



The Peacebuilders

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

Vol. III, No. 7 Bi-monthly E-Newsletter of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs **December, 2020**

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Christmas 2020 Edition

Source: randomactsofflowers.org

ICF celebrates Human Rights Day through a Virtual Forum on Women's Rights

On December 10th, the celebration of Human Rights Day, ICF held the last session of its four on the Intersection of Religion, Gender, and Human Rights. Three amazing speakers accepted ICF's invitation to talk about "Women's Rights are Human Rights" from different angles and perspectives. ICF was very happy to have Honorable Samira Gutoc, Dr. Sonia George, and Advocate Anjana Ramanathan for the session.

Former member of Philippine Congress, Samira Gutoc gave a very powerful presentation on the ongoing human rights violations in the Philippines and especially Muslim Mindanao with its long lasting-conflict. She says that the women have to face the soldiers, who are in the communities to implement security rules. She said that women must find their space in decision-making processes run by the military and that they can no longer just be victims of conflict but need to take an active part to bring about positive change.

Dr. Sonia George gave an account of the situation of mainly informal sector women workers, who are not recognized and thus have little to no security and are often the victims of sexual harassment and abuse. She works with SEWA, which is a trade union registered in 1972. Although SEWA focuses on India, Dr. Sonia George pointed out that the issues for self-employed women workers are similar in all of Asia and around the world. She further emphasized

TO FACE PEACE IS TO FACE THE ENEMY

* KAZALIMBAGO MOVEMENT IN MARAWI WAS AN ANTI VOTE BUYING WATCHDOG FOUNDED ON PILLARS OF WORKING FOR PEACE, ENVIRONMENT AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

* CHECKPOINT COORDINATION

Need for effective responses

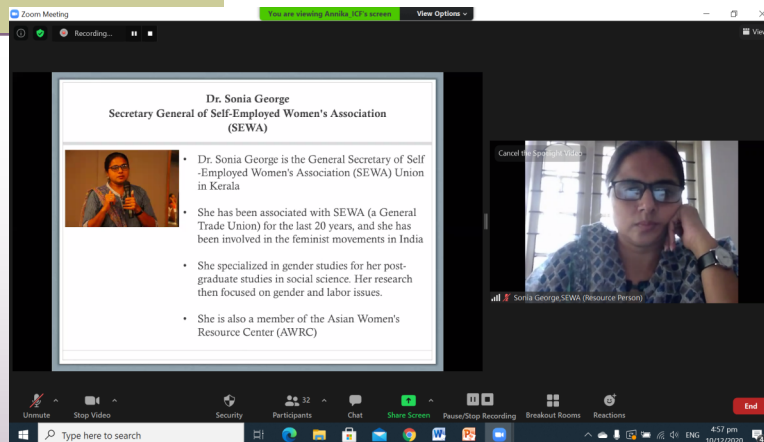
• The focus on security approaches may neglect the long-term and gradual approaches needed to build social cohesion and resilience in many areas where ISIS groups have proliferated.

• Social media is considered a strategic battleground.



"You are looking for one terrorist but you displace half a million."
- Samira Gutoc

ICF celebrates Human Rights Day through a Virtual Forum on ...



their need for recognition to protect women workers.

Dr. Sonia was part of the negotiations for the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 190 and Recommendation 206. The Convention outlines provisions for specific measures to address gender-based violence and harassment that disproportionately affects women and girls in the work-place, especially the protection of women in their place of work from sexual harassment and abuse. The challenge is for the member-countries to ratify this Convention that addresses violence and harassment in the world of work. Moreover, Dr. George lifted also the ILO Convention 189 known as the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011, or Decent Work Convention for Domestic Workers. This 189th ILO convention lays down the basic rights and principles that the domestic workers should enjoy. Many Asian countries have yet to ratify these conventions. Dr. George, therefore, called upon the youth to campaign and challenge their respective countries leaders to ratify these ILO Conventions that protect the workers who are outside of the regular employee-employer structures, especially the women.

Advocate Anjana Ramanathan spoke from the heart and presented the following five key points for the participants to honor and implement in their movements and activism:

1. be honest
2. be a cheerleader

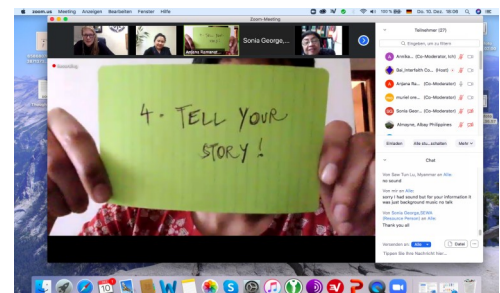
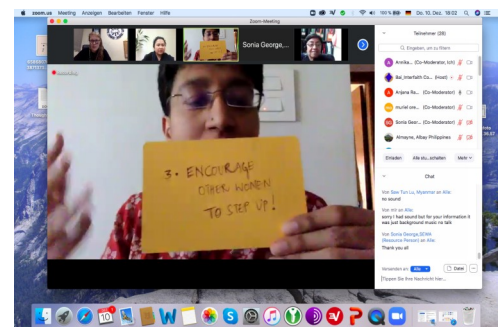
3. encourage other women to step up
4. tell your story, and
5. ensure your voices are heard.

At first glance, the above-mentioned points are simple. However, once Anjana Ramanathan elaborated on them, one could see how these points are easily underestimated, and how crucial they are for all our work. People often neglect or forget these values in the midst of their daily tasks and demands. Thus, the values that Advocate Anjana pointed out serve as an excellent reminder for all of us to honor them so we can reach our goals together, and lift each other.

Twenty-eight (28) regular participants attended, 18 of whom are female and 10 are males. The Christians dominated in the attendance as there were 19 of them present. There were 4 Buddhists, 3 Muslims and 2 Hindus.

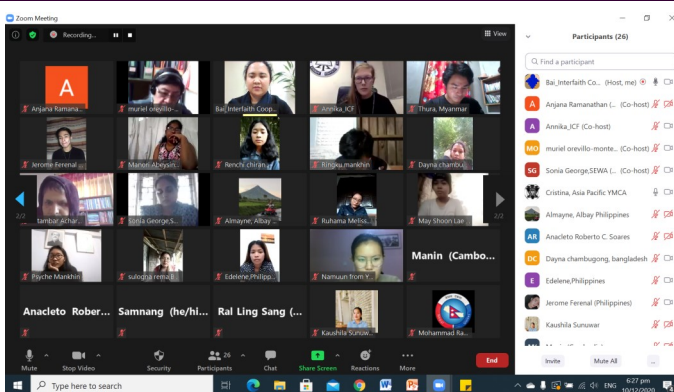
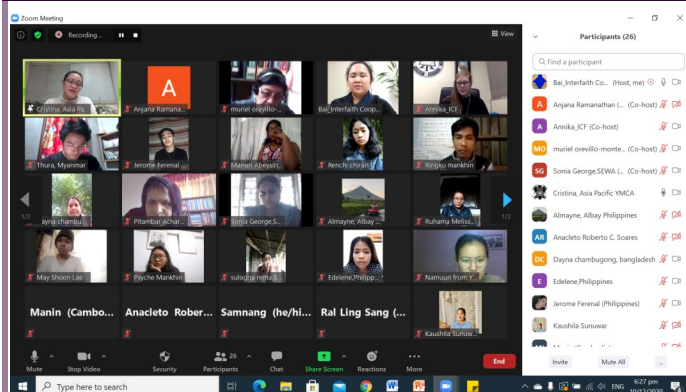
ICF is thankful to the speakers for giving thought-provoking talks and accounts in this final workshop of the series. 🙏🙏🙏

- Annika Denkmann
BftW Seconded Personnel



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Participants of the December 10, 2020 Virtual Thematic Workshop

3rd Session of Virtual Thematic Workshop Held in Time with World AIDS Day and International PWD Day

ICF held the third session of its Virtual Thematic Seminar-Workshop on the Intersection of Religion, Gender, and Human Rights on December 3, 2020. The third session focused on Health as Human Rights and Peace Issue. Thirty-six young people participants from Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Timor Leste attended the session; eleven males and twenty-four females. Among them, four are Buddhists, twenty-six Christians, three Hindus, and three Muslims.

As the world commemorates World AIDS Day on December 1 and World Disability Day on December 3, ICF gave special attention to HIV/AIDS and Persons with Disabilities. Dr. Erlinda Senturias, an Ecumenical Activist who served as HIV/AIDS consultant of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) from the Philippines, talked about the HIV/AIDS situation in Asia and the Pacific. For almost forty years of the HIV pandemic, she celebrates some of the gains during the span of four decades. She mentioned six gains:

- ♦ the meaningful participation of people living with HIV,
- ♦ support of UN agencies as a form of Global Partnership and Solidarity,
- ♦ location of HIV response within the framework of human rights, dignity, and gender equality,
- ♦ the participation of lay people in health issues,
- ♦ organizing interfaith network and inclusive theological language and actions, and
- ♦ organizing international congress on Aids in the Asia Pacific.

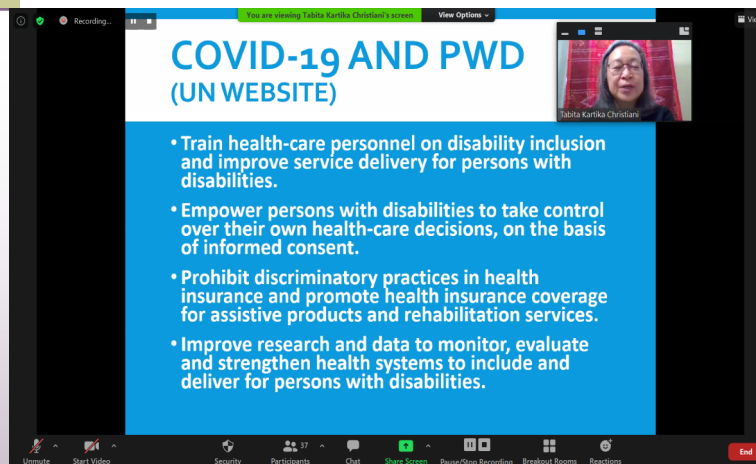


Dr. Erlinda Senturias



Acknowledging these gains, she emphasized that there are still challenges we face especially in the Asia Pacific Region. The UN AIDS reported that in 2019 cases in the region continue to rise; there were 300,000 new HIV infections, 160,000 AIDS-related deaths. There is an increase in cases in the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea, Australia, and Malaysia from the year 2010- 2018. Poor access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV information contributes to the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The knowledge of Comprehensive Sexual Education is lacking on issues such as sexual rights, sexual orientation, gender identities, and consent. Less than half of young people do not have access to such information. With the covid19 pandemic, access to treatment for the people with HIV/AIDS affected and missing the Anti-Retroviral Therapy can lead to viremia and more infections and may compromise their immune systems.

3rd Session of Virtual Thematic Workshop Held in Time with . . .



Dr. Tabita Kartika Christiani

Dr. Tabita Kartika Christiani, an Associate Professor from Duta Wacana Christian University and a PWD herself, talked about the struggles of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). In her presentation, she clarified the inappropriate use of terms “disabled” and “differently-abled” to address the persons with disabilities (PWD). Rather than using those two discriminatory terms, she urges the use of the term people or persons with disabilities. The term “persons with disabilities” apply to all persons with disabilities including those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, which hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (www.un.org). She also shared the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities, citing some articles recognizing the rights of the persons with disabilities to promote, protect and ensure their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights, fundamental freedom, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

However, with the COVID- 19 pandemic, persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted. Many of them have pre-existing health conditions that make them more vulnerable to contracting the virus. During the pandemic, hand washing, physical distancing, and the wearing of facemask are three of the most important

activities to prevent infections. But for persons with disabilities, these are barriers. They have a greater risk of contracting the COVID- 19 because of barriers to the basic hygiene measures, e.g. water basins, sinks, or water pumps may be physically inaccessible to a person who has difficulty rubbing hands together. The PWDs are dependent on support from other members of the family or caregivers, and so the restrictions on physical distancing are challenging. The PWDs find themselves isolated and unable to survive during the lockdown. The wearing of a facemask is a barrier in accessing health services and information, particularly for the deaf and mute who “listens” through lip-reading. The system does not communicate public information formats and means not accessible to all persons with disabilities.

The two resource persons emphasized that health is the well-being of all people and this is a peace issue. Well-being includes health, wholeness, and completeness and that there is a need to scale up the support for better health care and services for all. The topic was a great opportunity for the participants to be aware of the health issues and learned their relation to human rights and peace issues. ICF was grateful for the two resource persons

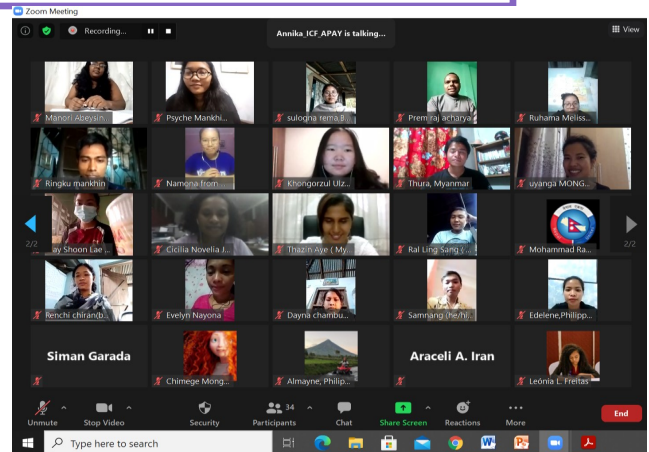
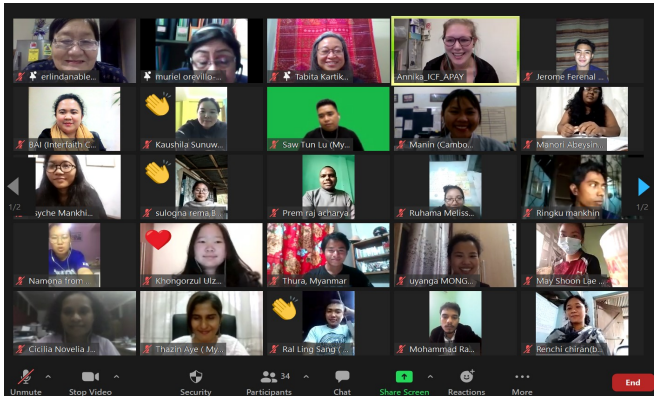
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3rd Session of Virtual Thematic Workshop Held in Time with . . .

for sharing their experiences and expertise.

Like the two previous sessions, on December 08, the participants had the opportunity of sharing their reflections about the topic. All of them shared that health is indeed a basic human right and a peace issue. However, they still found some challenges in terms of access to health services for most of the marginalized and vulnerable sectors of their respective communities.



ICF hopes that through these virtual thematic workshops, more young people will be aware of the social issues in their countries and act on the matter. 🦋🦋🦋

— Baidido Saganding
ICF Program Officer



Birisiri Youth organized Pre-Christmas Celebration with the Interfaith Community



On December 17-18, 2020, the “Challenge COVID -19 Group” held a pre-Christmas Celebration with the Interfaith community at the ground of the YMCA compound in Birisiri, Durgapur. The pre-Christmas celebration aimed to put into action the message of the Jesus’ message of love and peace to all. The activities intended to bring joy and fun to the attendees. There were singing of action songs, prayer, drawing competition, bible quiz, “drama-completion,” fashion show along with make-up competition, treasure hunting, singing carols and a youth-initiated cultural program. The activity’s highlight was the distribution of gifts to people with disabilities, those with special needs and the poor. On December 17, 2020, we held the interfaith activities with the interfaith children, youth, and adults. On December 18, 2020, we spent the time to distribute gifts – blankets - to the interfaith community, particularly giving special attention to the children with disability and people with special needs from Birisiri community. We have distributed



With the Persons with Disabilities
Photo Credit: Rinku Mankhin

gifts to twenty (20) disabled children and fifty (50) other interfaith people with needs.

Most members of our “Challenge COVID-19 Group” are students, so we do not have enough money for our planned activity. However, we went around to solicit funds from the Birisiri community. We were

Birisiri Youth organized Pre-Christmas Celebration ...



The Challenge COVID-19 Group with Rinku Mankhin (extreme right, in black and red jacket)
Photo Credit: Rinku Mankhin

so surprised and pleased that most people responded positively and stood with us. We were so happy that most people in our community supported our activity through their contributions. They inspired us to reach our objectives. Once again, we are thankful that our focus on building a strong relationship among the people of different cultures & religions in our communities yielded positive results. This helped us to jointly work and live together in peace and harmony.

Christmas brings lots of joy into our life. As we celebrate the day of Jesus' birth, we remember that he came to bring the message of love and peace. His life teaches us to love and serve for the people. Every year Christmas makes us happy and teaches

us to live in peace and harmony with each other.

There is not any doubt Christmas always a great platform to spreading the message of peace, friendship, and harmony. We can make our dreams to make a peaceful society in creative ways. For us, Christians, we must be true to the calling of becoming messengers of love and justice. In that way, we can encourage others to promote peace. I know our contribution is not enough. We only did whatever we can for our community people towards building peace. I would like to continue in delivering the message of peace among the peoples in future. As human beings, we all have so many responsibilities in our own community. We need to start from ourselves. I believe that it is just the beginning of our life, when we are strongly committed to holding our positive thoughts to live in peace and harmony with each other. May this Christmas bring peace to all! 🙏 🙏 🙏

—Rinku Mankhin
School of Peace 2019
Organizer, The
Challenge COVID-19
Group
Bangladesh

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Gift-giving with the children
Photo Credit: Rinku Mankhin



Editor's Note:

The following section features the reflections on the theme "The Intersection of Religion, Gender, and Human Rights." The two December sessions focused on Health as Peace Issue, giving special attention to HIV/AIDS and Disability, and Women's Rights as Human Rights.

**Reflection:****Why are PWD and PLW HIV/AIDS Considered Peace Issues?**

When I started reflecting on HIV/AIDS issues, I think of several causes: lack of sex and health education, access to information, socioeconomic problems, and so on.

In Myanmar, people are still sensitive about teaching sex and reproductive health to the young due to their misconceptions. People think that teaching sex education may lead the children to teenage sex, marriage, and pregnancy. Sex education is still a taboo, unacceptable, and against their social beliefs and norms. As a result, the children become uninformed. Lack of proper information leads teenagers to have unplanned pregnancy, abortions, sexual diseases, HIV/AIDS, and later, mental health problems and death. In fact, the people do not even know what sex education is really. These people include many parents, teachers, politicians, and even the young themselves. In reality, sex education is the instruction of issues relating to human sexuality, including emotional relations and responsibilities, human sexual anatomy, sexual activity, sexual reproduction, age of consent, reproductive health, reproductive rights, safe sex, birth control and sexual abstinence.

In Myanmar's new curriculum for Grade-10, sex education is included and newly introduced as an extracurricular subject this year. However, most teachers are afraid to teach the children and some people are complaining about that curriculum. I believe informing people about sex education as a public health campaign is one of the key preventions against HIV/AIDS and other related problems. In turn, we can also eliminate destructive impacts of the negative views and discrimination of the society on PLW HIV/AIDS. Individuals can do this educational drive, or through a collaborative action with the government, schools, civil society, NGOs/INGOs and all the stakeholders.

Traditionally, from the perspective of religious belief, some people in my country see disability as a sin, or the result of poor karma in the previous life. There are a lot of prejudice and violence against PWD such in job opportunities, education, politics, and other community affairs, and even more with People Living with (PLW)HIV/AIDS. Public facilities and health care services still need some reconstructions and development to give accessibility to PWDs.

What makes health a human right? I think access to health care services makes health a human right. The right to health for all people means that everyone should have access to the health services they need, when and where they need them, without suffering financial hardship. No one should get sick and die just because they are poor, or because they cannot access the health services they need. Other basic human rights including access to safe drinking water and sanitation, nutritious foods, adequate housing, education and safe working conditions determines good Health.

How is health a peace issue? Peace is not just the absence of war and direct violence, but the presence of justice, positivity, and well-being. Good health is well-being and having the essential

Peace is not just the absence of war and direct violence, but the presence of justice, positivity, and well-being.

Why are PWD and PLW HIV/AIDS Considered Peace Issues?

need for the one's inner peace. Access to health care services as a human right also plays a vital role in moving forward to peace. 🙏🙏🙏

- Hein Thurah Htet
School of Peace 2018
School Teacher
Myanmar



Reflection: Health as Human Rights and Peace Issue

What makes health as human rights?

It is a legal obligation of the state to provide health access to every people in the country. The right to health is for all people, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, status in life. As the World Health Organization says, 'the right to the highest attainable standard of health' implies a clear set of legal obligations on states to ensure appropriate conditions for the enjoyment of health for all people without discrimination'. It is freedom and entitlement to everyone. This makes health a human rights issue.

How is health a peace issue?

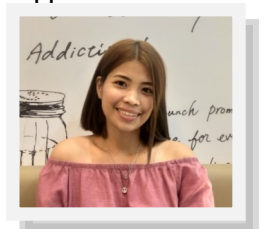
Health access programs exist in countries such as the Philippines, and it is said that everyone has the right to have access to health care. Yet, we cannot deny the fact that most of the people in these countries do not experience the right that they are entitled because only a few and selected people are only the chosen beneficiary of the country's programs. And most of those who enjoy the benefits are the ones who have the power and authority in the group or organization. Someone else enjoys the allotted budget for the ordinary people. Or some people use it for something else, which is an act of corruption. Health is a peace issue because it is the right that everyone must enjoy to have safety and security. Peace and health are both basic human rights, and they are both playing an

important role in making a society develop.

Can you think of any situation where people who have a disability or are living with HIV and AIDS are deprived of their human rights? Do you find them in your own communities?

In our small group discussion during the break-out rooms, we pointed out that in countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, once an employee reports or an employer knows that the person is infected, the people living with HIV and AIDS get fired from work. The stigma and discrimination are still a huge issue. This affects how people treat the infected individual. 🙏🙏🙏

—Edelene Rosin
Peace Institute I
Albay YMCA Staff
Philippines



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Reflection:**Women's Rights as Human Rights**

How does your respective country or community uphold women's rights?

This is a difficult question to answer because to see the extent of how the government of Indonesia upholds human rights, there must be a large-scale evaluation from both the government and society. In Indonesia, an agency protects women and children supposedly. However, but in reality, many women experience violence physically and mentally. They do not enjoy the respect of their rights. The rate of domestic violence is very high. Then there is the social structure that makes people see women as secondary in the system. Even in the world of work, women's voices do not count in decision-making. Men claim superiority over the women, and even oppress the women. Women experience oppression economically, politically, and culturally. I am saying this based on what I have seen and experienced, of how Indonesian society and Papuan society lack concern to uphold women's rights. I am thankful to the women who have struggled until now for women's rights.

Can you identify areas or specific sectors where there are violations of women's rights?

I think of domestic violence and human trafficking as well as in the world of work. In Papua, before a woman gets married the groom must pay a customary dowry. . This is a problem for women because the dowry itself has changed the meaning from a system that can strengthen family ties to a means of commodification. Men will say,

"I have paid you in full by dowry so you are mine. It's up to me to hit you, talk harshly, or whether you don't matter." Human trafficking is also flourishing as a profitable business where human values are at stake. The parties that should be able to protect women's rights are even involved in human trafficking. It is sad. In the world of work, the state and employers often ignore the rights of women workers. Sometimes, women could not take maternity leave. Women's contributions do not count in certain positions such as leadership or decision-making. Usually, contexts only give women the opportunity towards low kinds of jobs.

Do you see any room for improvement?

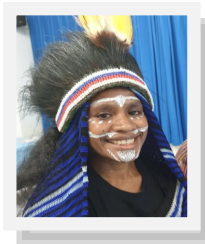
Of course, there is a big room for improvement. We can learn from mistakes, failures and so on. However, there must be awareness also from women themselves in understanding their rights.

Is there anything you can do?

I think, yes. I can take small steps to strengthen the base of women's education and mentoring young girls so that they will know their rights and fight for them.



—Cicilia Novalia Jambuani
Peace Institute 2, 2019
A Seminary Student
Papua, Indonesia



"We are either going to have a future where women lead the way to make peace with the Earth or we are not going to have a human future at all."

"Whenever we engage in consumption or production patterns which take more than we need, we are engaging in violence."

— Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*

Reflection:**Human Rights are Women's Rights**

Photo Source: mypope.com

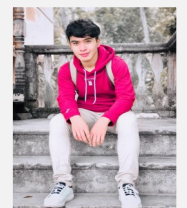
Human rights are inherent to human beings. These include the right to live free from violence and discrimination; to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; to be educated; to own property; to vote; and to earn just wages. But across the globe, many women and girls still face discrimination based on sex and gender. Gender inequality underpins many problems that disproportionately affect women and girls, such as domestic and sexual violence, lower pay, lack of access to education, and inadequate healthcare.

Violence is a stark reality that women have to struggle with every day. For Filipino women who grapple with poverty in a feudal patriarchal context, the challenge is greater. Indeed, the intensifying economic and political crisis in the country is increasing vulnerability of women to gender-based violence. Gruesome stories of violence committed on women and children have become a common fare in TV, radio and print media. These are not only individual cases of violence; many involve groups of women such as the cases of sex trafficking, cybersex, pornography, and prostitution. As time goes on, women become more miserable and worse. They

are the vulnerable who are afflicted by abuse and any form of violence. It is undeniable that not only is this happening here in the Philippines, it is happening all over the world. Therefore, for these reasons, some organizations and local sectors emerged to help empower women and strengthen their voices.

As youth, we can do something to help women not only for them to break their silence, but also our silence, that prevents them from fighting for their rights. We just have to give them space to express their thoughts and feelings about the violence they are experiencing. It is important to strengthen women's forces. It is only right that society should protect and support women to be free for them to effect changes in society. ❧ ❧ ❧

— Jerome Ferenal
Thematic Workshop 2020
A College Student and a
Fashion Model
Philippines



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12.
On the Twelfth Feministas
My true love gave to me
Fair rights and wages
Reproductive freedom
No victim blaming
No body shaming
No bullshit diets
Gender bias broken
Shame free breastfeeding
Equality!
Proud working mums
Male allies
No tampon tax
And a grope-free Christmas party

By Naked Mystic
<https://www.pinterest.ph/pin/>

Trivia: 12 Days of Christmas?

The 12 days of Christmas is the period in Western Christian tradition that marks the time between Jesus' to the coming of the three Magi. It begins on December 25 and runs through January 6 (the Epiphany). The four weeks preceding Christmas are collectively known as Advent, which begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on December 24.

In 1909, an Englishman, Fredric Austin composed the "annoying" carol called "Twelve Days of Christmas." ❧ ❧ ❧

- Editor



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Editor's Note:

Below is the Christmas call and statement from the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP). This ecumenical group was born on May 18, 2007, in Dumaguete City, during the founding meeting hosted by this editor as head of Justice and Peace Center of Silliman University at that time. PEPP is composed of five federations, namely, the Ecumenical Bishop's Forum, National Council of Churches in the Philippines, Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines, Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. PEPP is the first ecumenical group to emerge with the primary mandate to push for the resumption of the peace talks between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, a coalition of revolutionary social and economic justice organizations formed in 1973. The current Co-Convenors of PEPP are Archbishop Antonio Ledesma, S.J. of the CBCP and Bishop Rex Resurreccion B. Reyes of the Episcopal Church of the Philippines.

SILENCE THE GUNS DURING THIS SEASON OF HOPE

The Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) raises its alarm and concern over the deteriorating prospects for peace in our land. The advent season is upon us, yet unpeace reigns. Respect for human rights, which is a primary requisite for peace, is ignored, or worse, demonized as a barrier to “peace and order”. This is evident in the arrests of a journalist and six union organizers, on the day when the whole world was commemorating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Several activists have also been arrested or killed in the past few months while numerous lives continue to be claimed under the campaign against illegal drugs.

Harmful rhetoric abounds, even coming from the President himself. The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) is relentless in its malicious red-tagging of organizations and individuals critical of the government, including churches and church personalities, by falsely accusing them of being linked to terrorism. This is in sharp contrast with the advent period a year ago when back channel negotiations between the government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) resulted in a Christmas ceasefire which redounded to a hopeful atmosphere for peace.

Unfortunately, during this COVID-19 pandemic, the government rejected the results of the back channel talks, unilaterally stopped the peace negotiations, and proceeded to heighten its war against the NDFP, the New People's Army (NPA), and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), and its so-called “legal fronts”. The Anti-Terrorism Act was passed and substantial funds were also designated by the

government for its counter-insurgency program with P19-billion set aside for the NTF-ELCAC. Since then, three NDFP consultants – Randal Echanis and Eugenia Magpantay and Agaton Topacio — were killed, while many others like Rey Claro Casambre of the Philippine Peace Center remain in jail. Even former NDFP Consultant Alfredo Mapano, who was already working for the government, was re-arrested.

This drive to annihilate the CPP-NPA-NDF without seriously addressing the long-standing issues of poverty, landlessness and inequality in the country, will not bring about a just and enduring peace. It will only further fan the flames of the armed conflict. It is also very costly not to mention insensitive when the country is reeling from a serious socio-economic crisis brought about by the pandemic and the series of natural disasters that devastated the country recently.

As a significant portion of our country starts the traditional “simbang gabi” to mark the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, we appeal to the people to continue to pray and work for peace. Let us usher in a new dawning of peace – a peace that is not for the silencing of critical voices but a peace that addresses the root causes of dissent. We call on the government to re-focus its efforts and funds for medical and socio-economic solutions to heal the nation rather than spending for counter-insurgency and all-out war. We also call on both parties to silence their guns during this season of hope and open their hearts to peace so that as the year ends, “...by the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1: 78-79). ❧





Photo Credit:
charactermedia.com

Christmas Trivia:

"Silent Night"

There are nearly 750 different versions of the famous Christmas carol "*Silent Night*," and new ones are being produced and recorded each year. Franz Xaver Gruber composed "*Silent Night*" (German: "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht") in 1818 to lyrics by Joseph Mohr in the small town of Oberndorf near Salzburg, Austria. In 2011, UNESCO declared the song an intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, it has been translated into about 320 languages and dialects. So chances are yours is one of them. If you have not done it yet, see if you can find it. And of course, we cannot write about a song without listening to it. So here are two versions for you to listen to one in English and a German one. Enjoy! ☺

— Annika Denkmann

English:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iZGh9I-v7Y>

German:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBPfl2nUfk>

Photo Source: https://www.lieder-archiv.de/stille_nacht_heilige_nacht-notenblatt_200042.html

Announcements

On Small Grants for 2021

ICF will accept applications for Small Grants, both for Alumni Follow Up Activities and for Local Peace Education, Advocacy and Networking. National Forums, Alumnus/a, and friends from peace networks may submit their applications. Please request for the Small Grant Application forms from the ICF Office. January 15, 2021 is the deadline of submission of applications. The Screening Committee will approve 2 applications for each category. The announcements of the approved applications will come out by early February, 2021.

Activities for the 1st Q of 2021

January 15	Deadline of applications for Small Grants
February 9-10	ICF Program Committee Meeting (outgoing and incoming new members)
February 23-27 7:00—9:00 p.m. HK time	Virtual Thematic Workshop: Mental Health and Trauma Healing with Dr. Al Fuertes, Resource Person
March 4, 11, 18, 25	Women's Month—Thematic Workshop on Patriarchy, Adrocentrism and Misogyn in the Sacred Texts

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Interfaith Cooperation



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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:

Christmas . . . and our Hope for Peace

I am stuck in Hong Kong this Christmas! Unthinkable! But this is the reality. I cannot go home to the Philippines. The pandemic has been rampaging for a year now. It prevented me from going home—what with the hassles of swabs and quarantines! Fourteen days of quarantine in the Philippines and fourteen days in Hong Kong in an unaffordable hotel, and then, seven days more for home quarantine! It is so expensive and seems a waste of time! What to do? I can only listen to carols inside my tiny room and my favorite song, for now, is: "I'll be home for Christmas. . . If only in my dream!"

So what is there for Christmas? Surely, I miss my loving partner. I want to be in familiar places, to be with familiar faces. Christmas is about being with the siblings, family—my children and my grandchildren. I want to be with my faith community, sing in the choir, and visit friends. Surely, I have a faith community in Hong Kong. But, there is no place like home. I miss my community of plants too!

The feeling of sadness always makes a streak in my heart even as a little girl. It was perhaps because of the story that the power-hungry king massacred the

little children, the innocent ones, to secure the throne for himself. Somehow, I hear the wailing of Rachel in Ramah, crying for the lives of her children. My heart is full of anguish when I hear the cry of mothers whose children's lives the brutal persons snuffed in wanton violence. The pandemic is already more than violent, but the killings of the innocents in my country and elsewhere in the world have shown how the homo sapiens has lost its humanity! The proclivity to power, wealth, and violence has turn individuals into monsters that desecrate the dignity of the people.

Rachel's crying in Ramah was and is a witness of humanity's savagery. It still is a lament over the victims of extrajudicial killings anywhere. The Philippines is supposed to be the "only" Christian country in Asia. Yet, it is where the most violent and brutal killings happen.

In the Christian tradition, the birth of Jesus signals the coming of peace on earth and goodwill of all people. I try to console myself that there is hope. And we must work to make that hope and dream for peace a reality. ❧ ❧ ❧