

The Peacebuilders

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

Vol. III, No. 4 Bi-monthly E-Newsletter of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs **July-August, 2020**

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BftW Seconded Personnel joins the ICF staff

Beginning July 1, 2020, Annika Denkmann joins the Interfaith Cooperation Forum as the seconded personnel from Bread for the World. She will help in the implementation of the programs of ICF. Annika was prepared to fly to Hong Kong early this year, but the pandemic situation prevented her from coming. Now, meantime, she takes on the tasks assigned to her and works from her home in Bonn, Germany.

Annika holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Intercultural Communication and Modern Languages from the University of Southern Denmark in Sonderborg, and a Master of Arts degree in International Politics with a focus on globalization, poverty, and development. She holds certificates for Peace and Conflict Work from the Academy for Conflict Transformation in Königswinter, and International Project Management with the Association for Sustainable Development in Witzenhausen, Germany.

Annika has served as Programme Coordinator for the Engagement Global -Service for Development Initiatives in Bonn. There, she further developed and implement the North-South component of the weltwärts volunteer program that brings together young people from different parts of the globe that are passionate about development work, global learning, and equitable



encounters. She has served as volunteer coordinator for the Evangelical-Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony, Hermannsburg. As coordinator, she supported the young people during their one-year voluntary service, organize and conduct seminars for the volunteers and works closely with the mission's partner organizations. She had exposure to the Asian context when she went for a four-month internship with the Cambodia Defenders Project, focusing on the campaign against Gender-Based Violence in Cambodia. Moreover, she had a nine-month internship in Eirene – an International Christian Service for Peace in Neuwied where she assists the tasks in the volunteer department.

Aside from German, her mother tongue, Annika also speaks excellent English and has basic knowledge in French and Spanish. ☺☺☺

- Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro
ICF Coordinator

ICF welcomes new APAY Executive Secretary for Programs

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum welcomes Ms. Sunita Sumati Suna, the new Executive Secretary for Programs of Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCA (APAY). She formally started working with APAY on August 01, 2020. She takes the place of Mr. Duncan Chowdhury, who left in July 2020 for the U.S. after serving APAY for more than eight years.

Before joining APAY, Ms. Sunita worked with the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) for more than eight years where she served as Regional Executive for the Asia Pacific and Global Leader for the Identity, Diversity & Dialogues (IDD) Program and as Regional Secretary and Regional Women's Coordinator. She is a Lutheran by confession and ecumenist by passion. Sunita is an ecumenical advocate for a just world for people, nature, and creation. She has several years of experience in working with ecumenical organizations. This experience gave her the skills needed for ecumenical leadership development, capacity building, organizational management, and fundraising. She has special acumen in developing and implementing programs and projects on diverse areas particularly on gender



justice, and women's participation, eco-justice, peacebuilding, and overcoming violence. Sunita hails from India and has lived in Hong Kong for almost ten years.

ICF extends its sincere thanks to Mr. Duncan Chowdhury for his guidance and support to the work and activities of ICF. 🙏🙏🙏

- Baidido Saganding
ICF Program Officer

ICF held Virtual Meetings as the “New Normal” in Pandemic Time

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum would have ended its two-and-a-half-year program phase on June 30, 2020. It had lined up program activities to synchronize the phase's ending in June. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, ICF was not able to implement these activities. Thankfully, ICF's donor-partner, Bread for the World through Christian Fischer, understood the difficulty and graciously

granted ICF an extension-at-no-cost until September 30, 2020. This means ICF could implement the remaining programs without extra funds from the Bread for the World (BftW) for an extended period. In this light, ICF had to cancel the face-to-face Asian Interfaith Youth Peace Summit set in Manila in mid-September 2020. ICF also turned the two thematic workshops

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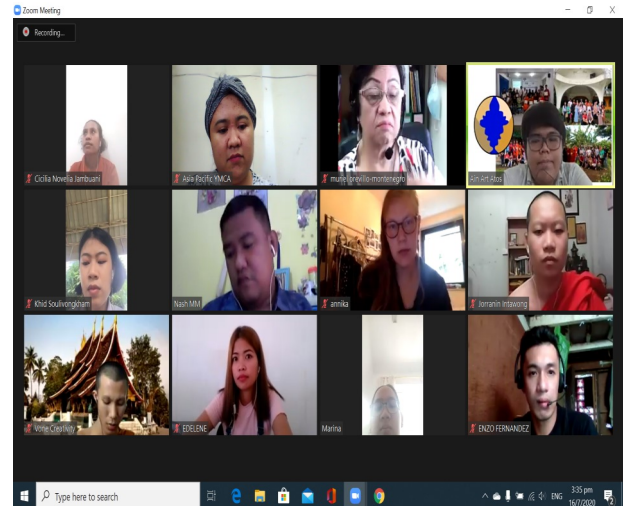


ICF held Virtual Meetings as the “New Normal” in Pandemic Time

scheduled in Bangladesh and Cambodia into virtual workshops and made open to the youth in Asia. Furthermore, ICF canceled the School of Peace with Kathmandu eyed as the venue.

In making such moves, ICF held virtual meetings with the ICF alumni for consultation and planning. On July 9, 2020, ICF held its first online meeting with the School of Peace 2018 and 2019 alumni, along with some members of the ICF Program Committee. Then, on July 16, 2020, ICF held another online meeting with the alumni of the Peace Institutes. Through these meetings, ICF provided an opportunity for the participants of the different ICF-initiated activities to be acquainted with each other. It was also an opportunity for everyone to share updates on what each one was doing and planning especially during the pandemic. Through the online meeting, ICF was able to present its reconfigured plan within the year 2020.

During the online meetings with the ICF alumni, ICF introduced Annika Denkman, the personnel seconded by Bread for the World to ICF. ICF also introduced Sunita Sumati Suna as the new APAY Executive Secretary who will take the post vacated by Duncan Chowdhury.



Zoom meeting with the Peace Institutes alumni
July 16, 2020

Due to some reasons, ICF did not get a one-hundred percent attendance. The School of Peace meeting only had 14 and the Peace Institute had 11 people showing up. The reasons included personal matters, conflict of schedule with jobs or online classes, weak internet connections, and limited internet connectivity due to limited subscription. Aside from the above, some participants still needed to learn how to participate in online meetings. These challenges gave ICF some issues to ponder and to address, especially in the preparations for the virtual thematic workshops.

These basic but crucial reasons gathered from the first two online meetings, however, do not deter ICF from taking steps to connect with the youth in Asia for peacebuilding during this pandemic time. ICF will continue to explore ways within the context of the “new normal.” 🦋🦋🦋

— Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro
ICF Coordinator



Zoom meeting with School of Peace Alumni and
members of ICF Program Committee
July 9, 2020

ICF met with Small Grants Recipients through Zoom

On July 17, 2020, ICF held a zoom meeting with the Program Committee members, the recipients and potential recipients of small grants for alumni follow up and local peace education projects. The objective of the meeting was for the participants to share updates on their small grant projects and their planned proposals. Those with approved proposals were set to conduct their activities between the months of March to May 2020. However, the proponents postponed their implementation due to the government restrictions on social gatherings as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the ICF Program Committee, only Biplob Rangsa from Bangladesh was able to attend, along with the ICF staff. ICF gives small grants to assist the ICF alumni in their activities, either for alumni-follow up, or, for local peace education and advocacy. ICF grants the amount ranging from USD 500 – USD 2,000, depending on the kind of activity. A Screening Committee approves the proposals.

Present during the meeting were applicants with approved proposals. They were Stella Shapnika Jayakaran, SoP2019 along with GS Jegan Jeevaraja of YMCA Batticaloa who proposed for Nonviolent Communication workshop. They post-poned the workshop indefinitely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they must implement the program before September 2020 ends.

Saw Tun Lu from Yangon, Myanmar reported that he has also postponed his activity on Religious Cultural Understanding and Peacebuilding for the youth in Yangon due to pandemic-related government restrictions. Hamsiya Olimpain from the Philippines applied for an alumni follow-up activity. She was able to



Zoom meeting of the Small Grants recipients and applicants
July 17, 2020

implement the project virtually by the end of August and early September.

The alumni from Laos and Myanmar joined the meeting. It is unfortunate that no one from Indonesia, Thailand, and Timor Leste attended the virtual meeting and did not apply for small grants. Among those who submitted their proposals but were not present during the meeting were Tirmizy Abdullah from Marawi, Philippines, and Pyae Ei Nyein from Mandalay, Myanmar. They also expected to implement their projects within the month of September

The meeting attendees explored the possibilities of pushing through with the planned activities adopting the “new normal.” While they have difficulties in imagining how to conduct the activities online, they are also positive that it is possible while the pandemic-related regulations are still in effect. Saw Tun Lu shared that their country’s government have limited the gathering to five persons. From the Philippines, Hamsiya Olimpain shared that people who cross the provincial borders must undergo the 14-day quarantine even if the government had relaxed a bit the protocol on social gathering. The attendees discussed alternatives to the face-to-

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ICF met with Small Grants Recipients through Zoom

face gathering, and zeroed in to the use of virtual meetings. Those who still hoped for a face-to-face gathering must follow the protocols of social distancing, wearing facemasks, and frequent washing or sanitizing of hands.

An alumna from Bangladesh, Biplob Rangsa, asked if it is possible for ICF to provide support to the vulnerable groups that struggles with the challenges brought by the pandemic. Some of the alumni shared that they lost their jobs and some of their parents too.

The ICF staff expressed understanding of the situation and recognized that some people have urgent needs. However, ICF has limitations as a project, and it could not provide for the needs of all people. Disaster relief, unfortunately, is not part of its program. Given

this limitation, the ICF staff challenged the attendees to think creatively, strategize, and share their "out of the box" ideas to provide help for the most vulnerable people.

With that note, ICF staff urged the proponent-attendees to revise their proposals adjusting to the "new normal" situation and implement their projects before the month of September ends. Overall, the meeting as fruitful and it culminated with a Buddhist prayer led by Thana Posysenthong.



— Baidido M. Saganding
ICF Program Officer

The Muslim World Celebrated Eid-al-Adha

The Muslims celebrate Eid-al-Adha on August 01, 2020, in Nepal and other parts of the world. The Eid al-Adha is the second major Muslim festival after Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the month of Ramadan. The day of Eid-al-Adha falls on the 10th day of Dhul Hijjah, the 12th and last month of the Islamic Lunar Calendar. Depending on the country, the celebrations of Eid-al-Adha can last between two to four days. Every Muslim celebrates it to commemorate the Prophet Ibrahim's devotion to Allah SWT (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) and his readiness to sacrifice his son, Ismael. At the very brink of the sacrifice, Allah (SWT) replaced Ismael with a ram that Ibrahim (Abraham) slaughtered as an offering of sacrifice in place of his son. This command from Allah (SWT) was a test of Prophet Ibrahim's willingness and commitment to obey his Lord's command without question. Therefore, Eid-al-Adha means the festival of sacrifice. The faithful carry out the act of Qurbani (sacrifice) after the Eid Salaah (eid prayers). The Muslim congregation performs the eid or festival prayers at the nearest Mosque on the morning of the Eid. The act of Qurbani consists of slaughtering an animal as a sacrifice to mark



The faithful praying during the Eid-al-Adha, 2019
Source: Spotlight News, Nepal

this occasion in remembrance of Prophet Ibrahim's sacrifice for Allah (SWT). The sacrificial animal can be a sheep, lamb, goat, cow, bull, or a camel. The animal must be in good health and over a certain allowable age to be slaughtered, e.g. at least one year for small animals, and two-three years for big animals. The faithful must slaughter these animals in a "halal" way, or according to the prescription of the Muslim law. The faithful divide the meat into three equal portions per share: one for the animal

The Muslim World Celebrates Eid-al-Adha



Eid-al-Adha 2020
Photo Source: Arab News

owner and family, one share for the person's friends, and one share for those who are in need. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the governments of countries instituted the policy on social gathering and lockdown. This policy does allow religious centers to open, including the mosques. Muslims, therefore, performed the Namaz (Salah) or prayer at home to avoid the spread of the coronavirus. The Nepal government also declared the Eid-al-Adha as a public holiday.

Traditionally, the faithful spend the day by celebrating it with family, friends, and loved ones. Everyone usually would wear new and best attire and would be giving gifts.

However, this year, as the coronavirus pandemic rages, many countries where the Muslims are the majority population, have announced restrictions on public gatherings. This year, it is impossible for the people could not gather with their families to celebrate one of the big festivals for Muslims. The Muslims could only call each other through the phone, or send virtual greetings such as "Eid Mubarak", "Happy Eid," etcetera. The most common Eid greetings and wishes Muslims like to send to their friends and fellow Muslims are "Eid Mubarak" which means Blessed Feast or Festival.

This year's celebration was different from previous years. This year, I could not celebrate Eid with my family because all members of my family are staying in different places. Coming home is not possible because of the lockdown. The celebration may be different but I prayed that everyone is safe and that this pandemic will end soon. 🤲🤲🤲



-Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman
Nepal
School of Peace 2017
Coordinator, Nepal Unites



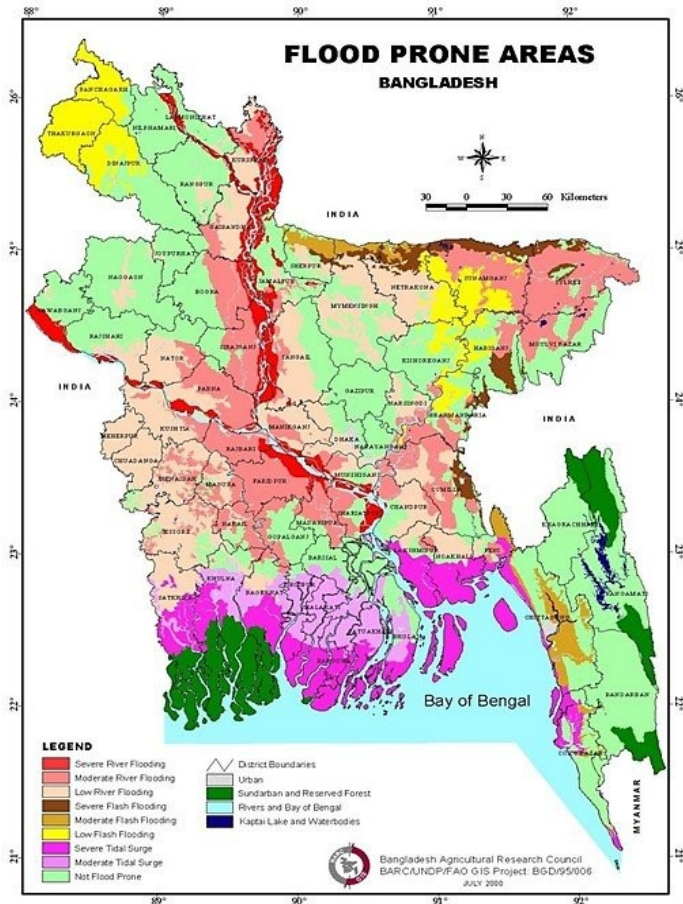
Celebrating Eid-al-Adha 2020 at Home
Photo Source: Vexls Design

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Flood Hit Bangladesh Again Recently

On July 13-22, 2020, the peak of the flood hit the 37 districts of Northern, Northeastern, and Southeastern region of Bangladesh. The badly hit areas are the districts of Sylhet, Sunamganj, and Netrakona; northern district of Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, Kurigram, and Gaibanda; northwestern and the north-central district of Bogura and Jamalpur.



Source: Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council
Photo supplied by Rinku Mankhin

The heavy monsoon rains brought a flood that began on June 26 2020, and damaged the crops, properties and affected thousands of people. People lost their crops, properties, and domestic animals. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), the floods resulted in over 220 deaths so far. The flood has fully damaged more than 1.27 million houses and has displaced over 167,000 families. It has also affected over 170,000 hectares of agricultural land. When the floodwaters receded in some areas, the

riverbanks continue to erode and pose risks to the surrounding communities. The affected people are struggling with their daily needs during the flood, as the areas were underwater. People suffered from a lack of safe drinking water and food. They had to evacuate and moved to higher ground and buildings such as schools and other safe places.

The flood is a natural calamity and became an annual situation in Bangladesh. Every year, about 2,6000 square kilometers (10000 sq. mi) around 18% of the country is flooded, killing over 5,000 people and destroying more than seven million homes and destroy lots of properties and crops. The flood is a big part of Bangladeshi peoples' experience and a threat they face almost every year. As a nation of rivers and canals, most Bangladeshi people depend on agriculture and fishing to support their daily living.

Essentially, Bangladesh is a huge delta as three large, major rivers run through the mostly flatland of the country, namely, Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna, which mostly originate from India along with fifty-four minor rivers. All these rivers flow into the Bay of Bengal. The land is merely five meters above sea level. This explains why Bangladesh is a flood-prone country.

Whenever the Himalayan Mountains' spring snow melts and monsoon season comes, Bangladesh usually experience excessive water flowing down the rivers and canals.



Photo Credit: Google
Supplied by Rinku Mankhin

Flood Hit Bangladesh Again Recently

Floods bring both positive and negative effects for the Bangladeshi peoples. The floods bring silts into the area and make the soil fertile. As a result, many kinds of crops grow in plenty. The floods also wash away waste materials. Yet, the floods harm the people too. The floods cause great loss to the country. They uproot the trees; wash away villages, roads, and houses. They claim the lives of people and livestock. The floods destroy the communication system

Flood brings a great loss to our country. It uprooted the trees, washes away village, roads, and even people's houses. Many human lives are lost and render many people homeless. The after-effect of floods is also equally difficult. Usually, famines and epidemic follow the floods come after the floods. Floods result to serious scarcity of pure and safe drinking water that causes great suffering to the flood-stricken people. Cases of cholera, dysentery, typhoid fever outbreaks also

usually follow the floods. The affected areas become muddy and unhealthy. The cost of food, goods, and other necessities goes up.

The flood is a curse and a blessing to the Bangladeshi people. The government should take the immediate and proper steps to control it. It must have more projects to dredge more rivers and canal regularly and more shelters should be set up at important places. It also behooves upon the government to rehabilitate and strengthen the existing dikes and embankments. It must also construct more levees to catch the excess water and prevent flooding. The citizens also must be more conscious about floods and disaster management, and take initiatives to help the government take proper steps to reduce the damages of floods. ❧ ❧ ❧

- Rinku Barnabas Mankhin
Bangladesh
School of Peace 2019



ICF Timor Leste Alumni Organized an Info Dissemination Activity

The Timor Leste ICF National Forum organized an information and dissemination activity on Gender Equality, Sexual Reproductive Health, and Sexual Harassment on July 25, 2020, in Uiso Lara Iiso secondary school. Fifty students attended the activity; twenty-five were females and twenty-five were males. As the country continues to experience socio-economic and security related advances, the situation for women, men, girls, and boys in Timor Leste has also improved. However, major challenges remain in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Thus, this activity aims to educate



The three ICF facilitators up front explaining the topic to the secondary school students.

Photo credit: Nogueira Mendes

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ICF Timor Leste alumni organized an info dissemination

the young people on the issues of Reproductive Health, Gender, and Sexual Harassment.

The facilitators of the activity were the alumni who participated in the ICF National Forum activity in March 2020 in Likisa, Timor Leste. The facilitators were Josefa Leonora, Anacleto Roberto C. Soares, and Leonia L. Freitas. It was part of their proposed plan after upon their completion of the training last in March 2020.

The alumni were also very much excited about the conduct of this activity. The participants actively

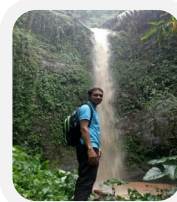


Some participants of the activity at Uiso Lara Isso Secondary school



ICF-TL Alumni facilitating
Photo credit: Nogueira Mendes

engaged with the facilitator and each other during the activity. They are hopeful to participate in the upcoming activities of the ICF. The National Forum remains supportive of the initiative of the alumni. 🦋🦋🦋



—Nogueira Mendes,
School of Peace 2017
Coordinator. ICF
Timor Leste National Forum

Reflection: The Usefulness of Online Psychosocial Support

Staying at home during the Covid-19 pandemic has put everyone into stress and unprecedented pressures. Young and vulnerable people who have mental health problems are prone to anxiety and fear all the time. Each one worries about what the future holds and when this coronavirus will end. Everyone was having a hard time adjusting to the new normal that results in panic buying. The lockdown brought stress to the people, as they are unable to go out and enjoy their summer break. All frontline workers are dedicated, and they managed to go to work during the Covid-19 pandemic. This shows their undying passion to help even though they also have the responsibility of caring for themselves. They also have needs and concerns, especially for their families.

As an alumna of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum,

this Online Psychosocial Support was helpful during this Covid-19 Pandemic. It helped us to put our minds at ease and be aware of our well-being. Moreover, it was nice to see and greet everyone virtually because we managed to catch up with each other. Despite the pandemic, some of us volunteered and donated stuff to their community, which is a very kind and helpful act.

🦋🦋🦋



- - Erika Fronteras
Davao City, Philippines
Peace Institute I

Events and Announcements

ICF will launch its e-book



ICF will hold an online book launching of the e-book entitled "Seek Peace and Pursue It: Daring to Take Small Steps" on September 29, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. Twenty-seven ICF alumni contributed their stories on their journey in peacebuilding and their poetry too. A Thematic Workshop alumna designed the art for the cover of the book. Come and meet the writers, poets and artists that made this book project possible.

Watch for the invitation on September 21, 2020 on the ICF Facebook and Webpage.

ICF e-Newsletter needs more contributors

ICF calls on the alumni family and friends in the peace network to please submit your news articles. Write about the peace-related issues in your locations. Write about what you are doing as peacebuilders, and even your struggles and reflections. Send us your art works if you have any—a drawing, a poem, a photograph.

Please send a photo along with your article or poem a photo of the activity, or on the subject of your article. Please send also your own photo with a one-sentence blurb.

Please send them to the following addresses:

*Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro
montenegromuriel10@gmail.com
muriel@asiapacificymca.org

*Baidido Sagandaing
bsaganding25@gmail.com;
bai@asiapacificymca.org

We will be so happy to hear from you and connect with other young peacebuilders.

Keep well and stay safe!
ICF Staff

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INTERFAITH COOPERATION FORUM

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The Interfaith Cooperation Forum is a program of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs. It values the significance of interreligious understanding and unity. Thus, it offers opportunities for study and appreciation of the different 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:

Discernment in times of Uncertainty

Nine months. Yes, it is almost nine months since the pandemic came and put the world to a standstill for some time. Many things have happened since then. Due to the travel ban, the pollution in the air, atmosphere, and the seas have become less severe. People find more time to relax and reflect on their existence on this Earth as human beings. Some find time to bond with their families. Others planted vegetables and flowers on their yard and recycled containers and have enjoyed the harvest. Some who are lucky to have the connection find more time with social media, watch TV, and Korean movies on Netflix. Many young people also gave time to volunteer to help the civil societies in distributing relief goods to the most vulnerable affected by the pandemic. Many people lost their jobs. Those who still have their jobs have to work from home. Others grieve over the untimely demise or passing on of loved ones due to COVID-19 or other comorbidities.

Many people—young and old—also found themselves so restless to go out and defy the protocols of wearing face masks, social distancing, and frequent washing of hands. There are people who mock those who are faithfully wearing their face masks as ones who live in fear and as cowards. They forget that

the pandemic is an issue of public health. One's personal life and behavior have implications for the life of other people in the community. They have become so impatient with the "new normal," of restrained life. Others began to imagine their mental health is so affected. Some lost the interest to continue living on this planet.

Yet, every religion I believe, teaches the follower to look at life with challenges and find meaning in these challenges. It is the human being's task to find that meaning even in little things and little miracles in life such as the rising of the sun, the chirping of the birds, the unfolding of a bud into a blooming flower. The Sacred gave human beings the faculties to think, feel, and discern. And so the Sacred has called human beings to use these faculties to find meaning to our existence along with the communities where we are located.

This then is a call to work for peace that is based on justice, especially in the midst of the pandemic, and in the midst of the terroristic postures of some state leadership such as the one in the Philip-pines. Muster patience and courage, while waiting for the pandemic to end, work for justice relentlessly, and wait for peace to come. This is our task as peace-builders. This is our hope and prayer. 🌸🌸🌸

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

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