



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



ICF will conduct a virtual Peace Institute in March 2022 Online Training of Trainers on Nonviolent Communication

This Training of Trainers course is for the young people who have gone through the 2-day introductory workshops on NVC during an ICF thematic workshop or School of Peace, or similar courses offered by ICF peace networks. It is a ten-day face-to-face program. However, in the context of the pandemic, ICF will conduct the ToT online with 3-hour session for ten (10) days. The 11th day will be set aside for reflection evaluation and closing ritual. The participants will prepare a module and implement this module in a community setting during the practicum that will be set on a later date, when there is no more travel restrictions. The participants should read ahead the reading materials on NVC. Participants must commit to *attend punctually* the complete training sessions.

For more information please read the complete concept on the ICF [website](#) and make sure you fulfill the requirements before you register for the Peace Institute.

“All violence is the result of people tricking themselves into believing that their pain derives from other people and that consequently those people deserve to be punished.”
— Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*



Inside this Issue:

ICF will conduct a virtual Peace Institute in March 2022	1
ICF Alum as Nepal Unites exec organized Mental health workshop	2
Nepal ICF Alumni organized Child Rights and Cyberbullying Workshop in Narayanshan	3
ICF staff shared insights on Cyberspace as Sacred Space	4
Albay ICF Alumni held activities on Cyberbullying Awareness	6
ICF conducted Online Workshop on Women's Rights, the Trailblazers and Ecofeminism	7
Reflections from Workshop Participants	9
2021: Resilience Rising ICF Staff attend virtual Peace Practitioners' Conference	13
From the editor's desk: A Season of Waiting Patiently and Taking Seriously the meaning of Christmas	14



ICF Alumnus as Nepal Unites exec organized Mental health workshop

On 30 Oct 2021, Nepal Unites organized a one-day workshop on Mental Health in collaboration with the Global Unites and United Religions Initiative in Kathmandu, Bagmati Province, Nepal. The activity received support from Kowloon Union Church in Hong Kong. The Youth participants were coming from different religions, ethnicity, and different background with gender balance in this workshop. There were 32 participants, of which 12 were female and 20 were male participants including special guests, facilitators, and organizer team.

The National program coordinator, Rajan Bhandari, started the workshop with an introduction and objectives of the workshop. He also introduced the participants. This was followed by NU national director, Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman's sharing of the vision, mission, and activities of Nepal Unites and Global Unites movement. He showed that Global Unites are present in many countries.

Manil Maharjan and Sandhya Khatiwada, representatives from Transcultural Psychosocial Organization or TPO-Nepal (www.tponepal.org) facilitated the sessions on Suicide Prevention and Emotional Well-Being. During this session, a lively discussion on many topics and questions took place. Why do people come to the brink of a suicide attempt? How do people feel when they are attempting suicide? What are types of suicide? How do we detect the behavior of people who are contemplating suicide? What are the causes of suicide? What roles could the youth organization take in suicide prevention? These were discussed during the first session.

During this workshop, a special guest in the person of psychologist Dr. Gopal Dhakal came to grace the workshop. He expressed appreciation to the Nepal Unites team for organizing the workshop.



He shared that mental health problems and illnesses are going to increase when people are not secure with their lives. Dr. Gopal shared the analysis that the second leading cause of death is suicide in the context of youth.

Dr. Gopal said in the year 2020 and in 2021, suicide cases have increased from 14% to 16%. In his findings, in the past years, the increase ranged from 8% to 10% suicide case rate. Mental health problems suffered more among children aged 16 years old and adolescent youths. The mental health cases are going up and all youths are at the risk. Activities like what Nepal Unites are doing are needed for every people and organization. The government also needs to include the mental health topic in the school curriculum, Dr. Gopal said.

Grishma Paneru also facilitated on Mental Health during the workshop. She asked the participants to form into 4 small groups and gave time for group discussion on the questions, e.g., What is Mental Health? What are the signs and symptoms of people who suffered from mental problems? Most of the groups shared many answers. Common among them were the following: the people who suffered from mental problems felt their life is monotonous; they lacked interest in anything, they have a sleeping disorder, feeling of sadness, and show some behavioral changes. Ms. Grishma shared some ideas and activities for young people to cultivate strong and healthy minds.



In the last session of this workshop, Dr. Hulsha Paudyal, a physiotherapist, discussed the topic of Physiotherapy in Mental Health. Dr. Hulsha showed how physiotherapists provide health promotion, preventive health care, and treatment of mental health. In this workshop, the participants learned that physiotherapists also support mental and emotional health by promoting physical fitness.

One of the participants, Kiran B.K. from the Dalit community, said many suicide cases and cases of violence have increased during the pandemic lockdowns. Many people lost their job, were frustrated, and suffered from depression.

Overall, there was positive feedback on the workshop, and a clamor to extend more time on the topics. Everyone needs to be aware of mental health issues. One slogan developed was “sharing is caring.” When people share their feelings or whatever it is in their minds, the act could reduce the suicide cases in Nepal. Nepal Unites Team gave appreciates all participants for actively engaging in this workshop. It felt it was a short time for a day only. It is our hope that in the coming days, a similar workshop will be done with more time to discuss. In the end, the participants received their respective participation certificates from the facilitators.

Appeal: Nepal Unites requests that if you want to partnership with us as a donor or sponsor, please reach out to us. Nepal Unites Team is waiting for your response.

*Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman, School of Peace 2017
National Director/ Nepal Unites
nepalunites2019@gmail.com
www.nepalunites.org
Kathmandu, Nepal*

Nepal ICF Alumnus organized Child Rights and Cyberbullying Workshop in Narayansthan

On 19th November 2021, Nepal Unites Peace Club organized a workshop on Child Rights and Cyberbullying in Shree Narayansthan Secondary School, Temal -5, Pokhari Narayansthan, Kavrepalanchok, Bagmati Province, Nepal. Sixty participants attended the workshop, mostly students from Grade 7-12. Mohammad Jiyaul Rahaman, a teacher in that school and an ICF alumnus initiated the workshop. He presented and elaborated on the objective of the workshop. During this time, Prerana Magar, the president of Nepal Unites Peace Club, gave her welcome remarks and appreciated the participation of the students, the work of the organizers, and sponsors for conducting this valuable and meaningful workshop with the students in school.

Bel Bahadur Thapa Magar facilitated the input and discussions on child rights. This session covered the issues of child rights, child protection, child abuse, child marriage, child labor, and child education. These topics helped students to understand their rights and right to get an education. One of the students argued against child marriage but had difficulty on the question of how to stop child marriage in Nepalese society. Regarding this question, facilitator Bel responded to students, citing the system results from lack of awareness of children's rights, and how the culture directly influenced the continuation of child marriage in the rural areas.



The next session was led by Nirmala Devi Mainali who is the teacher, and a leader of Nepal Unites Peace club. She facilitated the positive and negative aspects and impact of the internet. In that session, she especially discussed how to avoid unwanted internet users and to avoid being addicted to it. Nirmala also discussed the misuse of the internet such as trafficking, cyber-crime, and others. In relation to this topic, Md. Jiyaul discussed more cyberbullying cases, defamation through social media, and how social media is used to harm and harass people. Then, the students discussed among themselves how to secure from this type of harm.

At the closing session, the respected headteacher requested all students to apply the knowledge they gathered from the workshop. The school hopes to organize in all grade levels this type of event because the students come from different backgrounds and cultures.

*Md. Jiyaul Rahaman,
ICF Alumni, Kavre,
Nepal*



ICF staff shared insights on Cyberspace as Sacred Space

The two ICF staff spoke at the National Leadership Summit on Safer Cyberspace organized by CyberGuardiansPH on November 20, 2021. The two ICF staff, namely; Baidido Saganding and Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro focused on the subtheme, “Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion and Spirituality Online.” More than a hundred young people attended the summit. They came from different parts of the Philippines and other countries. CyberGuardiansPH organized the summit to create an awareness campaign on safer cyberspace and generate engagement from the youth. CyberGuardiansPH is a coalition of organizations and individuals seeking to co-create safer cyberspace. It aims to protect children and the youth against online sexual abuse and exploitation, cyberbullying, and other forms of cyber threats.

The organizers invited several resource persons from different backgrounds and organizations to share relevant topics on children and youth protection from cyberthreat. Baidido Saganding, ICF Program Officer, talked about “Social Media and the Muslim Community.” She shared the advantages and disadvantages of using social media and the roles of religious leaders in helping and protecting children and the youth. It is an excellent source of knowledge where everyone can gain in-depth knowledge of their religion. It is also useful for spreading beneficial content and some use it to share religious teachings. On the other hand, the disadvantages are some use it to take advantage and spread false information and distort facts about religion. She added that it encourages people to be more public about their personal lives, which may result in harm and abuse. To avoid these to happen, Saganding shared that the Muslim community has a great role in helping young people manage their social media usage. They should raise public awareness on the pros and cons of using social media sites and advocate for the laws relating to online protection. Religious leaders should also provide safe spaces for children and young people where they can ask for help if they experience abuses online.



From a Christian perspective, Dr. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro responded to Saganding’s presentation. She affirmed that social media helps in learning and practicing one’s religion. She explained the etymology and meaning of the word “sacred,” highlighting that it is anything set apart for religious and spiritual purposes. Orevillo-Montenegro wanted to be sure that the participants distinguish the meaning of “spirituality” vis-à-vis “piety.” On the one hand, Orevillo-Montenegro explained that spirituality is about one’s lifestyle. It is what a person does in one’s day-to-day life. On the other hand, piety is about one’s display of religious behavior concerning one’s devotion. She pointed out that making cyberspace a sacred space is an expression of one’s spirituality. One must cultivate a good understanding of one’s faith, values, and teachings to have a good religious practice and behavior. Cyberspace can be a sacred space only if the users are mindful of making it an avenue to manifest one’s faith in coherence with one’s practice or ethics. Ultimately, the users have the moral obligation to use responsibly social media and cyberspace.

The summit was successful. ICF is grateful to the organizers for the opportunity to share their insights with the participants.





Albay ICF Alumni held activities on Cyberbullying Awareness

The Albay ICF alumni organized an awareness program on cyberbullying on November 21, 2021, at Barangay Taysan Multi-Purpose Hall and on November 27, 2021, at Barangay Binitayan, Legazpi City covered court. The alumni conducted this activity in person or face-to-face sessions. There were fifty-four (54) students, youth community leaders, and Katipunan ng Kabataan (youth organization) members, ages 12-25, who participated in the activities. The project aimed to help the participants

- Define what is cyberbullying
- Describe the effects of cyberbullying on an individual
- Identify the strategies of cyberbullying

Each event consisted of a 4-hour interactive discussion. Edelene Rosin, an ICF Alumna led the discussion on the topic, "What is cyberbullying?" She led the discussion on the definition of cyberbullying, its inclusions, and the possible reasons why an individual is prone to cyberbullying, or why a person would tend to become a bully. The participants also shared their thoughts on why they are being bullied during their online classes. Among the reasons shared are the learner's poor data and internet connection. Another one is how their surroundings or background look like. An educator who was present during the session noted and confirmed these shared experiences. She also shared the reports she received from her students, as well as her actions in relation to the matter of cyberbullying. On her part, the educator shared that she called the attention of the bully privately and asked the person why he or she talks to someone negatively online. The educator noted that her role is also to orient the students to proper attitudes and values towards others.

The second topic was "The effects of cyberbullying." In her presentation, the resource person, Rosalie Asaytuno, a Teacher and Children International Program Staff, noted that the one person subjected to cyberbullying may develop insomnia, chest pain, increased stress, and anxiety.



Rosalie Asaytuno also took the lead in the discussion of the last topic, "Strategies when dealing with cyberbullying." She pointed out a friendly strategy to deal with cyberbullies and how to properly act in social media. Using some video clips related to cyberbullying, Edelene Rosin facilitated an activity, where participants identified the positive and negative actions of an individual.

The seminar ended with a group photo and awarding of certificates to all the participants. Through the support of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum, the cyberbullying awareness seminar was successfully conducted in the two Albay communities. This was a small doable project in relation to the ICF thematic workshop that Edelene attended entitled "No One is Left Behind: Children Rights and Welfare, and the Pandemic".

*Edelene Rosin, ICF Alumna,
Albay, Philippines*

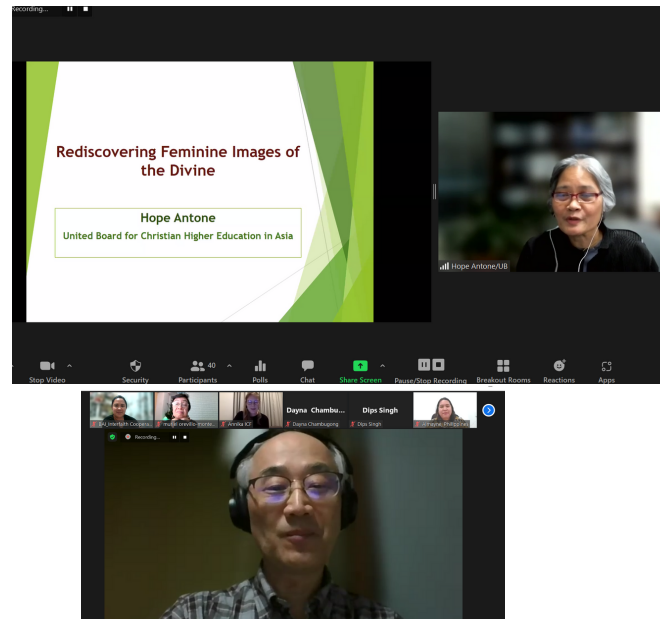




ICF conducted Online Workshop on Women's Rights, the Trailblazers and Ecofeminism

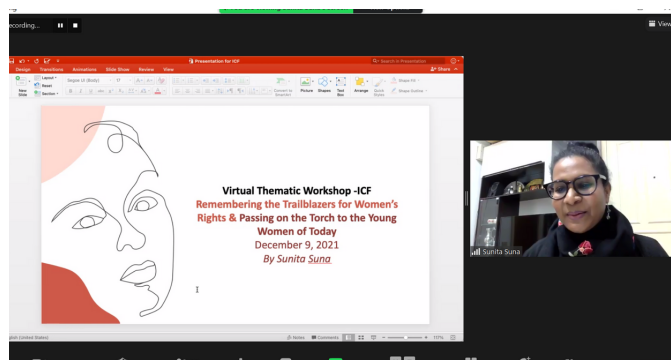
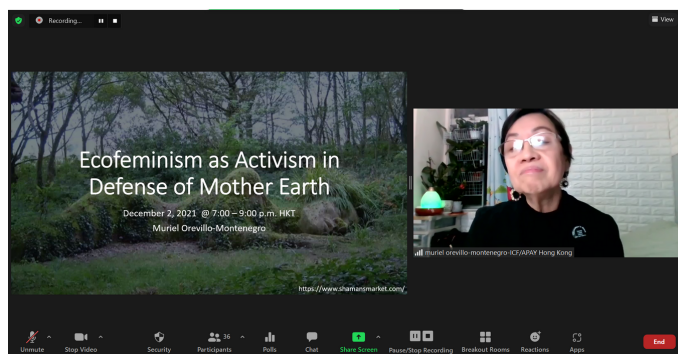
ICF joined the global campaign on 16 days of activism against Gender-based Violence by holding a series of online workshops on Women's Rights, Ecofeminism, and the Trailblazers in the Struggle for Women's Rights from November 25 and 26 to December 2, 3, and 9, 2021. Forty-one young people from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, and Timor Leste participated during the sessions.

During the first session of the workshop, Dr. Hope Antone spoke on "Rediscovering Feminine Images of the Divine." She organized her presentation into three parts: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Religion and Women's Rights, and Feminine Images of the Divine and Women's Rights. She started each part of her presentation by running a poll that the participants actively answered. On the question of whether the UNDHR document upholds the rights of women, the participants have Yes and No for an answer. She affirmed that yes, it upholds the rights of women. But it is also true to say No because the document is a broad stroke and specific details on how to uphold women's rights are not in the covenant. The UNDHR is not legally binding, more like of road map and a vision statement. The second poll asked whether each religion upholds women's rights. The answers from the participants were Yes, No and Unsure. Dr. Antone noted that the Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions includes women's rights, e.g. full equality with men, to be free from all forms form violence, to marry a person according to their choice, and to marry with free and full consent. The third poll asked if the participants agree that women's rights are grounded or rooted in feminine images of the divine. The participants answered yes, but some answered: "not sure." Dr. Antone proceeded by uncovering the feminine images of the divine from each religion's sacred text. She pointed out that one must investigate one's faith resources to rediscover the images of the divine. One also needs to use lenses of gender criticism when reading and analyzing to uncover the feminine images of the divine.



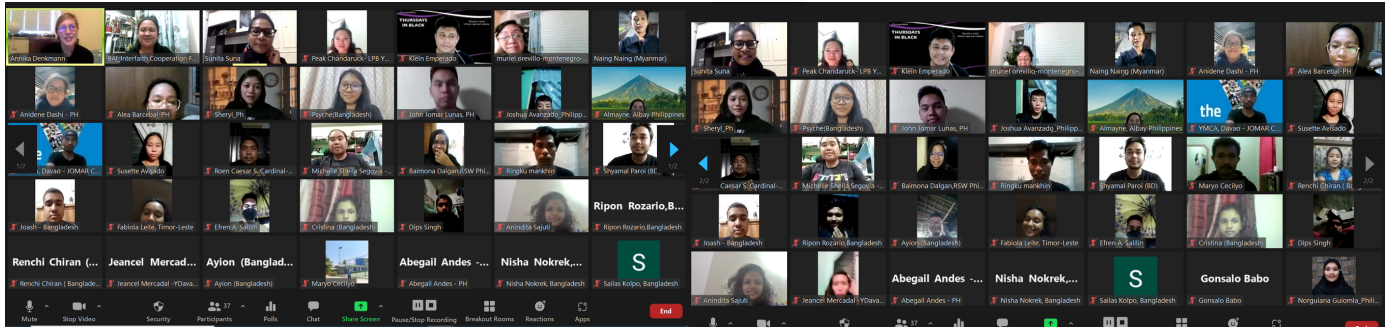
She also encourages the participants to recover the qualities of the divine feminine that may be missing today: mothering, abundance, beauty, inspiration, and peace.

Dr. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro's topic seemed to be new to the participants: "Ecofeminism as Activism in Defense of Mother Earth." She started her session by assessing the understanding of the participants on the different words such as feminism, ecofeminism, Anthropocene, religion and nature, and Francis Bacon. A few participants shared their views on feminism briefly, but the rest did not say anything on the remaining keywords. She used a word-study approach and discussed each keyword. She highlighted that feminism is a philosophy grounded on the premise that women's wisdom on matters that affect them is crucial in patriarchal, sexist, or male-dominated contexts. It is both a critical theory and political movement that seeks justice for women and ends all forms of sexism. She discussed how human beings treat nature from their religious perspectives. Through the concept of Ahimsa, the principle of non-violence, Hindus believe that all living things, including the natural world, are sacred because they are part of God.



While the Buddha did not give teachings specifically on this subject, he instructed the monks to never relieve themselves in or near running water and should not disrupt the established habitat of any other creature nor kill other living creatures. Taoism, the indigenous way of life of ancient China, values harmony between people. However, Taoism values, even more, the harmony between nature and humanity. Dr. Orevillo-Montenegro took a critical reading of Genesis 1:28, a favorite text among those coming from the Judeo-Christian tradition, on the role of humans to take care of the earth. She pointed out that the text is problematic because of the Hebrew words *kabash* and *radah*, which mean to dominate and subjugate. In Islam, the concept of oneness or Tawhid is reflected in Allah's creation, and human beings and nature form one whole that humans must preserve. Islam also teaches that individuals should act as a guardian or Khalifah of the earth as a sacred trust. Dr. Orevillo-Montenegro then proceeded to connect the philosophy of Francis Bacon with Genesis 1:28. Bacon took the image of nature as a female to be subjugated as a philosophy to argue for the necessity of extracting nature's secrets. Then, she proceeded to introduce another new word: the Anthropocene as the geologic period that humans heavily influenced. The Anthropocene Epoch is the start of the era of nuclear bomb tests, disposable plastics, and the human population boom that caused earth destruction. The Anthropocene is the beginning of adverse climate change. Ecofeminism is a commitment to defend women's rights and Mother Earth's rights. This could be done by taking actual steps to reclaim an earth-based spirituality, with a view that spirituality is a day-to-day lifestyle.

"Women's Rights and Passing on the Torch to the Young Women of Today". Sunita Suna talked about the four waves of the women's movement. The first wave of the women's movement started in the 20th century to advocate for women's right to vote and political participation. The second wave of the women's movement was from the 1960s to the late 1980s. It was the reaction to women returning to their roles as housewives and mothers after the end of the Second World War. While the first wave was largely concerned with the struggle for suffrage, the second wave focused more on injustices in both public and private spheres. The movement brought to the forefront the issues of rape, reproductive rights, domestic violence, and workplace safety. This brought about a widespread effort to reform the negative and inferior image of women in popular culture to a more positive and realistic one.



The Third Wave of Women's Movement emerged in the mid-1990s. It was greatly focused on reproductive rights for women. The fourth wave of feminism began in 2012 which focused on sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture among other issues. At the end of her presentation, she shared the video of the Sustainable Development Goals that includes gender equality.

The workshop series also included open discussions by the participants to share their reflections on the topics. ICF is grateful to all the resource persons for sharing their expertise and for the participants for their active participation.

*Baidido M. Saganding,
ICF Program Officer*

Reflections

Ecofeminism, Hope in the Struggle for the Rights of the Earth, and Women

Participating in the virtual thematic workshop on Women's Rights, Ecofeminism, and the Trailblazers in the Struggle for Women's Rights was an opportunity to view deeper the concept and praxis of ecofeminism.

As Dr. Muriel Oreillo Montenegro said, there is a gap, a lacuna, in the past feminist discourses and practice. She defined that becoming human would be impossible when people are apart from their communities, both the human and non-human citizens and elements.

She asserted that without these non-human elements, humanity will not exist as well. The term "earthlings" is now what feminists and ethicists refer to us as humans and other created beings.

Being an earthling, people must do away from the notion of being superior to other created beings. This concept should be a reminder that everything is interconnected. Humans should take concern and be alarmed of the harmful actions committed against mother earth in all her aspects of life.



Ecofeminism is the best counterwork for anthropocentrism and capitalism and patriarchy. Embracing ecofeminism as both a theory and a movement would be best for churches and faith-based organizations to do. It is an embodiment of acknowledging the essential role of humans to defend the environment from profit-seeking ventures. From there, we can begin to think and act for the good and the betterment of our people and the earth.

On another note, the said topic points us to the question, “Why is it hard to associate God with a mother?” When in fact, we have known that only mothers, the women, have the physiological capacity to give life through the womb and by giving birth to a child. This life-giving capacity continues with the act of a mother nursing the child with her breasts with the milk supplied by her mammary glands. The mother’s act of caring, of letting a baby go to sleep by humming a lullaby comes as a beautiful image of how God nurtures and nourishes her children.

The challenge now is on how to retrieve the buried treasure. As mentioned by the speaker, Dr. Hope Antone-Chan, the feminine qualities of God - mothering, abundance, beauty, inspiration, and peace, are what we truly lack in our society today. This absence is the very reason why we live in a chaotic and unjust world.

She posed the question, “Do you agree that women’s rights are grounded/rooted in the feminine images of the divine?” Answering “Yes” would mean saying “Yes” to the challenge of digging into the feminine qualities of God. Dr. Antone-Chan’s point that feminine divine qualities are innate but suppressed is still clearly manifest today in our communities. These qualities need to be resurfaced amid the attempts of patriarchy to counter women’s voices and narratives.

And yet, even as we are entrenched in our colonial faiths, we must look deeper into the life and practice of our indigenous peoples. They are the ones who treat nature and the environment as their life and the source of all nourishment. Their way of life is directed towards protecting and nourishing the earth and its resources.

If we retrieve the Babaylan’s indigenous spiritualities, anchored on the forces of nature, we will surely learn so many lessons. We will learn, from their life and work as multifaceted and multitasking community leaders of the pre-colonial Filipino society.



The earth-based spiritualities will lead us to be more conscious about the state of the earth. From the pre-colonial life of our ancestors, we can draw inspiration from their practice of animism. Though demonized by mainstream religions, animism made our ancestors regard with high respect the forces of nature and nature herself. They respected - the seas, mountains, rocks, rivers, plants, flowers, trees, and everything in it. Their regard for nature can be a rich resource for us to imitate and live out, for this will richly gear us towards more sustainable development.

This brings me to look at the local environmental upheaval in my community. The proposed 174 hectares reclamation in Dumaguete City and similar projects around the Philippines and Asia are manifestations of anthropocentric, patriarchal, and capitalist posture.

Allowing these projects to prosper would mean we are disrespecting mother earth and exploiting her resources by putting into our hands the future of the environment and our people. Human beings are playing gods. We are exploiting mother earth like how we are raping and exploiting women in our communities. What worries me the most is the urbanization of our community.



Urbanization will make our community prone to the coming of more foreign nationals who also come to sexually exploit our women and children. They will aggravate what the local sexual exploiters are already doing. These projects will endanger the lives of our women and children.

Sunita Sunas' presentation on the trailblazers of women's rights calls us to acknowledge the common contexts of women in Asia. We need to listen to the narratives of oppression, violence, and injustice done to women, and even to the youth and children worldwide. The women of the past struggled and found solidarity and support. They gained courage and the right inspiration to revolt against the oppressive systems and rulers of the time. They indeed fulfilled the task of being trailblazers. In short, these women paved the roads so that we now see women enjoying some rights and continuing the work towards gender equity.

"Women now, are very privileged because of the work of the women before. It is important to remember them." This statement from Dr. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro shared during the discussions was fitting to ponder on even after the course has ended.

Indeed, the trailblazers of the women's movement, whether in society or church, gave their life, sweat, and blood. They made sacrifices so that today's generation would at least enjoy the rights that they have been deprived of during their time. That includes the political right – the right to suffrage and the right to hold office. They made it a point that their voices were heard through writings, legal battles, legislative petitions, and street demonstrations.

Talking about passing on the torch, the struggle for gender justice and human rights is quite a huge and challenging responsibility to hold. It is also important to know those who share the same cause, for unity gives strength for the struggles of the days ahead. It is even more challenging to keep the fire of the torch burning, not only for the emancipation of women but also of all created beings, including those who are being "othered" and continuously oppressed by our society.

The movement's core work is to continually say NO to any form of injustice and abuse to women and girls and the earth, our mother.

Klein Fausto Emperado, Philippines





This topic is fascinating to me. I realize a lot of new words and some explanations that further my knowledge. We discussed some words that I find interesting, like Anthropocene, for example.

When we jumped into the section called “How the Human Beings Treat Nature”, and I feel like sometimes we forget that we are not alone in this world. There are animals, trees, wind, air, earth, and all things that exist that help us to survive and nurture ourselves. It’s also a reminder to people around the world, especially for me. We are all came from different religions, beliefs, and teachings. But the similarity is to enlighten human beings to defend our “mother earth.” Because we live in a family, a community and all composed of everything. And to conclude my reflection that “women and men are created to be equal, make the right decision with full responsibility and to teach and trust to our next generation.”

-Mário Cecílio Pereira da Costa, Timor Leste



In Islam we are often thought that we do sadaqah, like planting trees and preserving them for the next generation, because it is in a way a form of a continuous charity we can give to Allah’s creation, to show respect and gratitude for the life it has given us.

Since I am working in grassroots and particularly in a diverse community where women are starting to have their platforms through programs that the Bangsamoro have focused on, I think through my field of work I would like to study the aspect of women of today and how they enrich homes through building peace and making their voices and religious importance influence people, not just the young ones but especially those of their own who are hesitant to take a stand due to the limitations the society has created for them. In Islam, we are equally created, respected, and loved by Allah.

-Baimona Dalgan, Philippines

I learned that men and women both should equally get all the rights in this world. God’s word is very clear in telling us that all men are created equal and every single person can be a child of God, receiving the full inheritance of heaven. We can look toward the Bible to learn how to love and serve everyone no matter their age, color, or ethnicity, gender, or nationality. In Deuteronomy 10:17, it said, “For the Lord of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.” We all should learn to fight for our rights.

-Calvin Ayion, Bangladesh

We had discovered that mother earth and women have a very close relationship. Mother earth is considered a woman, as both earth and women are being dominated or tortured by our male-dominated society. Earth is being tortured by humans. As a result, the climate is changing which is not good for us. On the other hand, women are also being dominated by males, being deprived of their rights. I think the patriarchal society system is responsible for this discrimination. so we have to take responsibility to protect our Earth and women’s rights. As I belong to the “Garos” indigenous community; my community people believe that, as the mother takes good care of their children, women can also take good care of our earth, environment. That’s why we inherit property from our mother. Women become the owner of properties. Garos are one of the Matrilineal communities of the World.

-Psyche Mankhin, Bangladesh



2021: Resilience Rising

ICF Staff attend virtual Peace Practitioners' Conference

On the 3rd and 4th of December 2021, the 10th Asian Peace Practitioners' Research Conference "2021: Resilience Rising" was virtually held by the Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies (CPCS). Over 100 peace practitioners from the region attended the two evenings sessions. After the welcome message from Emma Leslie, the Executive Director of CPCS, different speakers on each evening gave their accounts on how to be resilient not only amidst the ongoing global pandemic but other devastations such as the military coup in Myanmar or the take-over by the Taliban in Afghanistan. The speakers were from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. We will not mention their names and organizational affiliations to protect them and their engagements.



On Friday, December 3rd, the first speaker recalled the recent events in Afghanistan during the take-over by the Taliban. He wrestled with the experience and what that has meant for him and his family. He narrated the struggle to leave their home behind and his feeling of guilt to those who were left behind. The second speaker of the evening was a woman from an original rural area in Pakistan. She defied traditions by going to university away from home and finishing her study. Considering the village tradition, she did not abide by traditional gender roles according to her mother's wishes. Moreover, she also talked about how to reconcile with her family and the rural village despite the different outlooks on her role as a woman in society. The final speaker of the first evening was from Myanmar. She spoke about how women were affected differently since the Military coup in February 2021.

She also pointed out their role in the resistance and what they can still do despite everything going on.

On the second evening of the conference, another set of speakers related their stories. The speaker from Myanmar told the story about the women in her family who stood up to patriarchal structures. Her story focused especially on her mother, who inspires resilience in her during the current military dictatorship. The second speaker was from Sri Lanka who told her personal story of resilience during and after the civil war. She described her experience on how to navigate through the post-conflict society as a woman from a minority group. The last contribution shared during the conference was a written message read by a CPCS staff on the ongoing engagement towards peace in the Korean Peninsula.

In the final part of the conference, the participants had the opportunity to discuss their accounts of resilience in small break-out rooms. Afterward, each group shared some thoughts with the plenary. A speaker concluded the 10th Asian Peace Practitioners' Research Conference with closing words of encouragement.

*Annika Denkmann,
BftW Seconded Personnel*

The root of the word courage is cor – the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage had a very different definition than it does today. Courage originally meant "To speak one's mind by telling all one's heart." Over time, this definition has changed, and today, courage is more synonymous with being heroic. Heroics is important and we certainly need heroes, but I think we've lost touch with the idea that speaking honestly and openly about who we are, about what we're feeling, and about our experiences (good and bad) is the definition of courage.

- Brene Brown



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: Advent: A Season of Waiting Patiently and Taking Seriously the meaning of Christmas

Advent season, in the Christian tradition, is the time of re-enacting the waiting for the coming of the Messiah, of Jesus who was born in Nazareth more than two thousand years ago. Advent is not about Jesus Christ “coming again,” because if we say that, then we are explicitly saying that Christ left the world like one who says, “Okay, bye for now. I will surely be back, albeit indefinitely.” Saying that “Christ will come again” negates the faith that God Immanuel is with us and has never left the people of God.

I write this piece as a Christian and I muster that faith amid this advent season’s tribulation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the advent of the Omicron variant, traveling demands more documents required for arrival in one’s country destination. Upon arrival in the Philippines, one goes through the processes of the Bureau of Quarantine and all, until one gets to the quarantine hotel. RT-PCR (Reverse Transcription -Polymerase Chain Reaction) test was done on the 5th day of the quarantine, December 14, 2021. Then, the Coast Guards, yes, the Coast Guards, assigned took a repeat swab for nasal and throat specimen on December 15, 2021, for reasons they did not know. My suspicion was the first set of specimens got contaminated. On December 16, I was supposed to fly to my home province but the long-awaited result for the RT-PCR did not come. Then, I received the notice: “Your flight to Dumaguete is canceled.” I re-routed my flight to Cebu on December 18. On the night of December 17, I received an email “Your flight to Cebu tomorrow is canceled.” Exploring all possibilities, I re-routed my ticket to Bacolod. My sons bought a new ticket for Cebu. Both flight tickets are set for December 20, at different hours. As of this writing, I do not know which one will work. I must relay this piece to the ICF staff for lay-outing because there is no internet connection in my destinations – in Cebu and Negros.

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





Back to Advent. It is a season to patiently wait indeed. Strictly, I should not complain. Thousands of my fellow Filipinos in the Visayas and Mindanao have lost their homes, crops, livestock, and most of all, some lost their loved ones. No thanks to Typhoon Odette (Rai), the damage is far more reaching; far more than what Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) did. The extent of the damage could surely be attributed to the strength of the typhoon. Meantime, Malaysia experienced flooding also during the weekend. These catastrophes came after several devastating tornados ripped the cities in Kentucky, Illinois, and neighboring areas in the U.S. The Filipinos are not alone. Yes, we are not alone because the climate crisis is affecting the whole planet Earth. This has been foretold. The geologists have now defined the effects of human activities that altered the geologic, atmospheric, and biological setup, among others, on the Earth as the Anthropocene. The increased frequencies and strengths of typhoons, cyclones, and tornadoes are signs of the climate crisis. And yet, in other parts of the world like Madagascar and Crimea, the water sources are depleted. Farming is now impossible, making food security not viable. I could go on with the litany on the signs of the climate crisis. And yet, we could not see any concrete and palpable outcome from the much-flaunted CoP26 held in Glasgow in November. What came out only is the rising cases of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in the UK and other parts of the world.

One must not be remiss in seeing the thread that connects the pandemic, climate crisis, and governance. In the world scenario, it is now public knowledge that sharing of vaccines by the affluent countries had been used to conjure up political leverage. Once again, the connection is glaringly clear in the priorities of the Philippine government. The vaccination campaign came only at the heels of the national election. The elections in the Philippines could be compared to a circus. Yes, it is the time for political family dynasties to re-install their grip on power in their established kingdoms.

The president claimed that the funds to assist the victims of the typhoon is minimal – to the tune of Php 900M (USD 18M), or “depleted” because the government used the funds for the acquisition of vaccines. Yet, it has allocated a reduced amount of Php 19 billion (USD 380 M) to National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). This fund could have been used to address poverty and injustices, the root cause of the armed conflict. Yet, the government allocates this fund to support its Anti-Terrorism Act, for militarization, harassment of human and Earth rights defenders, and even to the extent of extrajudicial killings of legitimate activists. Note that the Philippine government is concerned with the “local communists,” but it has welcomed a “communist” country to invest in and take over some industries in the country. At this time, the president faces a class suit filed against him in the International Criminal Court, but he refuses to cooperate with the ICC and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights. On the surface, it looks like a paradox or even an oxymoron. But the political analysis will show that the “local communists” are people who defend the sovereignty of the nation, the rights of the peoples, and seek to see political, social, and economic reforms, among others. This is clear in the Joint Hague Declaration of the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines signed on September 1, 1992. Unfortunately, the present regime terminated unilaterally the peace processes and peace talks to forge a durable, peace anchored on justice.





*the aftermath of typhoon Odette.
photo credit to the owner*



*the aftermath of typhoon Odette.
photo credit to the owner*

Advent is about waiting. I imagine the baby Jesus born, not in a manger, but the ruins of the devastation brought about by the typhoon. The baby is vulnerable to the Omicron variant, when visitors do not follow the protocols and do not wear properly their face masks, covering only the mouth, but not the nose! Advent is a season of reflection on how to give oneself to the suffering people. How to embody kenosis? It is a season to be vigilant to follow the steps of the mashiah, or Christ. As Christmas comes, the Christians will hopefully take the meaning of the season seriously. Instead of focusing on food, decors, and holiday fanfares, Christians must celebrate the birth of one who points to the meaning of Christ, the Prince of Peace, by remembering and following the work of the mashiah who said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

Have a blessed Advent and a Joyous Celebration of Christmas 2021!

*Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro
ICF Coordinator*

