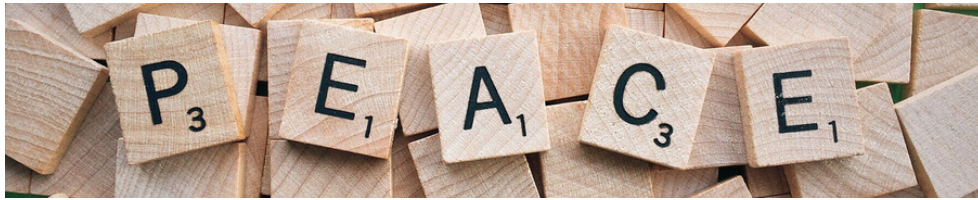




# THE PEACEBUILDERS

**“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



## Announcement

### Second School of Peace (SoP) in 2023 in Bali, Indonesia

ICF is happy to announce that it will hold another School of Peace in 2023. This second SoP of 2023 will be held in Bali, Indonesia. It will run for 60 days in person, from May 15 (arrival) until July 13 (departure). The SoP seeks to strike a balance between the theoretical and the practical. The curriculum integrates the social, cultural, interreligious, and conflicts brought about by economic, social, political, and religious-cultural factors. It is one avenue where young people from different faith traditions are equipped with the basic knowledge, principles, and skills to develop a strong network of the peace movement in their respective contexts. ICF seeks to reach out to 15 young people, around 20-35 of age, coming from different religious or faith traditions and nationalities. Gender balance - women, men, and LGBTQI - will also be considered in the selection of applicants. To read the full announcement and to apply please visit our [website](#).

If you want to know more about what the SoP is all about, check out the weekly news round-up for the ongoing SoP in Nepal on our [website](#).

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## ICF Alumnus Rinku Mankhin facilitated Nonviolent Communication Seminar for Girls

**Birisiri, Bangladesh** - On February 11, 2023, Rinku Mankhin, an ICF alumnus from Bangladesh, facilitated a three-hour session on Nonviolent Communication at the Training Centre of Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), in Utrail, Birisiri. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Birisiri organized this Girl's Seminar for the Junior and Senior high school and college level students (grade 8-12). There were 28 girls who participated, eighteen (18) of them were Christian, three (3) Hindu, and seven (7) Muslims. The group also included some office staffs of YWCA Birisiri. The young participants are all youth members of YWCA Birisiri. The aim of the Girls Seminar was to introduce Nonviolent Communication to young girls as a new way of communication with oneself and others. Birisiri YWCA reached out to a diverse group of young girl participants who wanted to contribute for promoting peace through learning and practicing nonviolent communication a new method of communication.

He introduced to participants how Nonviolent Communication, as a practical and learnable process, leads people to communicate with oneself and others in the spirit of empathy and honesty. It helps them to express their needs, desire, and values while considering others from the heart. The young participants enjoyed learning about the NVC as a new method of communication to each other during the session. They enjoyed identifying their own needs, feelings, and practiced applying how to make requests to meet their needs while considering others. At the end of the session, the young participants and the office staffs of YWCA Birisiri provided their valuable feedback and comments to the facilitator. The participants responded very actively and positively during the activity and it made the seminar successful.



*February 11- Rinku Mankhin (left) being welcomed by a representative of the YWCA Girls at the YWCA Training Centre.*

The three-hour had two different learning sessions and one exercise for the participants. Rinku Mankhin briefly gave introductory inputs on the topics of Nonviolent Communication, such as what is NVC, the principle of NVC, Four key components of NVC: Observation, Feelings, Need and Request.



*February 11- Rinku Mankhin facilitating a three hour session on NVC at YWCA Training Centre.*

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) is a voluntary Non-Governmental Organization. Birishiri YWCA is one of the 13 branches of YWCA in Bangladesh. The Birisiri YWCA office is located at Utrail in Durgapur Upazila of Netrokona district. Since 1984, this organization has been providing various services. The 9 activities YWCA conducts are-1) empowerment of women and young women and development of transformative leadership 2) quality education and child development, 3) women's health rights, 4) promotion of women's rights and gender equality, 5) economic justice, 6) environmental justice, 7) social peace and harmony, 8) partnership and networking, and 9) organizational development.



Birisiri YWCA - Group picture during the NVC Seminar on February 11.

On June 6-10, 2022, Rinku attended the one-month online Training of Trainers, and a five-day in-person and practicum on Nonviolent communication organized by Interfaith Cooperation Forum. The activity took place at Bethel Guest House, Rizal Boulevard, Dumaguete City, Philippines. The participants of the in-person Training of Trainer's practicum were those who complied with the requirements of the online sessions held on March 7-30, 2022 with satisfactory ratings. I am so glad and proud, after completing my TOT on NVC, I facilitated a nonviolent communication Girls Seminar (workshop) in my own community for young girls for the first time.

*Rinku Barnabas Mankhin,  
ICF Alumnus, Bangladesh*

## ICF Welcomes 14 Participants for the School of Peace 2023 in Nepal

*"The School of Peace aims at building a community of youths who will be enabled to commit themselves to promote peace and harmony in their respective communities."*

After a week of zoom classes and self-learning ICF together with its collaborator Nepal Unites were happy to welcome the School of Peace participants at Bhaktapur Guesthouse in Bhaktapur, Nepal on Monday the 30th of January. Fourteen participants from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam arrived to spend the next 50 days together. The following day, the in-person SoP officially began with an Opening Ritual, including words of welcome from the owner of Bhaktapur Guesthouse, where the group will reside until the 25th of February. On the 25th the group will embark to experience a community immersion and move to the second venue Ratna Giri Resort on March 1, where they will stay until the end of the in-person program on March 20th.

Since the beginning of the SoP, the participants learned about and discussed a range of different topics. Though, at first it was important that participants learn more about themselves, who are they, what do they value, what makes them who they are etc. This was examined in one of the first in-person session called "Life Stories" was facilitated by ICF Staff Baidido Saganding. As young peacebuilders it is important for the participants to know who they are and what they stand for before learning about others.



Bhaktapur Guesthouse - SoP participants during group work.



An important aspect of the SoP as it is conducted by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum is the exploration of all the major religions & spirituality. Some religions or spiritualities were to some participants and they learned about these for the first time, other religions or spiritualities were more familiar especially the participants own religions & spiritualities, but even then, the understanding of these was deepened. The different religions & spiritualities were covered by either in house speakers like ICF Coordinator Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro on Judeo-Christian traditions or by visiting places of worship such as the White Monastery for a Dhamma talk. Beyond Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism the participants also got the chance to learn more about Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Baha'i Faith and Indigenous Spiritualities.



February 4 - SoP participants learn more about Buddhism at Tergar Monastery.

In addition to gaining knowledge about different religions and spiritualities, the SoP in Nepal already provided the young peacebuilders information on how to analyze a conflict and comprehend the peacebuilding frameworks from Galtung and Lederach. Furthermore, the SoP also focused on Human Rights, Children's Rights & Women's Rights by exploring the UN Declarations and Conventions connected to these topics, but also through a range of activities to recognize the situations in the participant's respective countries and communities.

Another important issue that was already discussed during the SoP was the Climate Crisis. Considering that all the participants come from countries, which are highly affected by the consequences of climate change, this topic was much awaited by the SoP participants.

With four more weeks to go, at the day of writing this on the 21st of February, there are many more topics to be covered and studied. ICF is looking forward to this upcoming time spend learning together in Nepal.

*Annika Denkmann,  
BftW Seconded Personnel*



## Asian youth asked: Fight for children's rights

BHAKTAPUR, NEPAL – A human rights defender from the Philippines encouraged participants of the School of Peace (SOP) here to advocate for the rights of children.

“The countries signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are bound to ensure child protection,” declared Baidido Saganding, who facilitated on Feb. 13 a session seeking to raise awareness on the rights of children.

The SOP is an intensive course organized by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum to equip young people for peacebuilding. This edition, co-organized by nongovernment organization Nepal Unites, began on Jan. 30 and ends on March 20.

Saganding discussed the legal rights of children worldwide as enshrined in the landmark convention at the UN. The document, signed in 1989 and entered into force in 1990, is the most universally accepted human rights instrument, ratified by every country in the world except two.



She asked 14 participants of SOP, who came from nine countries in Asia, to reflect on how their nations have performed according to their commitments and how they could ensure better compliance in their communities.

Sulogna Rema, a participant from Bangladesh, stated: “The knowledge and skills I gained ... will help me to develop a legal fight against child labor in my city on a smaller scale.”



*Participants role-play as part of a learning activity on child protection.*

A volunteer of Nepal Unites, MD Jiayul Rahaman, added that the session also gave the organization a framework to address issues in child rights in Nepal. He added that events like the SOP were breeding grounds for Asians who can take part in peacemaking processes both regionally and worldwide.

*Thavin Pich, Sulogna Rema and Shaloom Naeem,  
SoP Participants*

### **‘Fake and false solutions’ to climate crisis not enough**

**BHAKTAPUR, Nepal** – Young peace advocates from different Asian countries participated on Feb. 17 in a session on environmental justice at the School of Peace (SOP) organized by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF), in collaboration with Nepal Unites.

The session, “Climate Crisis as a Justice and Peace Issue,” tackled the climate crisis, adaptation and mitigation. Arati Poudel, an environmental activist from Nepal, led the discussion.

Poudel, in her input, said that the Global North has been a major contributor to carbon emission (burning gasoline when we drive, burning oil or gas for home heating, or using electricity generated from coal, natural gas, and oil), a driver of the climate crisis. Meanwhile, nations in the Global South – which include the countries from which the participants come – were victims of climate crisis-induced disasters.

She also emphasized: “People should not be contented with the fake and false solutions that the Global North presents. We should ask for accountability for loss and damage, which include both economical and noneconomical factors.”

The session was part of SOP, a 50-day series of classes running from January to March, in which participants discuss human rights, climate justice and environmental issues, gender, religion, all as issues of peace. This edition includes youth from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.

A youth participant from Bangladesh, Afroza Khatun, said all countries, especially the Global North, should be more responsible for exploiting fossil fuels. She added that “genuine solutions” like agroecology, energy democracy and practicing indigenous people knowledge should be implemented.



A Pakistani participant, Shaloom Naeem, change should also focus on corporations not the individuals. In addition to that suggestion, the resource person reminded the students that little changes still contribute to the mitigation of the climate crisis.

Participants were asked to list down what daily habits they would like to change to contribute to build a greener environment.

They enumerated using public transportation, reducing plastic products, planting more trees and providing trainings to young people to help them gain awareness of the environment protection, among others.



*Arati Poudel facilitating her session.*

*Rose Hayahay, My Hanh, Afroza Khatun and Justina Santos,  
SoP Participants*

### **‘Newswriting for Peace’ training for young peace advocates**

BHAKTAPUR, Nepal - Youth from South and Southeast Asia participated in a ‘Newswriting for Peace’ training at the School of Peace (SoP) in Bhaktapur Guest House in this city on Feb. 21, 2023.

The SoP is a program of Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) in collaboration with Nepal Unites (NU) that seeks to equip youths with peacebuilding and conflict transformation skills. This edition included 14 participants from host country Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

“We learned [standards for] newsworthiness and ... qualities [of the news] that helped to broaden my understanding on [newswriting],” said Bayu Prihantoro, a participant from Indonesia.

“Newswriting for Peace” is a part of the series on peace journalism. Peace journalism is a new movement in journalism that concerns itself with covering issues of peace and conflict. Speaking was Koko Alviar, a journalist and human rights worker from the Philippines.



*The participants listening to Alviar during his input on journalism.*

The session on newswriting was followed by sessions on photojournalism for peace and peace journalism, respectively.

Vepoy Jr. Ramil Ventura, a Filipino participant, added: “The structure of news writing and lead writing is the major learning for me that will surely help me to write news. As a peacebuilder, anyone should acquire knowledge of newswriting”.

*Susan Kathayat, Bayu Prihantoro  
and Vepoy Jr. Ramil Ventura,  
SoP Participants*



## Feature - SOP participants and staff hike through Shivapuri National Park



Some of the participants and staff of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum's (ICF) School of Peace (SOP) set off on an exhausting yet delightful hike through the Shivapuri National Park on the northern side of Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, on Feb. 19, 2023.

"Though it was dusty ... and I felt like dying, I loved this hike," said Baidido Saganding, a staff member of SOP.

Shivapuri National Park is a protected area that covers an expansive 159 square kilometers of land. One of park's most notable features is the Shivapuri peak on the mountain range (which hikers can see on a good day). The area is rich in biodiversity, boasting over 300 species of birds and rare mammals like the Himalayan black bear and leopard. It's a must-visit for those who appreciate nature's beauty and diversity.

Stunned by the beauty they had heard of in the past days, the team chose to climb up Shivapuri National Park for their day out. The group arrived at the beginning of the trail on a bus around 10 am.

The place did not disappoint. As they journeyed through the park, the group was in awe of the stunning natural beauty that surrounded them.



*On the Stones: Some of the participants captured at their final destination.*

The winding paths took them through pillars of trees, past vast greenery and up to breathtaking viewpoints that offered panoramic vistas of the surrounding mountains and the valley of Kathmandu, making the city look Lego-like.

"... It was a very relaxing day [for me]. We got to spend the day outside with nature in contrast to being stuck in the session all day. It was an amazing experience that I will not regret of," said Annika Denkmann, another SOP staff member.

When the group arrived at the stream around noon, they were greeted by the calming sound of flowing water and the refreshing coolness of the shade. That's where they had lunch. They laughed and chatted, sharing stories and memories with one another, while some complained about the awfully freezing water that flowed underneath.

But the group was not only there to enjoy themselves; they were also committed to taking care of the environment. In keeping with principles of sustainability and responsible tourism, they brought everything they needed for the trip and left nothing behind in the park but their footprints and memories.

The SOP participants and staff recognized that the beauty of the park was something to be cherished and preserved for future generations.

Bayu Prihantoro from Indonesia, an SOP participant, stated: “I really loved the opportunity that I got to hike (the Shivapuri National Park). But it was sad to see that there was litter in most of the corners. I hope they care for this more.”



*READY FOR LUNCH. The students arrive at a stream beside a temple, a stopover for hundreds of hikers every day.*

The hikers were grateful for the opportunity to experience the park's natural wonders, and for the chance to do their part in safeguarding them.

As they made their way back to their lodgings, the group reflected on the day's adventures and the memories they had created together.

“... I work with [indigenous people], and they live in the mountains. When I went on the hike, it recalled the freshness back there. I felt so near yet so far from my community,” said Rose Hayahay, a participant from the Philippines and a volunteer at indigenous community schools.

The hike through Shivapuri National Park was a pleasant reminder of the power of nature to refresh and rejuvenate the spirit, and of the importance of taking care of the environment for the benefit of all.

*Yehen Asuramuni, Elipidus Mendes, Rhitik Sahi and Aafiya Banno,  
SoP Participants*

## **Reflection - Looking Back: My Reflections on the “Warm Hugs” event**

As I reflect on the recent Pre-Christmas Celebration called the “Warm Hugs” event organized by the ICF National Forum of Bangladesh, I am filled with a sense of gratitude and humility. It was heartwarming to see the members of the ICF National Forum of Bangladesh come together to spread the message of Christmas happiness and joy among the Street Children in their community. The event was not just about distributing Christmas gifts to street children. It was an opportunity to show these vulnerable children that they are loved and cared for. The day was 21st December 2022, at Alokito Shishu, an NGO that works for children with special needs. The Alokito Shishu project staff and Street Children warmly welcomed the members of the ICF National Forum of Bangladesh at the Drop-in Center in Mymensingh City. The joy and happiness on the faces of the street children as they received their Christmas gifts, including winter clothes and a month’s food package, were truly heartwarming. It is important to remember that street children face immense hardships, especially during the winter season. Many of them spend their nights under footpaths, at railway stations, or under bridges, with no shelter or warm clothing to protect them from the cold winter.



The Alokita Shishu project a project of Caritas Mymensingh Region has been working tirelessly to improve the lives of these vulnerable street children by providing them with one meal a day, primary health care treatment, entertainment and sports, technical life skills, values education, and technical training. They are also working on public awareness and sensitization at the family and community level on various issues related to child protection and rights. As I reflect on the “Warm Hugs” event, I realize how important it is for us to come together as communities to support those who are in need most.

The ICF National Forum of Bangladesh’s small initiative to support street children this winter was a powerful reminder that even small acts of kindness can make a big difference. It was heartwarming to see how the community responded positively to the call for donations and extended their helping hand to support vulnerable street Children by the ICF National Forum of Bangladesh.

As we celebrate the season of giving and joy, let us remember those who are less fortunate than us, and continue to support them in whatever way we can. Let us spread love and kindness to those around us, and make this world a better place, one small act of kindness at a time.



*Handed over foods package to the staff of Alokita Shishu project.*



*Group photo with Street Children.*

*Rinku Barnabas Mankhin,  
Bangladesh*

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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: Art and Peacebuilding*

Art is a forerunner of peace; it prepares the ground for peace. Art and peace. Both tend to share the same patterns of birth. They require people who are passionate about them. Both are equally beautiful. All the peaceful moments of change happening around the world have one common thing: art. Art, in any of its forms, can move hearts and change society. A stroke of the brush can do what a swing of a sword cannot. A note of music sometimes goes higher than the fired missiles. A theater performance sometimes is powerful enough to change the very character of society.

“At first, art imitates life. Then life imitates art. Then life will find its very existence from the art”. -Fyodor Dostoevsky

This shows how art is extracted from human life and holds the capacity to impact and transform it. Looking back in history, we can find many examples where art played a decisive role in peace movements. Feminist art serves as an example, where art challenged the existing norms of society. Many art pieces were produced and defied existing norms, perceptions, and societal rules regarding women. “Birth tear/tear” by Judy Chicago, is one such art piece, which symbolizes women being strong and empowered. This piece relates to the pain of labor women go through. Lucy R. Lippard, a writer, and critic, talked about feminist art and said, “It is neither style nor a movement but instead a value system, a revolutionary strategy, a way of life.”

Art, as an agent of peace, has a wide range of spectrum; it is not just confined to a certain level of peacemaking. From creating a dialogue about the conflict to healing the victims of conflict, art finds its place as an agent of peace. The Seagull Foundation for the Arts in India is working in the conflict-affected areas within the country.

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They are using theater as a medium to promote peace, harmony, and solidarity among people who are divided by conflict. An organization named "Musicians without Borders" is using music to heal the victims of war and violence. They collaborate with different art groups and help the victims to raise their voices through music. Here, an art form is being used to heal wounds and for the survivors to develop new connections and find a way back to the stream of life.

“Wherever you look at period of dramatic change and revolution it is always reflected in art, and art has always played role in it.” -John Molyneux.

In his book, *Dialectics of Art*, John Molyneux explores different dimensions of art as a political agent. Art, even in its most individual form, has a political angle to it, and it can bring political change. This symbolizes the importance of art as a tool to bring and maintain peace. This compels me to ask questions like;

- 1) Does art play a role in catalyzing the peace process?
- 2) If yes, then, why is the potential of art not being used as a tool of peacebuilding?
- 3) What is the scope of arts in areas where the concept of basic human rights does not exist?

In the School of Peace 2023 (SoP 2023) held in Nepal, I got closer to understanding these questions. The participants and I explored the arena of theater, both as an art form and as a tool of Peace. In SoP 2023, I was introduced to "Forum Theater." This form of theater was developed by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal who said: “Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society.” The very purpose of developing Forum Theater was to transform society. The Forum Theater is a tool to develop awareness regarding different social issues. This type of theater revolves around different forms of oppression. The types of oppression, oppressor, and oppressed are portrayed by the performers in front of an audience. This becomes a venue for the people to look for solutions within them, or at least to develop a debate regarding the prevalent problem. In this context, the audience is not just reduced to spectators, but they are “spect-actors.” The spect-actors can stop the play after the concept of oppression is developed fully, and can replace the oppressed. After replacing the oppressed, they can act according to their will, portraying their solution to the oppression.

This form of theater is a very efficient way, especially for oriental societies to develop awareness regarding various social evils. This not only develops awareness but also empowers the affected communities to be part of the solution. This has a psychological paradigm too, as the solution is not imposed but comes from within. Peacebuilders, especially those working on the issues of women, children, and earth rights should use this tool as it can bring a huge change in less time. It also gives chance to connect with the people on grass root level and develop a relationship with them.

I deem it a huge achievement of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum, for they were able to equip the participants of SoP 2023 with the knowledge of Forum Theater. Being sensitive and considerate towards the theater and other art forms will help revitalize the peace movements emerging in Asia. The knowledge gained regarding the use of art will help the young peacebuilders to cultivate peace from the grass root level. Society, in this case, would not just be a receiver of peace but will also be an actor and medium of peace. It is high time to connect with the victims of violence and help them to have a voice. It is a ripe time to mobilize people for peace and assist them to know their potential to bring change. Art can be a tool in both of these tasks. We should not forget that at the end of the day, peace is also art. To achieve this "master-peace," a passionate heart, a creative mind, and the right tools are required. Art forms are among many vital tools.

*Shaloom Naeem,  
Guest Editorial Writer*