended the ceremony. Whereas, the international community was represented by Bishop Geraldine Wolf of Rohdes Islands, Rev. Mrs. Julie Lipp Nathaniel, Secretary for South

Asia, United Society for Propagation of the Gospel, London, Rev. Mrs. Margarita, of Swedish Church, and Mr. Dick Klienheslink representing the Uniting Churches of Netherlands.

The action of women ordination was brought in civil court by an army major, Timotheus Nasir now moderator-secretary of a break away church (McIntire) of the United Presbyterian Church of Pakistan. His civil suit sought declaration against women ordination for being “opposed to Holy Bible (1. Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:9-15, Titus 2:3-5) and heretical. He claimed that ordination was linked to a radical feminist movement supported by the World Council of Churches that promotes homosexuality and lesbianism.” The suit and the appeal of Rev. T. Nasir were finally dismissed. The writer represented the respondents as the defense lawyer. It became high profile case because Mrs. Kushnood Azariah is wife of Bishop Samuel Azariah and Mrs. Rohama Asif is wife of Rev. Asif Karam. The plaintiff who publishes an Urdu monthly “Kalam-e Haq” wrote and published articles declaring ordination as heretical and Bishop Azariah as Anti-Christ.

It is rather disappointing that despite the fact that church faced such an obnoxious opposition to her bold and righteous act, it made no arrangements to educate its people on the subject by organizing study courses, workshops, seminars or consultations. It was an opportune time to use pulpit to liberate people suffering from obscurantism and fundamentalism. But the church behaved shy and apologetic on the issue. The action of women ordination was no doubt bold and historic but the patriarchal traditions were not challenged on philosophical and Biblical frontiers in a courageous manner. The reason is quite evident that socio-cultural traditions are yet quite strong and oppressive and bringing change required concerted efforts and sacrifices as well. The church perhaps has yet not ready to undo status quo and bring about radical social change.

The Society of Jesus and ours’ teach that women are unclean as they menstruate. They should not go to church during menstruation. In Pakistan women hesitate rather feel unable to have Holy Communion during menstruation. This is discrimination ingrained in the psyche of our women. The problem is in their belief that “women are unclean”. We need radical change. Yes, because we need equal partners in our struggle for social change. Saint Mark narrates a story of a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years. She wanted to bring change in her person. She had heard about healing power of Jesus. She went out where Jesus was in a crowd. She followed and touched Jesus from his back. She was empowered and that empowerment brought change in her. In order to bring about social change one must bring change in oneself. Mark 5: 21-34. Jesus said to her, “your faith has healed you.”

Isn’t it true that our societies in Asia in particular have same stories of oppression against women? We in Pakistan have dehumanized our women. We kill them for men’s honor. We sell them in marriages. We do not allow them to choose their life partner. And if they dare do, we kill them and promote the evil custom of ‘karo kari.’

In Pakistan abduction, rape, killing women for saving family and man’s honor are so common that it has become a regular feature in our dailies every day. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported in 2003 that a woman is being raped in every two hours in Pakistan. The feudal culture with patriarchal traditions renders women as an instrument of shame for the enemy and a matter of honor for one’s self. And the factor of class contradiction also brings humiliation for women. If a woman likes a man or falls in love with a man of a lower class, she is supposed to have

brought shame to the family. And the only way to save one's honor is to kill the woman. The traditional justice is administered at "Jirga", an assembly of elders that constitutes of local feudal lords. The matter about the couple is brought before the Jirga that has always declared man and woman as Karo and Kari. These are words of Sindhi language. The word Karo means black - one who has done some thing black and shameful. (Man is Karo and woman is Kari). The ghastly decision of the jirga is always for public killing of the man and the woman. The crime precisely is that the couple followed the heart in disregard to the family custom. The federal criminal law certainly does not allow any one to kill other under any circumstance. But the law does provide space for killing under grave provocation. And secondly the witnesses of the cold-blooded murders do not come forward to verify the commission of offence. The Courts have invariably taken a lenient view and either they have acquitted the accused or reduced the sentence from death to life imprisonment or from life imprisonment to lesser period of sentence. The brutal murder of Shazia Khaskheli and Mohammad Hassan under Jirga verdict on October 8, 2003 in Sanghar, in the Province of Sindh, Pakistan caught the attention of the Supreme Court of Pakistan which took suo moto notice of the dastardly murder and asked the area Sessions Judge to hold an inquiry. The inquiry was sabotaged as no witness was allowed to appear before it. Interestingly, instead of parents of Shazia, the local police officer has been the complainant of the case. The way the couple was literally butchered is difficult to pen down. It is shameful, cold blooded, inhuman and animalism. The parents out of love for their daughter have stopped sending them to schools and colleges. The incident will have a serious impact on females who already stand marginalised.

After this incident, the President of the country denounced honor killings saying, "They have no place in our religion and law". But nothing was done at state level thereafter. The state of affairs is the same and women remain victims of Patriarchal avenge for killing for honor. (NEWSLINE, November 2003)

There has been another shameful occurrence of avenge for honor as against women. The President of Pakistan has taken exception to that. It happened on April 30, 2004 when two young girls Mumtaz Mai, 16 and Mudassan Mai 28 were subjected to rape on the orders of local jury (Jirga). This was done to avenge for honor lost because of the brother of the two girls allegedly had dared to have an affair with the daughter of Ghaffar Jeer, the complainant father. Despite the fact that head of the state had taken interest and had ordered for an inquiry the witnesses are not forthcoming as the local patriarchal mafia had created a scare that did not allow a citizen to come to their rescue. Reuter's team interviewed the victims who were not prepared to talk out of shame. Mumtaz said, "How can I show my face now? I will either jump in a well or take poison." Mudassan said, "These are feudal people. The police belong to them, the courts belong to them and even the government belongs to them." (Daily Times Lahore, May 8, 2004). There were two more instances of shame in April 2004. A woman's head and eyebrows were shaved off by her husband in Sikanderwala village in Kabirwala on the orders of local jury (Jirga) that convicted Kaneez Mai 30 of her alleged involvement in "immoral activities". Ashiq Hussain of Bangla Qasim village in Tranda Muhammad Panah near Multan, chopped off nose and lips of his wife Mumtaz after her parents refused to let their two daughters marry his brothers. On learning the news, Bhudday Khan, brother of Mumtaz, brutally beat his wife Haleema Mai (who is Ashiq Hussain's sister). Both women were admitted in hospital in critical condition.

The Hudood Laws enforced 25 years back in Pakistan are especially discriminatory against women and minorities. The offence of rape is quite common but it is very difficult for the courts to convict the offender as to prove offence, the victim woman is obliged under law to produce ‘four adult male Muslims who had seen the commission of the offence with their own eyes’. It may be mentioned here that death by stoning for adultery, amputation of hands and feet, and the prospect of an adultery conviction for women who were raped are part of the grim Hudood Ordinances. The National Commission on the Status of Women has recommended the repeal of four Hudood Laws to the federal government. The women organizations are pressing the government to implement the recommendations of the Commission. Whereas, Samia Raheel Qazi, vice-president of the Jamaat-e-Islami Women’s Wing who is also a member of the Parliament has opposed the move and has argued, “The laws that are given in Quran, Allah does give humans the right to change them.”

Illiteracy, backwardness, obscurantism, religious fundamentalism, feudalism, and the patriarchal culture are the main factors that are the cause of oppression against women. The forums, judicial or administrative are not effective for the redress of the grievance. The political will of the administrators of the society is also lacking to enforce the judicial orders. The people are suffering from a culture of silence. They have learnt to bear all that. It is part of their life scheme. They need education and awareness about their rights and some helping hand to come out of this morass. This requires a joint struggle of men and women. The struggle is for emancipation and liberation from oppressive structures. Unless the liberative forces turn out to be dominant political force the status quo will remain in force.

The prevailing dehumanizing conditions will not change unless we commit our selves to bring change. The status quo must change. But we will have to first change, in our approach, in our theology, in our patriarchal and oppressive traditions and in our medieval doctrines that promote discrimination as other wise the evil structures will not dismantle.

6. A Quiet Movement of the Buddhist Women in Cambodia

Peou Vanna (MSc.)

Generally Cambodian nuns observe the eight-fold or ten-fold Buddhist precept. They have their hair and eyebrows shaven off and they may wear a white robe or dress in a white blouse and black skirt. Some nuns live in pagodas while others live at their homes with support from their children. Habitually Cambodian nuns and laywomen think primarily of serving monks such as by cooking meals for them, cleaning the pagoda perimeter area, etc. Additionally they may care for other duties such as looking after the homes of their children, baby-sitting grandchildren or doing many other household chores that keep them busy far beyond a usual day of work. In spite of caring for all these difficult jobs, women are often criticized as being unable to get away from the kitchen. It is a fact that nuns, as well as laywomen, are so busy serving the monks and other people in their entourage that they do not have much time to think of themselves to the same extent that monks and men do in the practice or learning of Dharma.

The new shoot of a quiet movement came into existence in 1995 when a group of 107 Buddhist women from all over Cambodia gathered to push for the establishment of an association known as the “**Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia,**” (ANLWC) of which membership is restricted to Buddhist women. The association was born following a four-day regional conference, from May 1-4, 1995, on the theme “**Roles of Cambodian Nuns and Laywomen in National Reconciliation,**” held at the Cultural and Meditation Center at Prek Ho in Kandal province and attended by distinguished national and international guests from Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Germany.

The Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia promotes the rights of Cambodian nuns and laywomen and encourages them to change their stance from being one of not daring to take part in society to becoming counselors, from cooking or cleaning pagodas to becoming teachers of Dharma, meditation, and community laws, and helping solve disputes or conflicts among people in the communities, especially in remote areas where information networks do not exist, through the learning of Dharma and meditation in order to attain a peaceful mind.

Another holy activity of the Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia is to preserve and promote Buddhism in keeping with the Buddha’s prohibitions and permissions through training and developing Buddhist followers so that they are well informed with regard to both Buddhism and secular affairs.

These activities constitute a quiet movement of Cambodian Buddhist women who have walked and are walking slowly towards equality of rights and gender equality and promoting the equal rights of women within the realm of Buddhism as well as in the secular environment.

Despite nearly a decade of efforts put forth by the quiet movement of Cambodian Buddhist women, Cambodian nuns who observe the ten-fold precept have yet to be allowed to become novice female monks or Bhikkhuni (women monks).

Currently the association has 10,825 members; 65 percent of them are nuns and 35 percent are laywomen. Among the nuns, 45 percent are over 55 years of age and 10 percent are aged from 30 to 50.

Most of the laywomen do not live at a pagoda as nuns do; they live in their own homes. Of the laywomen, 25 percent are over 50 years of age and 10 percent are aged from 29 to 50.

The level of education of most nuns is still low, but they have a wealth of experience in life because they have gone through many different regimes and especially because of having lived through

decades of prolonged war and strife. They are seen to be morally strong, dynamic, decisive and fearless in overcoming any problems encountered. With their practice of meditation, they are calm and firm and have leadership qualifications.

It is observed that most of the nuns are mature in their thinking, well disciplined and have a higher sense of responsibility in relation to a number of the young novice monks who are yet lacking in education.

The practices that the Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia have adopted since 1995 include training in and learning the Dharma, self-development, peaceful mind development, leadership, human rights, promotion of women's rights, conflict resolution, elimination of domestic violence and providing care for patients living with AIDS.

So far the nuns and laywomen who are trainers in the association have provided training on how to meditate and attain a peaceful mind and have given counsel to people in crisis, homeless children and sex workers. They have educated children to understand the meaning of the five-fold precept, etc.

At the present time, the local people have, to some extent, recognized Cambodian nuns as they often invite nuns to participate in funerals or other religious ceremonies the same as they do monks. Moreover, on every fasting day His Majesty the King always invites the monks as well as at least five nuns to join him in listening to the Dharma preaching in the Royal Palace.

Besides their daily core activities, Cambodian nuns and laywomen are expanding networks at international levels with other countries around the world. For instance, every two years, Buddhist women around the world gather to hold an international conference called "**Sakyadhita,**" which means "**Daughter of the Buddha.**"

Daughters of the Buddha from around the world gather to debate and exchange ideas about Buddhist issues in connection with the current situation of society. They have spared no efforts to work together to solve various problems the world is facing either in relation with Buddhism or secular affairs.

The Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia has regularly dispatched representatives to attend the "**Daughter of the Buddha**" international conference since 1995 and their participation has been full and active.

There is another international conference called the “**International Network of Engaged Buddhists,**” (INEB) whose activities focus on participation in order to promote Buddhism around the world. This conference is aimed to bolster and promote Buddhism around the world in order to contribute to a common solution, that being genuine peace for humankind the world over.

These international networks provide crucial advantages for all participants, particularly the members of the Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia. Like a brilliant spotlight, these networks help them see more clearly the situation of Buddhism in various geographical locations around the world.

Though Buddhism is spread all over the world, the practice of Buddhism in each country varies depending on the culture, civilization and resources of that country. But generally Buddhist followers all over the world share a common goal: to find spiritual tranquility and peace for mankind throughout the world.

This holy goal responds to the current situation of Cambodia which is encountering many problems such as a decline in social decency and morality and an upsurge in violence of many kinds such as domestic violence, thefts, robberies, killings, etc. These acts are completely contrary to the concepts of the five-fold precept of the Buddha which are aimed at leading people to a peaceful state.

Linking with problems currently facing our country, the quiet movement of Buddhist women followers and supporters is carrying out its mission to contribute to a reduction of violence and to tackle the decline in social decency and morality. They are also working towards national reconciliation through the development of a peaceful mind, meditation and the promotion of the five-fold precept that can be used to help solve disputes among nuns, laymen, laywomen, students and people in the communities so that they could achieve peace for themselves and for society as a whole.

A peaceful mind is an effective medicine to heal conflicts of every nature!

May the whole world live in peace!

7. Unjust Gender Issues in a Moslem Family in Surakarta

Totok Budi Santoso.

First, I would like to express my gratitude and thankfulness to Max Ediger and his colleagues from the Asia & Pacific Alliance of YMCAs (APAY), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and Church Development Service (EED) for their decision to invite me to this consultation. I am so happy to be here and to be a part of this movement. I think that life is like a movement where we can sit, lie or stand, breath, sneeze or laugh, work, party or do sports. So if we have a movement, we can share

Participant List
May 2004

many aspects of life together. I have a dream that this consultation can be a way of sharing our experiences and making a contribution toward gender justice and genuine partnership of women and men in the world

Foreword

Although Islam, which is the religion of 96% of Indonesia's 208 million people, teaches equal rights and responsibility in all matters, this is not always a reality in the domestic life of every Moslem family.

We can see this in an example of a Moslem family in Surakarta, Central Java. The daily life of a wife is focused on domestic duties such as preparing food, making the beds, managing the children and assisting the children in their education. Her housework starts early in the morning before other family members wake up and continues on until all other family members have gone to sleep. Thus the wife always wakes up earliest and sleeps last. This phenomenon not only happens to those wives who do not work, but also to the wives who labor outside the home as well. In this case the wife, in fact, has two burdens to bear. It is very clear, then, that a wife has a heavier workload than the husband.

The questions that emerge from the above phenomenon are why women seem unconscious about their situation, what are the inequitable social mechanisms created by this phenomenon and what, in fact, does Islam teach about this inequality?

Myths concerning the obligations of male and female toward household duties in Surakarta

Traditionally in Indonesia, from birth the daughter is expected to learn household duties such as washing dishes, washing clothes and plan and prepare the meals. This is very different from the expectations of male children. From a young age boys are usually taught not to come near the kitchen and not to assist the mother with work in the kitchen. Usually the boy assists the father's work and hobbies. Boys usually engage in more play outdoors and associate with other friends. As the boy grows older, he is encouraged to be involved in "mannish" activities while the girl's remains involved with work related to the kitchen. This phenomenon will continue and will form their future roles as husbands or wives.

The difference of the work load between husband and wife in Moslem families is very unique. In many Moslem households in Indonesia, there is usually a division of duty which tends to be hereditary. Boys will follow the work habits of the father and, conversely, daughters will follow the work patterns of the mother. A husband will always occupy the position as household head and the mother is never seen as family head. This matter is related to the husband's position as the major earner for the family even though, presently, wives can also serve as wage earners. Strangely, the wife is always considered to be just an additional wage earner for the family even though, sometimes, the wife's earnings are bigger than that of her husband.

In the everyday life of a Moslem household, a husband must take responsibility to earn the living for the family. He may also use some of his time to escort the children to school. The rest of his time is devoted to social activities like attending meetings of the kenduri (traditional party in a Java

village) and sports such as jogging with friends. Sometimes there is other light work such as improving or repairing a leaking roof, repairing the water pump, etc.

For many generations already, a mother must encourage her daughter to do *temandang gawe* (skillful kitchen work) in order to rear the daughter as a good wife candidate. To be a good wife candidate, the daughter must have the skill to manage all kitchen work, keep the house spotless, prepare good food and manage all day-to-day needs of the children and the husband. This practice has created the term *kanca wingking* which means that a wife is considered a person who always works in the kitchen. This simply means that a woman must be ready to become the “other side” of the husband and to carry out all housewifery duties conducted at the rear of the house. As you may know, in the traditional house structure in Java, the kitchen is always at the rear while the sitting room is situated at the front.

This unjust role of wife and husband has been strengthened by the stigma in Indonesian society that considers the domestic work of women to be lighter and lower than men’s work. Women’s work is deemed unproductive as a profession. Thus, from the time they are small, women are trained to accept domestic work and not take on the duties traditionally given to men. So women grow up feeling that doing domestic work is natural for them and if they do not complete it well they must feel guilty. On the contrary, custom prohibits men from participating in domestic duties. Unfortunately, there are many women who feel that this domestic role is natural and taking on this work is a glorious duty which can only be done by women

As an example, I would like to narrate the true story of a woman called Mrs. Ati, 37 years old, who lives in Surakarta.

Mrs. Ati is an elementary school teacher in the private sector in Surakarta City. She has four children who are all still in school. Two children are in elementary school and two are in senior high school. She teaches in her school from 07.00 am until 12.00.am. After that she continues her work by giving additional lessons to pupils from wealthy families at their homes. This extra teaching is done twice a week. In one day, Mrs. Ati gives the additional lessons to two pupils. During one week, Mrs. Ati has 4 pupils who must be given the additional lessons. Before returning home after the special classes, Mrs. Ati stops by the market to do shopping for cooking for all family members. She reaches home at 5.00 pm. Getting home, housework is waiting including cleaning, cooking and preparing dinner and ironing clothes. Besides that, Mrs. Ati also gives some other tutorial classes at her home. These special tutorials are usually done twice a week for six children. Additional lessons start at 1.00 pm until 3.00 pm. Mrs. Ati feels it is important to have this additional work because she feels her husband’s salary is insufficient to fulfill all the family requirements. The husband of Mrs. Ati is a construction worker and his salary is very small. Although Mrs. Ati has the larger salary, the business of doing housework falls entirely on her shoulders. She does not have an assistant to help her with these tasks.

According to this writer, this situation of injustice has become a culture in Indonesia. For example, this culture ascribes that: (1) gender roles are established without question, (2) housework is light work, (3) housework is the mother’s responsibility, (4) the husband feels under no obligation to assist with the housework while women feel guilty if they do not finish the housework, (5) the

husband will lose prestige if he becomes involved in housework, and (6) housework represents the natural work of women.

Islamic view toward the household

In the hadist of the prophet Muhammad SAW, it is said that, “Almaratu raa’iyatu fii baiti rau jihaa wa masuulatuu’an ro’iyatihaa” (Hr. Imam Bukhari and Muslim from Abdullah bin Umar ra). This hadist means that a woman is a person who is responsible for her husband’s household and she will take this responsibility toward God.

In the Quran, An-Nisa: 34 (4:34) it says, “Fasshoolihaatu Khoonitatu Haa fidhotun lil ghoibi bimaa hafidhotullah”. The meaning of this text is that a godly woman is a woman who faithfully obeys her husband.

Islam teaches that in constructing a family, equal cooperation must be done by husband and wife in: (1) leading the family, (2) making decisions based on mutual consensus, (3) giving maintenance, (4) parenting and educating child, and (5) doing housework. All these things must be done by husband, wife, and children together

To realize this teaching, husbands and wives must be open and sincere in all matters, deliberating together on all decisions, helping meet all demands and requirements, cooperating with and assisting each other, building mutual trust, accepting and managing any conflict in the family wisely. They must also strive to make religion a guide for their way of life.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the above, we can make some conclusions for a strategy to overcome the injustice of the division of labor in Moslem communities.

A strategy to realize gender justice in the division of labor in Moslem households can include:

1. Reconstructing the family to return to the concept of a family which emphasizes gender justice and encouraging potential husbands and wives to undergo training before marry.
2. Creating campaigns for youth, elite figures, religious institutions, and relevant publications to education the members of society about the concept of gender justice within the family.
3. Giving a positive reinterpretation to religious theory that is in the holy Al’Quran and Hadist by those with authority like Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Board of Indonesian Islam), institutes of the Tarjih Muhammadiyah, and teachers of Islamic religion in schools.
4. Returning the moral messages as base value of Islam teaching which is in the form of deliberation, justice, and equality in God’s eye.

8. Gender Justice Bias in Madura: The Case of the Lost Hope Toward a Local Value Ma’arif Jamuin

Participant List
May 2004

First of all, I would like to thank Ms. Rose Wu, Ms. Hope Antone, Ms. Lapapan, Ms. Shella, Ms. Rajeswari and Mr. Max Ediger for giving me a chance to share my reflections at this consultation. I also appreciate so much the topic "Living Our Faiths in Community: Towards Gender Justice and Genuine Partnership of Women and Men" to be addressed here. I can learn much from the first-hand experiences of the 48 participants from different faiths who have gathered from 12 countries in the region of Asia and Pacific.

Foreword

Based on my experience in the midst of helping Internally Displaced Persons in one district of Madura, I found an inexcusable act that was out of the rule of any religion and the state. It was an action of killing someone with a very specific reason, in particular woman. They call this kind of action as "Carok". It is a form of preserving a family's honour, but it now tends to prolong injustices in society.

"Carok" for Madurese is an action of taking revenge from any harassment. In the beginning, the idea of this action was genuinely to maintain the union of family kinship. Lately, the idea was adopted to be a value of defense, not only for each clan, but genuinely for each family as well. The elder of each clan and or family should protect anybody who is to be his responsibility, with "Carok". It is believed as a good value which is mainly maintained by Madurese families up to now.

Technically, "Carok" is an action always using a specific knife blade with very unique type called Clurit. A man used to come alone to a subject and ask to fight with him in a "Carok". It was a fight of fairness among two people. But the rule of the fight has now changed with the focus on killing the target in an unfair way. The perpetrator might attack from the back of a victim with Clurit without a word of warning.

As a local value, it now tends to be misused and misrepresented as a form of keeping woman under man's will. Women who plan to marry, or are already married, will lose their freedom in society. They have no chance to make any relationship freely in their community. Their spouses, even their ex-husbands, would protect and control their will.

Madura is the name of an island and is a part of East Java Province of Indonesia. Its area is about 6 times larger than Singapore. If Singapore now has an area of around 150 square kilometers (after taking sand illegally from Riau Province of Indonesia to fill in its sea area) the area of Madura is about 900 square kilometers. The population of Madura is almost totally of the Islamic faith.

A Story of Injustice

Let me share a story that happened in front of my office in one district of Madura.

It was in a lovely evening. Hasan, A 24 year-old street vendor who married Fatima only a few weeks earlier, died with his neck severed so seriously it was almost separated from his body. He left his 17 year-old wife Fatima, a kindergarten teacher, with no insurance. Fatima herself had a

very young boy, two years-old, from her first marriage. She had decided to marry Hasan after she was separated from her former husband for two years.

Fatima was shocked when the local police told her that her second husband died because of "Carok". She had no idea how to face the problem. But she had actually known before that it might happen to Hasan if they got married. As Fatima said, "Hasan also knew that her former husband never would allow her to marry again with another man."

Her parents were sad to face what had happened, but they could do nothing but accept it as fate as they believed it was written in the sacred text of God, Allah the Most High. Contrary to Fatima's parents, Hasan's parent pledged to take revenge on the man responsible to the death of their son.

Fatima is from a rural community, a place that it is not far from the city where she lives. From her village to the city takes only 50 minutes by public transportation. But, she had moved to the city as a permanent residence when she married with her first husband.

Fatima's first husband is from the same village with her. They were neighbors when they were young. The distance between Fatima parent's house and her first husband's parent's house is only 50 meters. The two families have closely known each other for a long time.

Local Value Bias

My reflection to the case above is to understand more deeply about what could make the Madurese hold such a strong drive to use "Carok". I was also trying to understand their background to describe the motive more clearly. Like many other people, I was trying to understand more about the Madurese community rather more about the murder itself. What I want to know is not about the person who is responsible for the murder, but the motive of "Carok" itself.

Understanding the reason why Fatima's first husband killed Hasan, I am going to start by describing the background of their social life. Both Hasan and the perpetrator of the murder were uneducated persons. They have similarity in their work lives as informal street vendors. They only had a little knowledge of how to make friends and communicate to others. If they face a big issue in their life, I thought there is only one way they know to solve it - with violence. But my understanding of this phenomenon was actually wrong.

In terms of the ethic of society, it was an ordinary principle to people. I could not believe it before, but it was a reality in Madurese community. These were many voices from the local people which approved of "Carok". It was illustrated in their folklore and in a saying: "Carok from Madurese, by Madurese, and for Madurese." However, Madurese communities are not only using "Carok action" toward the same clan, but to others as well. It also frequently happened in many big cities in Java and other island of Indonesia. Remember, the riots at Pontianak, Sambas and Pangkalanbun in central Kalimantan were very much related with Madurese behaviour vis a vis of Dayak response.

Another thing I got from the field through a series of discussions with many groups of communities was that the motive of such murder is aimed to protect and to raise the honour of the family from the man's perspective. By "Carok", a man will make "justice" whether right or wrong. It is a kind

of “street-justice.” In the case above, the murderer wants to demonstrate that the family from her first husband took responsible in protecting her from any harassment. The rural community of Madurese is generally proud if their sons do "Carok" to raise their family honour up in society. It is a kind of holy sacrifice from the clan of the man's family. Therefore, it will be risky to marry a woman who has been married before due to the threat of her former husband.

Even if it was awful, this value is highly honoured by Madurese as a local culture up to now. Indeed, it is a potential violence in society and women could definitely be the subject of this harsh custom.

Gender Justice Bias

We need a more fine-tuned understanding of gender justice if we are to understand its dynamics and respond to it constructively, enhancing the positive and minimizing the negative consequences that are bound to this justice as function and dysfunction. The idea of justice genuinely means how to maintain and to raise human dignity, morals, ethics, and principals. With justice, individuals should receive what they deserve. Thus, justice will restore any broken society-relation not only among the victim and the perpetrator but the misery of all people as well.

In terms of sociological discourse, gender should be used when referring to the socially-constructed division of society into those who are masculine and those who are feminine. Whereas "male" and "female" are terms reserved for biological differences between men and women and boys and girls, "masculine" and "feminine" are reserved for culturally-imposed behavioural and temperamental traits deemed socially appropriate to the sexes. These traits are learnt via a complex and continuing process of socialization (Jary and Jary, 1991:254).

Anthropologists (e.g. Margaret Mead) and psychologist, as well as sociologist, have stressed that gender is not biologically determined but socially and culturally defined. Gender is seen as culturally and historically relative, i.e. the meaning, interpretation and expression of gender varies both within and between cultures, and is subject to historical modification. Social factors such as class, age, race, and ethnicity also shape the specific meaning, expression and experience of gender, underlining the fact that gender cannot be equated in any simplistic way with sex or sexuality (Jary and Jary, 1991:254).

In terms of gender justice, "Carok" as a local value of justice practiced by the Madurese, has absolutely nothing to do with justice in terms of preserving morals, ethics, and principals to life itself. Therefore, it is completely a mistake, or a form of an unjust tradition, in terms of protecting the dignity of men and women. The goals of women's protection should establish the rights of freewill, such as giving rights of freedom from strife and the right to self determination. If not, it will be in opposition to the justice they.

More in continuity with, rather than in contradiction to, this Islam teaches its followers to protect women through encouraging them, such as helping them to build up their capacity and skills, giving chances to reach a good job or opportunities and feeding and sheltering them when they are hungry in case of emergency as poor widows with children in their custody. This is one of the ideas from the Surah an-nisaa' (4), in particular verse 34 which says, "ar-rijaalu qawwamuuna ala an-

nisaa”, or “men should thoughtfully protect women in their life.” It means that men have to secure women from fear of her life. Indeed, men can not let women be in a vulnerable situation let alone take their rights with violence as in Fatima's case.

Also, from al-Quran, the Surah an-nisaa' (4) of verse 19 it is said, "la yahillu lakum an taritsuu an nisaa'a karha wa laa ta' dlulu hunna,” or “none of you are allowed to have (to marry) a woman without her permission and do not make them to feel miserable". It means that God forbids men to treat women harshly in any case of life, physically and/or psychologically.

Islamic teachings, however, allows its followers to adopt a local value as a phrase of Islamic principles. By using a "qaidat al-fighiyah or an Islamic general principle" such as "al-adat al-muhkamah or a local value (a local habit) that can be adopted as a specific term of Islamic law", "Carok" is not included. If people use this value, it will contradict the general principles of al-Quran which asks to protect the soul, mind, and human species or kinship. This is God's rule which must be followed by those who are in the faith.

In terms of adopting a local value, Islam has some conditions to approve it, such as: (1) it must not contradict to God's rules as declared in the al-Quran, (2) it must be accepted by all people as a good example or a good custom, as exemplified by Muhammad, the messenger of God when he was alive, and (3) it must endorse the effort of developing human dignity.

Referring to the general principles above, we know that gender justice should preserve the rights of life. By seeking justice, people want to release the imbalance of truthfulness among others. Thus, people need to set common values that will regulate their behaviour relating to what is good to do or avoiding being bad-tempered. However, the guidance of God is still needed to be the final judge if there are conflicts in nominating a local value to put into practice.

But again, there are actually many verses in the al-Quran which have been adopted to justify statutes which could be manipulated, in particular, in setting women position before the law. In the long run of Islamic history, the mujtahid or persons who officially make Islamic Law are mostly men. Women are not to be in the group of syari'ah law makers or Islamic law. another problem that also comes is the various meanings a specific verse of al-Quran can be given and which meaning will be chosen for practice.

By reference to the conditions above, women’s position before any regulations, both formal and informal, is vulnerable. Men’s opinions dominate in any sessions of policy making. In other words, women tend to be the object of policy-making as a means to control them. Therefore, women face many barriers when they take legal action on any issue. Many stories have been shared in the media regarding women’s misery when they appear in court. They generally lose even though they were doubtlessly innocent, especially in rape cases.

Socio-Religious and Political Impact

In an Islamic perspective, the verse of an-nisaa' (4), 34 that says in part, "Ar-rijaalu qawwamuuna ala an-nisaa',” or “men should thoughtfully protect women in their life" is fundamentally used as a theory of leadership. In Arabic literature, the word qawwamuun is understood as to lead and the

sentence of "Ar-rijaalu qawwamuuna ala an-nisaa" means that only men could lead or women could never lead men in any social life. As a result, that meaning is always questionable. This is what I want to address more deeply.

With reference to the interpretation above, it is difficult to place women equal before men in social relations. Unfortunately, this idea is used as justification in terms of socio-political practice. For instance, when Megawati ran in her first presidential election, she faced various rejections from the ulama' or the religious leaders of Islam, from several regions of Indonesia. Now, she faces the same thing in her second presidential race this July 5.

While the term above is used by a number of political elites to suggest that women are not eligible to be leaders, people's opinions vary. Some have one opinion, others do not agree, and the rest might not care. There are many people who think that gender equality would not be advantageous to their day-to-day lives. Or, they might trust that equal partnership among women and men can be constructed as natural as life itself.

In line with grassroots implications, however, a public discourse on the terms above might help raise people's awareness of whether or not only men are capable leaders. We need to recognize that a kind of reason usually drives people to set their worldview regarding the relationship between men and women. In the end, the values that people build up in their communities will direct their various actions. This phenomenon can be seen as a factor that interferes in the fight to develop equal partnership between men and women. I would further add that religious teachings could offer a challenge to the positive development of gender justice.

There may be logical reasoning that drives the Madurese people to do "Carok" in order to protect women and to feel in charge of justice. In spite of having a lack of education as well as living in poor economy, people who live in villages are usually known as being rather altruistic. In addition, theological experience might also make them to be persons of such behaviour.

In terms of family life, women mostly have a tendency to be a housewife. It could be a result of both theological experience and local tradition, or simply following her husband's will. This position makes it difficult for women to have an equal chance at a career. In consequence, it might cause women to go unheard in family decision making, i.e. to determine her daughter's or her son's education.

Closing

Finally, I am able to conclude now that addressing issues of gender justice is one way to test the development efforts of civil society. It is also a part of the development of democracy. A number of cases which condemn its success are always in conjunction with the differences of how to accelerate the main idea of justice into practice. In many cases, religions as well as local values are placed as function and dysfunction factors toward the gender justice question.

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Participant List
May 2004

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9. Gender Discrimination in India

Manoj Kumar Singh, India

It is a tragic irony that India, known for its resplendent civilization and culture, bears the stigma of gender discrimination. Here a girl child bears the trauma of grave discrimination. She is deprived of the fundamental right to education. In case of sickness, little attention is given to her. Even in the matter of feeding, more nutritious foods are reserved for the male child. A girl is considered as a burden. Right from the beginning, she is drafted for sweeping the floor, sharing domestic chores and taking care of siblings. We have continued to preserve this legacy, rigidly and proudly.

India became independent in August 1947 and a Republican State on 26th January, 1950. The trinity of 'liberty, equality and fraternity, enshrined in our constitution, holds no significance in the present ambience of gender discrimination. Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, one of the architects of free India, once remarked that 'if women move, the nation moves'. His concept of the development of women, however, has evaporated and the old system of gender discrimination is now again being zealously pursued.

Of courses there have been continuous noises in Parliament and Vidhan Sabha's (State Assemblies) for the removal of gender discrimination in social, economic and political areas, yet precious little has been done in this direction.

The Panchyati Raj Act (administrative people at the village level) has been introduced in most of the Indian States. This system envisages women's participation in all spheres in running the local administration. But unfortunately, as our studies have revealed, women members are dictated to by the male family members and they have no independence to exercise their own choice. They continue to be in a subordinate position.

It is a curious paradox that India claims to be shining in development and well on the road to becoming a superpower, but the goals of developing women and granting them equal status continues to be elusive. The figure of dowry deaths now touching the mark of 25,000 annually is very alarming. Besides this, there are untold miseries of the victims of domestic violence.

The census of 2001 reveals an amazing sex-ratio that for every 1000 boys, there are 934 girls. In other words, out of 1000 boys, 66 will have to lead a life of celibacy. This is quite alarming and calls for attention of the policy makers at the centre as well as the state levels, political thinkers, social activists etc.

The reason attributable to this gory situation is that generally parents of the upper strata do not want girl children. With the availability of ultra sound, the sex of the fetus can be determined. The girl

fetes is removed, i.e. the girl child is killed even before she is born. The age old legacy of son-preference continues. There is no diminishing of this bias.

Let me narrate the sad story of gender discrimination in my own state of Bihar. There is one village called Surath in the district of Madhubani (North Bihar) where every year one traditional meet is organized for one month (Aug/Sept.). During this month, would-be bridegrooms set up their own deras (lean-to) with their bio-data and a price tag. The price varies according to the qualifications and status of the would-be groom — for a doctor or engineer the price is one million rupees or above and for an IAS officer the price can range from 5 million to 10 million rupees. Similarly for clerks, government peons, etc. there is a price tag. There are brokers also. The girls' parents roam about and scan bio-data. When they identify the proper husband for their daughter, they make a deal with the help of the brokers.

The land of Ayodhya, or Janakpuri, is the birth place of Sita, wife of Lord Ram Chander. She is held in great esteem in the Hindu Community. But the girls in the same land are treated as marketable commodities.

What a shameful practice is thriving in this land in violation of all prohibitive laws.

Plight of Widows

A visit to Varanasi, one of the holy places in India, will reveal some disgusting facts about harsh treatment given to widows. With all the fascination of the ghats (ceremonial stairs lining the west bank of the river running through the city used for ceremonial bathing) on the banks of the Ganga River, one comes across a group of women with close shaven heads and begging bowls. They are reported to have been thrown out of their houses upon becoming widows and were left in Varanasi at the mercy of God. Begging is the source of their livelihood. They hail mostly from West Bengal. Unfortunately neither the government nor any philanthropic institution has evolved any scheme for their shelter where they can spend the remaining days of their lives.

Sati System

Another gruesome and cruel system that occasionally raises its ugly head in India is the 'Sati System'. On the death of the husband, the wife is pushed into the burning pyre of her husband to die alongside him. Though a prohibitive law is there, yet old customs die hard and the widow is forced to die along with her deceased husband.

The Intervention by the Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF)

Deorala Sati

The Deorala Sati (a convent-educated 17-year-old Rajput widow immolated herself on her husband's funeral pyre on September 4, 1987) shocked our people as it was an open violation of the law prohibiting this cruel and inhuman system. In protest, as well as to generate awareness on Sati, Swami Agnivesh, Chairperson of the Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF), undertook a 19 day march. The Delhi to Deorala Anti Sati Padyatra (march on foot) started from the Red Fort in Delhi

Participant List
May 2004

on December 5 1987. It was scheduled to cover 311 kilometers, but was soon interrupted as the police arrested Swamiji along with 200 marchers and brought them to Jaipur in police vans. Following an appeal in the high court, these prohibitory orders were withdrawn. But Swamiji & 200 others were arrested yet again. Though the marchers could not reach the site of Sati, yet it created a lot of ripples in religious orthodoxy and bigotry. A new thinking against this inhuman, cruel and barbarian custom emerged and the government enacted a new deterrent legislation called 'Sati Prevention Act 1987'.

As a crusader of equal rights for women, BLLF organized the Fifth International Conference on Dowry and Bride Burning and Son Preference in India on January 27-30, 2001 in Delhi. In this conference more than 70 participants, both foreign and Indian participated. It was revealed that there are 7,000 reported cases of bride burning in one year according to an official spokesman. According to some NGOs, the figure of dowry death touches the level of 25,000 per year.

The speakers, both men and women, vehemently condemned this evil practice that denigrates the fabric of Indian culture, wisdom and philosophy of life. A play by Dr. Rabinder Nath Tagore on the theme of the evils of the dowry system was also enacted on stage. It greatly impressed the audience. On the day of the play, school children were also invited so as to arouse their consciousness against this evil practice. The play received good publicity from both Indian and foreign media.

Crusading For Equal Wages for Men and Women

BLLF, at various platforms and through memorandum to the high administrative authorities, has been demanding equal wages for women.

At the academic level, BLLF has also been promoting education for girl children. In the non-formal education centers run by BLLF, special emphasis is made for the enrolment of girl children.

It is unfortunate that the TV media also depicts women in a secondary role - only as an object for attracting viewers. TV serials, too, have given inferior status to women actors.

The need of the day demands equal status for women, not only at home but in all fields - equal quota should be fixed in services, state legislatures and parliament. Much has to be done in that direction.

Empowering of Women in Rural Areas

It is well recognized that women in rural India are the worst sufferers in the social spectrum. To alleviate their suffering, the only meaningful measure is to empower them through skills formation, thus enabling them to earn some income by virtue of which they will get social recognition in their homes as well as in society. In this pursuit, Bonded Labour Liberation Front has been running vocational training for women in different trades for the last several years. As assessed, the ex-trainees are now in a better social and economic status and are leading a dignified life. The centers being run are:

1. Tailoring & Embroidery Centers for girls/women
 - At village Behlpa District. Gurgaon - Haryana
 - At village Khundroth, District. Alwar, Rajasthan
 - At village Mandola, Dist. Alwar - Rajasthan

About ninety trainee pass the training every year.

2. Composite Training Centre at Garhi Village (slum area) New Delhi
 - Training is imparted in trades like computer, beauty parlor and tailoring. About 100 girls pass every year.
3. Durrie making centre for Saharia women at Banskari, Shivpuri District, Madhya Pradesh. Twenty six Saharia women are undergoing one year of training in Durrie making.

Background to Prostitution in India

Another inhuman practice that is thriving in India is prostitution. The history of this system is traced back to the 'Devdasi System' practiced in the temples of the south and Orissa. As the custom prevails, one girl in the family is offered to the local deity of the area. She would live in the temple as 'consort' of the deity. She learns dancing and then performs dances in the temple in the court of local maharajas or feudal lords. She is thus sexually exploited. With the demands for prostitution growing in the metropolitan cities like Bombay, these temple girls were pushed into the Bombay sex market. These temples in the south have become procurement areas.

Delhi too is not lagging behind. Girls are brought from Nepal and other Indian states and are sold to brothel houses at G.B. Road, New Delhi.

The law does not permit practicing of the sex trade, but it is thriving in nexus with the police.

10 On Gender Justice: A Christian Perspective

Liza B. Lamis

On Gender Justice

Still a long way to go

Gender describes those characteristics of men and women (and others) which are socially and culturally determined. It is a social construct (therefore could be deconstructed) imposed on people, and who knows how many genders there are by the combination of determinants like role, biology, preference and orientation. To speak, therefore, of gender justice is bearing in mind others like gays, lesbians, transsexuals and bisexuals. For the sake of focus, I shall deal only on women as I hold an explicit bias for them, particularly for the majority of the poor and marginalized Filipino women.

Genuine partnership happens only among equals. By all indications, socially locating women in society shows that they comprise most of the poor and the politically marginalized. In this

Participant List
May 2004

condition it is not possible for women to be genuine partners of the men who oppress them at all levels in any endeavor. Genuine partnership is possible only when there is balance and responsibility in the gender power equation.

However, partnership could be defined for our purpose under this prevailing condition of inequality. Where the other party is an unequal, partnership would mean differently. I would insist that justice is restored by privileging the oppressed first. The women's movement for liberation is not a fight against men; it is a struggle to be able to fight side by side with men.

This would further mean proactively giving women time, resources and space toward molding and nurturing themselves into self-aware, self-constituting individuals capable of charting their own lives. It also means for many men to materially experience women's experiences no matter how limited, so that they would truly appreciate women's oppression not only in theory but in real life, thus enabling them to translate it to change in everyday behavior. This would also help men treat women and the women's movement for liberation seriously, and not to trivialize or patronize women.

Women want more than just physical presence (representation), they want their perspectives as women integrated, not just added, to processes and structures. Representation is good. A critical women's perspective is equally necessary. Furthermore, structures and processes have to change to reflect its genuine commitment to gender justice.

I should also add that even though women would opt first for their struggle for liberation, they do not forget their solidarity with all the other oppressed groups in society. After all, they belong together and it is only in their solidarity that all the oppressed shall be set free. This project for women's liberation from their oppression must lead them to their empowerment so that they become effective participants in the task of social transformation.

Women Reading and Interpreting Sacred Texts

Finding the liberating themes in scripture is a hard task for Christian women. The Bible as a Christian sacred text is problematic especially for women in that it was used to subjugate, oppress and violate women. Scripture was used to theologically justify the marginalization and even the demonization of women. Furthermore, it is a product of a particular time in history that inscribed its patriarchal values in it. It is even more difficult for protestant women to question the Bible as it is revered as the Word of God, authoritative and normative for Christian life.

However, many Christian women have already attempted at interpreting scripture on their own. This re-reading and re-interpretation is done using a principle of the hermeneutics of suspicion and reconstruction. Women's eyes are employed as an interpretive lens in reading the text and with suspicion for its dominating and liberating tendencies. It is grounded in women's critical awareness of their oppression and their struggle for liberation.

Reading and interpreting our sacred text is a truly political act. It is women who should do the reading and interpretation themselves, not the others. They should be the ones to determine how

scripture is authoritative through its liberating, empowering and transforming force or effect in their lives.

Some ways women reinterpret scripture

Reading the text in context as opposed to reading a text to find proof

Women love your husbands. Usually this mandate is highlighted and the following verse is ignored, exhorting husbands to love their wives as themselves and as Christ loved the church. (Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church. Ephesians 5:25-29)

Creation story. Which story? The most popularly used among pastors and priests, especially for weddings, is the version where woman was created for man and interpreted in a patriarchal love context (Genesis 2:22). The second account is ignored where equality of man and woman as created beings is stated explicitly (Genesis 1:27).

Children obey your parents (Ephesians 6:1). This verse is always used for children to demand their unquestioning obedience to parents, but how many remember to quote the following verses of “Parents do not exasperate your children. (In some versions it says “do not provoke you children to anger. Ephesians 6:4)

The point in bringing this out is the deliberate choice for a certain text to perpetuate blind obedience and to quell subversion of the text to serve the interest of those who want power over others.

Assuming women’s presence in the text

The absence of women in the texts we read does not necessarily mean women were not there. It must be remembered that scripture was written from a male point of view and a patriarchal perspective of a particular period of time. For example, women followers of Jesus must have participated in the Lord’s Supper. Basing on other texts, we know that there were prominent women followers of Jesus. Why use this to limit the apostleship and prohibit the ordination of women in many churches if this were so?

The popular story of the feeding of the 5,000 may have excluded women and children in the text, where a child offered his two fishes and five loaves of bread. There must have been mothers and children who came to listen to the charismatic teacher named Jesus.

Reading into the text our own patriarchal assumptions about women

Nowhere in scripture could we find any support at all that Mary of Magdala was the same woman who was the prostitute that Jesus forgave. Somewhere in our church history this was made to converge by the interpreters of the scripture, mainly the church fathers. This is not only a misreading of the text, but also reading the assumption that Magdalene is a prostitute because she was healed of an ailment and that she comes from a flourishing city of trade called Magdala, most likely where prostitutes abound. Henceforth Mary Magdalene was discredited as a prostitute. Some protestant missions for young girls were even named after her, and we call prostituted women today as modern Mary Magdalenes.

In the story of the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus at the well, the usual assumption about the woman who had five husbands is that she was a harlot when she might have been widowed four times. (This account is interpreted by a feminist scripture scholar as an inspiration for the evangelization of Samaria formulated by the early Christians in the early history of Christianity. Notice that the Gospel of John is an entirely different one from the Synoptics, - used to describe the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke that tell the story of Jesus Christ's life and ministry from a similar point of view and are similar in structure.)

Stereotyping women

Motherhood. Motherhood has been viewed all throughout scripture as the ultimate purpose and measure of the value of a woman. Motherhood is the only position and honor generally available to women, representing the highest status a woman might achieve. Being a wife is a basic and comprehensive category that describes the destiny of every female. Marriage played a central part in women's lives, and this centrality endured well beyond the founding of Christianity.

Women are thus expected, or pressured, to become mothers in their lives. If not, they are considered as cursed or forsaken by God. This is forgetting the fact that Jesus pointed out the value of womanhood beyond motherhood. Jesus debunked the myth of motherhood that continually harassed the women of his time. When a woman from the crowd shouted to him, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you!" (In some other versions, it is: "Blessed are the breasts that suckled you, and the womb that bore you." Here is not a woman, but body parts that determined her destiny.), Jesus replied: "More blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Women's worth is not measured alone by motherhood, but also by hearing and doing God's word (Luke 11:27-28). There is more to women beyond motherhood, and mothering should not be even made exclusive to them.

The meek and obedient image of Mary is preferred mostly as a model for women to emulate. It is not only stereotyping women as weak and docile but also forgetting the revolutionary Mary found in Luke 1:46-55 (called Mary's Song or the Magnificat) and the faithful follower of Jesus unto the cross. In contemporary basic Christian communities Mary is considered a model disciple.

Blaming and portraying Eve as a temptress not only saves men from responsibility as thinking human beings responsible for their own sexuality, but also demonizes women by naming them as hindrances to the holiness of men. Early church fathers called women "the devil's gateway" (Tertullian) and to this day we still hold this false belief. "Misbegotten male" is how Thomas Aquinas described the female of the species (the Creator made a mistake for creating woman?). The

works of Aquinas is required reading in Catholic colleges and seminaries. For Aquinas a woman is naturally subject to man because in man the discretion of reason predominates.

There are other ways of reading scripture using different lenses. Reading through women's eyes is only one. It is for women to discover how relevant scripture is to their lives.

Working Together

Our experience of working together in inter-religious groups reveals that, beyond our religious profession and tradition, we women have many things in common. Our lives as women imaging (or not imaging) the divine are a sacred texts themselves. All over our bodies are written the texts of terror, poverty, violence, exploitation and domination, as well as celebration, joy and fulfillment. We women must interpret these texts in the context of the larger community and work towards writing our own lives according to the will of God, i.e., life in its fullness for all.

The official church may not listen to us or may even ostracize us, but our faith communities will arise to go on discovering and recovering the liberative, empowering and transformative elements and ways of interpreting scripture.

Our lives are our common, sacred texts written in our bodies. Let us interpret them together, regardless of faith tradition. Let us join our voices together and let us work together for gender justice and for the liberation and empowerment of all the oppressed and the marginalized. Let us work together for the transformation of our world and ourselves.

11. How I feel to be a Javanese Moslem Woman in the Indonesian Context

Dewi Candraningrum

1. Introduction

The following article consists of a series of vignettes that reflect different phases of awareness in my life. I try to capture my early encounters as a woman with the outside world and my subsequent experiences both as a Javanese and a Moslem. The article can be read as an example of narrative inquiry in which I attempt to interrogate the aspects of my life and to understand the factors that have made me what I am.

2. Ilir-ilir: a Moslem and a Javanese Girl

Ilir-ilir tandure wus semilir
Tak ijo royo-royo tak sengguh temanten anyar
Cah angon penekno blimbing kuwi
Lunyu-lunyu penekno kanggo nyebo dodot iro
Dodot iro kumitir bedah ing pinggir
Domono jlumatono kanggo sebo mengko sore
Munpung padang rembulane
Mumpung jembar kalangane
Sung surako surak hore
(‘Ilir-ilir’, children’s Islamic Javanese song)

O wind, the rice field produces their fruit
The beautiful green of the rice field is like a new married couple
O shepherd climb the star fruit tree
Climb it though it is slippery
To wash your cloth
Which is wrecked
Fix and sew it
For this evening celebration
When the moon is full and the field is wide
Let's cheer and hurray
(English version of 'Ilir-ilir')

Before I go to bed, Bapak (Javanese name for a father) sings this song as a lullaby for my two brothers and me who sleep in the same bed. I can still feel the warm notes of this song whispering in my ears. This song has had a great impact on my life.

It was believed to have been composed by Sunan Gin (Saint Gin) in the 16th century. He was one of the first Islamic preachers in Java known as the Walisongo (Nine Saints). These Walisongo had turned Java towards a form of Islam that was shaped by Javanese culture, which had long ago been influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism. Sunan Gin's father was a Persian and his mother was a Javanese princess of Blambangan or East Java.

The 'Ilir-Ilin' song conveys a basic philosophy to every Moslem in Java. It is introduced to children in their early age through a lullaby before sleeping, and tells about Islam by asking the young generation to honour the five obligations, or Islamic principles, that are symbolized in the star fruit which has five corners:

First the *Syhadat*, the declaration that there is no god but *Allah*, and *Muhammad* is His Messenger.

Second, the *Shalat*, which requires that one pray five times every day from dawn until midnight.

Third the *Zakat*, almsgiving to the have-nots.

Fourth, the *Shaum*, fasting for one month during Ramadhan (one of the months in the Islamic calendar lunar system). The 12 month Islamic calendar begins with Muharram, and proceeds with Safar, Rabiul Awal, Rabiul Akhir, Jumadil Ula, Jumadil Thani, Rajab, Sha'ban, Ramadhan, Syawal, Dhulqodah, and Dzulhijjah.

Fifth, *Haul*, pilgrimage to Mecca.

The first word that was introduced to me was the name of Allah. I kept questioning: who was he? Where did he come from? How old was he? What did he look like? Was he a boy or a girl? Could I play with him? What did he eat? Did he have a bicycle? Why should he be "he" not "she"? I had lots more questions which Bapak could not answer.

The first language that I learned was Javanese. The linguistic expression of politeness was impressed on me very much during my early learning of the language. This language was used for polite social communication. If a child could speak politely in Javanese to an older person, it meant that he or she had a good upbringing. I had already encountered this difficulty in communicating

with olden people. Children rarely spoke to their elders because of this barrier.

Besides children, specifically, women are supposed to be polite, stay quiet and not talk too much. The Javanese culture that enveloped my faith, Islam, believes those women are supposed to not talk or laugh louder than man do. This is implanted in every girl who ever lived in the Javanese Moslem culture. The culture constructs how the woman should behave. And this is obviously patriarchal.

3. Being a Daughter in a Javanese Moslem Family

Being the youngest kid with two eldest brothers and thus the only daughter in the family is a difficult role to play. Most often I had to be responsible for almost 90 percent of the house activities such as sweeping the floor, washing the clothes and the dishes and sometimes cooking. The most painful part in this household role is the ruin of parts of the body such as hands and feet. They were exposed too much to the detergent—washing cream with strong chemical reaction. I did this from as young as 7 up to 23 before I finally got maimed. So I had been enslaved for almost 16 years in the name of ‘being the only daughter’ in the family.

Besides household responsibilities, I could not play as much as my brothers. They could come home late, but not me. Javanese people would not tolerate it if a woman came home late at night. If we played together, then the boys dominated the game whatever the type of game. Finally, we as girls would choose to move away and play our own game with the dolls. We used to play roles of a mother and a baby or sometimes a doctor with the patient. Boys will have the wide field to hit the ball and play with kites and their little cans. And the girls will have a tiny space next to them and watch them playing the competitive game.

Besides priority in the household activities and children’s games, priority in education was also imposed on me. I was supposed to join the cheapest education. This economic discrimination led to my effort of joining a state-school which is regarded as the cheapest among private education. My brothers would spend more money on education than I would. This oppression was activated in the name of culture. Culture as a social construct has framed my parents and my environment to behave discriminately toward me as a daughter in the Javanese Moslem family.

4. Being a Woman Teacher in the Islamic University

As a beginning teacher, the great number of students that I had to teach shocked me. The first class was exhausting: fifty students sat facing me in neat rows. I began to love teaching, although I was still unable to talk much in the class. The imposed and implanted solitary activity as a Javanese Moslem woman has led me to have very minimum verbal interactions with the students. I made my plan at home and wrote all the activities for the class on paper. When I arrived in the classroom, everything was settled. I knew what to do and my students supposedly knew what they should do. My classrooms were silent.

Besides the silent class, since I got the job in the age of 22, I was regarded as being a ‘woman teacher’ in my environment which has an exclusive meaning in it. This label has some rules in it. I have to wear a woman’s suit, which absolutely means no long pants. I regard long pants as the symbol of ‘the freedom of leg movement’ in which was implanted in me since childhood as

something rude. Sitting and walking politely in a long dress is preferably in my culture in which I felt being restricted by such a foolish rule. Despite the restricted movement I was also being disturbed if I had to walk up the stairs. Wearing a long dress is very inconvenient compared to wearing long pants. Furthermore, I should not speak loudly or even laugh out loud. This is considered very impolite. So I have been living in a cave of words for such a long time. And I should not dress too dominantly by using bright red or other bright colors. It was not written in law but it was passed from generation to generation, and if someone broke the rule, she will become the center of attention. I was curious to wear bright red and so wore a red blouse to see the reaction of my environment. I had to face the eye of mockery through their gaze. This is the most significant moment I have ever experienced.

Some experiences taught me how the concept of woman as being physically weak has influenced the policy makers' decision of recruiting woman teachers or not. The policy makers also considered that 'maternity leave' is considered ineffective for the sake of workplace development. I have a question in my mind that has disturbed me for a long ago. They have wives as the mothers of their children. Which one of them should take the 'maternity leave: the mother or the father? The mother should of course. Why should the mother endure the psychological scorn of taking maternity leave while she has already gone through the most painful job of carrying the baby for 9 months, delivering it and then nursing the baby for two years?

The effect of this 'baby business' has further influenced the policy of choosing official positions in the workplace. I can not count more that 20 women out of hundreds of positions being held by men. This obvious patriarchal system has disseminated its rule to disregard the woman's position. The painful experience is that the 'baby business' has become the excuse for claiming that women are not effective as leaders.

5. Concluding Reflection

What have I learnt by putting these vignettes together? My early childhood experiences showed my love for the exotic, the metaphoric, for the subtleties and mysteries of language. The complexities of the meanings of the metaphors of the first song introduced to me, *llir-ilir*, led me to inquire into the existence of God, Allah, which then became the foundation for my spiritual beliefs. This shaped me as a Moslem. And then the Javanese language was imposed on me like an implant, requiring me always to be polite to elders—a rich code of politeness that shaped me as a Javanese.

These two factors meant that I was positioned not solely as a Moslem but as a Moslem who was also shaped by the regional values of Javanese culture. This position was not one that I chose freely but reflected the world of culture, religion, and social relations into which I was born. This world continues to be reduplicated in my daily life as I grow older and so is a key aspect of my identity.

This is polluted by the painful experience of being the sole daughter and being a woman teacher. The unjust treatment of the community has led me to think in a different way compared to my contemporaries. This shaped the way I view my community. The dominant aspect of the masculine element in the patriarchal society offers nothing to the promotion of gender justice. I have announced myself as the one who will oppose this unjust practice whether in my own house or in

my own class.

By uplifting my own story, I hope I can heal myself and the women in my faith who have experienced gender inequality. This story leads to the formation of the commitment to empower women in Muslim communities. And the healing should be explored in the alternative educational resources that promote equal partnership between women and men. We can start it from the closest aspect of women's lives, in other words in our own homes, by promoting a different worldview that enables women to express their feelings, attitudes and behaviors. We must develop a paradigm that uplifts women's position to be equal in every aspect with that of men.

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15. Introduction to Youth Consultation

16. Statement

**Statement from Youth Consultation on
Living our faiths in community
Young People as Peace makers and Culture bearer**

Participant List
May 2004

5-11 September, 2004
Henry Martyn Institute, Hyderabad, India

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We, 48 participants from Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Indonesia, Hong Kong and America met in Henry Martyn Institute at Aman Shanti Nilayam-Shivrampally Hyderabad, India from 5-11 September 2004 to attend a consultation on 'Living our Faiths in Community' organized by APAY, CCA and EED. We came from regions and countries ravished by wars, conflict and violence, and representing different faiths, belief systems and ethnicities. During the five days, we explored, shared and deliberated on how our different religions can be used to promote peace, harmony and unity in our communities, region and the world.

We acknowledge the presence of a unifying power of compassion and love in our lives and our work which brings us together to work for justice, peace and harmony. Our rootedness in this belief is what motivated us to gather here as a multi-faith, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community of young people to study the root causes of conflict and seek positive alternatives to bring about transformation. We also acknowledge that each of us has a significant role to play in co-creating a new and just world.

In the year 2000, the United Nations declared the following decade as the 'Decade of a Culture of Peace.' In reality the world, especially Asia, remains filled with conflict, violence and division. In the midst of these realities, we recognize that all religions promote unity, harmony, love, peace and tolerance and could play a significant role in helping realize the UN's 'Decade of a Culture of Peace'.

As we explored Asian realities through personal experiences and case studies from our respective regions, we identified five major issues that contribute to conflict and seriously impact the lives of all people in the region, especially the marginalized. These five issues are:

1. Globalization

We have seen the negative impact of those aspects of globalization that create unjust economic structures and relationships, preventing the vast majority of the people from enjoying the benefits of their own resources while filling the pockets of a powerful few.

2. Identity

The rise of chauvinism and dominance by majority groups in many countries has marginalized minority groups giving rise to power struggles. The response to these struggles is often more severe repression, further alienating the minority groups. Thus violence spirals further out of control..

3. Religion

Religion is often misunderstood, misinterpreted and misused by extremist groups, resulting in hostilities, mistrust, hatred and violence. Even though all religions teach tolerance and love, these misrepresentations dehumanize societies and breakdown conditions for peaceful co-existence.

4. Militarization

We observed that militarization does not provide people with a true sense of security and thus alternative forms of security, from local to the regional level, need to be explored and modeled by the interfaith community.

5. Patriarchy

Our social systems are deeply rooted in patriarchy and many of our religious institutions are sources that reinforce this injustice. This contributes to the marginalization of women, both in religious communities and in the society at large.

Our vision as youth is that religious communities of all faiths will come together in unity and cooperation to creatively address these identified issues. We as youth in Asia believe that it is our responsibility to work toward this vision by building a network that is multi-faith, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and regional in nature.

From experiences shared through our case studies and discussions, we became more aware of our collective strength and potential in working for justice and peace at the local, national and regional levels. To more effectively utilize these strengths we need to build an interfaith regional network that can educate, organize and mobilize youth as agents of change. Through our lives and work, we will strive to be examples of an alternative society in which the five identified crucial issues are challenged and transformed.

This can be achieved by:

1. Conducting local, national and regional workshops/consultations that would provide skills and knowledge needed to address these issues.
2. Building national and regional inter-faith networks that can cooperatively respond to violence of all kinds and forms in the region.
3. Organizing public campaigns to pressurize governments, religious institutions/bodies and the civil society through creatively using all forms of media.
4. Creating spaces and platforms for interfaith dialogue and cooperation.
5. Utilizing development and social programs that respond to the felt needs of communities as a channel for raising awareness and organizing for action.
6. Setting up exposures, exchange visits and live-in experience programs for youth and grassroots communities.
7. Reaching out to support groups for financial aid and human resources that help sustain local and regional interfaith initiatives.

We further recommend to the international community that:

1. Assistance be given to organize workshops/consultations and other inter-faith youth programs to help strengthen and expand the regional network.
2. To help provide opportunities for interfaith youth of Asia to study and learn the skills and knowledge needed to build peace constituencies.

3. Support be given to establish an interfaith youth center for research, documentation, publication, and dissemination of information that can strengthen the work of youth in confronting the issues identified.
4. Help build interfaith spiritual centers that foster interfaith understanding, cooperation and inner transformation.
5. Governments, religious institutions and UN bodies be urged to support interfaith youth initiatives for justice and peace.

We urge that all women, young people and marginalized communities affected by political, economic, religious or social policies, be given a voice in decision-making processes.

May peace prevail in the world.

17. Living our faiths in community: Young People as Peacemakers and Culture Bearers

Ayesha Rao

If we take a look at the history of the world, we will find that different revolutionary ideas and reflections rise in the form of religion to shape the community and teach the individuals to live according to certain principles in order to achieve a meaningful way of life. For all religions 'Individual' is the central point. All religions define a complete code of life for the betterment and development of an individual.

Then why are we all fighting on the basis of RELIGION? "There is no difference between Islam and Kafir for me", declared Muhammad Quli, "because the basis of all religions is love". Should we not shun ethnic and religious differences? Maulana Rumi, the Muslim sage, believed in equality and peace. Similarly, those people practicing Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism should not fight on their religion.

Basically, the ruling elite are enjoying their status and benefits and are making all of us to dwell upon religious, ethnic or cultural differences. The rulers are exploiting our religions for their personal attainment of power, wealth and resources. According to my observation there can not be peace if individuals of a society are not able to fulfill their basic needs of life and are not satisfied or happy. If they do not achieve their goals and maximum level of satisfaction, they can not find peace in themselves, in the society and in the country as well.

Tell me honestly, do you, as an individual, think you are powerful, wealthy and have all the basic needs of life? I know a woman is helpless when a boy teases her when she is alone on the road and at the same time the so-called guards of society, the police, are giving her dirty looks. I think young girls are being deprived of the opportunity to study in a standard college but at the same time children of the elite class study in those expensive universities and even abroad. Where are all the resources and wealth of the country being distributed when 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line? People die of hunger and lack of shelter and clean drinking water. I think a father who is worried about his daughter's marriage and can not find an educated and employed boy for her, will not find peace in himself.

I think the skillful worker working more than 12 hours a day but not getting a sufficient wage from the industrialist can not think of peace. A young, jobless boy can not find peace anywhere. If all these people can not find peace in themselves, how do you expect to find peace in the society and in the country?

There are many examples of things we can learn and do to help bring about peace.

My organisation has established a non-formal school to teach the children of farmers for free.

My mother, rather than spending her money on sacrificing goats on Eid-u-Azha, gives that money to women who can purchase a sewing machine and earn a good amount of money to run her household.

In January 2004 I attended the World Social Forum where I learnt that terrorism is not religion based, but has come from all regions and religions. I learnt that countries can not develop in isolation, but rather that regions develop or sink together. I also learnt that any discrimination against people because of ethnic, cultural, social, religious, gender or economic differences should be shunned. Instead, we must talk to each other and identify the prejudices that have led to hatred among countries.

Through the media we can spread the correct and true meaning of love, peace and friendship.

What can we as youth do?

- 1- Learn to live within our resources.
- 2- Demonstrate good intentions, which our politicians generally lack.
- 3- Condemn foreign policies against underdeveloped countries.
- 4- Keep 'Religion' and 'Politics' apart.

In conclusion I would say that we are fortunate that youth have realized the need to bury our differences and disputes. This generation refuses to be hostage to history. There are immense opportunities for development and we can play a great role in eradication of poverty and ignorance. The ideals of peace, harmony, friendship and equality are prevalent in different cultures and regions. The great sages like Buddha, Guru Nanak, Kabir and Bullah Shah are equally respected and loved because they all stood for peace and equality of all people irrespective of their faith, culture and race.

I feel deeply sorry for the past generations of youth, who were unable to enjoy life because of conflicts which they inherited and for which they are not responsible. I came to this consultation with the small initiative to spread the idea that as youth we must accept each other as a Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist but not as enemies.

18. Stories of Peacemaking from Cambodia

Ream Rothamony and Kham Kolap

From Drugs to Peacemaking

Participant List
May 2004

After the first free and fair election in Cambodia, organized by UNTAC, Cambodia has opened its market. Now everything can flow into Cambodia whether it is good or bad. Our laws to protect this inflow of goods are very weak. Consequently businessmen can take the opportunity to bring bad things into Cambodia for their own benefit.

One of the most serious issues is drug trafficking because it can make Cambodia become worse and worse. The drug problem has effected youth from secondary school to university and is a serious problem because these are Cambodia's important human resources and the future of the nation. How can the government take action to solve this problem? And what should we do?

Chanthareaksmeay (not his real name), a former student at Takeo Province and now living in Phnom Penh to stay with his brother in order to continue his studies, has first-hand experience that can help answer this question.

Chanthareaksmeay is a former gangster and drug user. He and his group always did everything to get money to buy drugs in order to feel happy. When he didn't take drugs he felt bored, so then he needed money to buy more drugs. First he sold every thing that his family bought for him and then he stole his mother's money. He even would fight the students in the school for money. He and his group also make many problems for his neighbors and his community. They always would fight with youth from the other communities during special ceremonies or events. Sometimes even if someone just looked at him he would begin a fight.

His parents and his relatives were very disappointed with him because Chanthareaksmeay was attracted by drugs. It made him forget everything: family, relatives and friends. He wasted so much money on drugs.

When he came to Phnom Penh to study, he was invited to attend a workshop at Youth for Peace (YFP). After he joined the workshop, everything changed and he reflected on his past activities. The realities of his past life made him cry to the point of fainting. Today he is happy to speak in public about his change and he always shares and tells other youth not to be like him and use drugs. Now he no longer wants to be a gangster because he not only makes his mother and family cry every day, but also he hurt the society.

Today he is an activist student in YFP and the leader of the group call Peaceful Youth for Development (PYD). This group is very active for peace and even goes to the communities and villages that he used to know when he was a gangster. In Cambodia it is very difficult to do activities in public because everything must be approved by the government first. The government officials were afraid that the group was related to politics or was organized to criticize the government. He tried again and again to explain to the commune leaders until finally they agreed to allow the activities. Now the chief of the commune asks him to do these kinds of activities again and again. His group is also one of the groups selected by the Maryknol organization to conduct workshops in their center with street children and children affected by HIV/Aids.

Recently YFP planned a Youth Gathering Day with displays of youth activities. The goal of this event was to allow students to show what they had been doing and to share their experiences with

each other. The groups also were encouraged to create items for showing and selling to the public for fund raising. Families, teachers, and officials from the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports were invited to join. Chanthareaksmeay's group had few members and they were so busy they could not prepare for the special day. Determined to participate, he went to his home community and told his mother about his problem. She helped him weave some silk items that could be sold. His home area is famous for silk. Usually only the women do weaving, but he did it himself with good quality. He also created a very interesting and attractive PYD display.

Even though he has changed, he still has some problems with his family, especially with his brothers because they don't believe him. It makes him disappointed, but he doesn't stop talking and explains again and again to his family how he has changed. Now some recognize the change in him and one family member bought motorbike for him so he can work more easily.

Today he knows that it is important to gain a good self-image and to learn how to care for others in society in order to be happy. Drugs only create more problems and create more poverty. Helping others is a good way to reduce poverty because you do not spend money on wasteful things and in addition you do not waste your life.

Courage While Facing the Gun

Recently, 25 Youth for Peace (YFP) students, staff and monks were traveling on a bus in the rural countryside when the bus nearly sideswiped an oncoming motorcyclist. The bus stopped and the driver got out to see what had happened. The motorcyclist was not hurt, but he and the bus driver had angry words with each other. Then the motorcyclist pulled a gun and pointed it at the head of the bus driver.

The YFP Director, Mr. Outh Renne, could tell that this was a very serious situation and got off the bus. Some students also followed. He noted that the bus driver was in the wrong and said to the driver, "We are wrong. We should not have been on this side of the road. Please apologize to the motorbike driver."

After some hesitation, the bus driver complied and offered an apology. The motorcyclist then began to insist on some type of identification since the bus driver admitted to being wrong. He wanted to report the incident to the police and/or the bus company supervisor and have the driver lose his job.

Renne, speaking directly to the motorcyclist who was still pointing his gun, said, "You realize that we are wrong, but you also are wrong. It is illegal to have a gun and so you are committing a crime by having this gun and pointing it at us. We have apologized to you for our mistake, but you also are responsible for a mistake."

The motorcyclist put away the gun and left the scene without another word.

The students had a first-hand encounter with an active non-violent resolution to a conflict. They had just completed a workshop called "Culture of Peace" and received an object lesson they would never forget.

19. Khmer Ahimsa Introduction to Interfaith Consultation in India

Kham Kolap

My Views about the Youth

The youth crisis in Cambodia is caused by two social currents - materialism [modernization] and moralization. Modernization is growing faster than moralization which is, in fact, gradually disappearing. The power of ignorance is dragging the youth into delusion. The model of a bitter life is being illustrated through songs, music and movies that encourage youth to attack, to fight and to continue revenge. The reality, then, is that people are living in danger all the time. What is the cause of this? The Cambodian people experienced living in war for more than 20 years. The war created a society of revenge and division. It changed people's behavior from morality to immorality. Young people born in a country at war are given a war ideology which means they are taught to fight, to be brave and to have no tolerance toward their enemy. The teachings about how to be truly human must be given priority. I have heard a common saying, which says that "the one who is strong is the one who can survive". The weak, the poor and the illiterate have been oppressed and most of the time they have been divided and asked to fight against each other.

I have witnessed many events in Cambodia since my birth in 1980: Civil war followed the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979. The Vietnamese troops withdrew from Cambodia in 1989. The civil war between the national liberation forces and the Phnom Penh government continued. The Paris Peace Agreement on the comprehensive solution for Cambodia was drawn up. The first national election under UN supervision was held in 1993 to form a new government. This election led to armed conflict between the two Cambodian prime ministers. Street demonstrations led to many arrests and killing of people. The national election in 2003 led to a political block to form a new government. All of these events have taken place in my short life time.

The Cambodian people have been living in great fear all this time and the youth are the first group negatively effected by these events. In addition, the growth of anarchy, drug trafficking, political ideology and crime are threatening young people. When trying to respond to these problems, economists say that they are caused by financial problems and that the people do not have enough food. Politicians say the problems are caused by the lack of political reconciliation. Educators say the problems come from a lack of education and culture and ignorance. If people received a good education, they would have knowledge and then peace would come to Cambodia. Sociologists say that we have a society of social poverty.

"Tumpeang Snong Reussey" is an old Cambodian proverb advising children to prepare their behavior and knowledge in leadership for the family and the country. In Cambodian society, the children are normally instructed in the family or in the classroom to play a role in social development. Most of the girls in the country have had their schooling stopped at the age of 15 to 20 by their parent in order for them to help do the house work or to do some income work for the family such as chicken and livestock raising. The boys are encouraged to continue studying in the higher grades. Before marriage the boy is requested by parents to go to the pagoda to be ordained as a monk for one or two years. During the decades of civil war, the youth were used as tools in the war through the philosophy of the war-lovers. The youth were ordered to confront the crisis in the politics through violence.

Participant List
May 2004

The period of terror in Cambodia ended after the Paris Peace Agreement on 23 October 1991. However the legacy of the armed conflict remains rooted in present Cambodia. The political climate has been changed from time to time. The education situation in Cambodia is often criticized for its ineffectiveness and poor quality. The curriculum does not focus much on social and moral knowledge. With current globalization and the mass media young people are receiving the message that materialism is the only important issue in society.

In recent years, people have started complaining about the growth of youth gangs in the villages. Most of the youth gang members are addicted to drugs and are led by the sons of the powerful people. They have created many violent conflicts in the communities.

One youth in Seila Mineang Village was beaten to death by another youth group from Sre Ambel. Police went into Dong Peng pagoda to crackdown on the village gang living in the temple grounds and mistakenly arrested the son of a villager in Chomcar Krom. The boy received physical torture in police custody. His mother had to send money to the police authority for the release of her son. This incident was unfortunately caused by gangs who use the pagoda to start wars against each other.

Khmer Ahimsa (Khmer Nonviolence) is working to promote peace, justice, human rights and reconciliation in the community. Youth is one of our target groups who are receiving the opportunities to develop themselves and their community to deal with social injustice. Youth are being developed through training on leadership and the building of peace. They also gain experience through field trips. Following are some stories reflecting the community youth situation in an area where Khmer Ahimsa is working:

Community Division

Deikroham village is in Kompong Seila district of Koh Kong province. The village is divided by religious groups. People follow the Muslim, Christian and Buddhist faiths. Although people have different religions, they are still living in peace with each other. The community practices their religions without conflict. Muslims say that they have a good relationship with Buddhists and Christians say they have a good relationship with the Buddhist monk.

Recently, there was a conflict related to the use of a gun by the Christian youth to threaten a Buddhist youth for making love with a village girl. Following the incident, the police came in and arrested four Christian youth and took them to court. The youth were accused of illegal use of a gun and sent to police custody. After their release, the church leader said the youth had developed a positive attitude toward Buddhist youth. They came to church to receive God's advice and with tears expressed their regret about the incident. However, according to a Muslim man, the Christian youth did not change their behavior but instead have created many problems in the community. He says he has seen this group drinking alcohol and using the broken bottle to fight against Buddhist and Muslim youths. The community relationship has deteriorated because of the youth.

Value of Religion

The Cambodian constitution stipulates that Buddhism is the first religion of the country. The law also assures the rights of its citizen to participate in other religious beliefs such as Muslim and Christian. After the first general election in 1993, many churches, mosques and temples have been built. Each religion tries to attract people to their faith. One former Buddhist priest became a Christian teacher. He was strongly criticized by the community members. The man blamed Buddhism of cheating people and compared a Buddha to a sack of cement. Many Buddhist people warned the man that if he died he would not be allowed to be cremated on community land. The Buddhist group responded that a wooden Christian cross is not as valuable as a sack of cement. In this way there has been an increase of interfaith conflict among the people.

Villager intervention in youth conflict

Prieng and Chomcakrom are neighboring villages in Sre Ambel district. On Khmer New Year day in April 2004, Prieng organized the traditional ceremony in their Sala Bon (traditional meeting house). During the day time, they invited monks from Wat Dong Peng to receive food and to chant for New Year blessings. At the night time the Sala Bon committee prepared traditional games and dancing for village youth and children. The program welcomed all visitors. A youth group from Chomcar Krom village, led by the son of Sala Bon committee members Mrs. Sai, attended the festival. After several songs were played, a youth group from Chomcakrom quarreled with Preing youth over a female dancing partner. They started to attack each other and two youths were seriously injured. The festival was stopped by the incident. Sala Bon committee and village elders came to arrest 3 attackers who were the youths from Chomcakrom and brought them to the Sala Bon to sign an agreement not to create problems in the future and asked them to pay 30,000 riels each to cover the damage. Mrs. Sai learned about her son's involvement in the conflict. She raised the issue of the youth conflict at a village meeting in Chomcakrom. She told the meeting about her unhappiness concerning the measures taken by Preing elders against her son. The elders and Sala Bon committee of the two villages discussed the problem in the presence of a Khmer Ahimsa community peace worker as facilitator. The two villages agreed to heal the wounds caused by the youth and committed themselves to rebuilding friendship. At the same time, they formed one youth association which both villages participated in. The association was set up to make peace and to build good relationships. Three to four youths attended this meeting. Since the establishment of the Village Youth Association in May 2004, the situation between the youth has remained calm and people continue their cordial relationship as usual.

20. Four Pillars of Peace

Siriphone Niradsay

I. My Youth Group

I was born in a half Catholic family because my father is Buddhist but my mother and other family members are Catholic. In our family we do not have any problems with our religious practices. We live peacefully and love each other very much. My father follows his religion practices and I go to church every Sunday with my mother, brother, sister and grandparents.

I started to study Catholicism when I was nine. A few years later my sister introduced me to the Catholic Church youth group. In the youth group we have different activities. One activity is to

Participant List
May 2004

help the church for common interests such as guarding bicycles and motorcycles during the mass. Some sisters from the Philippines came to help develop our group and I am part of the third session of their group.

The youth group grew quickly and now has about 60 members from 15 to 30 years of age. In our group I first only joined with the choir. Now we have organized functional group leaders and officers. A formation team is composed of 12 members to give formation training and activities to other youth groups. I am a member of one of those teams. I teach traditional dance, assist the team with songs and games and prepare the food or snacks when we have activities. I serve as treasurer at the same time. In our church, we have song practice every Saturday and also a meeting every Sunday after mass during which time we have Bible sharing and play games with each other in the group. We have National Camp once a year in the capital city and different provinces as well and other on-going formation activities. We have to prepare everything. For example, we choose the place, select the topics, find a facilitator, appoint group leaders and arrange equipment and materials. The church, through our Bishop and a sister in-charge of the youth program, supports us in our finances and activities. We have a weekly and monthly meeting when the need arises.

Strengths of Our Group

When we work or do something as a group it is much better than working alone because we have many ideas to share and can choose the best thing to do for ourselves and for the group. It means we will be one strong group with understanding, belief and love in God.

When we can work as a team we benefit because of:

- * Strong spirit of voluntarism and perseverance of youth leaders.
- * Willingness to learn and to improve self and group and be useful in the service of the church.
- * Strong Catholic community belongingness and friendship.

Weakness of Our Group

In general, many people living in the same place always have different opinions. That is why sometimes we misunderstand each other while sharing ideas. Because of the cultural of respect to elders and superiors, young people are not eager to make their ideas or suggestion known.

Challenges to Our Group

The group challenges me to have good ideas, think about how to make a strong group, how to be one with another, how to forgive others and how to love other people as our family. Another thing is that it challenges us to share the good things and the true meaning of our religion. In fact religions will help all of us live in peace in the world.

The other big problem we see all the time is we always have some misunderstanding with Buddhist people because Laos is a Buddhist country. The Catholic community is a minority group. The Buddhists often say that Christianity is an international religion which was introduced into Laos by Western missionaries whom they do not like. The Buddhists believe in Lord but not in Jesus. They

believe in things that they can touch with their hands. They don't believe in the resurrection because Jesus and Buddha were born as human beings with bodies like other normal human beings.

The Role of Youth in Peacemaking

Our faith and belief is in God and we must love each other like God loves us as His children. We can be peace builders ourselves in our families, our groups and our communities by building a team that extends to other youth group dioceses. We can participate with other youth groups in building community and country. We can foster sharing and dialogue in our group to discuss and clarify misunderstandings and conflicts. Also we can organize prayer groups for peace.

Interfaith Efforts at Peacemaking

I believe that when we have peace, freedom of thinking, freedom of doing activities and freedom of religion will have a happy life. Sharing the Bible regularly and faithfully helps us understand each other better and strengthens our love as children in the same family because every religion teaches us to love each other and to act in the right way.

How Culture Can Help Build Peace

Culturally the Lao people are peace-loving people. We have the cultural values of forgiveness and do not usually dwell long with conflict. The Lao people have a strong sense of community and thus Catholics and Buddhists are brothers and sisters.

We have cultural practices that help build peace such as the Lao New Year, End of Buddhist Lent, Boat racing, Dong (Lao wedding ceremony), Funeral ceremony, That Luang Festival, etc.

Conflicts are not caused by religions because every religion teaches good things to people. They teach us to love each other and to be good in the society. But the conflict begins with a people do not follow the things that religion teaches and close their minds to understand other religions.

I live in a family where interfaith process is always observed. Trust, respect and love are values important in our family. Religious practices and observance are allowed and encouraged. I am open and I appreciate Buddhist religious practices and sometimes I also join them. By nature I am a "cool" and open person. When conflicts arise I usually try to analyze the source of conflict, be aware of my reaction and responses, pray over them and then workout the challenges. P.S. Augustine said: "Peace indeed is a process. Inner peace is very important. When persons are peaceful with themselves they are able to share it with family, society and everyone they come across. Most of this generation lacks this peace." He went on to say, "To achieve the inner peace one has to spend time in prayer. In this process he will understand, God, nature and the self".

In Laos, culture and Buddhism are almost always mixed like the same thing that can not be separated from each other. That is why I just follow my culture like other people but depend on my religion for guidance. For example, we Catholics usually celebrate two wedding ceremonies. One is a wedding ceremony following Catholic rite. Then we celebrate the Dong, or cultural wedding celebration, where the new couple is announced to the village leaders and community.

When I have a problem with other groups, I minimizing the conflict by talking and explaining to them. For example, I say that we are all Laotians so why do we have many conflicts? We have the same culture and tradition so why do we argue about things that not important? We are living in the same country so why don't we try to understand each other and make our country peaceful?

From all of these experiences I have learned many things that I have never known before. For example, I now understand that every religion teaches people to be good. Conflicts only begin when people do not follow what their religion teaches. Religion is a way of life and humanity will grow, develop and flourish if there is peace. To make peace with others one has to forgive others and sacrifice for others. I know how to solve the conflict but when I face a difficult case I can ask someone else to help me.

We must talk with open minds and hearts with other people. That means I'll say what I think but I don't insist that I am right and I must be careful not to create misunderstanding and pain to the other party. Though we are different in faith and practice of religion, we are all children of God - brothers and sisters. Therefore we are capable of living and working together harmoniously and happily with each other

I now understand that I must increase my ideas and knowledge of other religious practices in order to appreciate and understand them more. The most important thing is that I must know how to develop a strong belief that helps me pass all the conflicts as best as possible in my group and with other groups. I must be a good speaker and at the same time also be a good listener.

All of these things have given me a lot of experiences and have helped me to control myself in the group or with other people so that I can be a peacemaker and culture bearer. I can start to do something better in small and simple ways, strive to be a good youth and also know that peace makes us happy, healthy, more progressive, and correct in the way we do things.

In conclusion, peace is the main support of the world. If peace does not exist, one day the world will disappear from the galaxy. It is like removing the pillars that support a house. Without those pillars, the house will also collapse.

Pope John XXIII said that there are four "Pillars of Peace."

Truth
Justice
Solidarity
Freedom

Those pillars must be built by all the world's inhabitants because each of us has God as Father and Jesus as Brother.

21. Case Study from Taiwan

CHAN Hsiu-Yin, Taiwan

Current Situation of Taiwan's Religions-

According to official statistics, there were twelve main religions officially recognized by the Taiwan government before 1998. There are now no less than twenty-five religions, churches, new communities of faith and new religious movements officially recognized by the government. Although there are many religions existing in Taiwan, it is great that no conflicts or hurt against each other has happened even though more attention needs to be given to interfaith dialogue. Following is a more detailed picture of Taiwan's religions and my own personal experience of interfaith dialogue.

Folk religion, which stands as the religion of the great majority of people, is gradually becoming recognized as a religious system of its own. It incorporates many beliefs and practices of the three major philosophical and religious traditions of China: Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. As to Christianity, Catholic and Protestant churches are recorded as two different religions composed of less than 2.5 percent of the overall population. Together with Islam, Baha'i Faith, Tenrikyo, and five religions of Chinese origin (Lichiao, Tientechiao, Yikuan Tao, and HsuanYuan Chiao), there are twelve religions in total. Among them, YiKuanTao not only has many branches in the Asian and Western worlds, but also has become Taiwan's largest religious community and its most rapidly developing religious movement.

There is, in Taiwan, a growing interest in Taoist studies, and Taoist scholars whose research is deeply rooted in religious faith are greatly contributing to the development of a genuine inter-religious dialogue. The dialogue between Christians and Buddhists – a dialogue which has deep roots in Taiwan – is progressing at a fast pace. There has been, in the last ten years, a rapid development of new Buddhist centers of religious, cultural, social and educational activities.

In contrast with the flourishing “Chinese religions”, Christianity is still, in the eyes of many, a “foreign religion”. Many major churches, particularly the Catholic Church, have remained at a standstill for the last twenty-five years. However it must be noted that Christianity's cultural, social and educational influence in Taiwan goes far beyond the churches' institutional boundaries. It must also be noted that several Christian churches are actively engaged in the search for effective ways and means of promoting in Taiwan a meaningful inter-religious dialogue. For protestant Churches, we have tried hard to create dialogue with each other in the National Council of Churches of Taiwan (NCCT). What is a pity is that the disparity of a national ideology and identity seems to be another obstacle on the way to opening further inter-religious dialogues. So far, as my understanding, the annual sports competition is the most common alternative form of cooperation which NCCT members have thought up. Nevertheless, collaboration among religions and denominations was increasingly demonstrated after the serious earthquake on the 21st of September and has stabilized Taiwan to become a more peaceful and harmonious country. Prompt relief such as food, clothes, and people were allocated urgently by the co-efforts of interfaith and inter-denominational cooperation.

To improve understanding of the public, Taiwan set up a Museum of World Religions (MWR) and solemnly inaugurated it two years ago. The MWR is now an ideal meeting place for people of all faiths and people in search of a faith by which they can live; a place where all can easily learn to respect each other, to share their religious experience and to work together for the construction of peace in the world.

Personal Experience of Participating Interfaith Dialogue

I am glad I had the opportunity to participate in a *Mission and Interfaith Dialogue Conference* this year so as to have opportunity to have a bit more understanding about people of other religions. To be frank, this was my very first time to get to know them in person instead of by books with colorful descriptions and pictures. Additionally, this is the first time during these years that the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) held interfaith dialogue together with the Catholic Church while the Catholic Church is more experienced on this field.

This program basically was comprised of speeches explaining Taiwan's religions along with exposure to folk religions such as BaoAn Temple and monasteries of YiKuanTao as well as of TienTiChiao. There are some reflections I would like to mention after attending this interfaith dialogue. First of all, the attitude of respect toward other religions is what we visitors need to keep. For instance, it is really out of my imagination why some people are eager to adopt a religion which, in my interpretation, is not a religion but a combination of all the religions. How could many people believe in a religion whose rituals should be secretly performed and practiced? Is there any dangerous action within it? Or, how can people possibly believe in a religion with fundamental dogma emphasizing on incredible imagination which even scientists are unable to prove and give explanation for? I wonder if the simple reason for religious phenomenon is that people need religion or belief to carry on their lives. Just like Christianity, it is not necessary for you to see Jesus Christ in person before you have the reason to believe in God.

Secondly, I learned much from people with different religions. I believe in Christianity therefore I know that without God I cannot be the person that you see now. I believe in God therefore I did something which I had been unable to do or to think in the past. However, for those believers of folk religion, the effort they have committed themselves to and the sincere interaction they have with us is worthy of learning. This is not about whose doctrine is more foolish or ridiculous but about the way people performed and how deeply they love their Gods. I can say that from their behavior and ministry I saw how deeply they love their God and was impressed with the way they respond with the love God gave them. It is a very beautiful living image. On the other hand, I then ask myself what kind of person I have been since I believe in Jesus Christ. I told myself I will become a better Christian after paying other religions a visit. Knowing how to see and appreciate other religions instead of starting vicious criticisms of them opening the dialogue is of great significance. It is only when I see myself as other people see me that am I able to communicate.

In conclusion, though Taiwan does not have much trouble with interfaith conflict, our interfaith dialogue and collaboration still has a lot of room for improvement. No one can deny that interfaith dialogue is not only a mission but also a process to keep realizing the Kingdom of God. It is something beyond religion. It concerns social justice and the needs of the marginalized. It is not only about how we see others, but also how others see us. I, as a Christian, think if interfaith dialogue is part of our mission, then any conflict in the dialogue would be our unwillingness to try to create opportunity for each other. I trust and look forward to seeing the Religion Miracle of Taiwan coming true if we do not give it up.

22. SIAM (THAILAND)

Participant List
May 2004

Kitiporn Promted

General Situation

Thailand, or Siam, is located in South East Asia. Many centuries ago Siam existed happily because of the Buddhist culture which is the path of living close to nature. The country consisted of independent administrations in each city and there was no clear border between city and state.

Two hundred years ago colonial forces attempted to invade Siam. For protection, the government had to build a nation state and define the borders clearly. The government centralized the administration in the capital by pulling all the small independent states under one power. Problems immediately erupted between the separate races and this conflict still hovers over the country like a time bomb.

In recent decades Thailand began changing from an absolute monarchy to a democracy. In the early stages of this transition, everything was control by a military dictator and there was little or no freedom and liberty. These military governments created a central development plan influenced by the US. The plan has brought much suffering to the people.

Our Network

Our network began work since that time some years ago. The Sathirakoses-Nagapradeepa Foundation (SNF) is a Thai non-government organization with a spiritual, environmental and activist vision. SNF has continued to struggle at the grassroots, national, regional and international levels for freedom, human rights, traditional cultural integrity, social justice and environmental protection. The foundation was formed by academics in society who are brave enough to criticize the administration system. They created the network organization by educating the people about the issues.

Our Approach

- 1) Critically examine the present social system; consumerism, capitalism, injustice in our society and so on.
- 2) Create alternative options; bring back Buddhist culture and lifestyle.
- 3) Bring everybody into dialogue, especially work with local communities through a participatory process in order to build new attitudes and knowledge and create alternative ways of building solutions.

Spirit In Education Movement (Sem)

SEM is an alternative college founded in 1995. It offers a spiritually based, ecologically sound and holistic alternative to mainstream education. Its philosophy is rooted in Buddhist wisdom and a deep concern for ecological sustainability and social justice. SEM realizes that mainstream education in South East Asia is not in tune with the realities of the changing world. SEM provides training and workshops on such subjects as community building, NGO management,

meditation and social action, conflict resolution, deep ecology, leadership skills, and sustainable agriculture.

SEM has an 8-point curriculum consisting of:

- Understanding of life
- Understanding of interpersonal relationships
- Understanding of social structures
- Understanding of nature
- Understanding of aesthetics
- Understanding of creation/searching of knowledge
- Understanding of right livelihood
- Understanding and practice of spirituality

Conclusion

As a Buddhist, I understand that there are two factors for peacemaking: education and networking. Education refers to the eight aspects mentioned above. Networking is based on the understanding that a network of good friends is very important to successful work. Having good friends provides us a supportive environment that encourages and criticizes our work, thus sharpening our wisdom. We can share knowledge, thought and sufferings and learning together.

My final word is that, based on Buddhist thinking, everything shares the same characteristics of impermanence, change and inter-relatedness. Violence and conflict are impermanent and this is good news. But also, peace is impermanent. We need to work together in order that we can maintain the factors that are beneficial to peace.

23. Sri Lanka Ethnic Conflict

Warna Sankha Wijesinghe

Overview

Since independence from the [British Empire](#) in 1948, struggles between the majority Sinhala-speaking [Buddhists](#) and the minority [Tamils](#), who are mostly [Hindu](#), have been a regular feature of Sri Lanka's political life. Beginning in 1983 there has been an on-and-off [civil war](#), mostly between the government and the LTTE -- the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Tens of thousands have died in the war which has included terrorist tactics by the LTTE, village-scale slaughters on both sides, government disappearances, etc. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are displaced internally or have fled to Tamil Nadu, India and countries around the world. The largest concentration of Lankan Tamils outside the country is in [Toronto](#), Canada.

Background and origins of the conflict

Concerns about minority representation were expressed and given some attention during the independence struggle, but nothing was incorporated into the new governmental structure. Official

and unofficial governmental preference for Sinhalese became a sore spot with Tamils as they lost employment and educational opportunities.

Sinhalese argue that Tamils received preferential treatment under [British](#) rule. By the time of independence, there were more British built schools in Tamil dominated [Jaffna](#) than in the rest of the island. There also was a disproportionate number of Tamils in the civil service, medicine and law. Tamils claim that measures taken by the Sinhalese-majority governments discriminated against them.

In the decades after independence, Tamils supported a more federal system through the Federal Party. The concept of a separate nation, [Tamil Eelam](#), was proposed by the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1976. TULF was a coalition of Tamil parties who went on to campaign in the 1977 elections for an independent state for Tamils in Sri Lanka. They won and went to parliament to represent the northern and eastern provinces. The government of Sri Lanka banned the TULF from parliament for advocating an independent state for Tamils. Talk and nonviolent actions continued, but youth started to form militant groups, some funded by bank robberies, and military presence in the north also grew.

A deadly attack on police in the north sparked riots in Colombo and elsewhere in 1983. Thousands of Tamils died in the violence, and many more fled Sinhalese-majority areas. This is usually taken as the beginning of the ethnic conflict. Attacks and counterattacks became common, and support on both sides for violence grew.

Initially there was a plethora of different resistance groups. The [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam](#) (LTTE)'s position, attempting to learn from Palestine, was that there should be only one. Over time the LTTE, often bloodily, merged with or eliminated almost all the other groups.

India's Vietnam

India's involvement has been motivated by a mix of issues -- its leaders' desire to project India as the regional power in the area, worries about India's own Tamils seeking independence, and a genuine concern for the Sri Lankan Tamils' plight. Uncoordinated in the [1980s](#), the central and state governments (and even different agencies within them!) supported both sides in different ways.

In the late 1980s the Indian government negotiated an agreement with the government of Sri Lanka on the Tamils' behalf (without consulting the armed resistance). India promised military support if needed, and Sri Lanka agreed to concessions, including constitutional changes to grant more local power (13th Amendment). India got agreement from all of the Tamil resistance groups including, grudgingly, the all-important LTTE.

The Sri Lankan government was facing a mostly unrelated uprising by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in the south and called in the Indian military immediately after the agreement was signed. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was formed and initially oversaw a cease fire and modest disarmament of the militant groups. The Sri Lankan government pulled its troops south and put down the JVP rebellion, but dragged its feet on reforms. The LTTE's trust in both governments

dissolved and the IPKF ended up fighting the LTTE. Nationalist sentiment among the Sinhalese led to the government's call for India to quit the island, and eventually even supply the LTTE!

[Rajiv Gandhi](#), India's Prime Minister during their involvement, was assassinated on [May 21](#), 1991, most presume by an LTTE operative. Indian support for the LTTE dropped to near zero, and even in [Tamil Nadu](#) (home to 60 million Tamils) feelings are still mixed. India has been firmly against the LTTE ever since, although they do speak up for Tamils' rights.

In the 1980s and 1990s, successive governments officially revoked some of its discriminatory policies, recognizing Tamil as an [official language](#) and introducing a district based quota system for university admissions with Tamil majority districts having the lowest cut-off points. Sinhalese and Muslims today claim there is reverse discrimination. Most Tamils have seen this as too little too late.

The 1990s

The LTTE took significant parts of the north as the IPKF withdrew and established many government-like functions in the areas under its control. After failed peace talks with a new government in [1994](#), the government pursued a "war for peace" line, and retook [Jaffna](#) (the largest city in the north). All attempts by the government to take control of the land route from the south to Jaffna failed, as have LTTE attempts to re-take Jaffna.

The Sri Lankan government, with some success, pressed other governments around the world to outlaw the LTTE, interfering with their fund-raising activities.

A significant [peace movement](#) also developed in the [1990s](#), with peace camps, conferences and meditations, and many kinds of training, research, and outreach to bridge the two sides at all levels.

Tentative peace

The LTTE became willing to explore measures that would safeguard Tamils' rights and autonomy as part of Sri Lanka, announcing a unilateral ceasefire just before Christmas 2000. In [2001](#) an LTTE assault destroying half of the air force's planes dampened the economy, and government hopes for a military solution. In elections a new government came to power, and reciprocated another unilateral LTTE ceasefire offer. The two sides formalized it in a Memorandum of Understanding signed in February 2002. [Norway](#) is [mediating](#), and many other countries are offering substantial financial support if peace is achieved. Some Sinhalese and Muslims refuse any concessions unless the LTTE disarms and becomes a democratic political entity.

CASE STUDY

I would like state here some general information about Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has a population of 19.4 million, of which 74% are Sinhalese, 7.3% are Muslims and 18.3% are Tamils. Of the 18.3% who are Tamil, 12.7% are Sri Lankan Tamils and the rest (5.5%) are Indian Tamils. Sinhala is the language spoken by all Sinhalese while Tamils and a majority of the Muslims speak Tamils.

Participant List
May 2004

Four main religions are practiced by Sri Lankans - Buddhism (69.3%), Hinduism (15.5%), Islam(7.6%) and Christianity(7.6%). In general Buddhists are Sinhalese and Hindus are Tamils while the Christian population of Sri Lanka consists of both Sinhalese and Tamils. Islam is the main identity factor for Muslim people whereas language is the dominant identity factor for Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups.

Kandy is located in the middle of the country. In Kandy all the ethnic groups are living and all the religions are practiced

Kandy YMCA was established in 1905 for the youth. I joined as the youth member in 2003. We do not have any religious, ethnic or race barrier. All youth work together. Our main activities are developing leadership skill, career guidance, fun, fellowship, and peace building. In peace building we have organized the youth exchange program with the Jaffna youth. Youth from Jaffna visit Kandy and we share our experiences in war and what we can do in peace building. After their visit our 40 youth members visited to Jaffna. In this visit we saw what happened to them in war when they lost their own lands and homes. We had a chance to listen to them and share our experiences.

In July, 2003 we organized a trip to the Hill Mountain area called “Reverston.“ Eighteen youth members participated. The main aim of this trip was to educate them about nature and to build friendship among Buddhist and Christian youth. On the first day we went to the small village called “Mahalakotuwa.” It is a 100% Sinhala Buddhist village and the people are very poor. We stayed in the temple at night. The monks were very helpful to us. After we returned to Kandy we decided to give some help to the school children in that village.

In November 2003 we started to collect some school supplies to give the school children of Mhalakotuwa village. We collected many books, pencils and pens. Before going to the village we tried to inform the principle of the school that we want to help the children. As the village does not have a telephone, we tried to correspond by mail, but we did not get a response. O November 24th we went to the village again. This time we did not get a good welcome from them. The principle was not in the school. Then we went to the temple that we stayed in the last time. The monk told us that the people of the village don’t like our help and our visit because we are a Christian organization. We tried to explain that most of our youth members are Buddhist and we do not have any idea to convert the people, but the monk said we shouldn’t give anything to them as they don’t need any thing. After a discussion with the youth group we decided to return to Kandy. We had to walk around 8 km with the luggage and the books. After we reached our van we donated our books to another small school which didn’t have any problem with our donation.

After coming back to the YMCA we had a discussion about our experience. We agreed that we have to be careful with our community work because some fundamental monks and others in society will not understand our motives. We also felt that we must find some way to work at interfaith dialogue.

24. A SHORT WRITE-UP ON PEACE ACTIVITIES IN NAGALAND (INDIA)

Mr. A Vikheho Chisho, And Mr. Takatoba

Participant List
May 2004

INTRODUCTION:

The Nagaland Development Outreach (NDO) was created by Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) in 1999. Since then it functions as a development organization having a vision to work with the underprivileged and marginalized for their upliftment. Its office is located in Chumukedima, Dimapur. The NDO has established a strong link with twenty Baptist Associations and over 1300 churches established in all the villages and towns of Nagaland. Indeed, NDO is a people based organization. NDO has a very good working relationship with the government of Nagaland and also other NGOs in Nagaland. The organization has historical relationship with the American Baptist Churches, Baptist World Alliance, and Asian Baptist Federation through Nagaland Baptist Church Council. The main activities of the organization are concentrating on: capacity building, community healthcare, women empowerment through micro credit program and peace promotion. However, in this we would like to present a study on peace promotion activities.

1. SITUATION THAT CALLS FOR PEACE PROMOTION WORK:

It is a historical fact that the state of Nagaland was created not because of its economic viability but because of political reasons. However, the prolonged and unsolved Indo-Naga political problem continues till date. As a result most people in Nagaland live with acute poverty, health problem, fear, mistrust and uncertainty. There was a time when the innocent villagers suffered in the hands of the Indian security forces but now all the insurgent groups come out openly due to cease-fire and they live in the villages and towns along with the civilians. They demand taxes, extort money from people and therefore civilians are facing untold miseries. Young people are afraid of taking up productive businesses for fear of demands for money. There is a Cease-fire Agreement between the Government of India (GOI) and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) and NSCN Khaplang at present. However, fighting among the Naga insurgent groups continues. The issue of Naga integration is frightening the neighboring states. Efforts were made by churches and NGOs to create congenial atmosphere so that different people groups can have dialogue without resorting to violence. In Nagaland both the Churches and the NGOs have made several attempts to bring about understanding among various factions. So that they can as one body negotiate with the GOI and bring about final settlement. The Director of NDO has been using by the Church so far for meeting the top leaders of all insurgent groups. He went to Myanmar walking through the jungles along with other team members for having discussion with NSCN (K). He had been to London and Bangkok for meeting the NNC leaders and NSCN leaders respectively. This effort is not in vain because there has been great reduction of violence and communication channel is being opened. Almost all the home front leaders have been contacted and several dialogues had taken place.

2. NDO ENGAGES IN PEACE WORKS:

Seeing the enormity and the intensity of conflict that occurs in our families, churches and institutions and Naga society, NDO decided to devote itself to capacity building on conflict resolution and peace building. Since 2001 November, it has actively engaged in training various people on peace building. In 2002 and 2003 conflict resolution training were conducted in various districts. Both men and women attended these programs from various backgrounds. Participants included Church leaders, Village Council Leaders, Tribal Union leaders and College and NGO student leaders. They have been given basic peace building and mediation skills. They also have learned how other people in different conflict situation have resolved their conflicts. Efforts are

Participant List
May 2004

also made in order to identify potential men and women for providing further training both short term and long term in the field of mediation and conflict resolution.

NDO attempts to re-discover the traditional Conflict Resolution tactics, techniques, approaches and mechanism available for coping with conflict. Our attempt is to study more, involve more analysis so that we are able to modify or modernize the traditional techniques and integrate them with the contemporary approaches and practices thereby evolving a relevant conflict resolution program for peace builders. Therefore NDO felt that village leaders, church leaders, tribal, student and community leaders should be given training on mediation so that their micro as well as macro problem can be solved through a process of conscious mediation.

Issues of Women and Conflict are also addressed since in most cases women are the victims of violence and conflicts. It is husband or father or brothers being killed. The responsibility falls on her to take care of the family, children and other members of the family. Therefore, the need to include women in peace building is stressed. NDO has been making efforts since then to pull in as many women participants as possible so that they become active Peace builders. It is worth mentioning here that the Conflict Resolution Training was felt necessary in all the district in Nagaland, because Naga society is full of conflicts such as intra-conflict, interpersonal conflicts, inter-village conflicts, intertribal conflicts, conflicts between advanced and backward communities, conflicts in the churches, conflicts in the political circle etc. However no conscious effort has been made to deal with all these disputes. Simply saying “forgive and forget” is not going to bring any good result. It is also felt that both the church and the Government need to contemplate on peace education that is appropriate for the Naga context.

3. STRATEGIES FOR PEACE PROMOTION:

(a) NDO works for promoting peace with the youth groups through games and sports where youths from different tribes came together to interact and have fellowship. This serves as a platform where different tribal barriers are transcended/crossed to come together and promote peace and harmony and maintain understanding and closer relationship.

(b) NDO also involves in advocacy program where different tribal issues are identified and addressed. This program becomes possible due to the access that NDO has with the Baptist churches. NDO also works closely with neighboring states like Assam and Manipur. The recent conflict between the Karbis and Kukis motivated NDO to embark on a journey of peace to Assam on 29-30 May 2004, where consultation was held with the church leaders to foster mutual relationship.

(c) Cultural exchange programs are also held both within and other states. The basic aim of these events is to propagate peace and harmonious living among the various Naga tribes and other communities.

(d) NDO also focuses on peace education programs by organizing art and painting, essay writing, debates, extempore speech, peace concerts, making billboards, posters and pamphlets. These

activities are initiated in schools, colleges, and youth groups to promote personal sense of peace and harmony with each other and in the society.

(e) NDO has also undertaken Action Research program to understand the traditional method of peace making. This program was carried out to find traditional way of resolving conflict covering different tribes in Nagaland. The components of the findings were based on seven categories:-

- Resolving conflict between friends.
- Between husband and wife.
- Between clans.
- Between Khel to Khel.
- Between tribes.
- Conflicts between villages.
- Women's participation in solving conflicts.

This was necessary because the traditional practices and customs were slowly fading away especially in the urban areas.

4. CHALLENGES FACED:

(i) In the presence of economic disparity and when the people live in poor health condition talking of peace would be incomplete. Development should start with the people and their education on the various aspects of life that can bring about transformation. As long as there is inequality, poverty, exploitation, violence and injustice there can be no peace and conflicts situation will continue to exist.

(ii) Another challenge we find is the lack of corporation among the NGOs operating in Nagaland which is a manifestation of stereotypes and prejudices that are maintained among the NGOs.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT:

Through all these exercises NDO expects that an enabling environment for coping with conflict situation will happen. It will enable our Naga brothers and sisters to diffuse the prevailing milieu of mistrust. We believe that Nagas who have been the victim of conflicts themselves, eliminate discontentment, exterminating, entrenched and deep seeded prejudices amongst various ethnic groups whereby ushering peace, amity, harmony and cordiality in Nagaland. We envision an empowered community and individuals for dealing with conflicts. The task seems to be tedious but we will continue to work for a violence free world in the communion of all persons - be a balm for healing each others wound.

25. INDO-NAGA CONFLICT: A CASE STUDY

Mr. Khipenlo Aponza

INTRODUCTION:

Ever since independence in 1947, the beautiful homeland of the Nagas has been turned into a battlefield on account of the Indo-Naga political conflict. So much has happened and yet, little is

known by the world outside. Amidst many incidents, I intend to highlight three particular ones in order to identify some helpful insights about the role of youth in peace-building and reconciliation.

CASE 1:

On the 9th of July, 1997, Oinam, one of the Naga villages under Senapati District of Manipur, an untold incident happened. The Indian Army set the whole village on fire, burnt the barns, looted villager's belongings, killed the innocent, molested, raped, tortured, stripped naked and exposed to the freezing winter pregnant women were forced them to give birth in the open, etc. This cruel treatment was meted out to the entire villagers in retaliation for the camp attack made by the Naga freedom fighters on the same day. Long after the freedom fighters were gone however, the whole weight of the Indian military force came heavy on the innocent villagers on whom all their anger, hatred and frustration was unleashed beyond humanly tolerance. The village of Oinam was turned into one of the worst sorts of concentration camps.

CASE 2:

On December 27, 1994, on a pleasant cool Tuesday at Mokokchung, a beautiful Town of Nagaland, when people were engaged in New Year's shopping and preparations, a few exchanges of gun fire took place in the heart of the town between the Indian army and some unidentified gunmen at around 10:00 am. Immediately, the 16th M.L.I. (Maratha Light Infantry) and the 10th Assam Rifles carried out a brutal firing with guns and mortars on the civilian dominated area. The people were forced together, including women and children, and were forced to crawl on their elbows at gunpoint. The army burnt down 89 shops, 48 houses, 17 vehicles and 2 bicycles. They also killed 7 persons, raped 8 women, roasted 8 persons alive and tortured many others.

CASE 3:

On the 5th of March, 1995, the 16th Rastriya Rifles, who were on their way back from Manipur Election duty, turned Nagaland's capital town of Kohima into a battlefield for an unknown reason. More than 10 persons were killed in the random firing and explosion of mortars. Several others were injured, some tortured, some beaten with rifle butts and buildings, vehicles, and properties of the citizens were destroyed. This sad episode was aired all over India with censored fabrication which unfortunately led to the killing of the Deputy Commissioner of Kohima. All these horrific memories are still very fresh in the memories of the people. The shadow of terror hovers about us and no one can predict what is coming next.

SUMMARY:

It is roughly estimated that about 25,000 innocent Nagas have been killed during the past 50 years. All this death takes place on the pretense of fighting against insurgency which, in the real sense of the term, is non-existent in our land. The responsible military soldiers, far from being punished, are considered heroes under cover of the Draconian Law of AFSPA (Armed Force Special Power Act). In the eyes of these soldiers, the youth are the most important targets and can be shot on mere suspicion. Women including children are not spared. Such inhuman atrocities are beyond our

comprehension. As if this is not enough, we also have inter-factional conflicts which are not less terrifying. The youth of today are caught between the cross-fires with no security and help in sight.

ROLE OF THE YOUTHS IN PEACE MAKING:

Under these circumstances, what role can the youth play for peace-building? This is a difficult question. Shameful though it may be, the youth are rendered the most helpless and are unable to do anything to avert the ongoing conflict. I was personally present at the Kohima incident and I have never felt as helpless as that day. Instead of intervention which would have been suicidal, we were driven into hiding from where we could not come out freely to even attend the funerals. The youth, therefore, could not be counted decently even as silent spectators in all the three incidents mentioned because they were the victims in the first place. As the matter stands today, there is hardly any space for the youth to play their role of peace-making effectively.

Consequently, many have responded by taking up arms to fight it out and the others remain frightened, not knowing what to do constructively. But one sincerely doubts if intensifying the conflict would bring a lasting solution. A series of peaceful protests in the form of **strikes, bandhs** and **agitations** have been staged unsuccessfully one after the other. But it has never changed a thing at the top, but in return has only aggravated the living conditions of the people. Presently, peace talks between government of India and one of the Naga Factions (NSCN-IM) is going on. They have gone on for the last seven years. One wonders if the ultimate outcome would be acceptable to the people at large.

However, I sincerely believe that the youths are a vital force to be reckoned with in the peace process of any conflict, hence the following proposals.

1. In order to channel the youth force for peace rather than for conflict, **trust** and **confidence** building is indispensably necessary.
2. The myth that all the Naga youth are potential enemies should be dispelled and suspicion removed. Then and there only, the youth of today can play their role with their full potential in resolving the conflict. Their united participation would be invincible against the divisive elements.
3. The youth groups can also mobilize **mass-based movements** for peace and reconciliation through existing tools and agencies.
4. More avenues may be created for creative interactions, sharing and learning with the people of the main land (India) through which better understanding may be promoted.
5. In spite of the failures of the past, youth groups should unswervingly demand to repel the Arms Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) from the region. External support from inter-regional or inter-religious groups would be of great value to achieve this.
6. Finally, I as a Christian believe in the power of forgiveness as the only one true way of healing. If approached with sincerity and honesty to resolve the conflict, I am convinced that we can forgive one another, firstly, for the sake of the common good, secondly as a divine imperative for the Naga Christians, and thirdly the Naga youths who are mostly Christians can play a decisive role through the path of forgiveness.

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