

# The Peacebuilders

*"Keeping the ICF Circle informed; Connecting with Community of Interreligious Peacebuilders"*

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Bi-monthly E-Newsletter of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum  
of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs

**Sept. - Oct., 2019**

## ICF Alums attended the Conceptual Workshop on Strategic Peacebuilding

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Sixteen (16) participants attended the conceptual workshop on Strategic Peacebuilding and Theory of Change organized by ICF on September 4 and 5, 2019 in Tozanso, Japan. ICF inserted the workshop in the middle of the Youth Assembly on August 31-September 2, 2019, and the 20th General Assembly of the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs (APAY) on September 2 – 6, 2019. APAY deemed it useful for ICF alumni to contribute to the dialog on the theme "Living Together Within Nature on a Path to Peace." Among the eleven (11) males and five (5) female participants, there were 9 Christians, 2 Muslims, 1 Hindu, and 1 who did not indicate his religious affiliation. Among the 16 participants, nine of them were ICF alumni.

Dr. Emma Leslie, director of the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies facilitated the workshop on Theory of Change and



Some participants of the Workshop with former CCA GenSec  
Ahn Jae Wong

Strategic Peacebuilding for two sessions. As the ICF Coordinator was asked to moderate another workshop on Christian Foundations of YMCA work, she passed on the task of facilitating the workshop on Peace and Religion. Both workshops went well and sparked interest especially among the youth who joined the ICF alumni. Former CCA general secretary stayed throughout the whole ICF workshop sessions.

Peacebuilding is a long-term construction of peaceful and stable societies grounded on justice and restoration of relationships. It addresses the personal and common needs of people across the boundaries of race, class, gender, religion, etc. and transforms unjust institutions and systems nonviolently.

Strategic peacebuilding is protracted over time, at different layers of society.

## ICF Alums attended the Conceptual Workshop on Strategic Peacebuilding

It connects key people with more people on the ground, on personal and socio-political level. It upholds human and earth rights and builds institutions, policies, and relationships that sustain justice and peace. A theory of change describes the desired change, why and how it will happen in a context. It “fills” out the “middle space” between the interventions and desired outcome of peace.

Since it was the first time for the APAY constituency in an assembly setting to meet ICF participants and staff, the invited alumni came from ICF’s School of Peace and Peace Institute. Six (6) ICF alums, who were below 33 years old, joined the Youth Assembly. One of them, upon the recommendation of the ICF staff, a School of Peace alumna, Khamsa Homsobath from Laos, gave one of the two keynote addresses. The former Filipina Miss Teen Earth 2015, model and CEO of a social enterprise Project Lily PH, Julieane “Aya” Fernandez, gave the other keynote address to inspire the youth.

ICF staff and alumni led the worship service on the second day of the



Photo Credit: Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro

General Assembly, following the sub-theme, “Building Communities of Peace inclusive of People and the Earth.” They animated the song by Joey Ayala that articulated lament at how human greed has destroyed communities and plundered the Earth’s resources. They also participated in the chorus that led the assembly in singing.

The ICF alumni participants were Shreeram Chaudhari and Retno Sri Wardhani Ngapoan (SoP 2006), Biplob Rangsa and Khamsa Homsobath (SoP 2012), Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman (SoP 2017), Rani Rith and Baidido Saganding, now ICF Program Officer (SoP 2018), Mark Umali, Alalmiah S. Pangandaman, and Pingping Chanvilay (Peace Institute I, 2019).



Photo credit: Muriel OrevilloMontenegro

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## School of Peace 2019 will be held in Chiangmai

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum, a project of APAY will organize the second 60-day School of Peace (SoP) on September 23- November 21, 2019 in Chiangmai, with YMCA Chiangmai Hotel as its venue. There are twenty (20) participants expected to join this flagship program of APAY. It is always a policy of ICF to consider gender balance among the participants, as well as a balance in the representation of religious traditions.

The overall goal of ICF as a project is to “contribute to a peaceful transformation of inter-religious and social conflicts in the participating program countries of Asia.” Thus, this ICF invests in the youth of Asia to equip them that they may be able to help create peaceable inter-faith communities in their local contexts. The School of Peace provides the youth opportunities to gain knowledge and skills for peacebuilding, but also equally important is for them to cultivate peaceable values and attitudes. The School of Peace 2019 will



Photo Credit: agoda.com

follow the curriculum used for SoP 2018 with slight variation. There are five sections of topics that the participants will study, namely:

- 1) Leveling Off, Orientation on the History of YMCA, APAY and the Work of ICF
- 2) Conflict, Peace, and Peace-building Frameworks.
- 3) Religions, Practices, Indigenous Spiritualities and their Teachings on Peace.
- 4) Making Connections and Identifying situations as Peace Issues.
- 5) Practical Skills that include NVC, trauma healing, mediation,

peace education, basic news writing in Peace Journalism, and designing Workable plans (proposal writing)

To supplement the learning experience, the participants will go into community immersion and visit temples and places of worship of other religions.

Resource persons from Chiangmai area, from India, Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia will come to help as facilitators. ☺☺☺



Photo credit: booking.com

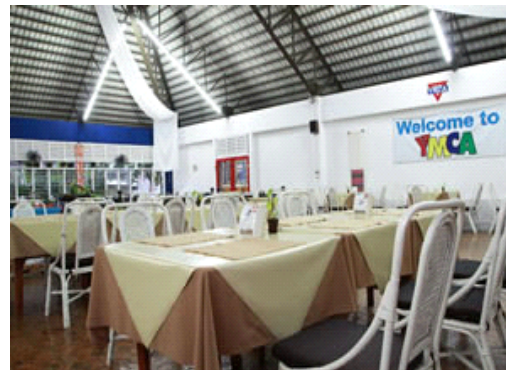
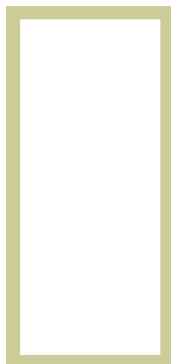


Photo Credit: www.sawadee.com

## My Tozanso Experience: A Reflection -Alamiah Sampaco Pangandaman



Alamiah with Emma Leslie  
Credit: Alamiah S. Pangandaman

I am a Moro, a Muslim and a Filipino.  
Proud to be one!

It is my great honor to be among the ICF alumni invited as part of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum delegation to the ICF Workshop within the context of the APAY Youth Assembly and 20th APAY General Assembly. There were 377 delegates, including 116 youth that gathered from 22 countries for the week-long activity from August 31-September 6, 2019 in Tozanso, Japan. Professor Emma Leslie of Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies facilitated the first workshop that focused on Strategic Peacebuilding that highlighted the importance of Strategic Conflict Transformation, Movement Strengthening and Unity Building across faith and cultural divides. The workshop emphasized the importance of conflict analysis in peacebuilding.

The second workshop for the ICF Team focused on understanding different religious concepts such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. It was an interfaith dialogue between and among diverse beliefs of participants

coming from the Philippines, Cambodia, Laos, Japan, Sri Lanka, Hongkong, Nepal, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. It was a privilege to be a delegate coming from the Islamic faith. It was a great opportunity to introduce our faith to non-Muslims. I had a chance to clarify the misconceptions of people about Islam that are regarded as controversial by many media platforms. Indeed, interfaith dialogue promotes understanding and acceptance that will help deter conflict in every diverse community.

The ICF Team also had a chance to perform an interpretative song that promotes diversity, peace, and love with one another. It also showcased our indigenous or cultural dress and instruments that represent our respective countries and religion. 🎶 🎶 🎶



The participants of the 4th Youth Assembly

Credit: Alamiah

Alamiah is an alumna of Peace Institute I. She hails from Marawi, but based in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines where she work as staff-in-charge of Interfaith Initiatives under the National Commission on Muslim Affairs. She graduated from Law School and is waiting for the results of the Bar Exams.

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## “It was amazing to be in the youth Assembly” —Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman



There were 116 youth delegates from the 4th APAY Youth Assembly coming from 17 countries, including the ICF team. The ICF team was composed of Khamsa and Ping(Lao), Mohammad (Nepal), Alamiah and Mark (Philippines) and Ranny from Cambodia.

Khamsa was one of the speakers. Khamsa shared his work experiences and interfaith engagements and networking. He pointed out four areas: relationship building and connecting with the people, method of faith sharing and, and personal transformation. The primary and most important is self-transformation first before one can do social transformation and others.

During the Q and A part, I asked this question to Khamsa: How do we do interfaith dialogue? His response was this: Make the plan for the interfaith dialogue with the religious leaders because the people will most likely follow the leaders who can easily influence them and share with them the message and information. I asked

this question because we need also the interfaith dialogue in Nepal. In there, religion make more complications. Some people do not have good relations among them because of differences in religions. I applied his advice from experience in my field.

Another youth speaker was Juli or Aya from the Philippines. She is the founder of the “Project Lily,” a skill-based project that helps the disabled persons to survive. I was inspired more with her experience, as she just made this concept when she was still 17 years young. She continued on her journey with her dream and finally, she succeeded. She suggested to the youth to have 3 levels of dreams: for the self, for other people (family, friends, relatives), and the community and country. In her speech, she said that before doing something, we have to first identify the problems, assess the resources and people that we have. Moreover, we have to find Mentors who are easy to work with and who can help us make the work easier. It was amazing to be in the youth

assembly.

We had also the group discussion during the youth assembly and the participants got to know each other as well as their engagements in their respective countries. This sharing helped me to think of the plans with my organization in my country. We also discussed the major issues faced by youth in the region, such as education, employment, mental health, child marriage, etc.

The 20th APAY General Assembly’s theme was “Living Together within Nature on a Path to Peace.” Based on the theme, we focused our discussions and workshops on nature, environment, ecology because we live with the environment and nature. We have to protect nature and the environment, as these play the most important role in our sustainable life. We must care for the environment so we can be saved from climate change and disasters. So, protect the environment and enjoy life with nature, with the fresh air and get the fresh breath, with green space. No nature, no life, no peace. Find the peace within the Nature.

I am a Muslim but I do not feel different from others because we are all human beings. This APAY project called Interfaith Cooperation Forum does not only focus on the Christians, and so everyone can join with this movement. This is a great nature of this organization that I



Mohammad raising a question while Pingping looked on.

Photo credit: ICF



## “It was amazing to be in the Youth Assembly”

—Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman



Khamsa Homsobath  
Photo credit: ICF

feel good. As a youth, I made friends with everyone during the General Assembly, even with professionals. It is the first time for me to attend a gathering like this GA. I want to be a part of the YMCA. I heartily appreciate the ICF that gave me this type of platform and gave me more responsibility to do something new in my country. It is not only about the GA, as I also got more information about the system, policy, culture, tradition to visit the places around the accommodation and venue. We also became friends with the local staff. The hiking experience to the foot of Mount Fuji was good for health. Hiking is also a part of the peace journey because if we do not have good health, it is not possible to take the role of a peacemaker or peacebuilder.

The ICF group discussed with Ms. Emma Leslie who is director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. She focused on “Conflict Transformation” and on the role of physical, cultural and structures on social issues. We also focused on the place of working with key people or with people or groups. We also looked at the role of attitudes. I think attitude is the most im-

portant for a peacebuilder. The next day, the ICF team focused on religion. Ms. Bai, the ICF program officer the participants to group ourselves according to our religions. Discussed our understanding of different religious concepts in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. What does religion say about peace? I learned that every religion teaches respect to people so that there will be peace. But only somewhere, some individuals and groups create problems and do not encourage religious tolerance. For me, I am a human being, and I want our being humans to be the basis of our unity and peacebuilding. I do not focus on religion and to what religion people belong. So, we need to hold hand-in-hand and connect heart-to-heart and with the spirit. Let us go together on this peace journey. 🙏🙏🙏



Participants of the 4th Youth Assembly  
Photo credit: Tozanso Host

Mohammad is a member of Shanti Nepal, and coordinator of Nepal Unites. He is an alumnus of SoP 2017. He is based in Surkhet, Nepal and works as a freelance journalist.

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## Memoirs from My Journey to Tozanso - by Biplob Rangsa



On 1st September along with Bangladeshi six delegates, I flew to Tozanso, Gotemba, Japan to join the ICF workshop and APAY 20th General Assembly. On the way to Bangkok airport, I met with Shreeram Chaudhari, SoP 2006 from Nepal. Shreeram and I are pleased to join the 20th General Assembly of APAY with the care of ICF Coordinator Ms. Muriel Orevilla Montenegro. We arrived at Narita Airport around 6.25 am and a warm welcome greeted us by the Tokyo YMCA's staff in the airport ground. Finally, along with delegates from other countries, we safely arrived at Tozanso on 2nd September to join APAY's, General Assembly.

Just after the arrival and accommodation in Building one, I met with the rest of ICF groups/ alumni, youth delegates of different countries practicing and preparing the chorus for next morning worship. I joined them and

took part in leading the singing during the morning devotion. We practiced the songs for the chorus every day after dinner for the next morning worship. On 3rd September we practiced an ecumenical dance for the morning worship on 4th September 2019. The ICF Coordinator, Ms. Muriel Orevilla-Montenegro led the ICF alumni to practice for the worship services where ICF was to be among the leaders, including the singing of songs and hymns. Through APAY, the ICF had the opportunity to introduce to the assembly delegates the different religions and indigenous spirituality. It was a tremendous experience to be there and respect all different faiths, religions, and believers during the 20th APAY General Assembly. 4th September worship has the ICF alumni felt the honor, especially I, of performing ecumenical worship dance, playing indigenous instrument music, as well as wearing our traditional dresses.

On the same day that ICF took a major part of the worship service, the ICF thematic workshop followed. Ms. Emma Leslie, Executive Director at Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies, Cambodia facilitated the sessions. She led a wonderful session that helped us to understand much deeper about the nature of the conflicts. We learned about the cultural and structural violence that cause physical violence and conflict. I learned much more about the other stories of strug-

gles from the rest of Asia. The open discussion helped me to understand the other participants' situation and a deeper understanding of the conflict situations. The next day, Emma Leslie talked about human attitude, structural change and relates these to conflict issues.

After lunch, we gathered again and Ms. Baidz, the Program Officer, led the afternoon session. She helped us to find out the teachings on peace from our own religion's holy book. We formed ourselves into groups according to our religions, different faith groups and search what are the messages in our religion book. We found a lot of texts that promote peace in our religion's holy book. One of the most interesting parts of this GA for me was hiking up to Mt. Fuji.

To conclude, this is my recommendation:

To hold peace and justice activities, every National Movements should take initiative to organize justice and peace-related workshops or seminars, design projects and implement them. ✨ ✨

Biplob Rangsa is from Bangladesh, based in Dhaka as a Program Officer of YMCA Bangladesh. He is an ICF alumnus (SoP 2012) and active in Bang-

## My Memorable Days in Tozanso - by Ranny Rith

My name is Ranny Rith. I am from Cambodia and I am a Buddhist. It is my great honor to be part of the gathering of delegates from 22 countries to discuss and share as a peacebuilder and on networking. I was so pleased to attend the 4th Youth Assembly and 20th General Assembly as an observer from the Interfaith Cooperation Forum. I got a chance to learn from another School of Peace Alumni, Youths, the respective leaders of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, volunteers, professors, peace advocates, peacebuilders, and young leaders all around Asia. I attended Assembly as an observer but then I also had the opportunity to take a part in sharing about my country's issues and listened to other youth's views. I can say that the youths right now are the potential for a strong movement to work on. They start to care about their own countries, so I think if they get involved with peace advocacy or as peacebuilder, we will see a change for the better.

In the General Assembly, people were friendly and joyful, and at that moment I realize that working for peace is a big deal. Part of the work for that societal peace is for us to learn how to enjoy our life, an inner peace, keep own selves healthy, including mental health, to care, share knowledge, and skill. It is important to have round table discussions and each participant must be engaged to make their voices heard.

I was excited to join the group discussion. The output of these discussions, I imagined, would be translated into action by Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, and delegates to work for justice and peace. Emma Leslie of Centre for Peace and Conflict Transformation



facilitated the workshop on Strategic Conflict transformation. Strengthening unity among people of different faiths, backgrounds, interests is important as we work for the same goal. Emma shared that there are many institutions, and people who are trying to solve the problem but they focus mostly on the physical, rather than on the cultural and structural issues. I think that it is hard to see the violence that counts as cultural or structural, and this is a really interesting thing for me to learn more. I gain more critical thinking skills. I realized that no matter how hard we pay attention to the physical problem, the problem will stay because we leave the cultural and structural dimension of the problem behind.

To social workers, peacebuilders, facilitators, teachers, village leaders, I think, we need to work together within our community so that it will be impactful to the world. The second workshop was about understanding the differences of religious perspective. Facilitated by the ICF Program Officer, it was an interfaith sharing from the

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## My Memorable Days in Tozanso - by Ranny Rith

diverse followers of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. I like to have a dialogue and having the chance to learn about other participants who came from different countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Philippines, Hong Kong, Nepal, and Indonesia. I am interested in the question of how each religion defined the work for peace. To work for peace, understanding is major task to do, along with listening, and discussion. I am glad that was able to share more about Buddhism since I am Buddhist. I know even more clearly about my religion and understand others. I believe in Buddhism because my family does, but this workshop brought me knowledge of each religion, so I grabbed the chance to know better.

There was not only learning, but also fun during the Youth Assembly and General Assembly. I was excited to have the chance to perform as part of the ICF group and represent my home country as well. So, all these things are joyful and unforgettable memories for me. However, I wish to have a longer time to learn about "Strategic Conflict Transformation" and gain a capacity for peacebuilding. How do we start from zero to mobilize the people? What are the effective ways to transform people? How to strengthen the core peacebuilder? Finally, I would like to thank

for this chance that gave me a lot of insight and be a part of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs. I commit myself to work together with youths, people, toward social justice, peace, and to work for equal opportunity and people's right to dignity. ✨ ✨ ✨



Photo Credit: Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro

I realized that no matter how hard we pay attention to the physical problem, the problem will stay because we leave the cultural and structural dimension of the problem behind.



Photo credit: ICF



Group discussion during the Youth Assembly.  
Mark Umali from the Philippines is trying to make

## INTERFAITH COOPERATION FORUM

Asia and Pacific Alliance of  
YMCAs  
23 Waterloo Road 6/F  
Kowloon, Hong Kong

Phone: +852-27808347

Fax: +852-23854692

E-mail:

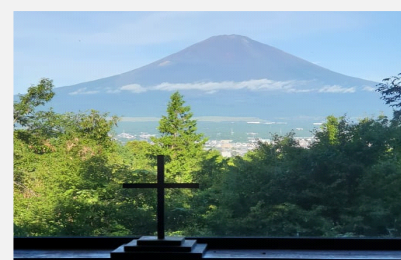
APAY@asiapacificymca.org

**"Keeping the ICF Circle informed; Connecting with Community of Interreligious Peacebuilders"**

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum is a program of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs. It values the significance of interreligious understanding and unity. Thus, it offers opportunities for study and appreciation of the different perspective of religions on peace, and discern the role of religion in peacebuilding. Yet, considering that unpeace is brought about by many factors, including the onslaught of neoliberal economic globalization, more people experience poverty, internally displaced people are increasing as communities are destroyed, native wisdom and values are overrun by Western and consumerist outlooks, patriarchy and racism persists, and climate change is now felt as the destruction of the Planet Earth seems unabated.

Peace is celebrated as a gift from the Divine, yet, we, the earthlings have the responsibility to make peace a reality. Although its contribution may just be like a drop of water into the lake, ICF seeks to equip young people of different religious traditions, especially from the marginalized communities of Asia and Pacific, to make waves of peacebuilding actions.

### Tozanso Photo Gallery



Please send news about your Forums, Alumni programs, events or activities related to peacebuilding to the addresses below:

<muriel@asiapacificymca.org>

or to

<bai@asiapacificymca.org>