



The Peacebuilders

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

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ICF Program Committee plans for 2020-2023

Mohaimen K. Arba, Philippines, SoP 2018

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) Program Committee held its annual meeting on January 12-14, 2020 in Malaysia. It was graciously hosted by the Kuala Lumpur YMCA at Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. The ICF Alumni members of the Program Committee met the leaders and Board members of KL YMCA headed by the Very Reverend Philip Thomas and Dr. Chee Loo Fong. The KL YMCA hosted one sumptuous dinner for the Committee.

The Program Committee

is composed of the six ICF alumni, General Secretary and Executive Secretary of APAY, ICF Program Coordinator, and the Program Officer. Among the ICF alumni members were Biplob Rangsa, Rina Krebru, Ranny Rith and Sirikanya Chaiwongkeaw but two, namely Tirmiizy Abdullah and Shreeram Chaudhari were not able to come. However, some other ICF alumni who were invited to attend the thematic workshop set after the Program Committee meeting have also had the chance to participate in the meeting.

Mr. Nam Boo Won, APAY General Secretary, and Mr. Duncan Chowdhury, Executive Secretary gave updates on the work of APAY and ICF. Mr. Chowdhury also facilitated the review of the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Program Committee. One feature of the ToR is the staggered term of office of the members. The alumni provided updates of their involvement in Interfaith activities in their respective communities. On the morning of the second day, Dr. Muriel Oreillo-Montenegro, the ICF Co-



Mr. Nam Boo Won, General Secretary of APAY, gave the Program Committee members and guest ICF Alumni an update on the work of APAY.

Photo credit: ICF

ICF Program Committee met in Kuala Lumpur

ordinator, discussed the results of the external evaluation of ICF and the evaluators' recommendation for the next project cycle in 2020 to 2023. Then, Baidido Saganding, the ICF Program Officer, facilitated the workshop on committee inputs for the next project phase in 2020-2023. The meeting was also an opportunity

to discuss the Peace Summit activity with the Alumni that is scheduled in May this year.

The ICF Program Committee and other alumni are hopeful that through the next project phase implementation, ICF will be able to reach out to more youths in Asia.



Mohaimen K. Arba is a Barangay Council member of his village in Simsiman, Pigcawayan, Cotabato, Philippines.

ICF Workshop Challenges Alumni to Write

Saw Tun Lu, SoP 2019. Myanmar



The workshop participants during sessions at the Kuala Lumpur YMCA Board Room at Brickfields, KL, Malaysia
Photo Credit: ICF

On January 15-18, 2020, ICF held a Thematic Workshop focused on writing in Kuala Lumpur YMCA, Malaysia. Only nine among those invited showed up for the workshop. Nine ICF alumni participated and wrote nine "Life Journey and Success story as a Budding Peacebuilder" articles and nine news articles to be

published in ICF e-Newsletter, The Peacebuilders, and e-Book. The workshop aimed that all the participants will write their "life journey and success story as a budding peacebuilder." The workshop also aimed to equip the participants with skills to write news articles. The participants came from Asian countries: one

from Myanmar, one from Nepal, two from the Philippines, one from Indonesia and three from Thailand. There was one Hindu, three Christians, and four Muslims. Of the nine participants, two were males and seven were females. During the workshop, the participants took turns in carrying out the

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ICF Workshop Challenges Alumni to Write

responsibilities such as moderators and as time-keepers. The ICF Program Officer, Baidido M. Saganding also participated in the workshop. The ICF Coordinator, Dr. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro presented the basic writing principles and skills and facilitated the workshop. She asked the participants to write their respective life journeys and success stories in the peacebuilding process.

The writing workshop referred to by the facilitator as a “writeshop” yielded articles on issues such as gender discrimination, human rights, their struggles in life, and

the story of their life journey. The participants presented their outputs to all the participants for critiquing by their peers and the facilitator. They also gave suggestions to improve their peers’ write-ups.

The second workshop was about the basics of news writing. The ICF Coordinator gave a presentation on the basic principles of writing straight news. Then, she asked the participants to write news articles on events or incidents that they feel to be relevant

to their situation and in peace-building.

This writing workshop was a challenging but enjoyable learning experience for all the participants. ☺ ☺ ☺



Saw Tun Lu is an SoP 2019 Alumnus from Yangon, Myanmar. He was appointed Program Coordinator of YMCA Myanmar in December 2019, a couple of weeks after he

finished the School of Peace.

Photo Credit: ICF

ICF pulls through North East India thematic workshop

Wati Longchar, India with
Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, ICF Coordinator

Everything was set for the February 11-15, 2020 ICF thematic workshop in North East India in cooperation with the Tribal Study Centre of Eastern Theological College in Jorhat, Assam. But COVID-19 came with travel ban and quarantine issues, preventing the ICF Coordinator and Program Officer to fly to India. The thematic workshop pulled through with Dr. Wati Longchar, who had to take the helm and responsibility of seeing to it that the activity will be a success. Longchar had been among the resource persons for the past School of Peace. The workshop-seminar’s discussions revolved around the theme “Just-Peace in Globalized Context: North East India Focus.”

According to W. Longchar, the workshop brought together 40 prominent people – young and the

not-so-young - from various religious traditions (Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and a Heraka follower), disciplines, NGOs, activists, and scholars from various North East Indian region comprising seven states. The first day was set aside for an interactive and exposure trip to Majuli Island, the world’s largest river-island. This river-

island is home to Assamese neo-Vaishnava culture that was started in the 15th century by a revered Assamese saint Srimanta Sankardeva, who also established several satras or monasteries. During the visit, participants were able to interact with the Auniati Satra and its monks. The participants also visited and interacted with



The seminar-workshop participants in Jorhat, Assam with the facilitators

Photo: Wati Longchar

ICF pulls through North East India thematic workshop

the Christians whose church building was partially destroyed by a group of Vaishnavite Hindus. At the end of the dialogue, the participants were unanimous that Christian and Vaishnavas believe in love, equality, and diversity of God's creation, and so they decided to stand together in solidarity to protect the Constitution of India.

The second day focused on the Analysis of Global and National Unjust Structures. Under this theme, various resource persons and panelists made a presentation on various related sub-themes. Wati Longchar gave the keynote address on "Just-Peace in Today's World," in which he raised a number of issues critical to world peace and reiterated the need for interfaith dialogue for peace

and harmonious co-existence. Following this, panelists representing various religious leaders and scholars deliberated on the contentious agenda of the existing Government of India, "One nation, One language, and One religion," Wati Longchar gave another presentation on "Liberation or Assimilation: An Indigenous People's Perspective." The day ended with a presentation and deliberation on another burning issue of the "Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and its Implications on Indigenous communities in

North East India (NEI)."

The third day focused on "Religio-Cultural Structures and Peace Initiative Processes." Various resource persons spoke on issues such as (a) Patriarchy and Marginalization of Women; (b) Tribals and Land Issues in North East India; (c) Achievement of World Peace through Inter-religious Harmony: A Buddhist Perspective; (d) Racial Discrimination in Major Cities in India: A Search for Solution. The day ended with panelists representing various NE states presenting and shared People's Movements for Justice in the various North East States.

The fourth and final day saw the participants deliberating on the broad theme "Mobilizing Just-Peace Resources." The topics for presentations and panel discussions include Civil Society for Peace; Religious Resources for Just-Peace; and Mobilizing Collective People's Solidarity Movement for



Participants with an Assamese neo-Vaishnava monk at the Auniati Satra
Photo credit: Wati Longchar



A presenter on Patriarchy and Marginalization of Women
Photo: Wati Longchar

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ICF pulls through North East India thematic workshop

Just Peace in NEI. The resource persons and panelists representing various religious and ideological

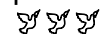


Peace channel diagram by Dr. C. Panto, one of the facilitators during the Jorhat Thematic Workshop
Photo: Wati Longchar

traditions, as well as activists associated with various people's movements in the region engaged in tapping into resources for just-peace and for forging united efforts to work together for just-peace in the society.

This workshop calls for joint efforts to combat any forms of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination on the basis of caste, tribe, gender, religion, and community. It also helped the participants in analyzing the contemporary reality of forces that perpetuate violence and discrimination

and to explore ways for building peace and harmonious society.



Dr. Wati Longchar is a pioneer in Asian indigenous theology. He had worked with Christian Conference in Asia and with the World Council of Churches. He taught in seminaries in India and Taiwan. He is now based in Kolkata, and works to support theological education in Indian churches.



Photo: ICF

Thai ICF Alums initiate peace camp in Chiangmai

Tasneem Ismail Samoh, Thailand, Peace Institute II

On 11th -15th December 2019, the Thai Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) Alumni organized a peace camp in Wat Rampeng, Chiang Mai under their project entitled "Understanding Peace and Religion." The organizing alumni included three Thai- Buddhist Monks from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) and two Thai-Muslim students from Fatoni University (FTU). The ICF Alumni were participants of ICF's Peace institute II in 2019 that was held on July 31- August 10, 2019, in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. These ICF alumni coming from two different religions from north and south of Thailand were running this activity. The participants were high school students in Northern Thailand. A total of 25 persons participated in the camp: 15 were males



The ICF Alumni initiators with the Peace Camp participants
Photo Credit: Phra Jorranin Intawong

and 10 were females. The youth participants were composed of thirteen (13) Buddhists, seven (7) Christians, and five (5) Muslims. The graduates of Peace Institute II and School of Peace 2019 took turns in facilitating the activities, except for Fr. Niphot Theinwihan. A Jesuit priest, Fr. Niphot facilitated the discussion on

Peace in Christianity. Phra Sivone Keovilaipunya presented The History of ICF, Phra Jorranin Intawong facilitated the workshop on The River of Life, and Environmental Issues, Phra Somboon Sompong led the discussion on Conflict: Types, Levels and Causes, as well as the topic on Peace in Buddhism.

Thai ICF Alumni initiate peace camp in Chiangmai



A Workshop during the Chiangmai Peace Camp
Photo: Phra Jorranin Intawong

Tasneem Ismail Samoh and Muneeroh Toche led the discussion on Peace in Islam.

The activity on Understanding Peace and Religion aimed to help the participants learn about other religions, their followers' faith, perspectives and practices in promoting peace. During the Peace Camp, the participants learned about how Buddhist, Christian and

Muslims do meditation and the teachings of these religions. The participants also learned about Nonviolent Communication, conflict and the environmental problems that were related to peace. This basic knowledge that the youth gained at the peace camp is a key to peacebuilding.

This was the first project that Thai-ICF Alumni worked on as organizers

and it was particularly a collaboration between the student monks and Muslim students. Furthermore, this first project is just the beginning of other projects that the Thai ICF Alumni will undertake in the future as a peace movement in Thailand. ❧ ❧



Tasneem Ismail Samoh is an alumna of Peace Institute 2. She is currently a student at Fatoni University (FTU) in Pattani, Thailand, major in English literature.

Photo: ICF

Bangladesh ICF Alums co-organize Justpeace Festival 2020

Rinku Barnabas Mankhin, Bangladesh, SoP 2019



Biplob Rangsa, SoP 2012 giving a speech during the Festival
Photo: Rinku Mankhin

Supported by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs (APAY), Bangladesh ICF National Forum co-organized the "Just Peace Festival" on February 12-13, 2020. It was held at Jaynul Abedin Park of Mymensingh along with partners such as Shanti Mitra Mati, Community

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Bangladesh ICF Alums co-organize Justpeace Festival 2020



Puppet Show for children during the Justpeace Festival
Photo: Biplob Rangsa

Trust Mymensingh Forum, BD Clean Bangladesh, and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The festival plays a vital role in promoting peace among interfaith people in Bangladesh. This is the sixth time that Bangladesh ICF National Forum co-organizes the festival.

The festival aims to raise awareness on just peace and inspires especially the young people to work for peace and harmony in the community. The festival's theme revolved around the environment and care of creation, and focused on "Climate Change and Inter-religious Harmony."



The Commitment Tree
Photo: Biplob Rangsa

The festival started with singing a song on justice and peace, and a welcome speech from Ms. Suborna Poli Drong, who is a SoP 2012 alumna, and a member of the organizing committee of the festival. The Bangladesh National Forum of ICF had a booth that served as an information center where we gave information about ICF to the people. We, the Bangladesh ICF Alumni, shared with the people the aim of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum and its activities particularly in building peace among different religions and faiths.

During the whole festival, the participants from different faiths and religions expressed their dreams for a peaceful society in creative ways. It was a positive process to bring social change in our community. I hope that we can create a peaceful society on earth, and live in peace and harmony with all living beings. I feel very proud of having that wonderful opportunity to attend the just peace festival. I have learned many things that inspire me to work as a peacebuilder in my community.

Being part of the just peace festival 2020 for the first time made me see that this festival can be a platform for spreading the peace message, and forging friendship and harmony among people from different religions. During the event, I have seen how people from different religions, especially the youth and children, have actively participated in different awareness activities. There were interfaith workshops on justice and peace among the youth and children. There was also an exhibition of paintings by the local artists around the theme



Suborna Poli Drong, SoP 2012 (far left) with the Festival co-organizers and guests
Photo: Rinku Mankhin

of peace and justice. Another activity was a drawing session for young people and children on just peace themes. There were art installations and a workshop on inter-religious harmony based on the theme of the festival. The festival stressed the need for inter-religious harmony and that these different religions have teachings about peace and harmony.

I hope to encourage people from different religions to know properly about their own religions and respect other people's religions. I believe that this event is a good platform where we can spread the message of unity and peace, and inspire people to promoting peace in our communities. 🙏🙏🙏



Photo: ICF

Rinku Barnabas Mankhin, SoP 2019 is from Birisi, Bangladesh. He works as a freelance tutor.

SoP Alumna participates in Peace-gifts giving to PWDs

Sirikanya Chaiwongkaew, Thailand, SoP 2018

Christmas is a famous festival that Christians celebrate in December. It is a celebration of the birth of their Lord Jesus. On December 25, 2019, the First Church in Chiang Mai celebrated Christmas with the Persons with Disabilities (PWD). The theme of this Christmas celebration was "Not far from us." It means God is accessible to people. The Christmas festival was the work of the church and community cooperation to organize this event for the PWDs in Chiang Mai, Thailand.



A Nativity Tableau

When I joined the School of Peace in 2018 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, I understood more of the PWDs' hardships with physical disabilities and the usual negative attitude of society towards them. It made me want to do something for them. Therefore, I joined the committee of Christmas organizers to do a Christmas celebration for them with the First Church of Chiang Mai, my local church.



Giving gifts to a paraplegic child

This year, The First Church had sent invitations to more than 400 people with disabilities throughout Chiang Mai such as the disabled club, the blind club, the club for the deaf, Deaf School, among others, to attend the annual Christmas. There were performances, music, drama, and games to entertain the PWD guests. There were more than twenty (20) restaurants and beverages shops that donated 1,000 Peace-gifts to PWDs. There were teams composed of more than 60 people - from teenagers to the elderly, who helped in the distribution of the gifts and do the preparations and aftercare.

Also, during the Christ-



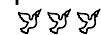
Enjoying meals offered by the church

mas festival, the church gave Peace-gifts to the organizing team as well. This event allows them to learn about sharing, giving, and making sacrifices. According to Acts 20: 35, "It's more blessed to give than to receive."

This activity was a collabo-



ration of a small group of people that creates great happiness for others. Furthermore, I would like to thank the learning in the SoP program that taught me to realize the value of humanity and stand up to do something to create peace in society.



Note: All the photos used here are from https://www.facebook.com/firstchurchcm/media_set/?set=a.10159158499955558

Sirikanya "Kwang" Chaiwongkaew hails from Chiangmai, Thailand. She is currently doing her masters degree program and is helping her local church carry out its ministry.
Photo: ICF/Retha Andoea

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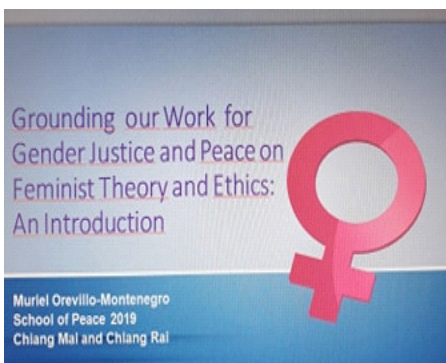
“Anchor gender justice work on feminist theory and ethics!”

Kaushila Sunuwar, Nepal, SoP 2019

“What is the use of studying *conflict* if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of *peace*, etc., and if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life?”

The facilitator began the session with a slide that projected her adaptation of a quote from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. On October 12, 2019, the School of Peace 2019 had a workshop on ‘Grounding our Work for Gender Justice & Peace on Feminist Theory and Ethics’ as part of its two months course.

Dr. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro facilitated the session on Feminist Theory and Ethics for Gender Justice and Peace. Its aim was to help the participants understand the basic principles of feminism, its importance, and influence in creating and sustaining peace. She also elaborated on the significance of the statement of an American radical feminist legal scholar, Catharine McKinnon, who said, “equality aiming at justice requires theorizing from the perspective of the dominated.”



The workshop session began with the viewing of a UN short film called ‘The Impossible Dream.’ SoP participants were then asked to reflect on the content of the film by using certain keywords. They also participated in recreating the probable scenes and causes behind various news headlines with live-action and tableaux that were performed by each group. Other activities afterward consisted of reviewing certain social theories, learning feminist terminologies, and familiarizing some feminist theory of justice.

In learning certain feminist terminologies, some participants found new words and theories that were not familiar in their previous situations. Such terms as patriarchy and gender were reviewed and reflected upon by the groups with some contextual

examples from their respective countries. The SoP participants finished the session with Dr. Muriel summarizing that feminism, as a theory and as a political movement, is intersectional, with many layers and conjunctions.

The School of Peace is a program organized by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum, a project of Asia & Pacific Alliance of YMCAs. The sessions were held at the YMCA International Hotel with 19 participants from 11 countries, beginning September 23 to November 21, 2019.



Kaushila Sunuwar, SoP 2019 alumna. is from Ramechhap, Nepal. She got her Bachelors’ Degree in Sociology a few months after she joined the School of Peace.

A Garo Alumnus introduces the Wangala Festival

Rinku Barnabas Mankhin, Bangladesh, SoP 2019

Wangala is a harvest festival that Garo tribes in Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Assam in India, and Greater Mymensingh in Bangladesh celebrate. During this festival, the Garo people give thanks and praise to God (Misi Saljong), the sun God, for blessing the



people with a rich harvest. The dates of the Wangala Festival is usually movable, but the different villages usually celebrate it from September to December. Though the Garo Indigenous People in Bangladesh are getting

Indigenous Peoples and the Wangala Festival 2019: A Reflection

more educated these days, they are still facing discrimination in areas of education, employment, political and economic structures, and other opportunities. The Garo indigenous peoples have their own cultures such as language, food, clothes, faith and spirituality. It is very sad to say that many indigenous peoples are losing their language and cultures, and the Garo people are in the same situation. The lack of written evidence or document, the absence of a department that serves as guardian or vanguard of Garo culture, and the lack of opportunity to practice our language and culture are the main reasons for losing our language and culture.

In this situation, the Birisiri Simsang A'chik A'samo Wangala Committee is playing a great role to make our language and cultures survive, to support us, the Garo people, to practice our culture, and encourage others to respect each other's cultures. This festival committee started to organize the Wangala festival in 2017 in Birisiri, Durgapur, Netrakona. The festival aims to raise awareness of the Garo culture, to preserve the Garo culture, and for the people to live in peace and harmony as they practice



Garo Village's Wangala Festival

Photo: Rinku Mankhin

their language and cultures. During the Wangala festival, we try to inspire the young generation to preserve, understand and respect our own culture by practicing it.

The Birisiri Wangala Festival Committee had organized the third Simsang A'chik A'samo Wangala festival on 13th December 2019 at the riverbank of Simsang, Durgapur, Netrakona, Bangladesh. There were more than 200 people present from the Garo community during the festival.

The festival started with greetings and a welcome speech from Nokma Mr. Bulbul Mankhin. I have learned many things from that festival and I found peace in sharing my peace mission among all of them. I tried to focus on the "inter-cultural harmony and peace" aspect of the festival. I have greatly learned that if we can practice and respect our own culture, it is possible to bring peace together in the community. I believe

that every culture says something about peace and harmony. Yet, most of the time, our practice is different out of our ignorance and indifference towards other cultures. I hope that this Wangala festival can be a way to encourage people to know properly about one's own culture and respect other people's cultures.

As a peacebuilder, I hope to find peace and unity, and we help each other. I find peace whenever we share our happiness. We know that peace is needed on this earth. Peace is needed in our community, in our society, in our family, and our personal life. We cannot deny that there are a lot of conflicts that exist in our daily life, and these pose barriers in bringing about peace and harmony on earth. So let us come forward to work together to promote peace, open our minds and help create conflicts in our daily life.

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ICF's TW Alumnus Represents Peace CREED at 17th TAYO Awards

Ali Melicano, Philippines

My name is Ali Melicano from Mindanao, Philippines. I am a proud Maguindanaon. I am an ICF Alumnus. I have attended the Thematic Workshop (TW) in January 2019 in Iligan City, Philippines. I am also the Vice-President of a small organization called Peace Community Renewal on Ecological Entrepreneurship and Development (Peace CREED). Peace CREED Philippines was born on December 5, 2018, and it envisions developing the conflict-affected areas in Central Mindanao into a Peace and Reconciliation Community. An alumna of the Thematic Workshop and School of Peace 2019, Hamsiya Olimpian, is a co-founder of Peace CREED.

It is a great opportunity to share about my experience, along with our organization - the Peace CREED Philippines during the 17th TAYO Awards last February 10, 2020, in GSIS Theater, Pasay City Philippines. TAYO is an acronym for "Ten Accomplished Youth Organizations." The TAYO Awards Foundation Incorporated is the only award-giving body that recognizes and supports the contribution of the youth in the Philippines. In November 2019, our semi-youth organization ("semi-youth" because not all persons in the leadership are young people), qualified for the area visitation and validation process by the TAYO Awards Foundation. The Visiting Team had a good impression of our works and advocacies, and we made it to the regional qualifiers. Among the ten (10) qualified youth organizations in Mindanao, Peace CREED Philippines was chosen as one of the Top 5 regional finalists. This gave the organization the chance to be

among the National Finalists. As Vice President, my colleagues gave me the responsibility to represent the organization during the final pitch of our project on February 10, 2020, at the Philippine Senate Building in Manila.

It was a great experience for me. I have learned so many things from my co-presenters that inspire me to do more initiatives in my community and in our organization. The event also provided me an opportunity to know some friends who could be our organization's partner. I am so happy and proud that in our little way we were able to help other people, especially in our community. I am grateful to Peace CREED for the trust and for giving me the chance to represent and share our project. Representing our organization was a great responsibility because it was our chance to showcase our project and be recognized nationally. I was confident though that I can represent well our organization and its project. At first, I felt nervous because the group of finalists is composed of people from mixed backgrounds in terms of education, culture, and religion.



Final pitch of presenting the project concept
Photo Credit: TAYO Awards



Ali (extreme right) and his co-presenters receiving trophy as recognition of their work.

Photo Credit: TAYO Awards

But looking back at my experience, I knew that I can do better because I know other religions, at least the basics. The knowledge I gained from the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) activities helps me a lot. It provided me a wide perspective on different cultures and practices of each religion. This gave me more confidence that I know somehow each practice. During the whole duration of the workshop event, I gained some friends from other religions. We treated each other with respect during our sharing. They understood me, especially when I practice my Salah (Prayer). My roommates were Christians, and every time I was about to pray they silently observed me. They turned off their phones and the TV in our room. I am very much thankful that I have the chance to share my religion, Islam, with others and they understand it.

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My Journey: The School of Peace leads me to YSEALI!

Hein Thura Htet, Myanmar, SoP 2018

I am Hein Thura Htet, a SoP 2018 alumnus from Myanmar. I joined the School of Peace in 2018 organized by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs hosted by Duta Wacana Christian University Faculty of Theology in Yogyakarta, Indonesia for two months. My experience with SoP 2018 provided me a good platform to work with diverse people and further my learning about Peace studies and advocacy. It raised me to expose newer experiences and expand networking for change not only in the local context but also abroad. Additionally and especially, I was encouraged and strongly recommended by the ICF Coordinator to get selected for the competitive YSEALI application process. I applied what I have learned in the SoP2018 in some sharing and discussions during the YSEALI. By participating in these programs, I improved my skills like communication, adaptability, leadership, and collaboration with others that perfectly contribute to my academic and professional development. My training in both the School of Peace and YSEALI have improved my self-esteem and self-confidence to work on



Thura making presentation during SoP 2018 in Yogyakarta
Photo: ICF/Retha Andoea

crucial issues with my community towards a constructive and sustainable social change. I am now sharing my experiences and learning with my community and I will also participate in ICF Alumni activities.

I want to share my experience with YSEALI Academic Fellowship during Fall 2019. Launched in 2013, the Young South-east Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) is a U.S. government's signature program to strengthen leadership development and networking in South-east Asia. Through a variety of programs and engagements, including U.S. educational and cultural exchanges, regional exchanges, and seed funding, YSEALI seeks to build the leadership capabilities of youth in the region. It also seeks to strengthen ties between the United States and Southeast Asia and nurture an ASEAN com-

munity. YSEALI focuses on critical topics identified by youth in the region: civic engagement, sustainable development, education, and economic growth.

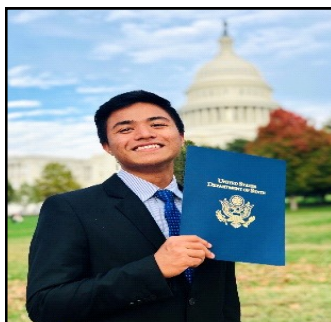
As a YSEALI Fellow, I went to Kennesaw State University (KSU) in Kennesaw, Georgia. I belonged to the fifth cohort of YSEALI Academic Fellowship on civic engagement with participants from 10 different Asian countries. Even though the theme of the Academic Fellowship at KSU was "International Civil and Human Rights", it covered many interesting subjects. Among them were on International Peace Studies, Conflict Management, International Civil and Human Rights Studies, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Social Entrepreneurship and Project Proposal Development. The teaching strategies included lectures, team-building, service activities, class observations, and dis-

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My Journey: The School of Peace leads me to YSEALI!

cussions. It perfectly included study trips to some places related to the US Civil Rights Movements. The sessions had excellent speakers from different fields of educational and social studies. Although we did not have a homestay experience like what we had in the School of Peace, KSU offered faculty small group family dinners that made us, the participants, feel at home and had informal discussions. KSU's student mentors were helpful and friendly. During the last week, all the YSEALI fellows from UNO University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) and KSU came together and enjoyed the educational tours to Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C. In Washington, D.C., we presented our project proposals to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S Department of States, and then enjoyed gradua-



tion and debriefing with the Program Officer.

The School of Peace 2018 provided me basic knowledge about peace and human rights studies. YSEALI offered me in-depth studies on the U.S. Civil Rights Movements and the African-Americans' struggles, especially from Selma, Montgomery, Birmingham, Atlanta, and other sites. I had comparative thoughts on the United States Civil Rights Movements with Myanmar National and Student Strikes. The SDGs provided me with deeper understanding, especially on

how it could be implemented for community development and social change in Myanmar. The social entrepreneurship and project development course brought me very new insights on how we can productively initiate, process, and sustain community-based projects within non-profit organizations.

At present, I work as a freelancer and volunteer facilitator for some workshops and trainings. I also joined the Research Methods and Analysis for Advocates courses at the Institute for Political and Civic Engagement in Mandalay, Myanmar. I am so especially grateful to Ma'am Muriel for very strong recommendations that made me fulfill one of my application requirements. Thanks to ICF for giving me a chance to share my experiences, and for keeping me in the ICF loop. 🙏🙏🙏

ICF continues supporting activities initiated by National Forums and Alumni

ICF continues its commitment to support the national forums and individual/group of alumni through a Small Grants to those that submit proposals either for ICF Alumni Follow-Up activities, or for Local Peace Education, Advocacy and Networking.

The first grant is intended to help the Alumni gather and update their skills and knowledge in peace efforts. The ICF alumni are those who have attended ICF-initiated activities such as the Thematic Workshops (TW), Peace Institutes and School of Peace.

The second grant is for an alumnus/a, a group of alumni, or a national forum to gather the youth in a local community for Local Peace Education, Advocacy and Networking. ICF grants range from USD 500-2,000. A Screening Committee will give the approval for the release of funds.

The following activities have been approved for support:

Country	Activity	Dates	Themes
Bangladesh	Local Peace Ed, Advocacy, Networking	Feb. 12-13, 2020	Justpeace Festival
Timor Leste	Local Peace Ed, Advocacy and Networking	March 4-8, 2020	Understanding Conflict and Religion
Sri Lanka	Local Peace Ed, Advocacy and Networking	March 12-13, 2020	Peacebuilding and Nonviolent Communication
Nepal	Local Peace Ed, Advocacy and Networking	March 11-13, 2020	Peace Education and Conflict Transformation
Marawi, Philippines	Local Peace Ed, Advoc. and Networking	March 21-23, 2020	Mindanao Youth Peace Formation
N. Cotabato, Philippines	Alumni Follow Up	April 16-20, 2020	Most Significant Change (MSC) Workshop for ICF
Myanmar	Local Peace Ed, Advocacy and Networking	April 27-May 1, 2020	Religio-Cultural Understanding and Peacebuilding for

**INTERFAITH
COOPERATION
FORUM**

Asia and Pacific Alliance of
YMCAs
23 Waterloo Road 6/F
Kowloon, Hong Kong
Phone: +852-27808347
Fax: +852-23854692
E-mail:
APAY@asiapacificymca.org

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.



From the Editor's Desk:

How COVID -19 affects the work of ICF and our lives

Health is a peace issue. One of the objectives of the School of Peace curriculum says that the participants will be able to "explain that disability, health, sex, and gender justice are peace issues." The participants must "analyze the inter-connection between disability, health, and economic injustices as peace issues."

As the novel coronavirus, baptized as COVID -19, came to spread from China to Hong Kong, to other Asian countries and beyond, most of the plans had to be dropped temporarily. APAY did the same. The plans of ICF to hold a thematic workshop in Bangladesh is indefinitely postponed. We could not fly to India in February to do the thematic workshop. Thankfully, it pulled through with Dr. Wati Longchar's help.

For the moment, we

continue to explore possibilities to hold a thematic workshop in Cambodia in April and to organize the Asian Peace Summit in May, albeit provisionally. We can only hope the virus will go away soon and that everything will be back to normal.

The onset of COVID-19 exposed so much of human frailty on the one hand, but it also surfaced the compassionate side of some people, on the other hand. People scrambled for surgical face masks, hand sanitizers, alcohol, and even toilet paper. Some moneyed folks tended to hoard these items. It also surfaces racist and xenophobic attitudes and tendencies. We hear of governments trying to hide the facts to keep a good image, at the expense of public health.

Yet, we also learn that medical doctors, health workers, and journalists continued to serve the

people, giving out information about the virus, or serving in the hospitals. These they did to the extent of risking their lives. Some of them died.

This situation shows how health is interconnected with cultures, beliefs, economics, politics, ecology, and social justice. That health intertwines with our values and lifestyles. It also challenges our faith in God's goodness and love, and our understanding of greed and evil. As COVID-19 continues to sow fear amongst people, may we continue to reflect on the meaning of our existence, on our health being intertwined with our Planet's or Mother Earth's health. This is crucial in peacebuilding. We are transient in this Earth. We simply live in the meantime. We may say, "This too shall pass." Nevertheless, this circumstance calls us to have faith and live it out.



Please send us news about your Forums, Alumni programs, ICF Partner events or activities related to peacebuilding to:

Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, Editor
<muriel@asiapacificymca.org>
and
Baidido Saganding
<bai@asiapacificymca.org>