



# The Peacebuilders

*"Keeping the ICF Circle informed; Connecting with Community of Interreligious Peacebuilders"*

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## ICF lines up activities for July – November 2019

ICF will hold a thematic workshop on peace-building on July 19-26, 2019 in Jayapura, West Papua, Indonesia. The hosting preparations were done by Rina Krebru Yanike, who is a School of Peace 2018 alumna, and a member of the ICF Program Committee. Assisting Rina in the local preparations is the National General Secretary of YMCA Indonesia, Ms. Retha Andoea. Ms. Andoea had also collaborated with the SoP 2018 host, Duta Wacana Christian University Faculty of Theology in ensuring that the School of Peace 2018 will run

on its course smoothly. This is an example of healthy cooperation between local or national YMCA, the ICF alumni,



Chiangmai YMCA, one of the venues of the Peace Institute 2

and ICF staff in making the program or activities a success and meaningful.

Another upcoming activity assisted by local

YMCA is the Peace Institute 2, which will be held on July 31-August 11, 2019 in Chiangmai and Chiangrai, Thailand. Everything is now ready, thanks to the hosting preparations graciously carried out by Ms. Phanomwan Yoodee and Ms. Chularat Phongtudsirikul of Thailand YMCA.

Some details still need to be ironed out, but ICF will hold the School of Peace 2019. The SoP 2019 will run for two months. This will be in the middle of September up to the middle of November 2019. ICF is still in the process of preparing for details on the hosting are still underway.



## Bangladesh National Forum held SoP Alumni Follow-Up

The Bangladesh National Forum of ICF alumni held its Follow-Up activity at the Matthew Malaker Conference Hall of YMCA Training Center at Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh on May 24-25, 2019. Out of eleven ICF

alumni, seven were present, only two of whom are women. A total of fourteen (14) participants came for the workshop including some YMCA staff. The activity started with a program

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## Bangladesh National Forum holds . . .

*True peace is not merely the absence of war, it is the presence of justice.*

-Jane Addams



orientation and greetings from the Nipun Sangma, NGS of NCY-Bangladesh. This was followed by the greetings from APAY and ICF, and the sharing of alumni involvements in interfaith efforts for peace.

APAY executive secretary, Duncan Chowdhury, explained the history of the emergence of ICF within the context of Asia. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro shared the coverage of ICF work. She also introduced very briefly one principle of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as time was very limited.

On the second day, the couple, Mervyn and Kirstin De Mello facilitated the workshop on peace-building. They started with brainstorming on the definition of peace, and proceeded to several workshops with a focus on the basic questions, namely: what/who are the forces against peace in the family, educational institutions and

communities? What/who are the forces for peace in the family, educational institutions, and communities? Through a story of a composite character, the participants discussed and reflected on the cycle of violence that happens to a person, family and communities, and how to find a way out of such vicious cycle.

As a brief back-grounder for the National Forum to plan for its program, Orevillo-Montenegro gave a sweeping introduction on the theory of change. She called on the Bangladesh National Forum to formulate its theory of change as a basis for brainstorming and planning for its future task. Some notes on the theory and on some plans were made. The National Forum also decided to appoint Nichodemus D'Costa as acting-Coordinator of the National Forum while Mabhuva Moni Parvin is unable to carry out her

task as Coordinator due to her delicate pregnancy.

Day before the workshop, Duncan, Muriel, and Biplob took the four-hour trip to visit the YMCA Edilpur, where Sabbir Talukdar, School of Peace 2018 alumnus serves as a volunteer. The General Secretary of Edilpur YMCA, Bappu Mree, an alumnus of "mini-SoP," welcomed the APAY-ICF personnel.

That evening, the dinner graciously hosted by outgoing APAY President and incoming Bangladesh YMCA president, Babu Markus Gomes, along with former NGS Raymond Areng, also a "mini-SoP" alumnus. Chowdhury and Orevillo-Montenegro also met with the National General Secretary and the staff of NCY Bangladesh to discuss the feasibility of holding the School of Peace 2019 in Bangladesh. Biplob Rangsa, a School of Peace alumnus and the Executive Secretary of NCY - Bangladesh coordinated the whole affair. ❧ ❧

## Photos from the Bangladesh ICF Alumni Follow Up Activity



Photo Credits: Biplob Rangsa

## ICF Coordinator joined the Solidarity visit to Sri Lanka

On May 28-31, 2019, the ICF Coordinator joined the Solidarity Visit to Sri Lanka YMCA and churches. It was organized by APAY and World Alliance of YMCA. The visit was headed by Carlos Sanvee, Secretary General of the World Alliance, and Nam Boo Won, General Secretary of APAY. The visit aimed to express World YMCA family's condolence to the victims as well as sympathy and solidarity to the families, churches and people at large deeply affected by the brutal terrorist bomb attacks in the Easter Sunday. The ICF Coordinator, Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro was asked to join this visit with a view of exploring interfaith peacebuilding programs in Sri Lanka, particularly with the alumni of the ICF programs. The officers of Sri Lanka YMCA, namely, President Nirmal Fonseka, National General Secretary Charles Brownson, APAY Vice President Kishan Gunawardene, and, former President Felician Francis also joined in the visit.

It was an intensive solidarity visit. On the first day, the Nam Boo Won and Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro met with SoP alumnus, Jaffry Joyson Chelvarajah. Then, together with the key leaders of Sri Lanka YMCA, we had a meeting with the Auxiliary Bishop of the Catholic Church to express YMCA's deep sympathy for the victims of the bombing. The YMCA delegation also expressed possibility of exploring ways to collaborate with the church in Sri Lanka for interfaith peacebuilding. The group also visited St. Sebastian's Church in Katuwapitiya, where more than a hundred people died when it was bombed on that fateful Easter Sunday. The sanctuary that was destroyed by the bomb is



L-R: Nam Boo Won, Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, and Joyson Jaffry Chelvarajah, an SoP 2018 alumnus.

A Groupie photo by Joyson Jaffry Chelvarajah



The temporary cemetery where the victims of the bombing of San Sebastian church in Katuwapitiya were temporarily buried.



The group ready to go to Batticaloa for a Solidarity Visit, headed by APAY Gen Sec Nam Boo Won, World Alliance of YMCA Gen Sec Carlos Sanvee (in yellow) and Sri Lanka NGS Charles Brownson.

Photo credits: Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro

now restored gradually. Then the group proceeded to pay a short period of prayer in the temporary cemetery set by near the St. Sebastian church. Dinner on that first evening was hosted by the former Vice President of APAY Eraj Wijesinghe, who was also a former President of the NCY-Sri Lanka.

The delegation went to Batticaloa on the second day. The group expressed solidarity to the Batticaloa YMCA members and staff who are working hard to assist the victims of the bombing of the Zion Church, a Protestant Church in the area. They continue to support the families of the victims in different ways towards healing. The group also visited the homes of some surviving victims of the bombing.

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## ICF Alumni Feature: SoP 2018 Alumna joins ICF

**Note:** ICF uses the term “alumni” in an inclusive sense. Thus, this section is dedicated to feature one who went through any of the ICF programs such as School of Peace, Peace Institute (formerly mini-SoP), or even a thematic workshop. ☸ ☸ ☸



**Note:** Baidido Manalasal Saganding is a Maguidanaoan Muslim from South Cotabato, Philippines. She is a licensed Social Worker. She was hired as ICF Program Officer in early April of this year. However, she was able to join the APAY project only on July 2, 2019 because of the long process of getting the working visa in Hong Kong. Bai, as she prefers to be called, tells her story about where she is coming from. Ed.

Growing up in a conflict-affected community in Central Mindanao, at an early age I already experienced fleeing from our home almost every three years, having stopped going to school, living in evacuation centers, or living in my relatives' home. At a young age, I thought that such experiences were just normal for every child. I enjoyed living with our relatives under one roof. We ate noodles and canned goods almost every meal and played with other children in the centers.

As I grew older, I realized that my situation was not normal anymore when the opening of classes was announced. I was not able to start my Grade 4 class in the elementary school time. I was able to join my Grade 4 class when almost half

of the school year started. I was way behind my classmates in doing the class requirements. And yes, this was because we fled from our place.

Why do I want to share this story? I am telling this story because this childhood experience influenced in the shaping of my innate desire to work for peace. My mind started to open when I participated in a Summer Institute for Peace and Development Motivators, a month-long seminar-workshop organized by Southern Christian College, a Protestant school in Central Mindanao in the Philippines. I decided to take up a Bachelor of Science in Social Work in that same school, Southern Christian College. During college days, I was actively engaged in peace activities conducted by the school and its partners. I also volunteer as part of the Peace and Reconciliation Team members of North Cotabato of Peacebuilders Community.

Wanting to pursue my passion for helping my own community, I worked in a national non-government organization that worked for healing and development of Internally Displaced Persons of Central Mindanao. My almost eight years of working in the non-government organization helped me to develop my capacity to continue working for peace, especially for women and their children.

At present, I am taking up a leave from my Master Studies in Extension Education at a university in Southern Mindanao. ☸ ☸ ☸

Baidido “Bai” Saganding  
SoP 2018  
Philippines

*“I object  
to  
violence  
because  
when it  
appears  
to do good,  
the good  
is only  
temporary;  
the evil  
it does I  
is  
permanent.”*

— Mohandas K.  
Gandhi

## Reflection



## Reflections Corner:

From the Thematic Workshop-Philippines  
Participants

## My Understanding of Peace

June 20, 2019.

My heart was glad as I stood there facing my very attentive classmates. I was sharing with them the way I understood PEACE. Actually, when my teacher started to ask us about the meaning of Peace, I could not help but be excited as I recall the words of Ma'am Muriel during the Peace Institute I seminar. So, when our teacher asked us to give our ideas on how we understood the topic, I raised my hand and went up to the front.

I said,

"Peace is not really the absence of war but the presence of justice, love, and respect among everyone. Peace is a long and arduous work that can only be achieved if both conflicting parties take the time to sit down together and talk. The true culture of peace is the ability to listen to both sides and understand the fact that what each party could really see is just a portion of the whole truth. Therefore each one should accept the fact that no one really holds everything. Negotiation must be done so that nobody loses and everyone gets their exact share of the cake. Peace talk, therefore, must be strengthened and be established fairly so that Peace would be achieved. Every conflict has its own root, but cutting the

*Peace is actually possible if we all make extra efforts to make peace with ourselves and with others, as we practice mindfulness anchored in justice, love and respect.*

roots would only kill the plant. It is best to treat the roots properly than plucking it off. Similarly, war is never a solution to achieve peace. It is through peace talks that we can really protect the welfare of the people and finally agree on matters to achieve Peace. As we embrace our diversified culture, peace is actually possible if we all make extra efforts to make peace with ourselves and with others, as we practice mindfulness anchored in justice, love and respect." ❧ ❧



Eremie Ratunil  
Peace Institute I  
Cagayan de Oro City  
Philippines



Photo Credit:  
Muriel Orevilla-Montenegro

## News Feature: Hate Crime rises again in Bangladesh and is increasing

It was the 2nd of June, Sunday of 2019. Like the other mornings, I went to the local market to buy some vegetables, fishes, and other things. But that morning was quite different. My mum called, telling me not to go to near the temple. She said my younger brother told her that he saw police officers around the temple. Someone destroyed the icons in the Hindu temple the night before.

The news really made me sad. This type of things is unexpected. Curious, I went to the temple after my errand to do marketing, without informing my mother so she will not be anxious. The temple is just about 8-10 minutes walk from my house. This is a very old and famous Hindu temple in our community. It was established before Bangladesh became a British colony in 1757. The temple is called Dashavuja Mandiir, named after the famous Hindu Goddess Durga. Sometimes Goddess Durga is called Dashavuja because she has ten hands. In old Bengali language, "Dash" means 10 and "Vuja" means hand.

I came to the temple vicinity where the yellow police tape with the words "Crime scene, do not cross" cordoned the area. The police force was still collecting evidence for the investigation. I asked the Police Officer who knew me, to take me inside for a few minutes to see with my own eyes what happened. I promised him I won't touch anything, and I will just take some photos. Luckily, he agreed and guided me inside the temple. What I saw inside was a terrific scene. The broken parts of the icons were scattered all over the place and outside the

yard of the temple.

That sight really upset me though I am not a Hindu. I could not hold the tears from my eyes when I saw the idol maker was crying loudly. On the following day, the 3rd of June was a day of prayer to celebrate the saint Loknath. He had many icons of Loknath to make, and he was nearly finished with his work. Making idols in the temple ground and selling them is his only occupation and the only way to earn money. Icon-making is a family trade hand down from his grand grandfather. The vandals did not miss to break his nearly finished idols.

Breaking the idols of Loknath means many Hindu people could not go on with their prayers and rituals on the 3rd of June. According to the Durgapur police findings, no valuable things were taken. Only the idols were destroyed. This led to the conclusion that the act was to kindle conflict between the Hindu and Muslim communities.



The broken icon of Goddess Durga

Photo credit: Md. Raja Rahman Chowdhury



## Hate crime rises again in Bangladesh . . .



Broken pieces of the icon of Goddess Durga.

Photo credit: Md. Raja Chaudhary

The violent act of desecrating the temple and the idols there is definitely a hate crime. This hate crime is motivated by prejudice on the basis of religion.

Bangladesh is a country where Muslims are more than 80% of the population. Statistics show that in the last few decades hate crime is increasing so fast. Examples could be cited, such as the burning the Buddhist temple in Ramu, a part of the Chittagong division, just because of a

piece of fake news or rumor. Vandalizing the temple of Hindu Goddess Kali in Brahmonbaria and the burning of the whole community of Saotal, an ethnic group in Gaibandha District last year. These are some proofs that hate crime is increasing so quickly in Bangladesh these days. In the past, Bangladesh was a very peaceful country. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians lived together peacefully. But now it is getting worse. There was a proverb in the past that everyone believed: "Religion is yours, but the festival is for all."

As a Muslim peace activist, I want my country to be a peaceful country where there will be no conflict between any religion, any tribal or ethnic groups. There should be no violence between "major" and "minors" religions. We want to see that everyone is living in peace, harmony, and blessings. Our mindset should be like that. "No more conflict, no more violence. No more vandalism." We live in one country and we just want peace deep down in our hearts. ❧❧❧



Md. Raja Rahman Chowdhury  
Durgapur, Mymensingh Bangladesh  
SoP 2018, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

## ICF Coordinator joins Solidarity Visit

One was a twelve year old child who sustained wounds on his belly and leg. One grandmother had her leg wounded. The group visited the family of the man who tried to ask questions to the unfamiliar person with a backpack, the guy blew himself up and all those around him. The scope of the damage was unthinkable. The pastor, Rev. Roshan Mahesan, still demonstrated his faith amidst the painful reality that 33 of his parishioners died, 14 of whom were children, and some are still fighting for their lives in the hospital.

We thank the YMCA Sri Lanka for being with APAY and World Alliance representatives in the visits to the people who have been closely affected by the terrorist attacks. The evil of terrorism is unredeemable, but the work for peace must continue. This is a challenge not only in Sri Lanka, or in Asia, but in the whole world. ❧❧❧

## INTERFAITH COOPERATION FORUM

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The Karen Student Network  
Group

Photo credit: Saw Say Moo

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 perspective 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.

### Karen Student and Youth Exchange Program held seminar

The Karen Student Network Group (KSNG) started the Karen Student and Youth Exchange Program in 2014, and continues until now. It aims to gather Karen students and youth together to promote peace, human rights, understand the current peace process in Myanmar, the environmental issues and the foundation of Karen education.

The theme of our program last year was "Youth as a Peace Builders." It was held at Thoo Mweh K'mler High School, Hpa Ah district, Karen state, Burma. There were a total of 104 participants from five middle schools, two high schools, along with some teachers, and out of school youth. The topics discussed included Karen history, Myanmar peace process, community peacebuilding, development & peace, and Karen education movement. Documentary films entitled "Nightmare Returns" and "Unrecognized Leaders: Raising the Voice of Forgotten Youth" were shown in the evening. The participants also watched a short video clip of peace movement and KSNG activities.

Each day, the sessions started with breathing meditation, and recap of the previous day's session. The participants gave their full participation in group discussions, presentations, singing songs and other energizing activities.

"This is a very good program for bringing student and Youth together from differ-



Karen young attending seminar to be  
peacebuilders

Photo credit: Saw Say Mo

ent places to know each other, building trust and friendship. It helps us understand the things happening around us, and give us the strength to work for the community. We request to have this kind of activity more in the future for young people," said Padoh Saw Plat Htoo, the Head of education at Hpa Ah district.

I was one of the key facilitators on peacebuilding. I used most of the skills I learned from SoP. Those skills are very useful for me and my organization in the community. I hope that the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) will invite more peacebuilders and give the young people skills through SoP. I am thankful to ICF for providing me more knowledge and skills, and to everyone who supported our activities. I welcome you all to join us for the next Karen Student and Youth Exchange Program in Karen Land.

Saw Say Moo  
SoP 2017  
Myanmar (Burma)