



The Peacebuilders

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

Inside this issue:

SoP 2019 Alumni held workshop for local youth in Nepalgunj	1
ICF -TL conducts Peace Education and Advocacy Activity	4
Bangla ICF Alumni launch an awareness campaign on COVID-19	6
Volunteering with Albay YMCA in responding to the pandemic	7
Social Distancing and Greeting Namaskar in COVID-19 time	8
Responding to the Pandemic as Volunteer with Batticaloa YMCA	9
Understanding the unseen enemy from faith	10
How COVID-19 affects our world	10
How can we live in this haunting situation of COVID-19?	11
My Experience of Working with the Quick Response Team	12
COVID-19, Killer and Threat to Humanity	13
My reflection on the Cultural Peace and Harmony Seminar among	13
Editorial	15

Vol. III, No. 2 Bi-monthly E-Newsletter of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs **Mar - April, 2020**

SoP 2019 alumni held workshop for local youth in Nepalgunj Kaushila Sunuwar, SoP 2019

School of Peace 2019 alum, Kaushila Sunuwar, organized a three-day workshop on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation on March 11-13, 2020 as an implementation of the proposal and module she and Amit Chaudhari have prepared during the School of Peace 2019 in Chiangmai, Thailand. This workshop was implemented with the ICF small grant for Local Peace Education, Advocacy and Networking and held in Nepalgunj, Banke. As Amit could not attend the workshop, Kaushila Sunuwar got the assistance of fellow ICF alumni, Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman, SoP 2017, who is a member of Shanti Nepal and a coordinator of Nepal Unites. The activity focused on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation. The activity was held in Nepalgunj, Province No.5 Nepalgunj is a town in the Tarai region where the Muslims are the majority. There were 20 core participants in the workshop.

The core participants were from different religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, different backgrounds, different areas, different cultures, different age groups, and different languages, different faiths. Some of the participants in this workshop were local leaders, some are youth activists in this workshop. The Interfaith Cooperation Forum, a project of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCA's supported the activity, but the SoP alumni also seek collaboration with Nepal Youth Council Province-5 and Genteel Society Nepal.

The activity was divided into three sections, one section for each day. The first day was a theory-based session and discussion on Peace, Conflict, Role of media in Promoting Peace and Conflict



Group Photo with Leaders of Different Religious Leaders in Nepalgunj
Photo credit: Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman

SoP 2019 alumni held workshop for local youth . . .

Transformation. The second day was spent on Inter-Religious Dialogue with Religious Leaders on Peace and Reconciliation. This was followed by discussion, reflection, and sharing sessions with core participants. And the third day was spent on a field visit to Narainapur village where conflict happened between two religions Muslim and Hindu.

The workshop started with Sunuwar leading the meditation in Hindu tradition. This was followed by Rahaman giving an orientation on the workshop's objectives and schedule of activities. Then he made a presentation on the work of YMCA, APAY and ICF, as well as that of Nepal Unites, which he coordinates.

Kaushila Sunuwar facilitated the workshop on peace, conflict analysis, and the role of youth in promoting peace. The participants shared their understanding of peace in their language. The session on conflict started with a game. In this game, two groups were formed, each with five members. Group A members were given pins, while Group B was given inflated balloons. The task of Group A members was to prick the balloons, while Group B's task was to keep their balloons safe. As the game progressed, it became chaotic as those people with pins just jumped up to burst the balloons, while the other group tried their best to protect the balloons. Group B did not negotiate and did not plead with Group A not to burst their balloons. There was no conversation and negotiation between the two groups. This resulted to conflict.

During the process of reflection on the game, the participants realized that they were just thinking of their supposed goals. They did not think out of the box. They realized that this is happening in



Kaushila Sunuwar, SoP 2019 facilitating
Photo Credit: Mohammad Rahaman

the communities. Conflicts in the communities happen because people do not negotiate and engage in dialog. After the game, the participants formed four groups. Their task was to identify and discuss three conflicts in their respective local communities. Then, Sunuwar introduced the subject on conflict analysis using the Conflict Tree. After the presentation, the four groups were tasked to analyze the most pressing conflict and present them to the big group using the Conflict Tree.

The next activity was a discussion on conflict transformation and the role of the youth in social transformation. Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman facilitated the process. He emphasized that transformation requires a change in structures. To help the participants connect their discussions on conflict and social transformation with reality, they were given an orientation for a field visit to Narainapur village on the third day.

On the second day, the participants joined in an Interreligious Dialogue with Religious Leaders on Peace and Reconciliation. In this dialogue, the Religious leaders present were Mahanta Chandranath Yogi of the Bageshwari Hindu Temple, Maulana Abdul Jabbar Manjari, a Muslim, Kul

Follow us @ ICF 's
Facebook page:
Interfaith Cooperation
Forum



SoP 2019 alumni held workshop for local youth . . .



Participants presenting their Conflict Analysis using the Conflict Tree

Photo credit: Kaushila Sunuwar

Prasad Sharma, a Pastor and vice president of Christian society, Gan Bahadur Lama, a Buddhist, and Kamaljit Singh Sardar, a Sikh. These religious leaders presented their views on religion and the role of religious leaders in peace and reconciliation to the participants.

This dialogue was organized to clarify what the religions say on peace and create an environment of non-violence, reconciliation, tolerance, and acceptance of people from different religions, unity, social harmony, and camaraderie. The religious leaders said that every religion's holy book calls on everyone to respect everyone, to make unity and peace. But somewhere, due to the wrong information and lack of awareness, problems and conflict happen between the religions' followers. The religious leaders suggested that this type of dialog be continued, at the school level as well. They said it is needed more on the ground level for the young people to know more and have clear understanding about religion and to foster harmony among people. They challenged the participants to focus on communicating and sharing with their peer network as well as with their schools what they have learned during this activity. During the dialog, there were more than 70 people from different ethnicity, different background, different cultures and

Coming from the Dalit community, I see that the program is about learning about each other's religion, faiths, culture and that all religions should be treated with dignity and equality.

-Deepa Sunar, participant

faiths who attended.

On the last day, the core participants went to a community visit and field exposure in Narainapur village. In the last four years, this village has been disturbed for some time due to the religious conflict between the followers of the two religions - Hindu and Muslim. The conflict was traced by the local people to political reasons and wrong information that dragged the religions into it. During the community visit, a forum was held with different community leaders. The Principal of Vintage College of Hotel and Tourism Management, Gajendra Malla from Buddhist faith shared about peace and the role of youth. A journalist and sub-editor of Community Information Network(CIN) Lil Prakash Chand, from Kathmandu, facilitated on how the media can help to bring peace and role of media for transformation and reconciliation in the community. (<https://www.acorab.org.np/index.php?pagename=cin>)

The youth participants in the program also shared their ideas about how to bring peace to the society after conducting site-based some data gathering in Mathaiya of Narainpur village. The participants have committed to be active in promoting peace and social harmony with their youth organizations and children's clubs on the ground. They committed to work for transformation in this community. ❧❧❧

I hope that this type of program would help in maintaining social harmony in the community.

— Sahil Ansari,



Kaushila Sunuwar, SoP 2019 alumna. is from Ramechhap, Nepal. She got her Bachelors' Degree in Sociology a few months after she joined the School of Peace.

ICF -TL conducts Peace Education and Advocacy Activity

Leo Gamboa, SoP 2019



The ICF alumni of Timor-Leste led by Leonardo Marçal Gamboa and Luis Garcia, both School of Peace 2019 alumni, organized a six-day Local Peace Education and Advocacy on March 3 – 8, 2020 in Ismaik, Dare, Timor-Leste, including arrival and departure. It focused on the theme “Human Rights and Conflict Transformation.” Nineteen participants were coming from different Timor-Leste municipalities, cultures, religions, and organizations. This activity was supported by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum’s small grants. The activity, a training that follows the curriculum that was originally formulated by the Timor-Leste participants during the School of Peace 2019 in Chiangmai, Thailand. The facilitators and resource persons included the Timor-Leste SoP alumni and national organizations.

During the opening ceremony, the general secretary of Timor-Leste YMCA Antonio da Silva gave the keynote address and orientation on the work of YMCA, as well as the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCA and its project, Interfaith Cooperation Forum. He said that he is very proud to be part of the activity training because YMCA-TL cooperates with youth programs like ICF-TL that helps young people to engage with youth from diverse backgrounds. He also added that the YMCA encourages the youth to get involved with YMCA activities like training

and sports. This also helps young people to develop their capacities for language and communications.

The president of the Conselho Nacional De Juventude de Timor-Leste (CNJTL), Maria Dadi Magno, also came to congratulate the ICF-TL alumni for initiating an important activity to train the youth on human rights and conflict transformation. She also spoke on Understanding the Human Rights Conventions focusing on Gender Equality. She encouraged the participants to have more of these similar activities and share the opportunity with other young people – women and men.

Magdalena Pinto, SoP 2018 alumna, facilitated the session on Understanding Conflict. She said that she felt very happy to share her experience because many young people lack knowledge about conflict and the capacity to deal with conflicts. “I share my knowledge, but it doesn’t mean that I know everything. I share because I know something that other people need to know,” said Magdalena Pinto, also known to her friends as Nona. She also asked the participants to use this opportunity to learn because not every people can get the same opportunity as they do. She said, “You need to learn so that you can implement these in your

Follow us @ ICF ‘s
Facebook page:
Interfaith Cooperation
Forum



ICF Timor-Leste conducts Local Peace Education and . . .



Small Group Discussion with Luis Garcia
Photo Credit: Leonardo Gamboa

community.”

Luis Garcia dos Santos, SoP 2019 facilitated the workshop about the Tools of Conflicts Analysis. First, he explained that young people need to understand and analyze things when conflict happens. He emphasized that it is crucial to gather the information related to the conflict so that we can discover the cause of the conflict. Moreover, it is also important to know the parties who are involved in the conflict and their relationships to get an idea of how to approach the conflict. He cited as an example of the problems and conflicts in Timor-Leste. “What tools can we use to analyze them?” he asked. Then he introduced the following tools to analyze the conflicts according to what he learned during the School of Peace sessions, namely: a) onion ring, b) conflict tree, c) timeline, d) ABC Triangle, e) pyramid, and f) Conflict Map.

SoP 2012 alum and former coordinator of ICF Timor-Leste forum, Julio Martins, shared what he learned during his SoP time in India about understanding conflict. He said the solution to conflict depends on how people react to the conflict and how to negotiate with the parties.

The session focused on deepening more on Understanding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights followed. Jose Oliveira, the executive director of Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) facilitated the session that was focused on education as a Basic Human Right. He pointed out that while there are talks of human rights, many children in Asia are abandoned, they do not go to school and do not have access to education because of economic issues. Children choose to work and earn money to help

their family rather than go to school. Oliveira pointed out that children’s right to education has been violated, but that this is the responsibility of the government. He added that in the practical level, Timor-Leste is still in the transition stage and it is very slow in the area of connecting other basic rights such as education from the traditional perspective of letting children go to school. Thus, children are vulnerable.

A session on Reproductive Health and Family Planning was set. This session introduced young people to a better understanding of their bodies, their sexuality and to prevent unwanted pregnancies, especially teenage pregnancies. Cipriano M.M. Ribiero, a staff of the Marie Stopes Timor-Leste, an international non-government organization that provides access to quality sexual and reproductive health information and services. The session covers the topic of understanding the female and male anatomy and the natural processes of the human body. Other than the prevention of unwanted pregnancies, understanding sexuality also helps prevents sexually transmitted diseases. Another important factor is for the youth to understand the importance of responsible sex, family planning, and how to decide about their life and future. Thus, it is important to provide training for the youth on reproductive health.

Ribiero said, “I feel very happy to provide this training because all the participants were very active and eager to learn that they ask questions.” He encouraged the youth to share the information with their respective communities.

On the last day of the activity, Leonardo Gamboa Marçal the current National Coordinator presented



Magdalena “Nona” Pinto, SoP I8
Photo Credit: Leonardo Gamboa

ICF Timor-Leste conducts Local Peace Education and . . .

the Levels and Types of Conflict. He also facilitated a sort of evaluation of the activity by interviewing the participants. He pointed out that having attended the Local Peace Education and Advocacy, some of the participants may qualify to attend the School of Peace and when they return to their home country, they will implement what they already learned. He summarized that good knowledge and understanding of the basic human rights must be connected to issues such as sexual harassment, conflicts and the issues or problems happening in Timor-Leste. This training-activity gives the participants an introduction to understanding one's basic rights and how to approach issues and conflicts. As a parting word, he challenged the participants to share their knowledge and

commit their lives toward promotion understanding of Conflict and Human Rights in their communities, as well as support the ICF-TL in the work for justice and peace. ✂ ✂ ✂



Leonardo Gamboa, SoP 2019
interviewed by a workshop participant

Bangla ICF Alumni launch an awareness campaign on COVID-19

Biplob Rangsa, SoP 2010

The Corona Virus (COVID -19) has shaken Bangladesh just as it badly affected other countries of the world with the infection. Before the virus spread all over the countryside of Bangladesh, the government took many preventive measures such as borders shut down, cancellation of flights, travel restrictions to other district or province, closure of schools and colleges, supermarkets, offices, the lockdown of cities and isolation

infected people. Besides the government, many organizations, volunteers, and community people are also working to stop this virus from spreading even if they do not have enough skills and resources. And yet, we hear in the news that the virus keeps spreading at a dizzying speed around the country.

On March 29, 2020, the youth forum of Birisiri YMCA and SoP alumni have taken the initiative to prevent the spread of this virus. The forum members and coordinators sprayed disinfectants in places as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 in two villages of Birisiri and the Utrail bazaar (local market). The School of Peace Alumni in this area also launched an awareness-raising campaign among the community people and the bazaar places about the coronavirus and how to prevent it from spreading.

Please visit ICF's
Website @
interfaithforum.org



Rinkhu Mankhin, SoP 2019 interviewing the store owner

Photo credit: Birisiri YMCA

Bangla ICF Alumni launch an awareness campaign on COVID-19



Rinkhu Mankhin with a YMCA volunteer disinfecting the area
Photo credit: Birisiri YMCA

One of the SoP 2019 alumni in Bangladesh is Rinku Mankhin, who, along with his friends, distributed awareness leaflets that they prepare by themselves. The leaflet mainly covers some of the important messages on the prevention of COVID-19 such as proper washing of hands, the importance of staying at home, avoiding meetings, seminars, or gathering, maintaining social distance, among others. They also informed the villagers about the nature of the Corona Virus, the infection symptoms, and what to do when symptoms appear. They urged the villagers to use a face mask and hand gloves. So far, as of this writing, they have reached at least 100 shops and 350 families

in the Birisiri area. Furthermore, they also stick this awareness-raising leaflet on the body of any local transport and posted the information leaflets in front of shops and houses so the community people can easily see it and can get the message of prevention methods.

The youth forum of Birisiri YMCA also tried to do their part by disinfecting public areas in the villages of Sagordi and East Utrail with a population of 459. They spray a mixture of bleach and water on the ground and public vehicles, hoping to prevent the virus present in these areas and things. The Coordinator, Brusly Ritchil, said that "We should do more spraying to protect the villagers. The resources are limited but we are ready to do more." Simon Antony Sangma, the General Secretary of Birisiri YMCA added that only prevention can save people because there are not enough treatment facilities in the area. Besides the households, they also disinfected a few roads and local bazaars. They raise the people's awareness of the importance of personal cleanliness and hand washing to prevent COVID - 19. ❧❧❧



A.C. Chester
WordPress.com

Reflections . . .

Volunteering with Albay YMCA in responding to the pandemic Ain Art Atos, ICF Peace Institute Alumnus 2019

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic spreads uncertainty and hardship around the world. It poses a massive global threat. Collective and coordinated action is the only way to overcome this pandemic. The Philippine government placed the entire country under a state of emergency on March 16, 2020, as COVID-19 spread rapidly. It imposed a total closure of institutions and establishments where people congregate. Lockdown of towns and regions called Enhanced Community Quarantine followed. However, the lockdowns have affected the most vulnerable groups economically. This crisis results

in a shortage of food and medical supplies, unemployment, and loss of livelihood. Amid the crisis, Albay YMCA quickly responded to the needs. We asked the assistance of Bukluran sa Kabuhayan (BSK), the handicraft arm of the YMCA to produce a substantial amount of affordable washable face masks. Together, we were able to produce thousands of washable masks. To provide a safe environment to our front liners, we also partnered with the Department of Trade and Industry Region V (DTI-V) and FabLab-Bicol University in initiating the production of face shields and Aerosol Boxes. Currently, we are spearheading the donation drive in partnership with the Rotaract Club of Metro Legazpi to

Volunteering with Albay YMCA in responding to the pandemic

continue the production of face shields and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE Gowns) for the medical personnel, and to provide food for vulnerable sector.

The Albay YMCA recognizes that the vulnerable sector, particularly women, children, and youth, the pandemic will leave a significant and negative impact on their health and opportunities. It is committed to offering development and humanitarian assistance to them even after the pandemic. We, as volunteers and members of Albay YMCA, believe that with collective efforts

and prayers for the safety of everyone, we can overcome this crisis and we will be successful in flattening the curve. 🙏🙏🙏



Ain Art Atos, Philippines

Social Distancing and Greeting Namaskar in COVID-19 time Kaushila Sunuwar, SoP 2019



Kaushila Sunuwar, Nepal

Nepal is still on lockdown as of this writing. During these days, I stayed at home and focused on personal health care. I spent the most time with my family, and watch movies at home. I asked my friends to stay at home also and practice washing of hands regularly with soap and water before and after meals, and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when they are out and there is no water.

because it is also within me. In sharing this, there is no distance and difference between us. We are the same. We are one.” And unlike shaking of hands and hugging, this Hindu kind of greeting has no physical contact that comes with the greeting, there is less possibility that germs and disease are being transferred. I am pleased because many people all over the world are using now Namaskar greeting in this pandemic situation.

In Nepal, we greet people by doing Namaskar *mudra*, a greeting done with both hands pressed together with palms and fingers pointing upwards placed in front of the chest while making a slight bow while saying the words “Namaskar” or “Namaste.” This greeting is an act of transferring positive energy. In essence, it means “I bow to the God in you. . . My soul recognizes your soul. I honor the love, light, beauty, truth and kindness within you

In Nepal, the students, poor people and laborers are suffering from lack of food during the lockdown. I had planned to distribute the foods for the needy people, but I did not get any support. Yet, I am glad that iwhile there were those who tested to be positive of the disease, there is no report of death. I pray with you and for everyone to stay safe and healthy. 🙏🙏🙏

Follow us @ ICF 's
Facebook page:
Interfaith Cooperation
Forum





Responding to the Pandemic as Volunteer with Batticaloa YMCA

Stella Shapnika Jayakaran, SoP 2019

The global coronavirus attack caught Sri Lanka slowly but by the end of March, the entire country has fallen into a pandemic. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 infections, the situation in Sri Lanka has deteriorated. To lessen the spread of infection, Sri Lanka implemented curfew, locked down the villages, quarantined persons who tested positive to the infection and required people to stay at home.

On 27th January 2020, Sri Lanka registered a 43 years old Chinese tourist as the first case of COVID-19 positive infection. Then, on March 11, 2020, a 52-year-old tour guide became the first Sri Lankan confirmed with COVID-19 infection. As of April 30, Sri Lanka has 649 cases, 7 deaths and 136 recovered. The Sri Lankan government assigned 24 hospitals to treat COVID-19 patients. Many doctors, nurses, other health workers, police officers, military workers, and other workers in institutions related to the essential needs of people give their selfless services to protect the country during this situation.

On March 20, 2020, Sri Lanka President Gotabaya Rajapaksa implemented a lockdown and curfew for the entire nation. Considering the needs of people, the curfew is somewhat flexible for some hours on specific days. Earlier, the people did not realize the danger of the disease. The media help to raise awareness about the disease, its symptoms, and the precautionary steps to protect the people and society. Most people followed the advice, but some break the rules. However, these measures have also created many negative impacts among the communities, public service departments, private sectors, trades, agriculture, and broke down the flow of the societal mechanisms.

Many government and non-government organizations gave out the essential goods and foods to the people in the rural areas who depended on daily wages. They also disinfected the common places in district-wide public areas. In some places, animal-rights organizations provided food to street animals. Young people and students also launch an awareness campaign through social media on how to prevent the virus from spreading and infecting people.

The Batticaloa YMCA voluntarily joins and commits itself in saving people from the deadly virus. YMCA General Secretary sits in the District Coordination Committee. Batticaloa YMCA responds to the challenge of COVID 19 with the support of USAID's Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE)- Global Communities (GC). Batticaloa YMCA provided gloves and face masks through the Regional Director of Health Services (RDHS) for the prevention and management of COVID-19. Hand gloves and face masks for 44 hearing impaired school students' families supported by the Social Services department. Batticaloa YMCA distributed dry ration packs of essential food items. Sri Lanka's YMCA National Council supported 350 vulnerable households. Other Individual donors supported for 143 households. The Social Service department supported for 44 families of hearing-impaired children with the above relief packs. Batticaloa YMCA intervenes in indoor delivery of medicines (medical supplies) by involving its trained volunteer team in the Batticaloa district. Batticaloa YMCA supports the Scouts teams involve in the handwashing campaign by providing masks and gloves. YMCA launched a video to promote the use of face masks and preventive measures against COVID 19.

I am happy because most of the people worked to help address the pandemic. for their society's harmony. Religious and ethnicity differences do not seem to matter for now. What matters now is people generally working together, joining hands for humanity and society. I am thankful for APAY and ICF for the opportunity of sharing the Sri Lanka situation and initiatives taken by the Sri Lanka YMCA. 🙏🙏🙏

Understanding the unseen enemy from faith perspective

Siman Garada, India, SoP 2019

The year 2020 welcomes the world with many crises: earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions, and forest burnings that destroyed many lives and properties. This is topped by COVID-19, the pandemic that infected millions and took thousands of lives. This probably could be the reaction of the environment towards injustices done to nature. Now, countries all over the world especially the poor countries are struggling with lack of health facilities and medicines.

Health is a peace issue. Nature is essential to us, humans, in protecting our health. If human beings start exploiting nature and do not pay respect to it, then the environment reacts in such a way as the world is facing the crisis currently. The pandemic brought everything to a challenge - the world

economy, political power, science, technology, and social structures. For now, cleanliness and social distancing are the only way to fight against the COVID-19. I wish that the differences in religions, caste and gender discrimination will be minimized, and people will pay more attention to family and humane values.

When knowledge is misused, injustice happens to God's creation and then the world suffers. Still, human beings have chance to renew themselves. We must change our ways of relating with nature. For now, the fight against the pandemic must come with prayers translated to action. It is powerful and saves lives and the world from this pandemic.

"Cleanliness is next to Godliness and Godliness leads to healing against COVID-19." 🙏🙏🙏

How COVID-19 affects our world

Ranny Rith, SoP 2018

The COVID-19 pandemic has infected 3.2 million people and has claimed the lives of 228,872 people as of April 20, 2020. In Cambodia, only 122 confirmed cases were reported, with no death so far. There was no report of new COVID-19 positive cases since April 15. Here, I work as a social mobilizer. I feel bad that COVID-19 makes people's health go bad especially for the older people. Health is one of the peace issues and the COVID-19 disease is a global health problem. It compromised the well-being of people because of lack of preventive means and protection. When people get infected, people must stay at home for safety to prevent the virus from spreading. Yet, the stay-at-home order also led to loss of jobs and livelihood especially for the contractual laborers, day-to-day income earners, and the poor.

They lack food or do not have anything to eat. They get no income to support their family during period. The stress and anxiety levels are high on them. The economy is rapidly going down, and people need financial support. Support is much needed for prevention and healing the infected.

Corona has a huge effect on the works of all sectors, citizens, NGOs, and civil society, government, and the private sector. The tourism industry in Cambodia lost guests. Work or activities had to be postponed to another month. Sometimes they do not even know when they could hold the activities. An example is our work with ICF. We, as alumni of ICF were supposed to host a thematic workshop

Please visit ICF's
Website @
interfaithforum.org



How COVID-19 affect our world

in April. Unfortunately, we need to move it, but we still do not know when coronavirus will be gone. Our plan for the whole year needs to be changed and some activities are put on hold indefinitely.

To fight COVID-19, we citizens have to play an active role to protect people's health. To prevent the spread of the coronavirus, I choose to stay at home. I skip gatherings with friends. I stop going to parties. I practice proper hygiene by washing my hands more often and I tell my family to do the same. It means I protected my family. If all people understand and implement these guidelines properly, the coronavirus will be gone soon. I follow our government's prescribed ways. I read reliable news and think positively. I will not allow

the coronavirus to scare me. Mental health and dealing with racial and ethnic discrimination will be a major issue after the COVID-19. The virus will surely pass but the trauma will stay. I heard about people complaining that the Chinese brought COVID-19. Some people make a joke out of them, and some hate the people from China. This is bad for our humanity. Making a nationality as a frame for discrimination may lead to depression. I would like to suggest that Social Workers, Peacebuilders, or those who work for humanity's well-being should pay more attention to these issues. The thematic workshop could work on the topics on mental health, healing, and how to eliminate discrimination. I think critical thinking is a needed skill. We can link this with the tools of analysis, and human rights. Discrimination is a violation of one's basic human rights that must be respected. 🙏🙏🙏

How can we live in this haunting situation of COVID-19?

Venerable Phra Sivone Keovilaipunya, ICF Peace Institute Alumnus

I fear the COVID-19 pandemic. I do not want to stay next to infected people. This I thought when I first heard the spread of the coronavirus. I first heard of what happened in Wuhan City Hubei, People's Republic of China. At that time, people around the world were so curious about this novel virus and how the Chinese leader handled the situation. At the same time, people outside China sent their concern and encouragement to Wuhan residents to keep fighting (加油) for this pandemic shall pass.

After a month, China was reported to have managed the situation in Wuhan. Yet, no one has thought that the deleterious virus can spread around the world. Thus, most countries closed their borders, just like Laos, my country. What happens when all the countries close their borders? The answer is quite common, yet, it has a great impact on peoples' lives, especially in the small countries. People suffer. Factories, companies, and shops are shut down, people lost their jobs, but they still must pay their bills. They have no choice but to return to their hometowns without money in their purse. Some are drowned in sorrow and hopelessness for their families. The country leaders, employers, and concerned citizens must do something for their

people more because nobody wants the pandemic to happen. The employees, the workers are the backbone of any business. Without them, the entrepreneurs would not be able to reach their goals.

This is a case that no one expects to happen. But how can we live in such a haunting situation? We cannot do anything but accept the situation and follow all the advice given by the doctors. We keep hoping that one day "it too shall pass" and everything will be fine. Although we might have lost someone that we love so much due to this pandemic, we should not forget that there are still people waiting for us. If we do not stand and help each other, if we do not follow all the preventive regulations, we might no longer have a chance to do it again. 🙏🙏🙏



The Venerable Phra Sivone Keovilaipunya is originally hails from Laos. He is monk from a Theravada Buddhist tradition and is currently based in Chiangmai, Thailand.

My Experience of Working with the Quick Response Team

Eugene Jamandron, ICF Thematic Workshop Alumnus

As pandemic rages, some people in our locality tried to help contain the virus. In our small town, we constructed and installed sanitation tents designed by the University of the Philippines (UP-Diliman). This booth structure comes with a diffuser system and chemical disinfectant. These tents help our town in disinfecting those to who enter the town boundaries.

I, along with some fellow schoolteachers, submitted to the Local Government Unit (LGU) as Frontliner Volunteers on March 28, 2020, to prepare for the conduct of Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) in the entire province of Negros Oriental. Our responsibilities comprised assisting in the installation of the modified decontamination tents and the scaffolding for misting. This we did with the help of the environmentalists, licensed engineers, licensed chemists, and technical people in the LGU in the team. We followed the guidelines of SaniTent Philippines. We also initiated proper communication with people regardless of social status and political affiliations for community empowerment amidst the COVID-19 outbreak.

Our team members are well-oriented on our tasks as part of the Quick Response Team Volunteers. We also set up the decontamination tents in the borders, public market, and hospital. We are responsible for the day-to-day checking of the operations and functions of the Decontamination Tents



Eugene Jamandron (in purple shirt), preparing the decontamination tent with a fellow volunteer.

Photo credit: Eugene Jamandron

to ensure the protection of the public within the jurisdiction of our town, Siaton, from the possible transmission of COVID-19.

A provincial executive order further empowers the LGUs to immediately act to prevent the loss of life, utilize appropriate resources to implement critical measures to contain or prevent the spread of the virus as well as mitigate its effect on the community. One must note that we are using safe and non-irritant chemical solution following the health standards of Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (US-EPA), and SaniTents Philippines. These all we do to lessen the worries of our people during this COVID-19 outbreak that affects all our lives. 🙏🙏🙏

Eugene Jamandron is now a high school teacher. He was all set to join SoP 2018 but was prevented by the Philippine's Bureau of Immigration's officers corrupt attempt to squeeze something from newbie travelers.



Follow us @ ICF's
Facebook page:
Interfaith Cooperation





COVID-19, Killer and Threat to Humanity

Luis Garcia, SoP 2019

Unlike any other war, the battle against COVID-19 pandemic is different. We cannot see nor touch the enemy. It is invisible. Yet it makes all people suffer, experience sadness, hunger, panic and trauma. My beloved country, Timor-Leste, is used to struggles. It struggled for independence, and for the protection of human rights. But this is a different experience. I used to go out to the streets to show my support in any human rights rally. But the struggle with coronavirus is different. Everyone is advised to stay home as our Minister of Health announced that Timor-Leste got the first confirmed positive case of the disease on March 21.

As of this writing, Timor-Leste has twenty-three (23) confirmed cases of infection. There may be new cases in the coming days, but I there will be none, really. It is sad, but this is reality. We must entrust our lives to God for I believe only God knows our lives. It is hard to accept and reflect on this pandemic that killed so many people around the world.

In Timor-Leste, the government declared a state of emergency and lockdown for one month on March 26 and there will be a possibility of extending it. Like any other country, the government urged the Timorese to

strictly follow guidelines. The lockdown is good for the people. But this also affects the vulnerable sectors of the community. The single parents, persons with disabilities, vendors, elderly, taxi and public transport drivers do not have any source of income. They do not have money to buy food for their family, but they cannot go out to find jobs because of the restrictions. Some have to ask their neighbors for some food. The people claim that they may not die of coronavirus, they will die of hunger instead. I am sad hearing this from my people and seeing desperate posts on social media. Some people are starting to extend help to the needed. Our government could not provide humanitarian aid yet, but people are expecting and hoping for it.

I am hoping this aid will come soon to help the vulnerable sectors of the community. I heard that many families around the world lost their loved ones to COVID-19. I share their grief. I am praying that this will not happen in my country. Accepting the realities is hard, but I hope we will not feel discouraged. May we remember that God will receive them in the other world. We must know that they died because of the crime against humanity and of the COVID-19 that made them suffer. Let us pray for our people, and the world to be safe. 🙏 🙏 🙏

My reflection on the Cultural Peace and Harmony Seminar among Indigenous Peoples

Rinku Barnabas Mankhin, Sop 2019

On March 14, 2020, Birishiri Simsang A'chik A'samo, a Garo organization advocating for the preservation of Garo culture, organized a seminar on "Cultural peace and Harmony" at the Durgapur-Birishiri YMCA campus in Netrakona, Bangladesh. The organization invited me to speak on peace education. Forty (40) people, youth and adults, came. Mrs. Ludia Ruma Sangma, General Secretary of Birishiri YMCA gave her welcome remarks.

Birishiri Simsang A'chik A'samo plays a great role in



Rinkhu Mankhin speaking during the seminar

My reflection on the Cultural Peace and Harmony Seminar



Rinku Mankhin, SoP
2019



Group discussion on words in the metacards
Photo credit: Rinku Mankhin

preserving the Garo language and culture. It works for social awareness activities in 2017 in Durgapur and Netrakona District. It provides the young people an avenue where they can work together to spread the message of peace and unity and inspire people to promote peace in their community.

I spoke about understanding conflict and peace education. I asked the participants to form into pairs and later, into small groups. I applied the methods I learned during the School of Peace sessions like using the meta cards for word arrangement, posting strategy (cognitive, affective and action), gallery walk. The participants also had to make individual and group presentations. They learned from each other by sharing, asking questions, presenting their knowledge and experience, and reflecting on their understanding of conflict and peace

education.

During the first session, the participants discussed and learned about the importance of understanding conflict in daily life and society. They learned that conflict is not always negative; that it could also be a great opportunity to change their lives. The second session focused on peace. I applied the photo gallery strategy for an exhibition of their outputs on what is peace.

Participants expressed their need to study more about conflict and peace. The session on peace opens their mind and challenged them to promote peace in their community.

Facilitating and explaining the importance of peace education was not easy for me. The learnings I got during the School of Peace in Thailand helped me a lot. I am proud that as an ICF alumnus, I got the chance of sharing what I had learned. I had the feeling of confidence and fulfillment. I am happy and I believed that my contribution by sharing my experiences and knowledge is important in promoting peace in my community. In doing this, I also had the chance to get to know myself, my relationship with others, my community, nature, and my Creator. I hope this inspire the young people to work form peace. I will continue to contribute to making a peaceful society. 🙏🙏🙏

Follow us @ ICF's
Facebook page:
Interfaith Cooperation
Forum



*Congratulations to the new
Lawyer,
Atty. Alamiah Sampaco
Pangandaman ,*

ICF Peace Institute Alumna 2019
for Passing the Philippine Bar Exams 2019!

The ICF Family is so proud of you!





From the Editor's Desk:

Mindfulness of the Foundations of Justice and Peace in times of Pandemic or No Pandemic

Well-being. Health. These are peace issues. Yet, justice must precede peace. There will never be any peace without justice. The crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the surface so many justice issues in different levels and realms of the political, economic, religio-cultural, and social life.

As of May 2, 2020, Worldometer records 3,401,002 COVID-19 cases, with 239,602 deaths, and 1,081,600 recovered. Yet, the fight against the pathogen is far from over. Tracing the events, the first cases of the disease goes back to mid-November 2019 and report to China's World Health Organization (WHO) country office on December 31, 2019. On January 5, 2020, the WHO first published its Disease Outbreak News on the novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China as zoonotic, but on January 22, it confirmed evidence of human-to-human transmission of the disease. The WHO declared the international outbreak on January 30 and identified the pathogen as "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2" (SARS-CoV-2) and named the disease COVID-19 on February 11, 2020. In its February 16-24, 2020 report, the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pointed out that the disease is not SARS and it is not influenza. "It is a new virus with its own characteristics." As the world went on panic over the steep rise of deaths, the WHO came out on March 11, 2020 with a delayed declaration: COVID-19 has reached the pandemic level.

The disease is transmitted through "droplets and fomites during close unprotected contact between an infector and infectee." Fomites are materials that are possible carriers of the infection, such as clothes, utensils, and furniture. WHO admitted that while the airborne spread is not a major mode of transmission, it is possible "if certain aerosol-generating procedures are conducted in health care facilities." This explains the increased vulnerability of health workers and other front liners.

Until vaccines are available, only the non-medical or non-pharmaceutical measures could contain the

transmission chain. It means the "extremely proactive surveillance to immediately detect cases, very rapid diagnosis and immediate case isolation, rigorous tracking and quarantine of close contacts, and an exceptionally high degree of population understanding and acceptance of these measures." The public must also practice the most basic preventive measures of rigorous frequent washing of hands, covering one's mouth and nose (face masks); monitor one's self of signs such as fever and dry cough, "social distancing," stay-at-home practices, avoidance of gatherings, and help make the high-risk elderly population and those with comorbidities safe.

Different country-leaders approached the pandemic in different ways. Some ignored the science of COVID-19. Some countries mostly led by women carefully planned together with the experts on how to respond to the crisis with transparency, informed by science, and on how to address the social, cultural, and economic impact of the pandemic. In Asia, some simply announced a lockdown without clear plans on how to address the social and economic issues that come with it, and without preparing the people of its implications. Other country leaders flaunted their political interests instead and seek to use the pandemic crisis to float the idea of declaring a de facto martial law. In the Philippines, leaders refuse to heed the call of the United Nations to implement a ceasefire. The vulnerable groups are given attention - the "elderly people, those with ill health and comorbidities, or homeless or underhoused people." A well-known medical journal, The Lancet, acknowledged that those may not be considered vulnerable at the onset of a pandemic, may become "vulnerable depending on a country's policy response to the crisis." They are the people who lost their jobs and livelihood. They are those who struggle to cope with the crisis not just financially, but also mentally, physically, or even spiritually.

Among the issues of justice and peace that the pandemic has exposed is the inability of the

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

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.



From the Editor's Desk: Mindfulness of the Foundations of Justice and Peace . . .

government leaders to empathize with economically vulnerable people to cope with the stay-at-home policies. These people must go out to sell vegetables or find jobs so they can feed their families as assistance from the government could not sustain their basic needs. Some do not even receive assistance. In the Philippines, there are reports of police abuses in the checkpoints, the arbitrary arrests of volunteers distributing relief goods, the killing of a mentally ill citizen, and critics who expressed dissent.

Four months. The pandemic put into a halt the industrial machines, travels, tourism, schooling, and other human activities. Reports have it that the ozone layer above Antarctica is slowly healing. The streets are clear of traffic jams. Smog is gone and the skies are blue again. Canal waters are cleaner and clearer. It seems that as human beings are forced to abandon their "normal" destructive habits, the ravaged Earth is finding respite and recover slowly. The pandemic must be a wake-up call to all human beings. We held on to the idea that the Earth is there for human beings to exploit. Human beings have invaded the forests and habitats of different species of God's creation, have played

God by tinkering and engineering genes of animals and plants and subjugated the Mother Earth. People must understand health not just in terms of personal and public rights to health. People must view health in terms of Earth's rights and health.

In situations of a pandemic or no pandemic, human beings and nations must take and practice the ethics of truth-telling, transparency, equity, caring, reciprocity, and solidarity as the foundations of justice. True peace is about the practice and presence of justice among non-human and human citizens of this Earth. Human beings must, therefore, abandon desire and greed. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Live simply so others may simply live." This ought to be the "new normal" way of living out justice and peace – pandemic or no pandemic! 🙏🙏🙏

Please send us news about your Forums, Alumni programs, ICF Partner events or activities related to peacebuilding to:

Muriel Orevillo-
Montenegro
Editor and Lay-Out Design
<muriel@asiapacificymca.org>
and
Baidido Saganding
Circulation and Promotion
<bai@asiapacificymca.org>

Dear ICF family and friends,
Hello there!
Please submit your articles—news, reflections, and art works if you have any, Send your photo, and a 2-sentence blurb along with photos related to your articles.
Thanks and looking forward to receiving your articles.

Keep well and stay safe!
ICF Staff