



# 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



*Reminder*

## Contributions for the eBook: *Chasing our Dreams for Peace*

Dear All,  
this is a friendly reminder to submit your contributions for the eBook: *Chasing our Dreams for Peace*. If you are planning on submitting an essay, a case study, a short story, poetry, or art to be part of this project, ICF will be very happy to receive your contribution. The deadline for contributions was set for Friday March 4th, if you need more time please contact us. We are still accepting contributions and looking forward to yours. If you have any questions you can find all the relevant information on the ICF [website](#) or contact the ICF team directly.



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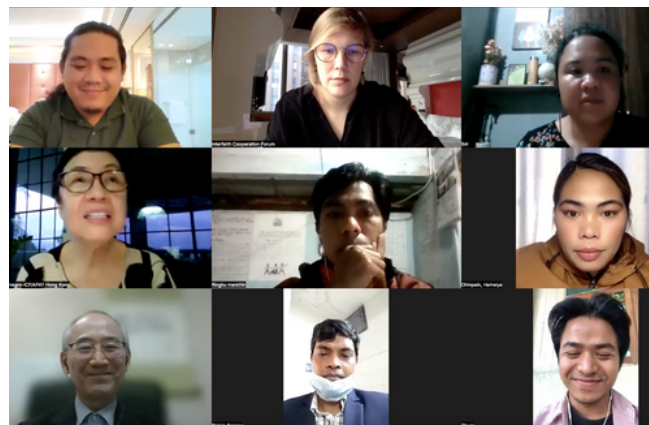
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## ICF Program Committee held its first meeting in 2022

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) Program Committee held its first meeting in 2022 on February 11 via zoom. Four ICF alumni and four APAY staff attended the meeting. The alumni were Rinku Mankhin, an alternate member from Bangladesh, Hein Thura Htet from Myanmar, Dunhill Angelo Maraya, an alternate member, and Hamsiya Olimpain from the Philippines. The ICF staff were Baidido Saganding, Program Officer, Annika Denkmann, BftW seconded personnel to ICF, Dr. Muriel Oreillo-Montenegro, Coordinator. Mr. Nam Boo Won, APAY General Secretary, also attended the meeting.

The meeting started with the greetings from Mr. Nam Boo Won. He also congratulates the ICF and its committee members for the work done in the past year. During the meeting, Dr. Muriel Oreillo-Montenegro reviewed the Term of Reference of the Program Committee members. Some of its members are ending their term this year. Biplob Rangsa, ICF committee member from Bangladesh will finish his term this February 2022. However, due to the need to have a representative from the alumni who joined ICF activities before 2018, Biplob will continue to serve another term. One may recall that each member shall serve the Committee for two years, however, this could be relaxed when necessary. This is a special arrangement as provided for, in the Term of Reference. Meanwhile, ICF will look for potential candidates from the alumni circle to replace inactive members.

The meeting also served as an opportunity to share updates on ICF activities. Baidido Saganding shared an update of the ICF website. Each country will submit brief information about its alumni engagement and activities, to be posted on the website to reach a wider audience. Nepal was the first to submit and update its information on the website. Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the Philippines agreed to submit by early March 2022.



ICF is also expecting the alumni from other countries such as Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, and Timor Leste to submit their articles and photos respectively. Baidido shared an update on the small grant proposals. The deadline for submission of these proposals was on January 15, 2022. Bangladesh, India, the Philippines, and Timor Leste submitted their proposals. These proposals are now under review by the ICF staff. The alumni network may apply for two small grant projects: one for Local Peace Education, Advocacy, and Networking, and the other one for Alumni Follow-up activities. Moreover, Baidido informed the Committee that ICF received two small doable projects from the participants from the Philippines in relation to the November-December workshop.

Annika Denkmann shared the result of the ICF survey as part of the tracer study. Launched in November 2021, the purpose of this survey was to understand the relevance and impact of ICF programs. The survey result will hopefully help ICF to evaluate and plan its programs.

The meeting was also an opportunity to share ICF activities for 2022. The Newswriting workshop scheduled in February was postponed to May this year.

The book entitled *Just Peace in a Globalized Context*, a joint project with the Tribal Study Centre, Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, India is already out of the press. A virtual launching of the book will be planned soon with the Northeast India team. Meanwhile, the ICF e-book project, *Chasing our Dreams for Peace* is still in the making. The committed writers and contributors can still send their essays, stories, poems, poetry, and artworks on or before March 4, 2022.

Overall, the meeting was successful. ICF is thankful to its committee members and APAY for its continued support.

*Baidido Saganding*  
ICF Program Officer

## Reflection

### **Putin's invades the Ukraine: Why the West seems to care, and why it is not enough...**

On Thursday the 24th of February, Putin started the invasion of the Ukraine, an invasion that is not only historically complex to understand but has also been slowly approaching for years. Also on that day, I received plenty of shocked and bewildered messages from friends and family, asking me if I had heard? I had. And I wondered if I had seen a similar outrage and messages when the Taliban took over Afghanistan, or, when the Military Putsch happened in Myanmar. I had not. But now my social media platforms are flooded with messages of outrage and solidarity with the people in the Ukraine. Rallies are being announced and organized. What lies underneath all of these messages is not just empathy with the people in the Ukraine but also fear, fear of all of this happening way too close to home.



Anti-War rally in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Germany © Paul Zinken

Solidarity is not worth much, especially from people in power, if it does not include actual actions to bring about change. But what options for action taking are available? And which do we even want to see happen? Having been denied access to the NATO, mainly by interference of Russia, the Ukraine is not a member. The NATO can condemn the invasion by Russia all they want. But if they were to offer support in the form of troops to defend the Ukraine, a non-NATO member, against Russia, it would most likely escalate this war into a worldwide one. Which cannot be in anyone's interest. So far, on the one hand, we have seen Great Britain sending weapons in support of Ukraine. On the other hand, the German government declined a similar move referring to the country's past and furthermore argued that you cannot simultaneously negotiate in a conflict and equip it with weapons. I agree. But I also need to see their concerns transform into actions that show me that they actually care. It may be too late to work through a few decades' worth of failed communication between the USA, the European Union, and Russia. However, it does not mean that diplomacy can no longer be a useful tool even though the war has already started. It is a common misconception that diplomacy can only be applied pre-war.



A diplomatic approach that does not fuel the weapon industry further and saves lives at the same time can only be the preferred alternative. While the long-term impact this war will have on the rest of the world and how it will affect relations between countries has yet to be seen, the immediate impact this war is having on the people in the Ukraine is painfully obvious and demands quick thinking. There is a definite need to identify actions, which go beyond sanctions; actions that could save lives, but have been ignored in the past. So let us see more people in Berlin, Paris, Tbilisi, and other places take to the streets and have them make demands to their respective governments, demands for real solidarity. So far, all actions have been very reserved and calculated. So while the governments in Europe and elsewhere figure out how much they are willing to give, this war is escalating fast, and costing real lives.

*Annika Denkmann  
BfW Seconded Personnel*

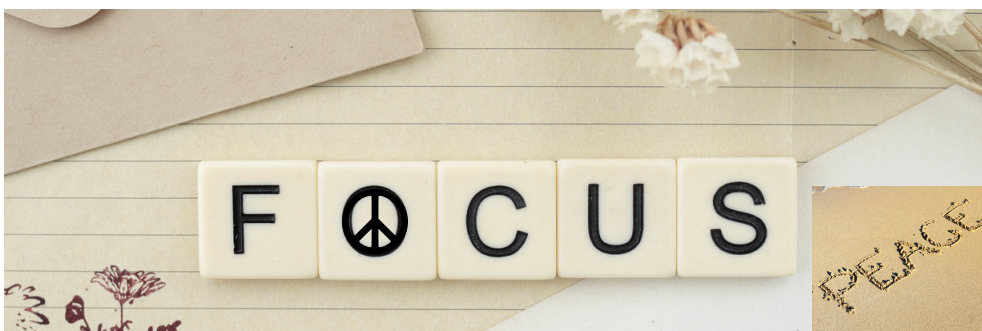


## Reflection: Beyond Covid – Time to Refocus

Spending any amount of time in isolation is a test of patience and a test to one's mental health. It is something that became abundantly clear to me upon check-in for my mandatory quarantine when I was handed the information leaflet for the suicide hotline. I wondered if this is supposed to be reassuring. So what happens when you spend 14 days isolated and the only people you see are the fully hazard suit-dressed PCR test teams, who'd rather be anywhere else. As you are a threat to their health, and of course, to the entire city, therefore you must isolate until proven you are non-threatening. A threat? This may have made sense when there was a zero case within the city, and the inbound traveller was the virus-carrying threat. However, with Hong Kong struggling to contain its biggest outbreak yet, keeping healthy inbound travelers isolated, and test centres occupied with their on-going tests during quarantine, I wonder if the zero-covid policy has finally found its expiration date. An expiration date, which was long foreseen and requested by many as the world slowly opens, living with covid instead of racing against it. Whereas, Hong Kong seems stuck with a strategy that no longer holds any power over the virus. Nothing, of course, changed during my stay. But after 14 days and 15 nights in Hong Kong quarantine, I was set free. A freedom I knew would eventually come from an isolation I went into knowingly after traveling to see my family. A trip that I knew I was privileged to take; which led me into an isolation of my own choosing. An isolation that messes with my head, but ultimately ends as promised and was a choice I made. But what about the people, whose doors do not open after 14 days? Whose doors have been shut from the outside without any knowledge of when they will open again, or will they open at all? Just because the world is still battling with covid, and news outlets are preoccupied with regulations, restrictions, outbreaks or vaccine statistics, does not mean that the governments are not anymore starting wars, throwing people into prisons for speaking their minds, for protesting, for disobeying systems that oppress and deny freedoms.

The world slowly opens and settles for a coexistence with a virus that may never be defeated, that halted lives and occupies the news. It is about time to refocus our attention to other issues that are as prevalent as ever, if not more and need our attention.

*Annika Denkmann  
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## Moving Beyond Multi-track Diplomacy and Big Man Mediation

"What does behind-the-scenes mediation look like, and why should we let go of the "big man" approach to solving conflicts in the 21st century?" Is a question the Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies answered with their recently published eBook: *Moving Beyond Multi-track Diplomacy and Big Man Mediation*. The eBook is available online for free, simply scan the QR code in the picture and start reading. The launch event was recorded as well and is available to watch here.



<https://www.facebook.com/centrepeaceconflictstudies>

## ICF Pushes through the Virtual Training of Trainers on Non-Violent Communication

*"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



ICF is very happy to conduct its long-anticipated Training of Trainers (ToT) on Non-Violent Communication (NVC). We were hoping the pandemic situation would have eased by now so a face-to-face would have been possible. But in order to move forward with our planned activities, we at ICF finally decided to conduct it virtually. The ToT will start on March 7th. It will proceed over the course of 4 weeks, on 3 evening sessions each week via zoom with learning days in a virtual classroom in between. A face-to-face practicum will follow to complete the ToT once the situation allows. The trainer will be Amina Mambuay, from the Philippines. She has been a trainer for ICF in past activities and we are very happy to have her working with us again. For this ToT, 15 participants from 9 different countries have been selected to attend the ToT. The participants have been chosen based on their prior experience with NVC, country of origin, religion and gender balance. ICF strives to have a diverse group of young people attend from different backgrounds. We apologize to all the registered participants who could not be considered this time.

Annika Denkmann  
BftW Seconded Personnel to ICF

## INTERFAITH COOPERATION FORUM

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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 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: When will human beings ever learn?*

I had my early exposure to Lumad life when I was a young student in Mindanao and Luzon, in the Philippine. I encounter the names of places, namely, Kiev (Kyiv), Anatevka and Ukraine during my student days, through the stage play Fiddler on the Roof. Today, the names of these places and of the people I met echo in my mind as news of turmoil flooded the television and my laptop screens.

On February 25, 2022, these news items came out: "Lumad teacher Chad Booc killed by state forces." "Missiles rain down around Ukraine." "Ukraine Crisis Live: Russia Says "First Day Successful" After Declaring War On Ukraine."

"If you assume that there is no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things, then there is a possibility that you can contribute to making a better world."

— Noam Chomsky

Chad Booc is a graduate of the University of the Philippines-Diliman, a state university, and was human rights activist. He was a teacher at the Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV), a school for the Indigenous Peoples (Lumad) in Surigao. The Philippine government has been remiss as it did not provide schools for the Lumads, much more, ones that preserve the culture and spirituality of the indigenous peoples. For his conscientization work that empowered the Lumad students to do critical thinking, he earned the ire of the state, particularly the military.

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The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict red-tagged him long before the military killed him on February 24, 2022, a day before the 36th anniversary of the protest rally that forced the dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. to flee from the country. Killed along with Booc was another Lumad teacher in Southern Mindanao and three others.

“Most of us have been conditioned...since armies are legal, we feel war is acceptable; in general, nobody feels war is criminal or that accepting it is criminal attitude. In fact, we have been brainwashed. War is monstrous. It’s very nature is one of tragedy and suffering.” —The Dalai Lama

On the other side of the globe, bombs thundered as Russia’s Putin announced a “special military operation” in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Days before, he promised the world he will not attack Ukraine even as he already deployed military forces and hardware on the borders of the latter. Ukraine declared its independence from Russia on August 24, 1991, after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), under the consternation of Russia. It is not only the second-largest country in Europe geographically. Ukraine’s desire to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) upsets Putin. Ukraine is rich in natural resources and is a flourishing democratic country. Russia wants to control this wealthy neighbor, and it had already taken a part of it – Crimea in 2014.

The impact of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine will surely affect not only the peace in Europe but also the global business. It could affect Asia as Ukraine is one of the suppliers of wheat and cereals, including the Philippines. Potentially, the war may affect the price of pan de sal, a Filipino favorite bread.

Asia seems to flounder amid the Russia-Ukraine upheaval. Some Asian countries tend to lean towards Russia, with whom they have strong trade relations.

Others tend to keep silent as they have forged an alliance with the United States. I resonate with some observers’ fear that should Russia succeed in defeating and taking back Ukraine, China would follow suit in aggressively taking Taiwan. Yet, NATO would most likely not just take the position of a bystander. This situation spells disaster! It would turn the clock to a century back.

The already elusive world peace will, even more, become just a dream. All of this goes back to human frailty, of hubris. In ancient Greek, hubris, refers to the intentional use of violence to humiliate or degrade. In modern times, hubris takes the meaning. It is the rabid arrogance that makes a person believe that one can do things apart from the divine. Hubris leads one to recognize one’s finitude and limitations in a divinely ordered universe. Hubris is exemplified in the words of Gordon Gekko in the film Wall Street, where he said: “Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. . . Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. " In Christian theology, hubris is associated and even equated to the biblical Greek concept of hamartia, as sin and sinfulness. It is not just as an error as modern discourse view it.

The Hebrew word shalom, the Akkadian shalamu, and other Semitic words, including the Arabic salaam, mean peace. Shalom and shalamu are inclusive of wholeness, health, well-being, safety, security, and prosperity. However, peace is humanity’s responsibility. When will peace as shalom become a reality? When will human beings ever learn? If we, human beings – especially the leaders of nations – will not turn back from their hubris, from their patriarchal and phallocentric greed, and from their desire to control, peace will remain elusive. Each and every one, therefore, must work hard and nurture the future leaders of the world to become peacebuilders in this world.

