



# THE PEACEBUILDERS

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

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



## Register for the upcoming Virtual Thematic Workshop in September

COVID-19 uprooted millions of migrant workers in Asia through lost jobs, lockdowns and mobility restrictions, and border closures. In many countries, migrant workers experience different treatment in comparison to local nationals when it comes to social protection, COVID-19 relief, and income support.

In many cases, they are not included in the government provision of their host countries for subsidies and other aid and relief assistance. The ongoing pandemic also exposes many existing injustices (non-formal employment contracts, exploitation, and abuse to name just a few) that migrant workers have to contend with. To learn more and to register click [here](#).

In order to have a more equal distributed number of participants per country, we would especially like encourage young people from Cambodia, Nepal, Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand to register until September 5th.



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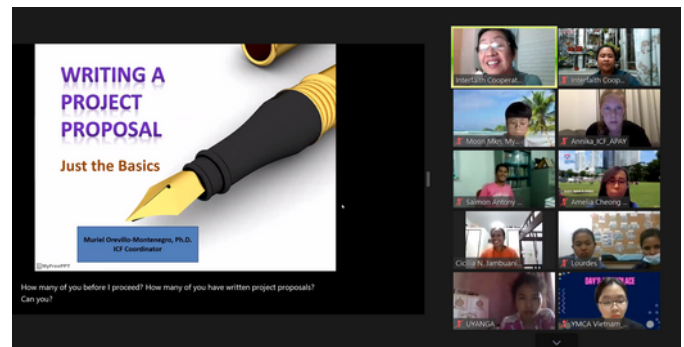
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## ICF Thematic Workshop

### How to write a Project Proposal?

From July 5 to July 9, 2021, ICF conducted a virtual thematic workshop on project proposal writing. Project proposal writing is an essential skill for people in the non-profit field, where organizations rely on funding to offer programs and activities for their communities. The workshop took place virtually. The ICF staff gave introductory inputs on the topic during the first two days. On the third day, the participants in teams or by themselves wrote their proposals. In the last two days, the participants presented their proposals for feedbacks. Thirty-three participants and five observers from 10 different countries in Asia and 1 from Africa attended the workshop. ICF reached out to a diverse group of young people who wanted to learn the basics of project proposal writing. They came out of the workshop with a draft proposal to polish and send off to the respective donors for approval.

ICF regularly calls for applications from its Alumni to conduct projects in line with its Small Grants scheme. During the pandemic, ICF also decided to fund small doable projects for the virtual thematic participants to organize in their respective countries, in line with the workshop topics. Observing that the ICF alumni struggle with proposal writing for the offered grants and the demand for young YMCA staff of the region to develop and improve their skills, the workshop was helpful.



On the first day, the ICF Coordinator Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro took the participants on a journey to understand the basics of project proposal writing. She gave an overview of all aspects that go into a proposal - from the concept note to the indicators to the budget - and why they must develop good project proposals. On the second day, BftW Seconded Personnel Annika Denkmann focused her input on a more detailed look into how to formulate and write SMART objectives and the activity flow of a project proposal. Then, the ICF Program Officer, Baidido Saganding followed with her presentation on the budget preparation. She presented everything about the budget - what to include, the details, and when to think about it. Just because it is usually the last document in a proposal does not mean one could deal with the budget as an afterthought. All three staff members pointed out mainly that none of the parts that go into a project proposal could stand on its own. They are all connected, and linked to one another to form a cohesive well-thought-out proposal.

After two days of heavy input, the participants went into their mid-week sample proposal writing. In the last two days, the workshop participants presented the proposals they have developed and written. The participants did not only receive feedback from the ICF team; they also got critiques from their peers. In this way, they learned from each other's proposals.

Overall, project proposal writing is a demanding and complex skill to acquire, but one can master the skills with a lot of practice. We at ICF are happy that the participants prepared so many proposal drafts. We wish all the participants success in getting their proposals approved by the respective donors.

*Annika Denkmann*  
BftW Seconded Personnel



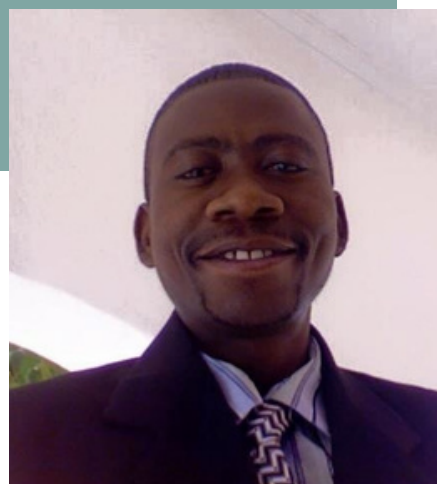
*"After attending the proposal writing workshop, I have gained lots of knowledge and was able to complete our proposal to submit to APAY. Thank you so much for your meaningful project and your willingness to guide us. We truly appreciate it."*

My Hanh, Vietnam

*"The thematic training was eye open, educative and full of fertile knowledge. The facilitators were friendly, humble and patience enough to grease our brains. Honestly, now am able to draw a thin line between outcomes, inputs, impact and objectives. I sincerely thank Asia and Pacific Alliance and Interfaith Cooperation Alliance for considering me to attend this important training as well as my fellows friends who were discipline to one another during the training.*

*From strength to strength!"*

Geoffrey Manasseh, Malawi



## Real Stories Not Tales



Real Stories Not Tales (RSNT) is a dedicated team in and out of Myanmar that aims to bring awareness to the reality of young people's lives since the Myanmar military staged a coup on February 1st, 2021. Stories are collected through interview with each protagonist by the team, either in Burmese or in English. Each character is drawn by a professional illustrator bringing a visual context to the story. We are now in the process of collecting more stories around the country. You can follow us on our [Facebook](#) page. Don't hesitate to share this page with your friends - the more we are, the better! You can also read the stories via the [Tea Circle](#) or through [Insight Myanmar](#).

*The Real Stories Not Tales Team*

## Virtual Thematic Workshop on IDPs and Refugees in Asia in the Context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Military Junta takeover in Myanmar

The Virtual Thematic Workshop on IDPs and Refugees in Asia in the Context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Military Junta takeover in Myanmar was attended by over 60 young people. The participants came from Myanmar, Timor-Leste, Nepal, Bangladesh, Philippines, Indonesia and Cambodia. The resource persons for the workshop were Ms. Maria Louella Gamboa and Mr. Elson Monato from UNHCR Office in the Philippines and Nichodimus Da Costa, an alumnus of ICF, who works for the Caritas in Bangladesh, on the first day. Two youth from Myanmar on the second day. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary in her role as UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons on day three. And another ICF alumnus Dr. Tirmizy Abdullah, who is an Associate Professor with the Mindanao State University-Marawi, on day four. ICF would like to express their gratitude to all these amazing resource people, who accepted our invitations and took the time to speak during the workshop.

*Annika Denkmann  
BftW Seconded Personnel*

## Concepts from the Workshop: What Everybody Ought To Know About the Refugees and Internally Displaced People

Attending the workshop from 26th to 30th of July on internally displaced persons (IDP's) and refugees in Asia in the context of the covid-19 pandemic and the military regime takeover in Myanmar provided answers even to unexpressed questions. The workshop allowed the participants to explore the issues affecting the people in Myanmar experiencing the coup, and the tribulations of IDPs and refugees during the pandemic. We, the attendees, learned a lot of information from the workshop.

People evacuated or abandoned their homes and became IDPs and Refugees as they became highly vulnerable in instances of armed conflict. Death rates among displaced people are much higher. They are also at risk of physical violence, sexual assault, and kidnapping. They are denied proper housing, food, and health care, especially now, during a pandemic. Women and children make up most internally displaced people. They are particularly vulnerable to violations of their basic rights. Internally displaced people, like the refugees, are more likely, stay near or get stranded in conflict zones, or get caught in the crossfire. They are at risk of being used as pawns, targets, or human shields by the warring parties.

The challenge is to implement the measures aimed at protecting IDPs and refugees and to ensure that their rights and freedoms are respected even when they are in situations of displacement.

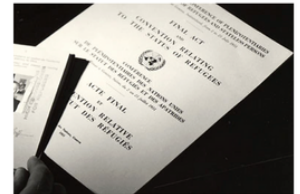
### 1951 Convention

#### Principles of refugee protection

#### Definition of refugees

#### Rights and obligations of refugees

#### Treatment in the country of asylum



The state, among others, is principally responsible for ensuring the protection of the IDPs from any abuse, and to implement or perform it's during towards the IDPs. It must create a unified strategy to assist the IDPs in coping with the challenges of forced displacement. Small-scale interventions are important for individuals in affected communities of origin and for the host communities in prioritizing the needs of these, particularly vulnerable populations. The COVID-19 outbreak made the situation of the IDP communities even more difficult to live in dignity and find long-term solutions. Short-sighted programs and policies do not completely address IDP issues as they arise from the lack of a national rights-based displacement management framework. With insufficient programs and policies in place, humanitarian responses to displacement do not result in improved and long-term human rights conditions for IDPs. The response is limited to addressing immediate needs rather than taking a systematic approach to address short-, medium-, and long-term displacement issues.

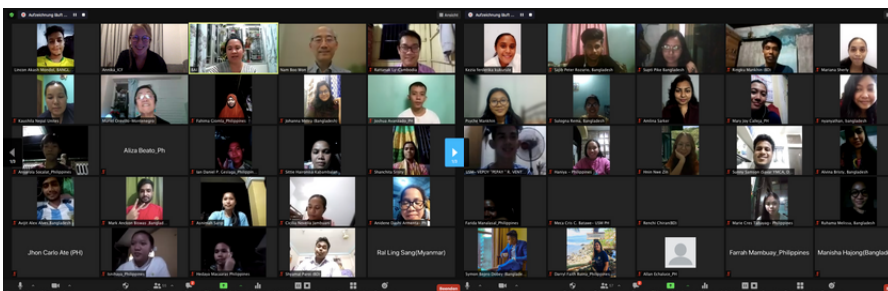
The presentations during the workshop were an eye-opener as the resource persons from Myanmar shared statements and images of their experiences. Nearly 1,000 demonstrators have been slain by the military, and over 5,000 political prisoners have been detained. Despite the humanitarian aid, relief organizations have not provided much assistance. The people have been denied their human rights by the state. The people need secure shelters, health services, sanitary facilities, and protection. Those IDPs and refugees have experienced indiscriminate attacks, airstrikes, and artillery fire that damaged their properties, and religious structures. Like the rest of Asia, they are also affected by the pandemic. In refugee camps, the disease spread more quickly especially the COVID-19 virus. Access to assistance is limited.

Lastly, in Mindanao, the Marawi siege turned the population into IDPs. In the situation of the pandemic, they also face a very difficult situation as they cope with the pandemic and struggle for rehabilitation and to return to rebuild their homes.

Like the rest of the country, the IDPs have who are still in temporary shelters, have difficulty in accessing health care and medicine, food, and other basic needs. The people of Marawi demanded that the government be held accountable for what occurred in their hometown, as well as compensation for the pain and suffering they had undergone. They also wanted their property and homes as these were destroyed during the siege.

The Workshop helps us to seek more than what the eye meets. It provided knowledge and skills to young people so that they can contribute to peace-building initiatives in their communities and be aware of the current situation. This helps the participants raise awareness about the need for special protection and aid for displaced persons. In this, we can develop a new concept and urge people to learn it further, to instill a feeling of connectedness or a common purpose among the participants to find greater significance therein. We can support, protect, and help them in whatever means, method, capacity, and anyways that we can. Promoting this kind of advocacy, and make justice prevail would help us achieve genuine peace.

*Richard Alex P. Lotivio,  
Philippines*



## Reflections from the Workshop's Participants

*I got to learn about the IDPs, and refugees from different country perspectives. Our countries are actually suffering from many different problems, but we are not able to help them out. Especially, Myanmar situation shocked me a lot. I was heart broken to hear the situation in there. People are becoming cruel and harsh, but still there are some people who are still fighting to bring back the light.*



Symon Bepro Dobey, Bangladesh



*During this virtual workshop, I have learned many things about the situation in Myanmar and although I am from Mindanao, I also gained more knowledge and realities on what happened during and after the Marawi siege. I was mostly struck on the sharing of the 2 speakers from Myanmar. I only knew what is going on in Myanmar through news channels and social media but hearing it from people who actually had first-hand experience on what is currently happening their shocked me. Truly, the media did not show what is actually going on there but they only showed the “better” side when worse things are actually happening there.*

Farrah Mambuay, Philippines

*It helped me to distinguish between IDPs and refugees by the definitions and criteria of these groups. I gain some theoretical understanding around the issue of IDPs and refugees. And I learned that the reality is contrasting to the theory and that makes the efforts to address the issue of IDP and refugees challenging. For instance, in theory, a government has the primary responsibility to protect its people. In reality, many governments are the source of the problems for many of these groups of vulnerable people.*

Rattanak Ly, Cambodia

## Thematic Workshop Alums Organized a One-day Seminar on the rights of IDP's with young people of Brgy. Nalapaan

On August 16th 2021, the ICF Thematic Workshop participants held a one-day seminar on the rights of IDP's with young people at Elementary school in Barangay Nalapaan, Pikit Cotabato on August 16, 2021. The Barangay Captain Hon. Blah Alagasi gave them the consent to use the village facility, and gave the welcome address, and encouraging words. The village officers or Barangay Kagawad also supported the activity. The seminar aimed to raise awareness on the rights of the Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) and the role of young people to advocate for the IDP rights. The event facilitators gave their thanks to all the participants. Twenty young people from Barangay Nalapaan attended the seminar, 13 of whom are female, and 7 are male. They were 5 Lumad (IPs), 5 Christians, and 10 Muslims who supported the event and gave their best in participating. ICF Thematic Workshop alumni namely, Farida G. Manalasal, Fahima U. Giomla, and Sittie Haironisa P. Kabambalan composed the organizing team of this activity.



The seminar started with the discussion of common issues with the effect of armed conflict in the community by Ms. Sittie Haironisa Kabambalan. The armed conflict results to the displacement of people and they become IDP's. The participants showed their reflections and experiences through their artwork and communication skills. Their presentations showed how they truly feel and how brave they are facing those challenges of being caught in the armed conflict.





To enlighten the participants more, the guest speaker, Ms. Norhanie Saganding, a social worker, shared her knowledge about the rights of the IDP's in the community and recognize that this is a valuable source of learning. She said that it is helpful to know these rights, especially when the youth find themselves in the midst of an armed conflict and become an IDP. The seminar gave the participants an opportunity to raise questions about the rights of an IDP and make suggestions about the role of youth in the community for future learning and peacebuilding. The discussion proved invaluable in learning and gaining very useful information about IDP. The Team noticed that the youth did not have enough knowledge about the rights of the Internally Displaced Peoples.

However, the facilitators did their part very well, and the participants gave due respect to the facilitators who were of their age.

The facilitator asked the participants “As a youth how can you advocate the rights of an IDP's?” The participants shared many ideas. Among them was sharing through social media, creation of billboards on the rights of the IDP, and conducting a seminar on the topic. The discussion with the facilitators came out very lively, as everyone participated. And, the way the participants made friends and socialize with each other is a good start in peacebuilding.

*Farida Manalasal, Cotabato Province,  
Philippines*

## Thematic Workshop Alums held a KAPAKIMBIBITIYARAI: A Conversation with IDP Youth

On July 26-30, 2021, a group of participants from Misamis Oriental in the Philippines joined the webinar conducted by Interfaith Cooperation Forum. The topic was the “Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees in Asia in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Military Junta Takeover in Myanmar.” After the 5-day workshop, the Misamis Oriental cluster proposed a small project entitled

### “KAPAKIMBIBITIYARAI: A CONVERSATION WITH YOUTH IDPs.”

The objectives we set was for the local youth would -

1. recall their experiences during the Marawi Siege and express their feelings and needs concerning their experiences during and after the siege;
2. express their needs and request about their feeling and experiences during and after the siege; and
3. recognize the feelings and needs of the participants concerning their shared experiences and be able to assist in addressing the needs of the participants.

When ICF approved the project, the Cluster implemented the project on August 15, 2021. The Cluster invited 21 participants (Muslims and non-Muslims) from Marawi City and Cagayan de Oro City.

Invited to share their experiences as Internally Displaced Persons were two displaced youth from Marawi City who witnessed the Marawi siege. Another invitee was one who experienced displacement due to the Typhoon Sendong in Cagayan de Oro. After listening to the sharing of the invited sharers, the participants also shared their first-hand experiences during the Marawi Siege, and of Typhoon Sendong.

The participants shared that they have lost valuable equipment and materials, and even their homes. However, these experiences did not hinder them from starting life all over again. They recognize that they are given a chance to live again. The Cluster invited Amina Mambuay, a trainer on Nonviolent Communication and Muslim Coordinator of Silsilah Forum-Cagayan de Oro as the Guest Facilitator. She empathized with the participants about the participants’ shared experience. Finally, they were very thankful for what they have learned and heard from our guest facilitator.



Overall, the project proponents felt overwhelmed because this is their first experience to organize and facilitate a a webinar. It is worth the efforts we put into it.

The Cluster members were Hedaya Maca-aras, Sittie Haniya Maca-aras, Asnimah Sarip, Ansarola Socalat, Isnihaya Socalat, and Farrah Asleigh Mambuay.

*Farrah Asleigh Mambuay,  
Philippines*



## Nepal Unites Organized a Free Face Masks Campaign

Aug 14, 2021, Rajbiraj: The volunteer members of Nepal Unites distributed the facemasks in Rajbiraj, province no. 2 in the eastern part of Nepal. The facemask campaign included a small rally with participants holding placards with the message: "live and let live," "stay safe and stay healthy," "use a face mask, maintain physical distance."



Santosh Yadav led the campaign and called on the public to wear the facemask and take the act as an obligation. “Some people wear face masks on the chin, some put it in their pocket, and ignore wearing the face mask to wear. A lot of people remove the face mask to talk when they meet with acquaintances,” said Yadav.

For this reason, such behavior does not protect people from the transmission of the virus and jeopardizes lives instead. If people would not be alert at this time, the third wave of COVID-19 would seriously affect us. Nepal Unites put across the message of the importance of wearing facemasks properly and the seriousness of the COVID-19 during the campaign.

A volunteer of Nepal Unites, Mohammad Kamaruddin, said that the fledgling organization had distributed more than a thousand facemasks during this campaign.

Nepal Police Sub-Inspector, Nagendra Chaudhary, said that there is a need for public awareness programs from time to time. Nepal Unites also distributed hand sanitizers to the police and traffic police working in the front line. A School of Peace alumnus, Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman, founded Nepal Unites. The members of this organization have also been participating in the thematic workshops organized by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) virtually. They have also participated in the Local Peace Education, Advocacy, and Networking activities supported by ICF’s small grants.

*Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman  
National Director, Nepal Unites  
School of Peace Alumni 2017  
Mdayatulla2012@gmail.com*



## ICF Program Committee held Virtual Meeting

On August 26, 2021, the ICF Program Committee held another successful virtual meeting and finish its agenda deliberations on time. The meeting started with the opening prayer at 4:00 pm Hong Kong time. Nepal's program committee member Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman lead the opening prayer, imploring the attendees to pray for peace for Afghanistan and the rest of the world. The ICF Coordinator, Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, Ph.D., warmly greeted all the regular and alternate committee members. the ICF staff and APAY's General Secretary. After that Mr. Nam Boo Won, the honorable General Secretary of APAY delivered his opening remarks and welcomed the attendees on behalf of APAY to attend the program committee meeting.

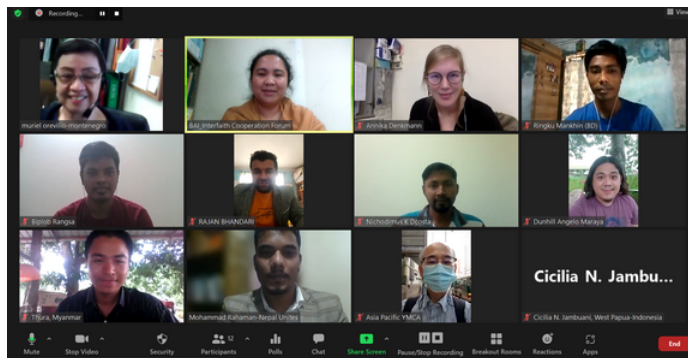


The ICF program Committee discussed the agenda to bring fruitful results for established peace in the region and resolved few burning issues. Baidido Manalasal Saganding, ICF Program Officer briefly introduced the new members of the Committee as alternates, namely, Rinku Mankhin and Nichodimus D'Costa, both from Bangladesh, and Rajan Bhandari from Nepal.

In this meeting, the Committee reviewed the last meeting's agreements. All members are grateful to the ICF and glad to know that every National Forum can publish information about their activities, news, or any other important information on the ICF-designed website. The 'Tracer Study' survey will also be circulated and sent to all alumni in November 2021. The members of the Committee were able to review before distribution.

One of the important discussions and decisions are taken by the program committee was to publish an e-book on the ICF alumni's first-hand experience in peacebuilding efforts. ICF alumni and stakeholders can write essays, stories, case studies, poetry, autobiography on their experiences of peacebuilding. This e-book will be published next year. The committee is also glad that the ICF staff design series of workshops on different peace-related issues, Training of Trainers (ToT) on NVC, and other activities to promote peace and address marginal community's rights. The ICF Committee agreed to meet once every three months on Fridays (late afternoon or early evening). The Committee agreed that the ICF staff can arrange an emergency meeting anytime, when necessary.

At the end of the meeting, the ICF Coordinator expressed her sincere thanks to all the participants for their active and constructive participation. The ICF Coordinator closed and adjourned the meeting at 5:55 p.m.

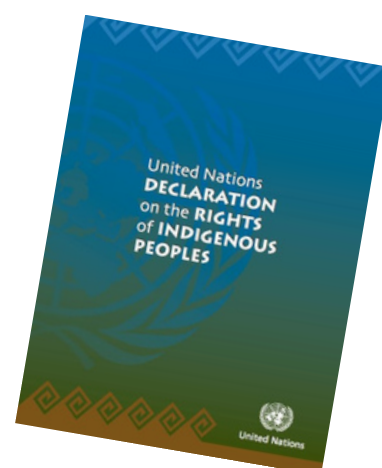


*Biplob Rangsa,  
Program Committee Member, Bangladesh*

### **65 youth attended the Thematic Workshop on the Indigenous Peoples' Rights**

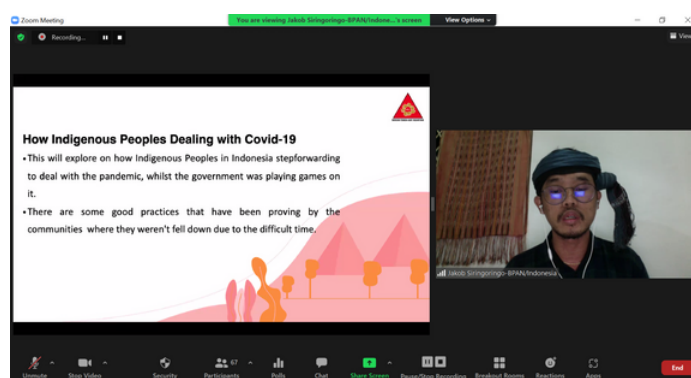
ICF organized a virtual workshop on the theme “Uncovering the Plight of Indigenous People’s Rights and Access to Health Care during the COVID Pandemic.” The workshop took place on August 23-27, 2021 from 7:00 to 9:00 in the evening, Hong Kong time. Around 60 young people joined the workshop as regular participants. Some young people joined from Indonesia, Timor Leste, Myanmar, Mongolia, and Nepal, but the bigger delegations came from the Philippines and Bangladesh. The religions represented during this workshop included the Buddhist, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and some coming from Indigenous traditions. The workshop was ICF’s way of expressing solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples as they celebrate August as the IP month and August 9 as the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples. During the first four days, ICF had invited resource persons to speak on different topics.

The first resource person was Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpus, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. She narrated the story of the beginnings and the hurdles in the process of the formulation of the rights of the Indigenous Peoples. Finally, the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that the UN General Assembly on a Thursday, September 13, 2007. Tauli-Corpus highlighted that the UNDRIP seeks to protect the collective rights of the IPs, because the individual rights are already protected by the UN Declaration of Human Rights.



On the second day, two resource persons shared their experiences. One is a young Lumad teacher of the Bakwit Iskul (Evacuees' School), Rose Hayahay from Mindanao. The other one is a young community development worker who volunteered to the cause of the Lumad, Rius Valle, the spokesperson of the organization called Save our Schools Network-Mindanao. Both Hayahay and Valle has shown the deplorable situation of the Indigenous Peoples. The IPs have defended their ancestral lands and mountains from the encroachments of the big mining and logging corporations – both national and foreign-owned. Consequently, they have forcibly left their homes because of harassments and assaults by the military that protect and pave the way for these corporations to enter the sacred areas of the Lumads. Hayahay and Valle showed images of burned and destroyed schools set up with the help of churches and religious groups, because the government did not offer educational services to the Lumads. Hayahay herself is red-tagged, a label that could become a license for the military or police to arrest her, or even take her life. On the third day, the resource person was Jakob Siringoringo, Chair of the BPAN National Board, an indigenous youth alliance in Indonesia. He showed how the Batak Indigenous youth of North Sumatra tried to address the issue of hunger during the pandemic. They made use of unused land to farm, and plant vegetables that they can use and sell.

Far from the city, their area does not suffer much from the impact of COVID-19.



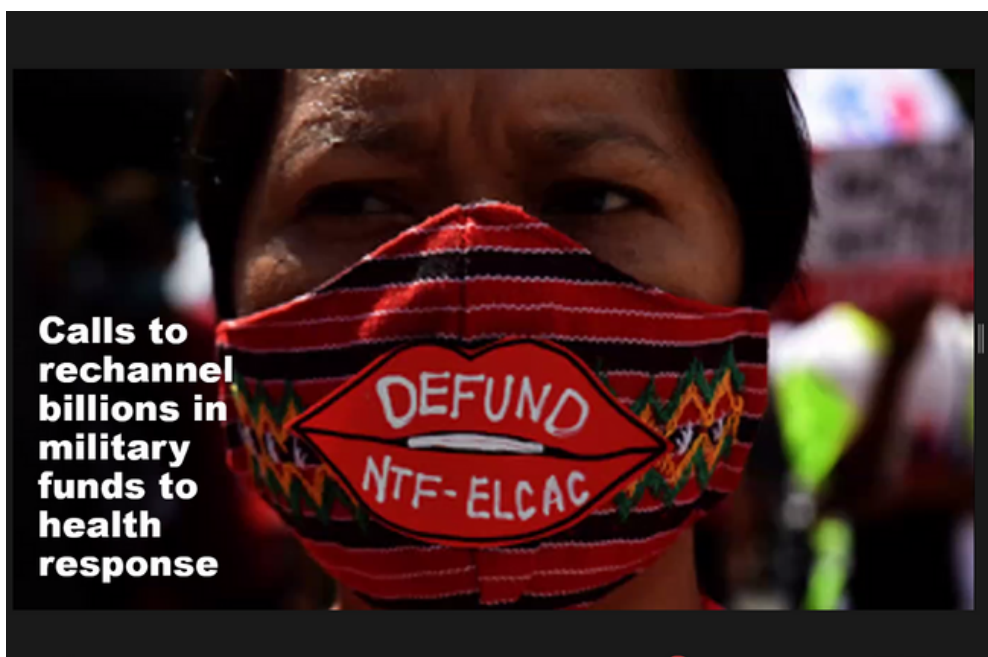
On the fourth day, two speakers address the issue of what the governments other entities (NGOs) do to support the indigenous people during the pandemic. A Lumad farmer and activist, Ms. Eufemia Cullamat is a member of the Philippine House of Representatives for the 18th Congress. She gave her presentation in English but wanted the participants to listen to her language. She answered questions in her language with translation facilitated by the ICF Coordinator. She was straightforward in saying that the pandemic allowed the government to intensify its program of driving the Lumads out of their homes and ancestral lands. While the Philippine government recognizes the presence of the Indigenous Peoples, its leaders are selling out their lands and mountains to the big corporations, especially the foreign ones. She shared that was the non-government organizations, churches, and schools readily gave their assistance to the Indigenous peoples who evacuated from their homes. discrimination and marginalization.

On his part, the resource person from Bangladesh, Sanjeeb Drong, from the Garo community and General Secretary of Bangladesh Indigenous People's Forum, shared that while the government simply regard the Indigenous Peoples as "Tribals," they have not experienced the militarization that the Lumads are experiencing in the Philippines. Yet, it does not mean that the IPs of Bangladesh do not experience. He lamented over the danger of losing their indigenous cultures, languages, and spiritualities. And while the IPs are also affected by the pandemic, he highlighted that the greater issue that IPs all over the world face is the realization of Article 3 and 4 of UNDRIP. Article 3 says: "Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination.

By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." Article 4 continues: "Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions." Tauli-Corpus regards these articles as the heart of the UNDRIP.

Listening to the stories during the workshop was very informative, exhilarating and heart-rending at the same time. At the end, everybody symbolically stood in solidarity with the IP struggle for self-determination, saying, "Long live, solidarity with the IPs!"

*Dr. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro,  
ICF Coordinator*



## Reflections Gathered from the Thematic Workshop on the Plight of Indigenous Peoples

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) organized a virtual thematic workshop on “Uncovering the Plight of Indigenous People’s Rights and Access to Health Care during the COVID Pandemic” from August 23- August 27, 2021. Resource persons from different countries shared stories and experiences with us.

According to United Nations (UN), Indigenous peoples are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment.

According to Amnesty International, there are 370 million Indigenous people around the world and spread across more than 90 countries. They belong to more than 5000 different Indigenous peoples and speak more than 4,000 languages. Indigenous people represent about 5% of the world’s population. The vast majority of them, 70%, live in Asia. Indigenous peoples often face marginalization and face discrimination in countries’ legal systems, leaving them even more vulnerable to violence and abuse. For example, we heard the stories of the IPs from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. Moreover, almost every story was very similar. Although Indigenous peoples from different countries have different customs and cultures, they face the same harsh realities.

They are displaced from their ancestral lands, denied the opportunity to express their cultures, physical attacks, and treatment as second-class citizens.

As I am writing about the struggles of the Indigenous Peoples, it does not mean that the international organizations and the Governments are not taking any steps. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007, by a majority of 144 states in favor, 4 votes against, and 11 abstentions. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples clearly says that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples while recognizing the right of Indigenous peoples to be different and to be respected. Indigenous peoples should have control over developments affecting them and their lands, territories, and resources. These resources enable them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures, and traditions, and to promote their development following their aspirations and needs. People should have respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures, and traditional practices for these contribute to sustainable, equitable development, and proper management of the environment. Although the Indigenous peoples have the UNDRIP, it is unfortunate that they are still being discriminated against.

They are displaced from their ancestral lands. They are unable to go freely to harvest their crops. Policies taken by International Organizations and Governments are often limited to the papers only. Implementation of these policies is rare.

My country, Bangladesh is not different from others. Although our Government is making many policies for IPs, the Indigenous peoples of Bangladesh still face discrimination. The Bangladesh government system does not recognize the Indigenous Peoples. The state considers the IPs as “Tribal Peoples,” and as “Upojati.” In Bengali, “Upo” means “Sub” and “Jati” means “Race or Caste.” The common people of Bangladesh consider the IPs as outsiders. Although historically, the IPs have lived in their lands for a very long time, the government and “regular” caste people drive them away from their places. The IPs do not have any documents or legal papers that prove their ownership of their ancestral lands. Therefore, the Governments or other organizations grabbed the lands of IPs. The government has declared the forests as reserved, prohibiting the Indigenous Peoples to enter their forests. The IPs could no longer harvest their crops freely. Many tourism projects are happening in the territories of the IPs. These projects forced the IPs to leave their homes. These are not only the challenges that IPs of Bangladesh are facing.

The system deprived them of almost all the services such as education, job, health care services, and many others. The system treats the IPs as second-class citizens.

As I also belong to an Indigenous community, I have experienced being bullied, or teased by non-indigenous peoples around me. These happened in schools or other public places, just because of my unique culture and traditions. People from other communities regarded the indigenous peoples, especially the girls around the tourist places as a source of entertainment or as a “pastime” for the tourists. Many individuals became targets of physical assault and killings just because they belong to an indigenous community. So many disappearances, murders, and rape cases are still unsolved. Although peoples who speak out for justice face intimidation and violence often supported by the state, many indigenous organizations or forums are still raising their voices to promote the rights of IPs.

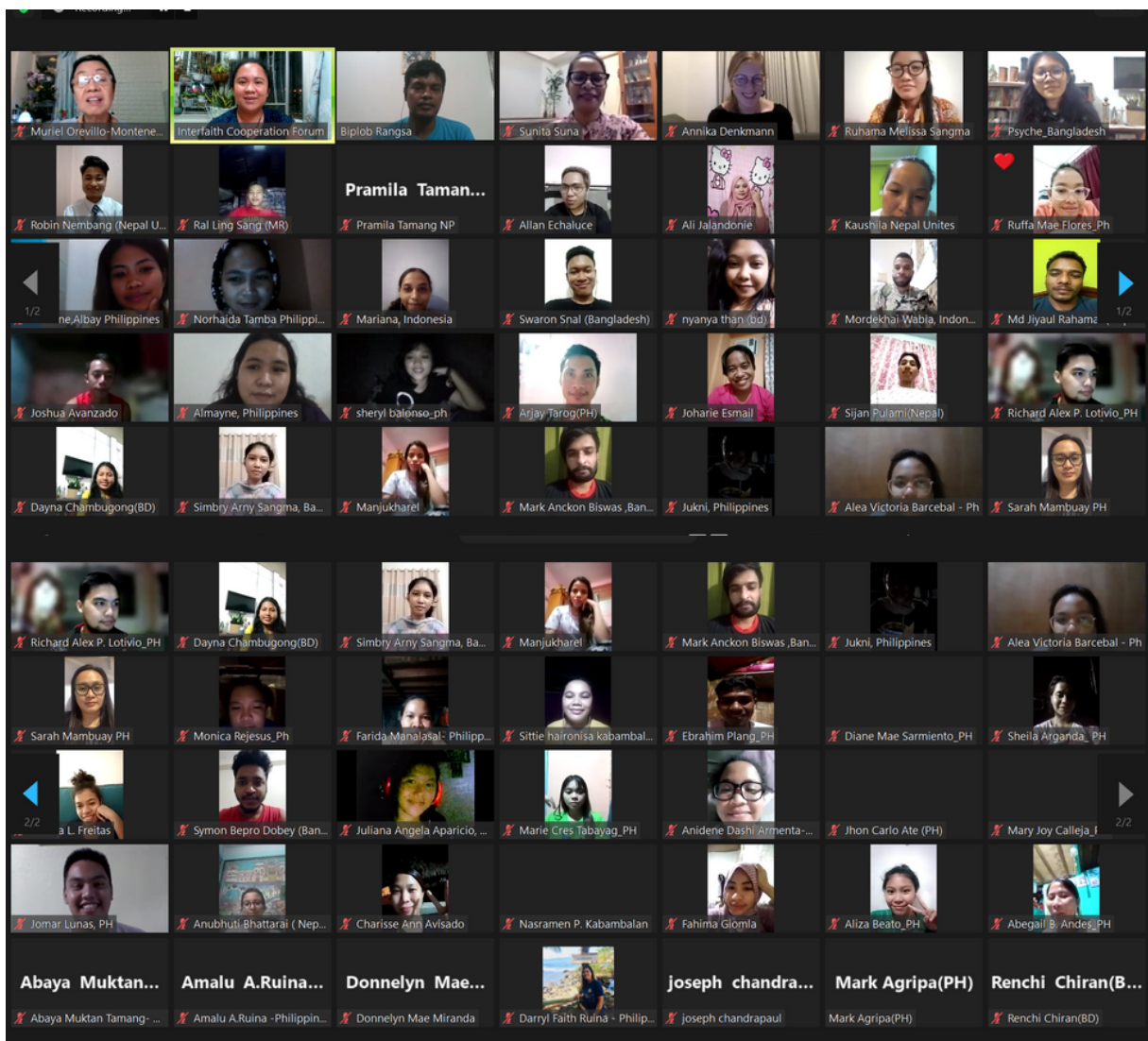
Indigenous peoples around the world have suffered from historic injustices as a result of, among other things, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories, and resources. Consequently, this historical injustice prevents them from exercising their rights to development according to their needs and interests.





Now is the high time to respect and promote the rights of indigenous peoples. If we can ensure the basic rights and justice for Indigenous peoples, we will be one step forward to build peace in our world. I know building peace and justice is not an easy task. But, I am still hopeful that the world will witness the day when every individual would treat the other equally. Let's all start taking initiatives from our respective positions to build PEACE and JUSTICE.

*Psyche Mankhin, Bangladesh*



## 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:  
office@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 perspectives 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: Is Peace an Impossible Dream?*

Look at the world. It is in a mess. There is no peace. Well-meaning members of societies seek and work for peace. Yet, peace seems elusive. Even before the pandemic came, the world is already in a mess. When the pandemic made an entrance, some governments made use of it for self or party aggrandizement. The Philippines is an example of leadership gone very awry. Corruption has gone to the hilt. Wanton killings of earth rights and human rights defenders, and anyone who expresses dissent have become rampant. The military and paramilitary groups have burned down the schools set up by the Indigenous Peoples, depriving children of the basic right to education. The state responded to the problem of the pandemic using a military approach. The institution of the anti-terrorism law is an irony because the state forces are the ones that terrorize citizens. From a semblance of democracy, Myanmar slid back to explicit military rule. The military jailed the leader who defended it before the international court in the case of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingyas. These two states produced hordes of Internally Displaced Persons – the Lumads in the Philippines, the Rohingyas, and now the citizens of Myanmar. One must note that the state did not grant citizenship to the Rohingyas as citizens. Some citizens crossed international borders and became refugees.

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

Muriel Orevilla Montenegro  
Editor  
muriel@asiapacificymca.org

Baidido Saganding  
Circulation and Promotion  
bai@asiapacificymca.org

Annika Denkmann  
Design & Layout  
annika@asiapacificymca.org



While one does not hear much news about Indonesia, especially in Papua, many Indigenous Peoples are fighting against big foreign companies that encroached into their ancestral lands. In Hong Kong, thousands are leaving after the Special Administrative Region gagged the pro-democracy voices. Today, Afghanistan is now in turbulence once again. Thailand may be silent for now, but like other countries in Asia, these may have spots that are beginning to simmer, where people's hearts are burning like a "social volcano" waiting to erupt. Peace is so elusive. But is peace an impossible dream?

*Shalom, salaam, santi, kalinaw, damai, santiphap, heiwa, kapayapaan* – are words expressing the same aspirations of the Asian people. Peace. Christian tradition holds that peace is God's gift. One must understand, however, that peace is everyone's responsibility. It is the people's responsibility, especially of the leaders, no matter to what religion one belongs. The Asian countries have populations that are adherents of different religions or faith traditions. Yet, the stark commonality is that the leaders of these countries – whatever religion or no religion they hold on to – lack the moral ascendancy to practice the tenets of their religious traditions that speak of peace as the well-being of the people. What pervades among the politician-leaders is selfishness and arrogance; no, it is greed and hubris. It is greed for power and wealth! These kinds of people make peace elusive.

Peace is not an impossible dream. Peace is possible. Yet, the leaders, together with the citizens have the responsibility to build societies that allow the life - of human beings and other earthlings - to flourish. It should not be a kind of peace-in-the-cemetery. The leaders especially must be agents of peace, rather than being torturers of the citizens. They must build peaceable societies. Leaders that put peace as priority in their platform of governance would get the support of the people. In contexts when leaders fail to do so, people must take the challenge and not give up hope, and continue to work for peace. In the face of leadership failures, the people should muster wisdom and discernment in choosing the next leaders who have a heart for peace and commitment to make it a reality. Sometimes, the work for peace may be risky. Peace is worth one's time and efforts, and even of one's life. One could not deny that there were groups and individuals that put their lives at risk for the sake of true democracy and genuine peace. In this light, ICF seeks to help contribute to the efforts towards peacebuilding in Asia by equipping the Asian youth with the values, knowledge and skills necessary for the task. And perchance, in the future, some of the ICF alumni may become leaders of their communities. Therefore, it behooves upon these youth to practice the values they have learned from their respective religions, and the knowledge they gather from the workshops that ICF has organized.

