



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 is planning its first face-to-face activity since the beginning of the pandemic

From June 6-10 ICF will conduct its first face-to-face activity since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This will be a follow-up to the virtual training of trainers on Nonviolent Communication (NVC), which took place in March. All participants, who absolved the online training successfully are invited to come together in Dumaguete, Philippines for the face-to-face training this June. We are very happy to kick-off our face-to-face activities again with this training and look forward to more to come in the future. If you want to learn more about what happened in the training so far, please read the article on the next page and you can already look forward to reading another piece on the face-to-face training in our next edition of the Peacebuilders coming out by the end of June.



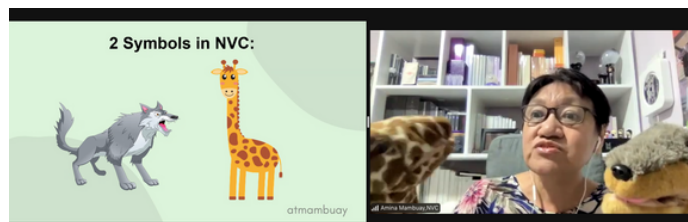
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ICF organized a virtual Training of Trainers on Nonviolent Communication

From March 7th to 30th, 2022, the Interfaith Cooperation Forum conducted a ten-day Peace Institute of virtual Training of Trainers (ToT) on Nonviolent Communication. Twelve participants attended the training. Six (6) of them were male and 6 were females from six Asian countries, namely, Bangladesh, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Nepal, and Timor-Leste. The training-of-trainers sessions were held for three hours on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday every week. Tuesdays and Thursdays were set aside to work on assigned tasks to participants for practical learning. ICF expects the certificate holders of the ICF Peace Institute to contribute as facilitators in some ICF activities, as well as in activities in their local or national contexts beyond ICF. ICF reached out to a diverse group of young people who wanted to contribute to promoting peace through learning and practicing nonviolent communication.

The whole Training of Trainers went through different learning session outlines and practicum for the participants. The session outline was about the introduction of Nonviolent Communication, The NVC model, principles of NVC, four important key elements of NVC (Observation, Feeling, Need, and Request), Empathy, and NVC languages (Jackal and Giraffe language). The participants were expected to read two textbooks as required reading. Using Google classroom, they interacted with the facilitators, fellow trainees or “classmates,” and hosts. Through this platform, they submitted their written assignments and other documents, both for individual and group assignments. For a simulated practicum for group facilitation, the participants teamed up into three groups and prepared the module to be used for facilitation. They also wrote their everyday journal for reflections.

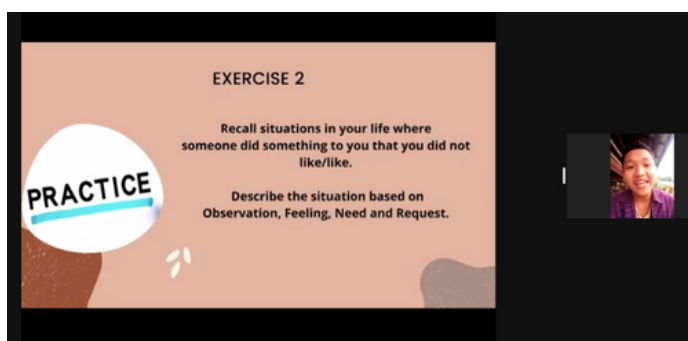


On Day One, on March 7, the Training of Trainers started with greetings from Mr. Nam Boo Won, the General Secretary of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs. Dr. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, the ICF Coordinator, gave an orientation on the program flow and introduced the work of ICF. The resource person, Ms. Amina T. Mambuay gave introductory inputs on the topics of nonviolent communication, such as The NVC model, and the principles of NVC. Ms. Lara Mambuay served as the assistant facilitator. Nonviolent communication is a practical and learnable process that leads people to communicate with themselves and others in a spirit of empathy and honesty. It helps people for expressing their own needs, desire, and values to fulfill by considering others from the heart.

On the second and third days, the resource person gave her input on the four important key components of the NVC, namely, Observation, Feeling, Need and Request. These components play a vital role in meeting the mutual needs and aspirations of people with compassionate nature.

On the fourth, fifth, and sixth days, Ms. Amina focused her input on a more detailed look into what is empathy and what is not empathy. She presented the practice of the “four ears” (jackal in, jackal out, and Giraffe in, Giraffe out) process of listening and speaking. She showed how these processes are important in sending and receiving messages from each other with clarity and empathy as a form of NVC language.

On the seventh day, the resource person gave various information, directions, and suggestions to participants for the integration and practicum. She discussed in detail how to facilitate and conduct a nonviolent communication workshop. For the simulated practicum, the three groups with four members each prepared their modules.



On the eighth, ninth, and tenth days, the facilitating teams did their practicum on nonviolent communication for two hours. Each team invited 4 to 5 guest participants from their respective countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Philippines, and Timor-Leste. The guest participants responded actively and positively during the simulated practicum in facilitation. At the end of the facilitation, Resource persons, the staff of ICF, and other participants provided their valuable feedback, comments, and guidance for the participants to improve.

On the eleventh day, the participants read their written impressions or reflection about the training of trainers based on their daily journals. The participants as well as the resource person and the staff of ICF also expressed their impressions about the training of trainers. The participants shared what they have learned from the training of trainers and what kind of changes has come into their life. They expressed how the training encouraged them to use a language that increases goodwill and allows their natural compassion to flourish in their daily life. Everything added a new dimension to participants gaining new experiences and knowledge in nonviolent communication.

Rinku Mankhin
SOP 2019





Reflection on the Training

Ma'am Amina's word

Sharing experience is the most important for the trainers because the trainers cannot keep their experiences, they are those people who going to share their experiences with others, I sometimes love to be a trainer but I don't like to share, after joining the TOT I realized that sharing should be my habit if I want to be a trainer.

During a month that I participated Nonviolent communication training I have changed many things in my life starting from the communication or the word that will come out of my mouth to the action and the mind that I have.

Nonviolent Communication is a practical and learnable process for communication with empathy, honesty, power, and compassion. This definition of NVC has been influenced me to be mature, I have learned how to be honest to myself and be honest to others, and also to communicate with empathy. I realized that myself before is not the same as who I am today after participating in the training of Nonviolent communication. It really influenced my ability to transform blame, and criticism into respectful communication. I have to be big heart if I want nonviolence.

One best principle of NVC : Everyone's needs are equally important

I take the first principle is the most important for me because I am living in an environment where each people just care about their needs not others and I applied it as well, I did not take everyone's needs are equally important. however the training influenced me to follow and do as what I have been learned, take everyone's need are equally important.

The lessons that I learned:

The NVC taught me to be careful with my words, before I do something I need to make sure I do with my heart not to hurt myself to hurt people.

Connection session: now, I can express myself honestly, connect with myself, and check my feeling and need.

Observation: I know how to observe something, I have to make sure I am getting the right message before I share the information with other people.

Judgment : In order to avoid your judgment, you need to ask and find out the real information especially, feelings, and needs before your judge. Sometimes your mouth cannot tell your feeling but your body will. We can have the same problem or experience but we have different perspectives so what might be good to you doesn't mean good to me as well.

I will always remember this last lesson and apply to my daily life: To make your friends feel better and their needs were met. Do not interrupt people when they are speaking, you let the person speak until such time the person stops talking that is the time to join her/him. We need to listen from the heart, just be there, just listen, you can just guide because at the end that person will sort out the problem by him/herself and will feel better.

Give empathy to ourselves, give time to yourself, know you met needs.

*Unedited Reflection by
Leônia Freitas,
ToT NVC Participant*



Nepal Unites organized Alumni Follow-Up and Discussion on Youth Challenges

Nepal Unites organized a one-day face-to-face workshop on Nepal Unites Alumnus Follow-Up and Discussion on Youth Challenge” in Nepalgunj, Banke, Lumbini Province, which is in the Mid-Western Region of Nepal on April 12, 2022. A total of 24 participants from different faiths and religions attended the workshop, 14 of them were female, and 10 were male. These alumni already participated in the 3-day thematic workshop on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation on 11th -13th March 2020, which was financially supported by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum.

Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman, the National Director of Nepal Unites, shared about the 2nd Cohort of Global Unites Master Trainer Academy, Global Unites Life Cycle, Nepal Unites Goals for 2022, School Relation Tour, National Conference, Paying NU Membership, Fundraising, Testimonials, and Volunteering.



A writer and journalist, Shahida Bano Shah, articulated her experiences with the problems, religious conflict, and disturbances that happened due to politics. She also shared cases where due to politics, instead of things benefiting the community, some people created confusion, sowed misconception, and misunderstanding. Bano also reminded the attendees of the religious disturbance in Narainapur, Banke where the Muslims and Hindus had separated due to conflict for a long time. She pointed out that the youth have an important role to play in reconciliation efforts. It is not necessary to organize a big program and hold a press conference in doing reconciliation efforts and creating harmony. These things are done just from small steps, and even a talk over tea to make harmony and reconciliation in the community, Bano said.

During the discussion on youth challenges, many of the youth challenges has been shared by the participants. Among them was the lack of opportunity for leadership. Others are qualified for a job, but there are no opportunities. Some youths do not have a good education. Others do not have access to government programs for the youth. The youth are not given a chance to participate in decision-making in local government. As a leader, Rajan Varma appreciates Nepal Unites' efforts to organize this follow-up meeting and discussion on youth challenges. He called upon the youth to make a declaration letter or a statement on the challenges the Nepalese youth are facing and organize a program with the stakeholders, political leaders, and other concerned parties.

*Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman
National Director/Nepal Unites
SoP 2017*

ICF Albay Team Conducted a Symposium on Women Trailblazers

“It comforts me to know that activities like this are being conducted to call people together and fight for a gender-equal world which at the end of the day, I deem, is everyone's responsibility and could make all the difference in our pursuit for a better tomorrow.”

- Ma. Jacintha L. De Leon, Participant

Women, across time, have continued to face adversities and struggles in the fight to have their rightful place in society. Up to this day, the fight still stands as women, despite decades of proving their contributions and functions in society, remain to be marginalized and discriminated against. Hence, we have the never-ending responsibility to break the bias every day and create safe spaces for women all over the world where their contributions are duly recognized, and their potential acknowledged in changing the world.

To do our part in championing the contributions and potentials of women, the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) Albay Team conducted the “ICF Women Trailblazers Symposium” on March 26, 2022, at McDonald’s Conference Room-Gregorian Mall with the theme “Break the Bias.” This activity was part of the National Women’s Month celebration. The event was also an echo activity of the ICF Virtual Thematic Workshop on Women's Rights, Ecofeminism, and Trailblazers in the Struggle for Women's Rights, which took place in the fourth quarter of 2021. The ICF Women Trailblazers Symposium sought to spotlight Filipino female leaders who thrive in the promotion and protection of women’s rights, climate change adaptation, mitigation, and response and peacebuilding in this male-dominated world. The activity drew 31 participants, 23 being females and 8 being males. All participants were Christians of diverse traditions and ages ranging from 13 to 38.



The event was also dubbed SHE Talks. It started with a prayer and was followed by a sharing of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum’s background. It was then immediately followed by the first session, with Ms. Almayne Joyce R. Mayor as the speaker, providing a brief look at the four waves of feminism. After which, Ms. Aliza Claire D. Beato took the floor and spoke on Women Leadership in Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation, and Response, which marked the first topic for Session 2’s SHE Talks. Following Ms. Beato was Ms. Sheryl V. Balonso to discuss Women Leadership in Peacebuilding. And finally, for the last topic on Women Leadership in the Promotion and Protection of Women’s Rights, the participants were fortunate to hear from Ms. Czarina Mae R. Cantorne from the Commission on Human Rights – Region V. The resource speakers noted above have discussed historical female trailblazers in relation to their respective areas, while additionally raising consciousness about feminism, ecofeminism, women’s rights, and other issues.



They also highlighted their empowerment journeys in the hopes of inspiring the participants. To close the activity, the participants had the opportunity to share their insights through a poster-making contest, which was followed by a crowd pledge to #BreakTheBias led by Ms. Abegail Andes.

Almayne Joyce R. Mayor
John Jomar Ll. Lunas
ICF Alumni



Reflection on the Philippine 2022 Elections: The Era of Disinformation

As of this writing, only six days are left before the May 9, 2022 elections. As we get closer to the make-or-break day for the Philippines, and as a voter, my anxiety is going like a roller coaster that only goes up, and never comes down.

This election and campaign season is one of the most remarkable times in Philippine history. Unlike the previous campaigns, people nowadays are more engaged/ With the youth sector consisting more than half of the voters' total population, the 2022 Philippine Elections become louder than ever. The youth are now bolder to speak up and stand firm for their beliefs. The political rallies have become more visible and trending amidst the threats of the pandemic. Looking at this, one can conclude that the voters of this election are passionate about what they are fighting for— and that is promising and inspiring.

Seeing the youth make a move and speak for themselves and the nation is a good indicator that the youth is our motherland's future. Perhaps Jose Rizal was right. This campaign season has revealed that despite the differences, we can sit together around the same table, share our aspirations and hopes for our nation, and fight as one to win our future.

However, we need to look at the root cause of why we see these swelling rallies. Why do people on social media make noises? Why do many choose to get out of their comfort zones and accepted the risks of choosing to fight? Why has this election become not just a competition of politicians versus politicians, but people versus people? At some point, the duration of this campaign has shown how the Filipinos are divided in terms of supporting possible leaders. Yet it also shows how people could be united when it comes to the expected goal— a better Philippines. But what divided us despite our united aspirations?

The Internet, social media, online platforms, and the media as a whole have been playing an important role and influence on the political stand and choices that Filipinos make. With the information that the media is providing the people, we come up with decisions. This means that depending on inaccurate information that the media provides, the people might also come up with the wrong decision. This is the problem of media in the Philippines. It has become machinery to spread disinformation and propaganda. With the rising population of Filipinos who are immersed on the internet for long hours a day, people have become dependent on what the media feeds them. We, the people, often fall victims to disinformation sown through memes, spliced videos, and by trolls and influencers who are paid to create misleading content, fabricated truths, etcetera.

Do we blame ourselves? At some point, yes. For those people who know the truth and choose to ignore it, I would say, yes. We blame those who choose to believe in content that is not accurate and credible. But I cannot blame the vulnerable individuals who are simply trapped and exploited due to a lack of empowerment and education about the veracity of the information fed to them. It is important to note that not all of us are privileged enough to have the resources and access to truth and information. Social media, for example, is not a platform for everyone. Some people use social media without sufficient knowledge of its use. With the manipulation of trolls and people who are spreading disinformation, the algorithm of social media platforms changes.

If they fail to filter which ones to believe, and which ones to reject, they become victims of false information. That is happening to our fellow citizens who do not have enough guidance and opportunity to responsibly use social media. In the case of the people who live in remote areas with no internet access or television, they depend on radios.

However, it is a frustrating fact that many radio companies and frequencies also share falsified information and their broadcast reach people in far places – ones who only depend on the information through the radio.

Because of this disinformation machinery, many people became believers in distorted and revised truths. Some of them made their truth a façade of their ego as they do not want to accept the real truth. As a consequence, Philippine politics has become a politics of personalities instead of being a politics of platforms. On the FB page, people are fighting in the comment sections over their candidates. People have become keyboard warriors to argue and beat each other. But the frightening fact is that not all of them are real people. These are mostly just names with fake accounts created to stir arguments and provoke real people to engage in virtual political arguments.

People, therefore, have become more vocal and braver in speaking up for the truth. This 2022 election ceases to be a competition among leaders. It has become a fight against disinformation, historical revisionism, and troll domination. Campaigns in the past elections are different by far today. The youth has seen the injustices and the manipulation of our Philippine democracy.

Many versions of truth may be fabricated and disseminated all over media platforms, but our fight for the absolute truth shall never end. Our vote this upcoming election is a vote for our country's future for the next six years. Our decision on the 9th of May will determine our fate whether we can recover from the pandemic or not. Our choice can make a difference only if we choose the one who can make it happen. And our efforts to let the absolute truth prevail can ripple down to eradicate the spread of the lies that have been exploiting our people and disrespecting our nation.

Jaymark Ferenal
Philippines

Thematic Workshop 2020-2021



LIFT HIGH THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

A Reflection for the Sunday of Celebrating Jesus' Resurrection

Scripture Texts: Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24;

Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18

A month ago, I received an invitation to craft the liturgy for the Ecumenical Easter Sunrise Service held annually by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). The first thing that came to my mind was how to elaborate, through a contextual liturgy, the message of Jesus' resurrection among our people who continually suffer and are hard-pressed due to the endless social, economic, political, health, and environmental crisis.

Looking into the narrative of the resurrection from the Gospel according to John, we could see two images of a woman - one who is weeping and the other one, proclaiming Jesus' rising from the dead. The weeping woman in the narrative was Mary of Magdala, a faithful disciple of Jesus who was mistakenly accused as a prostitute and a woman possessed by evil spirits according to patriarchal and sexist scholars' interpretations..

Mary of Magdala or Mary Magdalene resembles the image of the Inang Bayan (Motherland) who endlessly weeps over the suffering, agony, and death of her children who are victimized by oppression, corruption, deceit, dehumanization, and greed for wealth and position. The weeping woman today is seen in the mothers, wives and loved ones of the victims of extrajudicial killings, the false drug war, and of those wrongly accused and illegally detained, innocent individuals.

We are even led to a question of faith. If Christ has truly risen and triumphed over the world's power and dominions, why do we still see around us the problems of poverty and suffering? Did Jesus triumph truly over evil and suffering? What is the message of Jesus' resurrection today as we are faced with untruth, injustice, unpeace, and the worsening conditions of our people?

Amid the pandemic and the worsening socio-political and economic situations, we the Filipino people - are facing these heartbreaking realities. Stomachs are grumbling. People die due to the lack of access to quality healthcare and medical services. Those in power trampled the people's human dignity and the basic rights. Those who help the poor and speak the truth like church workers - Pastor Nathaniel "Dodo" Vallente (UCCP) and Kuya Aldeem Yañez (IFI), labor union leaders, and activists are red-tagged, accused, illegally arrested, and detained without any legal grounds. The persecution of truth-tellers, human rights defenders, development workers, peace advocates, and prophets of our time has worsened. The Lumads of Mindanao and other cultural minorities are harassed, killed, and incarcerated for their love of the ancestral land. Laborers are endlessly suffering from unjust treatment, low wages, and unsafe working conditions. Farmers and fisherfolks experience hunger and grave poverty due to unjust government policies. Families of victims who fell prey to the false drug war campaign are threatened for rising against the injustices. Filipino migrant workers continue to experience oppression and slavery by foreign employers. Women continue to suffer maltreatment and injustice from people and systems subscribing to patriarchy. Children are peddled by their own families to online sex predators for financial gains. The LGBTQIA community members are judged wrongly and gazed upon with much apathy. People living with HIV and AIDS are dehumanized due to our lack of empathy amid suffering and hardships. Earth rights are violated, and the environment suffers from destruction. Calamities, both natural and human-caused, worsen the poverty among our people. The country yearns and hopes for a leader who will serve the interests of most of the population, especially those who are on the margins.



These conditions and situations have dampened our spirits, crushed our beings, and entombed us into the darkness of desperation and frustration. We, like the Inang Bayan, have been constantly weeping and wailing over the endless sufferings of our people. Our tears have dried but still, we have felt that we have not grieved over the loss of people due to murders and the ongoing pandemic. We have been overwhelmed by grief, trauma, and hopelessness as if every single day was a journey to Calvary, bearing our heavy burdens and the cross of our suffering people. Our people have been experiencing their individual and collective crucifixions. They are left hanging and made to die without any help or support from those who promised them a good and better life during electoral campaigns. For all these, we continue to weep and mourn.

But as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, despite being hard-pressed, broken, crushed, persecuted, vilified, maligned, red-tagged, mutilated, and imprisoned in dark cells that resemble tombs, God enables us the body of Christ today - the churches and the communities of faith that profess Jesus as the Messiah, the one who is biased with the poor and the oppressed, to rise up and decry this tyrannical, oppressive, inhumane, destructive, punitive and cruel regime.

As the body of Christ today, we rise from the dark tombs to stand against powers and systems that dehumanize people and desecrate the whole of creation. The message and the challenge of the resurrection is rising and giving life to those who have lost hope, and even faith, to work and act for a better and just future.

Meanwhile, we also focus on the image of the woman who proclaimed Jesus who rose from the dead. Despite deep grief and uncertainty, she ran to tell the disciples about the occurrence that Jesus' lifeless body has disappeared from the tomb. Her courage to proclaim the resurrection amid the threat of persecution from the ruling powers resounds until today.

The message of the resurrection is made even louder today with the proclamation of women who carry on with the liberation struggle not just for themselves but for the greater community. Women must be given the right place not just in the resurrection story but in our life and ministry as churches and in the greater community. We must express our solidarity with them as they carry on with the struggle for emancipation.

In the Gospel narrative, we see the Risen Jesus lifting the spirit of the weeping woman who was in grave desperation. We see the woman until today weeping for the Jesuses who have been victims of oppression, slavery, exploitation, greed, and impunity of those in power. But as churches and faith communities, we are the body of Christ today and we are called today to lift the spirit of the Inang Bayan through our ministry of bearing the message of comfort, support, and solidarity with the oppressed and taken advantage of.

As we rise as Christ's body, we give hope and inspiration to our people who struggle against adversities and oppression. The triumph of Christ over darkness and death persuades us to proclaim what is good and just, advance the welfare of many, and fight against evil and the vested self-interests of those in power. The resurrection of Jesus fortifies our faith and stance of advancing the liberating work of proclaiming the good news to the poor, freedom to the captives, sight to the blind, deliverance to the oppressed, and by reminding the people, through our bold prophetic witness, that the day of God's favor, God's reign will come into fruition.

May we, in our efforts, proclaim our witness of the resurrection as we boldly declare, like the women and the disciples: "We have seen Jesus!" However, not all people could see and feel the resurrection in our daily lives because we are overwhelmed with sufferings and strife.



So, what are the images of Christ's resurrection for all of us today? We see Christ rising from the dead in the lives of women challenging the patriarchal systems and fighting against every maltreatment and oppression. We see Christ rising in the youth and children dreaming for a better future for their own and the society. We see Christ rising in the cultural minorities striving hard to defend their traditions and the ancestral domain. We see the risen Christ in the workers and union leaders who continue the struggle for life-giving wages and safe working conditions and in migrant Filipino workers yearning for upliftment of their own families and the nation. We see the risen Christ in the members of the LGBTQIA resisting discrimination and judgment of the society, in the farmers and fisherfolks rising up against oppressive systems and policies. We see the risen Christ in people living with HIV and AIDS fighting for their rights to proper medical attention, in families of the victims of the fake drug war rising to claim justice for their slain loved ones.



We see the risen Christ in communities recuperating from typhoons, earthquakes, and other calamities; and in organizations and individuals advocating for earth rights by opposing reclamations, mining operations, and many other environment-destructive acts.

Indeed, Christ is alive among us today. Christ's body has risen from the dark tomb. Christ's body at present is the ecumenical church united to carry on with the task of proclaiming the truth to a society engulfed with lies, fake news, troll farms, revisionism, misinformation, and disinformation. The body of Christ in our present context - the church people, the clergy, and the laity, are called to struggle hand in hand against the evils with Christ's everlasting Light.

As Christ's risen body at present, we are called to proclaim God's justice and peace in all our works and ministries. We are then called to lift high the Light of Christ and proclaim God's love that is unending and powerful enough to defeat darkness, death, and the evils of our time. Siya Nawa!

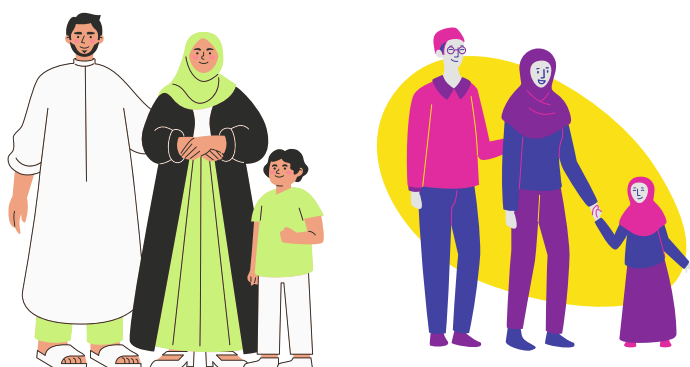
Klein Emperado

The Muslim World moves toward the end of 2022 Ramadan Observance

When the Muslim world sees the crescent moon in the sky, whether in the Philippines or in other countries, the observance of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan ends. This movable observance culmination could be on the evening of May 2, 2022. This year's Ramadan observance began on April 2, 2022. The Festival of Eid al-Fitr, or the Feast of Breaking the Fast, marks the end of Ramadan when Muslims gather to give thanks to Allah for a successful month.

Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam and the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. During this month, Muslims abstain from eating, drinking, and all forms of immoral behavior, including unkind thoughts. But more than this, Ramadan is a period of reflection, communal prayer in the mosque, and reading of the Qur-an. Ramadan is a month of rejuvenation, devotion, joy, and spiritual elevation. God Allah forgives the past sins of those who observe the holy month of Ramadan with fasting, prayer, and faithful intention.

The Muslims observe the month of Ramadan in three stages. The first stage is the Rahmah, which covers the first ten days giving emphasis on seeking the boundless mercy of Allah. The second stage is the Maghfirah, the second set of 10 days when people focus on seeking forgiveness (Istigfar) of Allah. The third stage is the final set of ten days that gives emphasis on safety or salvation from the fire of Hell (Nijat). The Muslim person's prayer on these days focuses on invoking Allah to protect the Muslims from the fire of Hell.



Ramadan is a month of sacrifice for Muslims, and so they observe fasting. Yet, women who are pregnant and menstruating women, children, those with severe illnesses, and the elderly need not sacrifice fasting. There are, however, conditions on the exemptions, namely:

- a.) a pregnant woman may observe fasting, only if there is an assurance that the baby is safe;
- b.) a menstruating woman will continue to observe fasting once her menstruation period is over;
- c.) girl children who have had already their first menstruation period, and boys who are 15 years old may be allowed to observe fasting with parental guidance as a training;
- d.) severely sick persons in a critical situation are exempted from fasting; and
- e.) elderly persons who are still capable of fasting may be allowed to do so, except when their bodies could no longer bear the impact of fasting.

Persons with conditions mentioned above may do extra fasting days after Ramadan days when they are able. They can also give or provide food for the needy when necessary.

Ramadan is the way of almighty Allah to show that everyone is equal despite differences in gender, social, economic, and political status. In Ramadan, everyone must observe fasting, except for those who are exempted but with consequences. Muslims believe that Ramadan teaches them to practice self-discipline, self-control, sacrifice, and empathy for those who are less fortunate. As many Muslims experienced, the month of Ramadan is one full of blessings. It is a month when unexpected blessings come. These blessings prove that the almighty Allah is the one who provides for the people in this world.



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: Peace Needs a United Lobby!

War is “conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many“, with only a very few making huge fortunes, wrote retired United States Marine Corps Major General, Smedley D. Butler, in his 1935 book *War is a Racket*. Unfortunately, his statement is still as true today as it was then. War is an industry and a very lucrative one. The arms industry does not only make a lot of profit, but furthermore has one of the most powerful lobbies, which leads to even more spending from governments. This massive industry comes with power and profit, which are unfortunately deemed more valuable than human lives. This is especially attractive when the few who profit are not actually risking their own lives in any of the wars, which keep this industry thriving. I am not advocating for medieval battlefields, with the leader on the frontlines on horseback sword in hand or maybe a duel between state heads. I am, however, convinced that when confronted with their own mortality, some people might reconsider before they declare war. Nevertheless, there are certain heads of states that are fond of being photographed on horseback. We could add a sword in the mix and see how far he gets.

The main reasons why peace does not have an influential united lobby are also the main reasons why the arms industry has such a lobby: Profit and power. In order to stay in business, they need nations to be prepared for war at all times. This means stoking an imagined fear; fear of being overtaken by a foreign government, fear of the strength of another nation, and of course the need for readiness to defend or to interfere when threatened. All these threads of paranoia are fixed with arms, which represent power. In contrast, people advocating for peace seek neither power nor profit. They seek to distribute both equally.

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A united influential lobby for peace is not a new demand, neither an existing strong arms industry.. However watching Putin trying to take over the Ukraine, Russia's own military equipment, and lots of arms support to Ukraine from other nations, brings the arms industry back in focus. This is not to mention all the other on-going crisis in the world, where weapons are a daily tool, and the arms industry makes further profits with lives lost.

A united lobby for peace also comes to mind when observing Marine Le Pen gain over 40% in the presidential elections in France this past Sunday, April 10th and 24th . Yes, Emmanuel Macron won a second term of French presidency. The amount of support for the right wing Le Pen was and is scary. It confirms a dangerous trend Europe has been leaning towards in the past decade or so. A trend towards nationalism, right wing parties were gaining more and more support with seats in parliaments and cabinets, having influence on countries' foreign and domestic politics. History seems to be repeating itself over and over again. History repeating itself seems to be a very real thread in the Philippines as well, where the son of the former Dictator Marcos is up for presidential elections in May.

And while the world fought and is holding its breath regarding past and upcoming elections, this month of April 2022 marked a rare simultaneous occurrence of Passover, Easter, and Ramadan. On Friday the 15th of April Christians commemorated the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, and celebrated Easter on Sunday, marking their belief in his resurrection. On Friday, Jewish people celebrated the eve of Pesach, commonly called Passover, which commemorates the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, and the end of their slavery. That weekend as well, Muslims around the world marked another Friday, their weekly holiday, within the month of Ramadan, which began on April 2nd and will end on May 2nd. This coincidence in dates is unusual, especially as fast as the proximity of the Islamic Ramadan to the Christian Lent or the dates of Pesach and Easter is concerned.

This is only possible because unlike the Christian calendar, which is determined by the course of the sun and is widely used in the Western world, the Islamic calendar is aligned with the moon and the lunar year. The Islamic cycle of holidays moves across the Western calendar over the course of three decades. Therefore this rare occasion can only occur every three decades or so. Maybe this can serve as a reminder to people to remember and respect each other's religions all year, every year, and not just every three decades, when it happens to make the news for its simultaneous occurrence. Perhaps, this occurrence is also a subtle call to wage a united front, or a united lobby for peace in this world.

One can only hope that there will come a day when peace prevails and people learn from the past.

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