



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



Nepal Unites organized a two-day workshop on social media handling

On July 22–23, 2022, Nepal Unites, a chapter of Global Unites, a youth organization active in 13 countries, held a two-day workshop on social media handling. The present context has had many detrimental effects on the use of social media. Many individuals have are victims to scammers, fraudsters, and other con artists. The team believed that the message should be delivered timely to reach out to young people to spread awareness with the message on how to use social media appropriately. The Nepal Unites thought that this was a need of the time. With the support of Global Unites, and upon the recommendation, Mr. Danu Innasithamby, (<https://www.facebook.com/DanuInnasithamby>) a media personality based in Sri Lanka, was invited as the main facilitator.

The two-day workshop was indeed a success. Everyone was welcomed to attend the session and engage in meaningful and active participation. Anubhuti Bhattarai, a representative of Nepal Unites, oversaw participant registration on the first day of the workshop. The national anthem was played to kick off the event. In his introductory remarks, Mohammad Jiyaul Rahaman, the President of Nepal Unites, welcomed each and every participant. Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman, the National Director, provided information on Nepal Unites and Global Unites, as well as how to get involved in the organization. He also highlighted how many countries the Unites movement is active in. Rajan Bhandari, the Nepal Unites Program Coordinator, introduced the facilitator, the guest visitors, and the participants. One should note that almost all the leaders and members of Nepal Unites are also ICF Alumni.

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The speakers and facilitators were highly engaging. They provided information for the participants. A representative of the Nepal Police, Central Cyber Bureau in Bhotahity, Kathmandu, Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Pradin Tamrakar led discussions on cybercrime, cyber issues, cyber security, cyberbullying, current trends, and cyber legislation in Nepal.

Mr. Danu provided the instructions on how to utilize social media for local advocacy as well as to promote local customs, culture, and products on the global market. He demonstrated the power of social media in changing systems and mobilizing people even in the absence of funding. He also shared how the GOTAGOGAMA (GGG) campaign, which is the country's largest brand, utilizes social media. He went into further detail throughout the discussion on the possibilities for peacebuilding and the new spaces that social media can help people connect, coordinate, and mobilize around peace.



Session led by Mr. Danu

The presentation by Dr. Gopal Dhakal was important for understanding how social media affects a person's mental health. The Nepal Unites team also recognized Dr. Gopal Dhakal, a psychologist, for his invaluable commitment to community peace and well-being through the Mental Health Initiation in Nepal.

The organizers greatly acknowledged the workshop participants' feedback. After learning about the fraud email lottery and other cyber concerns, participant Jeevan Bhandari gave his thoughts.

He also provided statistics on various social media users to raise awareness of this kind of problem. On social media, Nanu Maharjan also expressed how the lockdown's backlash made her feel. According to Maharjan, many users had psychological issues because of their increased usage of social media. She noted that there are lengthy materials there that are unattractive to the users.

The workshop attendees included 10 females and 14 males who qualified after screening. The organizers selected the participants based on their responses to the questions on the online registration forms and on their geographical proximity. Mr. Sagar Panday, a “Life Skills Coach” came as an invited observer during the two-day workshop. At the end of the workshop, the participants received their participation certificates from the main facilitator and observer.



Group picture

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The ICF Alumni-led CPETR Bangladesh organized a Food distribution program

On July 12, 2022, the Centre for Peace Education, Training and Research CPETR-Bangladesh conducted relief services by distributing food to the 120 flood-affected families of Fulbari, Roghunathpur, Kalapani, Kaubari, and Jaganatpur in Kolmakanda Upazila of Netrakona District, Bangladesh. The food distribution program took place at the Baptist Church of Roghunathpur, Kolmakanda Upazila. Out of a total of one hundred twenty families (120), seventy (70) of them were Christians, thirty (30) were Muslims, and twenty (20) were Hindus. The food and relief distribution program aimed to support the flood-affected people so that they survive during these natural calamities. The Bookland Foundation and Bhairavi provided financial support for this food distribution program in collaboration with the Centre for Peace Education, Training, and Research Bangladesh.

The Centre selected the Raghunathpur Baptist Church located in Kolmakanda Upazila as the point location for the distribution activity. It is about 20 kilometers from Birisiri. On the morning of July 12, 2022, the Centre hired a Lorry (van) to transport the food items from Birisiri to Raghunathpur. We reached Raghunathpur Baptist church towards noon. We collected the names of the beneficiaries in advance. Based on the list, we distributed the relief goods to 120 flood-affected families of Fulbari, Roghunathpur, Kalapani, Kaubari, and Jaganatpur in Kolmakanda Upazila of Netrakona District. Our relief packets contained rice, salt, lentils, flour, and potatoes. Those who participated in the food distribution activity, Rinku Mankhin, the president of CPTRB, Drubo Rangsa and Nishat Afroze members of CPTRB, Toru Shahriar Shorgo, the executive committee member of the Bookland Foundation, and some volunteers from the local community.



CPTRB Team Members distributing food to beneficiaries

The Centre for Peace Education, Training and Research Bangladesh is a non-government, non-profit and voluntary organization. It was formed on May 28, 2022, by some ICF alumni and some local youth. The Centre primarily seeks to encourage the people, especially the youth, to contribute strongly to the efforts for peacebuilding and harmony from their hearts. Our vision is to walk together with people who have the passion to speak, work, and walk for peace. Nine (9) ICF alumni from Bangladesh national forum are involved in this voluntary organization.

Flood is a common affair in Bangladesh, killing over 5000 people, destroying more than seven million homes, and destroying properties and crops. Excessive rains in monsoon, water flowing from nearby hills, and overflowing rivers. Flood hits Bangladesh annually due to the monsoon rains. The floods cover about 26000 square kilometers (10000 sq. mi), around 18% of the country, taking thousands of lives and destroying homes and crops. The water came from the hills of Meghalaya, India, and the overflowing canals. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), a total of 14 districts of Bangladesh and 388 Unions were affected by the flash flood. As of June 20, 2022, this government agency recorded a total of 2,492 cases of people afflicted with diseases and injuries due to the flood.

The flood on June 17, 2022, affected more than 4.3 million people. On June 20, 2022, the Centre invited the community to assist the flood victims. The Bookland Foundation an institute of arts, culture, and media communication, along with Bhairavi, an organization for cultural research and performing arts, extended their support.

Rinku Mankhin
ICF Alumnus,
Bangladesh



CPTRB Team with beneficiaries of food distribution programme

‘Women's Leadership in Muslim Community’

Nepal is a country in South Asia. Nepal has at the 21st century but its position in global context still remains as one of the least developed countries. The country has a Muslim population of around 1.164 million Muslims comprising 4.4% of the total population of Nepal. The Muslims in Nepal possess a rich cultural heritage but they are lagging far behind in educational development in reference to many communities. There is the existence of wide disparity between male and female within the Muslim community. Literacy and education qualification are the vital indicators of women's social status. These are not only crucial factors for availing of employment opportunities created in the process of modernization but also for communication with the outside world as with increasingly educated males within the household.

The socialization patterns in Muslim community are such that young boys are prepared for the world of productive work and decision making of every field, while girls are trained to be household, mother and service providers. The main reason for Muslim women not accessing education is that the concept of women work should be limited only in household works. The earnings of a girl child (daughter) are not acceptable by Muslim parents. They think that, if a girl would not engage in earning activities, then why would they need education. Before marriage, a girl should be engaged in household chores. The parents do not allow the girl to go for a job outside of the home, and earnings activities.

In today's society, “there is a large gap between what Islam stands for and what the social reality is in terms of the status of women, thus further compounding the misperceptions and negative stereotypes.” Islam does not easily define the “role of women.”

The Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad seem to recognize the different functions and mutually supportive roles of men and women, encouraging a just and balanced social and family life. The social status is defined as the status in which a person gets plugged by society. The social status of women in Islam is a combination of religious and traditional status but it is significant that the traditional dealings outweigh the religious regulations.

The role of Muslim women in the society has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. There is now an increasing number of women getting education at all levels, and in different fields of employment and aspects of public life. Women now seek to achieve the high leadership roles in all sectors and as well as in higher education sector. They participate in the decision-making process in public and private sectors. However, women who strive to assume the leadership positions are facing multiple challenges. Many of them give up because they become overwhelmed in dealing with multiple barriers. The girls and women coming from a Muslim background in the Asian sub-continent are disadvantaged in the educational sphere. In one study investigated two particular aspects of this disadvantage. First is the giving of importance to educating males, rather than the females. Secondly is the issue of parental and husband's control over the rights of women to education and work. However, the Quran commands all Muslims, regardless of gender, to read, think, contemplate, and pursue knowledge, The Prophet Muhammad encouraged education as a religious duty for both males and females.

Worldwide there are growing numbers of Muslim women in all levels and fields of education. There is an equal or higher ratio of women to men in Muslim majority countries such as Jordan, Algeria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Libya, U.A.E., Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh.

Education is the only way to empower the girls, improve their status, ensure their participation in the development of their respective societies, and activate their role to be able to take responsibility for future generations. Women's education results in more equal distribution of capital because it facilitates capital generation in families and in poor and deprived communities. Women's participation in the economy and access to labour markets help build strong, secure and sustainable economies.

On a personal level, I think a gap arises between women's need to develop their careers and their duty to serve their family and fulfil their social duties. Society holds common prejudices that govern the actions and behaviours of women, such as stereotyping women as homemakers. The most significant obstruction to female leaders is due to the tribal culture, which asserts male predominance and puts hindrances to women's ascension to leadership positions. Culture always has a role. Some cultural influences are positive, but some are negative. It is positive, in a sense that when a woman needs support, she would receive it. However, it is negative in that, it would sometimes underestimate the women's abilities and capacity to outperform some men. Problems were also reported in relation to how misinterpretations of Islam are often convoluted with traditions and socio-cultural practices that make it hard for women to ascend into leadership positions. Female leaders encounter challenges arising from the patriarchal and tribal understandings that force a specific religious worldview.

The world witnessed several Muslim female leaders who have effectively flourished their viewpoints globally. One could conclude that Muslim women have the ability and potential to be effective leaders to perform at the top level of leadership positions. There is a need for society to take a paradigm shift towards women's capability to lead and give her the opportunity to prove herself to contribute to the development of the organization.



Society must support women psychologically, socially and politically, and create the suitable conditions to show their capabilities and efficiency. In some ways, society must also modify its view of the image of women. Members of the society could also help empower women by making them aware of their rights and their role in overall development. They need to affirm the women's capabilities to encourage them to take leadership roles and highlight the experiences of women leaders in different communities.

*Musarrat Jaha Ara Pravin
ICF Alumna,
Nepal*

“The Garos: Where Women are Unavoidable”

Bangladesh is a very beautiful country with diverse cultures and people of different indigenous communities. According to the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), more than 54 Indigenous Peoples are speaking at least 35 languages in Bangladesh. There are two types of Indigenous peoples of Bangladesh according to the terrain of their lands. One is those who live in the hill lands of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, such as the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Chak, Khyang, and others. The other type is those who live in the plains, like the Garo, Hajong, Koch, Manipuri, Khasi, Santal, Oraon, and others.

The origin of the name “Garo” has been a subject of controversy. People expressed different views on the meaning of the word “Garo.” Garo In Bangladesh, the people know the word “Garo” very well, but the Garos call themselves “A’chik” or “Mandi.” The word “mandi” literally means, human being. Often the Garos refer to themselves as A’chik, which means Hill People. But this word is hardly appropriate for the Garos who live in Bangladesh. A huge number of Garos live in Garo Hills in the Indian state of Meghalaya, but the Garos are also found in the plains. The Garos in Bangladesh live in large numbers in different districts of the Mymensingh division; such as Sherpur, Jamalpur, and Netrokona. They also live in Tangail, Sunamganj, Moulvibazar, Gazipur, and Sylhet. The Garos are generally accepted to be part of the Tibeto-Burman group.

The Garo culture is very ancient and diverse. Among the indigenous people of Bangladesh, the Garo community was able to retain much of its own culture and heritage. They have their language, attire, festivals, religion, food culture, and administration system.

Language is one of the most important cultural elements of any nation. The Garos call their own language A’chik. They do not have any alphabet to write their language. They use the Roman alphabet to write the A’chik language. The Garo language comprises different dialects such as A’beng, Matabeng, Atong, Me’gam, Chibok, Ruga, A’we, Matabeng, Dual, Gara Ganching, and Matchi-Dual.

The traditional dress of the Garo women is Dakmanda and Daksari. They weave the cloth by themselves. In modern days, Garo women also wear modern dresses. Garo men wear jeans, T-shirts, and shirts. They also have amazing traditional ornaments. Both men and women enjoy adorning themselves with ornaments, among them, being the Rikmachu, Natapsi, Jaksan, Ripok, Jaksil, Seng’ki.



Garo Women in Traditional dress

The Garos usually do not have any restrictions on foods. Rice, vegetables, fish, dried fish, etc. are their staple food. Bamboo shoots popularly known as “Mewa” are one of their favorite foods. They raise pigs at home because pork is the staple food in their social and religious ceremonies.

Homemade rice wine called the Chu is one of their favorite drinks. This liquor is also an important part of their social and religious ceremonies. They have their cooking technics without any oils.

The Garos are dependent on nature for their livelihood. Hunting and agriculture are their main occupation. In modern days there are changes in their occupations. Now they are working in different Government or Non-Government offices. They are also working in other different sectors. The traditional religion of Garos is called Sangsarek. The customs, practices, beliefs, worship, ceremonies, festivals, and rituals are based on this religion. They believe in Gods and Goddesses and spirits, which they call Mitde. In keeping with the modern age, many Garos have been converted to Christianity. In Bangladesh, more than 90 percent of the Garos proudly consider themselves Christian. But in the Indian state of Meghalaya, there is still a significant number of Garos who practice the Sansarek religion.

Wangala (Wanna) is the biggest festival of Garos. This is a post-harvest thanksgiving ceremony. During this festival, the Garos give thanks to Misi Saljong, the Sun God. Wearing their traditional attire, both women and men perform group dances with their traditional musical instruments during the Wangala festival.



Wangala Festival

There are very few societies in the world that have matriarchal and matrilineal systems. Bangladesh has only two. The Garo community is one of those two. The Garos are highlighted because, in a matriarchal society, women are the owners of land and property. The children bear their family name from their mother. Every Garo person is introduced to others by their mother's surname. According to Garo customary law, the daughters inherit the property. In the past, the youngest daughter of the family was regarded as the real owner of the family property. Nowadays, all the daughters are entitled to property. Moreover, the sons are also becoming the owner of family property. After marriage, the man moves to the house of his wife's parents. This practice is also changing nowadays. In Garo society, women are significant figures. Though women do not claim superiority over men, they are independent and free to express their opinion in any decision-making.



"Chu" Traditional Rice Wine



"Dama" Traditional Musical Instrument

Even as the Garo customs, practices, beliefs, rituals, and traditions are changing due to many reasons, Garos are setting a great example of equality between women and men in Bangladesh because of their matriarchal system. Meanwhile, mainstream Bangladesh society practices patriarchal culture.

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The Garos: Struggling to Survive in the Valley of Death, Prof. Dr. Mizanur Rahman.

The Strong Women of Madhupur, Robbins Burling.

A Glimpse Into Garo Folktales, Leonard Shankar Rozario

The Practicum: A Daunting but Exciting Experience

There were three teams assigned to do practicum in facilitating certain topics on Human Rights and Advocacies. This is part of the Peace Institute-Training of Trainers held in Dumaguete City, Philippines. Our team was composed of John Pete Abuyabor Tolelis and Hamida Paglas from the Philippines, Somsangium "Peak" Chandaruck from Laos, and Luis Dos Santos Garcia from Timor Leste. The topic we have chosen for the practicum in facilitation was on Collective Rights. The youth that participated as our participants came from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines-Dumaguete City, and from an NGO called Enfants du Mekong. We held the activity at the church sanctuary.

It was a great opportunity that we were able to apply what we learned during the training into practice.

We learned about human rights and advocacies, and prepared ourselves for the facilitation practicum by doing some research on Collective Rights. We thought we were ready to do the workshop and excited at the same time. But when the day practice day came, we felt nervous. We seemed to lose our control and our voice as we faced the difficulty of managing the participants, the time, and our session as a whole. During the first half of our session, each one of us – the practicing facilitators - were facing various challenges within us. However, we needed to carry on. As the saying goes, "the show must go on" until the end.

During the next half our session, we did much better as we helped each other to do the facilitation well. We improved by giving better instructions, and we saw that the participant followed and did activities as we have expected, until we completed the session up to the end.



Practicum participants working in small groups presenting their work

Our participants were very nice. They tried their best to participate even though they were still in getting to know the other participants. They were shy at the beginning, but in the end, they were able to work well with each other. They did their assigned group tasks well. One of our facilitators, Hope Ernest Tinambacan was there to support us, along with the ICF staff, Annika Denkmann.

What I learn from this time was this principle: Practice, Practice and Practice. We felt ready, we thought we got everything, we memorize all the details of the session, we thought we know our own job as a team, and tried our best. Yet, practice gives us more confident when we face some fears or anxieties.

Thank you so much for this great opportunity to learn and put into action these learnings. The practicum helped us have a good sight in what we do. It made us realize on the challenges, the good and the bad. It helped us prepare ourselves as future facilitator, and gave us so much experience in class, theory, and practice. I understand that we still have a long way to go, but the team of facilitators prepared us well. We will not forget this wonderful time and experience. Thank you.

Somsangium “Peak” Chandaruck
ICF Alumna,
Laos

Practicum on Facilitation: A Challenging Experience

“Not hearing is not as good as hearing, hearing is not as good as seeing, seeing is not as good as knowing, knowing is not as good as acting; only when there is action can learning be considered as accomplished.” - Xunzi (Chinese philosopher)

During the final day of the Peace Institute II: Training of Trainers on Human Rights and Advocacy in Dumaguete City, we - the participants - were set to share what we have learned by conducting a workshop with local organizations. Our team called the “Raise Your Voice Team,” which focused on sharing the political and civic rights was sent to facilitate the intergenerational group at the UCCP Sibulan church.

“Intergenerational” it means the group has a mix of people from different generations (youth, adults, elderly, etc.). Our team’s accompanier was Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, the ICF Coordinator.

As our team began to write the module and prepare the activities for the workshop, the members had plenty of thoughts and questions on our minds. Since we would be teaching individuals of mixed ages, can we effectively communicate what we learned from our training? Will the youth be able to understand the message behind the activities? Will the adults and elderly learn something new? Are we even qualified to be teaching these lessons to them, when we only had ten days of training?

Despite this flurry of thoughts, we pushed through with the planning and writing. However, working within a time limit truly lets us practice making quick decisions. There were concepts that we needed to simplify and activities that we had to remove to catch up with the schedule. However, this does not mean that we compromised the quality of our workshop. Instead, we were able to highlight the parts that truly mattered.

It was not easy. We stepped back and reevaluated multiple times to make sure that the activities we were preparing would help support the knowledge we wanted to share. There were times that we did not understand what we were doing but despite the frustration, I saw everyone in the team putting in all the work to make the workshop successful. My teammates also learned how to communicate effectively, especially since we were from different countries and had a few language barriers.

On the day of the workshop, everyone in the team was excited but also nervous. Although our workshop module was completed, we were not able to rehearse everything that we wrote down. Nevertheless, we were already on our way to UCCP Sibulan and there was no turning back. I still remember holding the bag full of materials and feeling a little nauseous for skipping breakfast (My stomach knew my uneasiness). Moreover, my feelings of awkwardness started to surface because UCCP Sibulan is my home church. I started feeling conscious of the fact that the group that we would be teaching was composed of my friends and acquaintances.



GG engaging with the practicum participants

When we arrived, the uneasiness lessened once I saw the familiar sight of my home church. We all helped each other in setting up our materials and rehearsing a bit more while waiting for the participants of our workshop. Slowly, they arrived until they pooled into six participants (all youth). It was unexpected because we expected that we would be teaching 15-20 individuals. Although it was a surprise, it still worked out and it gave us a more intimate experience with all six of them.

To ease everyone into the setting before we started the workshop, Nguyen Viet Hang, whom we call Vie, my co-participant from Vietnam, shared with me that the kids wanted to learn a few basic Vietnamese words. Drubo Rangsa from Bangladesh, also wanted to teach his Bangla language. It was a great idea as I remember everyone having fun as each one eagerly learned from Vie and Dhrubo.

Here are the few words that we learned from them:

English	Vietnamese	Bangla
Hello!	Xin chào!	Ohe!
How are you?	Bạn khỏe không?	Kemon acho?
How much?	Bao nhiêu tiền?	Koto kore / Dam koto
I love you	Tôi yêu Bạn	Ami tomake valobashi

Even if we were having fun learning the culture and language of Vietnam and Bangladesh, we did not forget the main topic of our workshop. Theater exercises supplemented our short lectures about political and civic rights, which the young people thoroughly participated and enjoyed. At the end of our session, everyone was able to define political and civic rights. They also enumerated ways on how, as church youth members, they can help in defending these rights.

In the end, the answers to all our questions from the beginning came through what we witnessed during the workshop. Yes! We effectively communicated the knowledge that we acquired from our human rights training. Secondly, yes! Despite not having adult and elderly participants, everyone understood the message of the activities and learned something new. Lastly, yes! Our sincerity to share the knowledge that we learned in the peace institute training and teach it with conviction to the youth of UCCP Sibulan made us more than qualified!

As I mentioned in the opening quote of the Chinese philosopher, Xunzi: *"...only when there is action can -learning be considered as accomplished."* It proves that the method of acquiring knowledge is not enough. We need to embody it and share this knowledge with everyone to be able truly say that we have learned.

Overall, I learned five things that I will always remember from the training and workshop:

1. In teamwork, trust and communication are important to the success of a project.
2. Always speak with conviction and confidence in your beliefs.
3. Even if things do not go as expected, learn to enjoy and let go.
4. There is hope for the youth of today, especially in times of crisis when we are needed to stand up for ourselves, and our fellow people.
5. Teaching others what you have learned is also proof that you have also become proficient in the topic/skill.

I am grateful for the chance to participate in the peace institute training. Certainly, these experiences have been planted deeply in my and my co-participants' hearts and minds as I start to see little buds of peace and hope to branch from their side of the world. I hope that in the future, there will be plenty of safe spaces, seminars, and workshops to discuss these advocacies and rights. And that we can teach not only the youth but everyone with confidence and freedom.

Until then, may peace be with you.

GG Lumayag
ICF Alumna,
Philippines



Vie and Dhruvo facilitating during the practicum.

Thoughts on the NVC Workshop

A two-day workshop on Nonviolent Communication took place in Taysan, Legazpi City. Six female and six male participants attended. As a Peace Advocate, I have come to value and appreciate this kind of training. The small group discussion was very informative. The facilitator, Ms. Edelene Rosin, clearly explained every principle, vocabulary, and terminology related to Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication (NVC). The mood in the room was initially tense, and the other participants were shy in sharing their individual perspectives on nonviolent communication. However, the training achieved its goal when we were able to internalize and connect with ourselves and others during the training. The exercises and energizers helped us feel relaxed in the conversation, made us feel at ease around one another, and enabled us to work as a group. I also observed that the chairs were arranged in a circle. So, I asked the speaker, "Why are the chairs arranged this way?" She responded that it removes the barriers between us, allowing us to speak up openly, observe, and feel everyone's emotions. The most fulfilling response confirmed that NVC is a method for building meaningful connections and relationships with individuals.



Edelene Rosin explaining Jackal and Giraffe language.



Edelene introducing the four ear exercise.

Personally, after the training, my key takeaways from the small group discussion are the word "honesty and empathy." Honesty is about giving an observation and practicing mindfulness to eliminate self-judgment. Being honest about our feelings is necessary to identify the needs to be met and express positive requests to make us happy and contented. The four principles that make up the OFNR should always be helpful in analyzing moral dilemmas because humans are constantly torn between becoming a jackal and a giraffe. However, during the training in nonviolent communication, we discovered how to consistently choose to be a giraffe and empathize with ourselves and others. I have learned that genuine listening and a few body gestures can convey empathy. I have realized that "empathy" is a powerful approach. It can make one feel better as a person, connect with others, and reduce structural violence. Most importantly, it improves one's quality of life.

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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: The Journey as Home: Living in Transitions

Many countries are now opening their doors sans quarantine requirements. People are now beginning to travel for business transactions, to visit families, or to reassert their freedom to travel. Hong Kong is slowly conceding to “open” its doors, albeit its “3+4” quarantine policy still does not make it easier for travelers. “3+4” means three days in hotel quarantine plus four days of home isolation. However, things will never be the same again. Hundreds of residents are leaving the once vibrant international finance hub of Asia day by day. It is not only because of the pandemic that people leave. Among the known reasons is the clipping of the wings of democracy that slowly drowned the values of democracy and freedom that is crucial in living the fullness of life.

In fairness, there are some good things to remember in Hong Kong. I never had major health issues while in Hong Kong. But the health care system is a thing to reckon with, albeit an appointment may take months, if not years, for the actual medical check-ups to happen. The government shelled out cash vouchers to residents, that recently and surprisingly included non-permanent residents. Hong Kong makes urban life easier with its efficient public transportation system. It has beautiful parks, although one must pay an exorbitant price for the entertainment that theme parks offer.

The middle class, and especially the rich and famous of Hong Kong generally benefit from the services of domestic helpers (The officially socially accepted but glossed over the term is *nǚyōng*). The Filipino DH circles use the common term *kunyang*, who doubles as a nanny (*bǎomǔ*) and tutor, although these tasks are not indicated in their contracts.

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Mostly from the Philippines, Indonesia, and other parts of the Philippines, the Hong Kong government does not include the kunyangs in government benefits given out to those on “ordinary residency” status. The government does not include them in the program of dishing out cash vouchers to the citizens and residents when they are the ones who need them most. These kunyangs left their homes and families because of the tough economic conditions of their respective countries. Yet, their working and living conditions are mostly unthinkable. Their situation became worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Very few are lucky to have compassionate employers. From experience, most native Hong Kongers including the ordinary workers at the airport have a fixed view that all migrant workers coming from Asia, especially from the Philippines, are domestic helpers. This is Asian racism at work

But do not get me wrong. There are some kind spirits amid all the brash Hong Kong world. For example, there is a fish seller, my suki in the wet market. (Its Hokkien word “Su Khe,” meaning “to lose for customer's sake.”) When she sees me, she would call out: “Pengyou!” She knows my favorite fish and gives me discounts without me asking. This small act of kindness makes me miss Hong Kong though. have a community of kunyang friends that gathers in my flat on Sundays and holidays. They blessed me with their stories of joys, struggles, and pains. I will be missing them, and I will miss the communities of faith such as the Kowloon Union Church and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines that welcomed me to Hong Kong.

I write this to help people who are not familiar with the nuances of living in Hong Kong understand that Hong Kong is not a paradise. Yes, it is a financial hub of Asia – it used to be. But the cost of living is exorbitant. And if one is not used to generally rude street language, one’s self-esteem could easily shrink, that is, if you are an ordinary brown Asian. The whites do not go through such an experience.

I write this piece with consideration to my leaving Hong Kong. I am leaving my very expensive shared cramped flat for good that my flat mate and I have occupied for just one year and three months. We were away for eight months because we could not come back to the Hong Kong flight ban imposed on the nine countries for months. Leaving the flat hit me with the realization that it is somehow a “curse” to own the very basic things such as a single bed with a mattress that occupies three-fourths of my room space, a small regular study table, a small refrigerator, and a washing machine. Only migrant workers want second-hand things. But while they like to be the second owners of this basic furniture, they could not take these things because, like our rented flat, theirs are also cramped.

The main office of the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs is moving to another part of Asia – a place where the producers of K-drama do location shootings for their films. ICF will move with APAY. The move to another location is part of the reality that there is nothing permanent in this world. Although some would say that the only permanent thing is change, those who belong to faith communities would say, only the Divine God of Many Names does not change.

