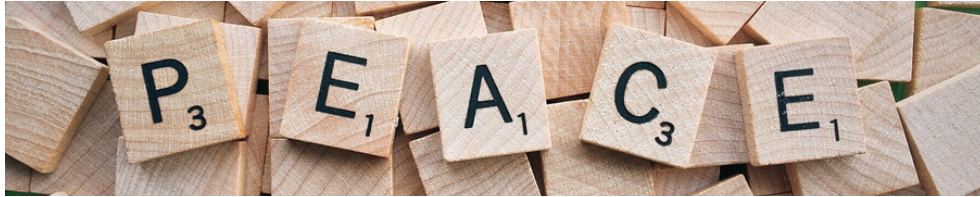




THE PEACEBUILDERS

“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



Sign up for our next Virtual Thematic Workshop on Women's Rights, Ecofeminism, and the Trailblazers in the Struggle for Women's Rights

The global campaign for 16-Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence kicks off on November 25 each year. Born in 1991, the annual campaign is the baby of the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) along with feminists from around the world. The UN adopted a campaign that celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2021. Working with youth in Asia, the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) adopts the campaign because it resonates with the goals of the campaign's proponents such as “peace beyond the absence of war.” They measure peace with clear “indicators of equality, justice, and human rights to challenge the economy of war and violence.” Another goal is lifting the “feminist standards as the norm,” by highlighting “feminist thoughts, standards, and leadership to influence civil society and its institutions and structures thereby addressing inequality, discrimination, and violence.”

This year, the thematic workshop weaves three keywords: women's rights, ecofeminism, and the pioneers of women's movements. Why does ICF give attention to these topics? The topics are important because there is no peace if people, men particularly and patriarchal institutions, do not respect women's and Earth's Rights. It is also important to remember and honor the women who dedicated their lives to open the paths towards women's emancipation.

Learn more about the workshop and sign up [here](#).

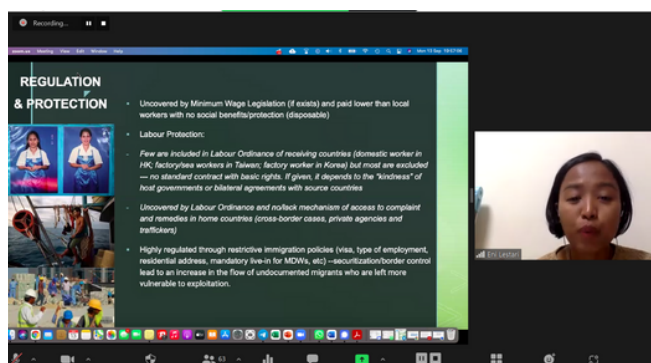


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Virtual Thematic Workshop: The Impact of the Pandemic on the Situation and Rights of Migrant Workers in Asia

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum organized the 5-day Virtual Thematic Workshop from 13th to 17th September 2021. Sixty participants from ten Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, Philippines, Timor-Leste, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar, attended the workshop. During this workshop, the participants explored the underlying issues afflicting the migrant workers on labor rights, job security, and working conditions.



On the first day on “How the COVID-19 Pandemic Impacted the Lives and Livelihoods of Migrant Workers in Asia”, Eni Lestari, Chairperson of the International Migrants Alliance, exposed how migrant workers are excluded from Covid-19’s responses of host governments, i.e. unemployment benefits, income relief, and subsidies, and how even their home governments offered limited to no financial support and assistance.

On the second day Teresa Sarmiento from the Association of Concerned Filipino Workers (ACTION-Thailand), and Dolores Balladares-Pelaez, Chairperson of the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-Migrante-HK), backed Lestari and shared compelling stories of their personal struggles, especially this time of the pandemic. For the third day on “The Impact that Migrant Workers have on the Economies of their Host and Home Countries”, Sringatin, from Asia Migrants Coordinating Body, and Rev. Frederick Carmelo explained how migrant workers play an important part in the host and home country’s financial and economic development.

Unfortunately, as laid out by the previous speakers, migrant workers receive little to nothing from either side since the pandemic broke out and they’re faced instead with job loss, forced unpaid leave, among others. Sringatin added how the pandemic affected their mental health due to the lack of communication with their family, safety concerns, and stigmatization by the local nationals, fearing they would spread the virus. This is on top of other pressing conditions of migrant workers, as enumerated by Rev. Carmelo in his talk, – i.e. poverty, exploitation and abuses, and lack of labor rights and social welfare. Finally, on the fourth day, Aaron H. Ceradoy, General Manager of Asia Pacific Mission for Migrant, discussed “The Role of Governments and Labor Organizations in Supporting the Migrant Workers”. He cited that migrant workers were treated as commodities where the sending countries make forced migration systemic and profitable through Labor Export Program. He expounded that for as long as the migrant workers stay overseas; the sending country profited from them through remittances, as it is measured and included in the country’s GDP and categorized as foreign earning. On the other hand, the receiving country benefits as they treat migrants as cheap labor with limited rights and freedom.



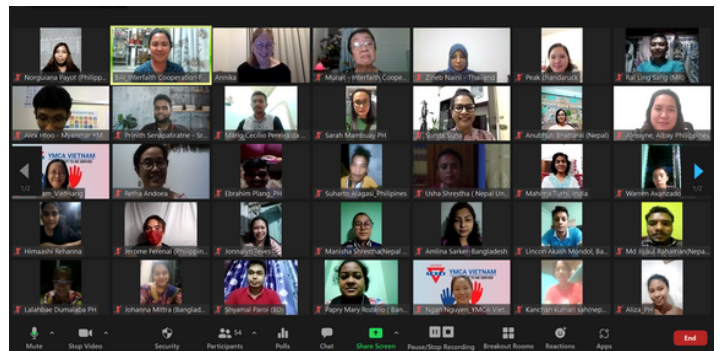
For him, the role of intergovernmental agencies is to strengthen the accountability of all actors, while for labor and migrant organizations

is to empower migrant workers to collectively engage and address important policies that were institutionalized and implemented by either the host or their home country. The government's role would ultimately be to listen to the migrant workers' voices and to uphold their rights.

At the end of the workshop, the ICF staff led two breakout sessions to solicit feedback from the participants on the most notable part of the five-day workshop and how they will protect and advocate for migrant workers' rights.

Overall, the participants described the sessions as valuable and eye opening. Some participants shared that they will seek help from the government and do some charity so they can help migrant workers even in small acts.

Almayne Joyce R. Mayor
YMCA Albay
ICF Alumni, Philippines



Participating in this workshop I got a great chance to know from the people who are suffering and also who are working for these' people's betterment. Covid-19 pandemic period has increased the sufferings of the migrant workers to the highest. Seeing them suffering is hard, now it becomes more painful when I imagine I can not do anything for them from my position. Still I can help them by creating awareness among the people around me and pray for them and through spreading love.

-Sunny Samson, Bangladesh

From small gestures as accompanying migrant workers to relevant offices, to lending them our ears and listen to their stories, to organizing gatherings for local people to meet and share time and experiences with migrant workers to big gestures as advocacy at a national and international level, to creating concrete opportunities for economic and social help; every opportunity represents a good chance of doing something that can improve their conditions and our societies in general.

As one resource person rightly said, the pandemic only surfaced issues that were already there, which means that the world post pandemic will only be the worst representation of the world before the pandemic. The end of it will not mean a consistent improvement of migrant workers' situation. In order to see an improvement we need to deal with the problems that lay at the base of a system deeply flawed by its persistence in putting economy above human beings.

-Zineb Naini, Thailand



Nepal Unites celebrated International Day of Peace

On September 21, 2021, Nepal Unites celebrated the International Day of Peace in Duduwa village of Banke, in Lumbini Province, mid-western part of Nepal. As part of the celebration, the youth held a ceremony of the “lighting the lamp,” known as Deep Prajwalan. The celebration also included the Panchmukhi Shiva Temple sanitation program that Nepal Unites organized with Nepal Youth Council Lumbini, Genteel Society Nepal, and United Religions Initiative at Rapti Bridge in Duduwa rural municipality ward no. 4 of Banke District.



The guest of the program was Ward Chairperson Bhandari Lal Yadav. He expressed the need for peace in the world and the need to clean the environment. We are all human beings who live on earth, and we must protect and find peace with nature.

Another guest was Gopal Prasad Sharma, who is in charge of the Area Police Office in Kamdi, a town of Banke District. He said that people primarily must maintain peace of mind. All people have a responsibility to make and create an environment of sustainable peace.

The President of Civilized Society Nepal in Banke program, Suryalal Yadav, hosted the program, along with Som Gurung, the province Coordinator of Nepal Unites.

During the celebration, the group discussed Sustainable Development Goal 16. It aims to promote sustainable peace and bring access to justice for all. To achieve that goal, people around the world celebrated September 21 as the International Day of Peace. The local people, representatives, media persons, police, intellectuals, civil society, and social activists attended the program. At the end of the program, the participants prayed together for a better nation, peaceful world at the Shiv Temple. The taking of a group photo capped the program.

*Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman
National Director, Nepal Unites*



Nepal Unites launched Blood Donation Program in collaboration with Nepal Red Cross

On September 4, 2021, Nepal Unites members donated blood under its Blood Donation Program in collaboration with the Red Cross. The program took place on the 59th Nepal Red Cross Day that Nepal Unites and Nepal Red Cross Society organized at Nepal Unites National Headquarters, Kalimati, Kathmandu. The organizers were able to collect thirteen (13) pints of blood during the program. The donors included two (2) women and 11 men. The organizer gave to all blood donors certificates of donation.



Special guest Bhattarai inaugurated the Blood Donation Program by donating blood.

Photo credit Mohammad

The Nepali film director, Yadav Kumar Bhattarai, inaugurated the program by donating his blood.

"Blood is not available anywhere due to lack of blood and since it is made in our human body, it is very important for us to donate blood," Yadav said.

Yadav also argued that blood donation is essential to prevent premature loss of life due to lack of blood. He confirmed that there is no negative effect or weakness in donating blood. Blood is essential during surgery and treatment of various diseases, loss of blood due to accidents, and childbirth. In order to reduce the shortage of blood supply for hospital needs, it is necessary for everyone to donate blood.

*Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman
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ICF Albay Team conducts Health Awareness Project for the Indigenous Youth (H.A.P.I)

The ICF Albay Team, composed of twenty youth who attended the Virtual Thematic Workshop: Uncovering the Plight of Indigenous People's Rights and Access to Health Care during the COVID Pandemic, conducted the Health Awareness Project for the Indigenous youth (H.A.P.I). The ICF alumni in Albay came up with a small doable project to serve the indigenous people who mostly affected and vulnerable to the COVID-19 crisis. The Interfaith Cooperation- supported the doable project that the ICF alumni successfully held on October 9, 2021. The activity took place at the Covered Court of Baranggay San Andres, Sto. Domingo in Albay. Thirty (30) indigenous youth attended the in-person activity.

Twelve of them were females and 18 males aged 12-18. They all come from the Agta and Mangyan tribes in the said locality. These Christianized Indigenous youth were Catholics.

The project had four (4) objectives:

1. Discuss the rights of indigenous people as stated in the UNDRIP and in the Philippine Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) with emphasis on the right to health;
2. Explain how COVID-19 spreads, its symptoms, and prevention strategies;
3. Demonstrate proper hand washing, wearing of a mask, and sanitation; and
4. Create a shared vision map for a healthy indigenous community.

According to the United Nations, even before the pandemic, the indigenous communities have already experienced poor access to healthcare, significantly higher rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases. They continue to have lack of access to essential services, sanitation, and other key preventive necessities, such as clean water, soap, disinfectant. Exacerbating the situation is the lack of public health information in their indigenous languages in their localities.

The project had a 4-hour workshop. The organizing ICF alumni ensured the safety of everyone and instilled observance of health and safety protocols such as using face shields, social distancing, and a strict attendance list. The team used Tagalog language for instructions and learning materials.



John Jomar Lunas facilitated the program preliminaries at 8:45 a.m. PHT that included the opening prayer and singing of the national anthem. Almayne Joyce R. Mayor gave the welcome remarks and orientation on ICF orientation. On the program content, Allan Echaluze and Charisse Ann Avisado discussed the Health and Human Rights, as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA). Then, Anidene Dashi Armenta and Sheila Mae Arganda explained the topic, The Virus Monster and How to Defeat Them. Virus monster is a colloquial reference to COVID-19. Other members of the team also distributed the H.A.P.I COVID-19 information leaflet, which explains the COVID-symptoms and the information on the agencies to call in case of emergencies.



This was followed by a read-along activity where each team member picked 1 or 2 participants in reading the storybook entitled “Ang Kampiyon na Susupil sa COVID” (The Champion who Fights COVID). The second half of the time had the participants do mapping of the envisioned community, and Health Hero talk facilitated by Aliza Beato and Jhon Carlo Ate. This activity revealed the aspirations of indigenous youth for themselves and their community – having a gasoline station, hospital, park, swimming pool, cars, and big houses. The “Hero Talk” was about proper handwashing, wearing of masks, and sanitation that Diane Mae Sarmiento and Mary Joy Calleja demonstrated. Right after this, the indigenous youth had a teach-back or return demonstration.

Before the project concluded, the ICF Albay Team distributed to each participant indigenous youth a health and hygiene kit consisting of one box of facemasks, face shields, alcohol, toothbrush, toothpaste, and soap. Out of private donations, the team was also able to give a pail of food items, which contains a pack of noodles, biscuits, milk, canned goods, and 2kg of rice.

In addition to this, we also distributed sleeping mats. The penultimate part of the project was the awarding of certificates. It ended on a happy note with message of thanks from the village leader, Honorable Evelyn Banua.



Through H.A.P.I, the thirty (30) participating indigenous youth learned and demonstrated awareness of their human rights, COVID-19 information, proper handwashing, the wearing of masks, and sanitation. On top of all, the project responded to the immediate indigenous community needs with the provided health and hygiene kits, food packages, and sleeping mats. These activities under HAPI contributed in keeping the indigenous community in the Province of Albay healthy, protected, and informed amidst the pandemic.

Almayne Joyce Mayor, ICF Alumni



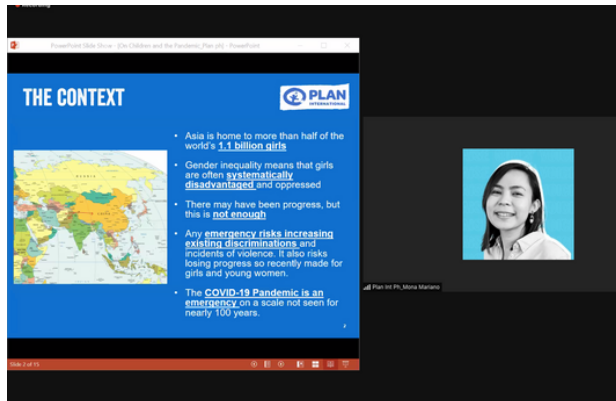
“The Philippines is the epicenter of OSAEC,” Thematic Workshop Resource Persons said

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum organized a 5-day thematic workshop on October 25-29, 2021, from 7:00-9:00 p.m. HKT online on the theme “No One is Left Behind:” Children’s Rights and Welfare, and the Pandemic. There were 52 regular participants. 35 of them were female, and 16 were male. The religions represented were Buddhism (4), Christianity (31), Islam (10), and Hinduism (3). One participant is a free thinker, one is “not religious,” and one has a dual religious identity as both a Hindu and a Muslim. Ten (10) Christian youths attended selected sessions as non-regular participants. The participants came from 10 countries, namely, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Timor Leste, Thailand, and Vietnam.

There were seven (7) resource persons, all women, from government and non-government organizations. They helped the participants understand the rights and the plight of the children in Asian countries especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the objectives of the workshop.

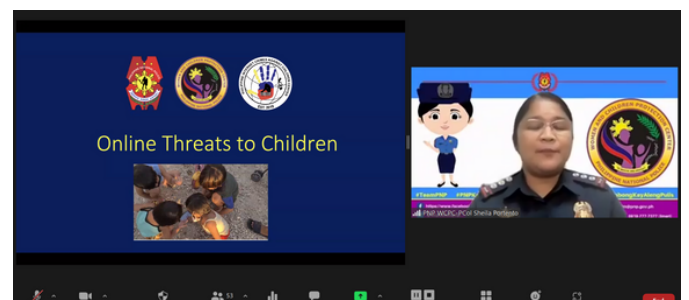
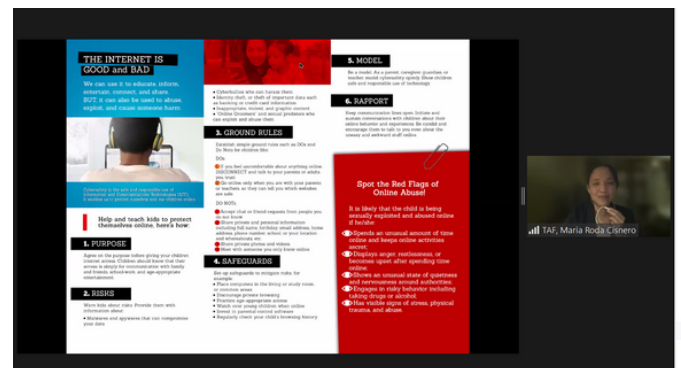
On Day 1, Minerva Cabiles, a Child Rights Governance Adviser of Save The Children-Philippines spoke on the topic, “How COVID-19 Affected Children: A Situationer.” Noting that there are similarities in the situation of children in the Philippines and other Asia countries, she discussed how the pandemic has greatly affected the children in terms of education, physical, emotional and mental health and the safety and welfare of the children.

The second resource person on the topic, Mona Mariano, a Country Gender Specialist of Plan International- Philippines' discussed the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls and young women in Asia and across the Pacific Regions and their role in society.



On Day 2, the topic set was the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Its Significance and Child Protection Issues during the Pandemic. Dolores Alforte, the Executive Director of End Children's Prostitution, Child Pornography, and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT- Philippines, Inc.), discussed the impact of the pandemic on health, economy, education in the new normal and the government's response to these issues affecting the children. She pointed out that the Philippines is the "epicenter" of Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) in Asia and the Pacific. She vehemently argued that poverty is not acceptable as a reason for adults to "sell" the children to pedophiles, be it in person or online. "What have the governments and their agencies done to implement the UNCRC before and during the pandemic?" This was the topic on Day 3. The resource persons for this session. The first was Police Colonel Shiela Templonuevo-Portento, the Chief of the Women Children Protection Center of the Philippine National Police-Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division. The second one was Atty. Maria Roda Cisnero, Senior Program Officer for Law and Human Rights Asia Foundation.

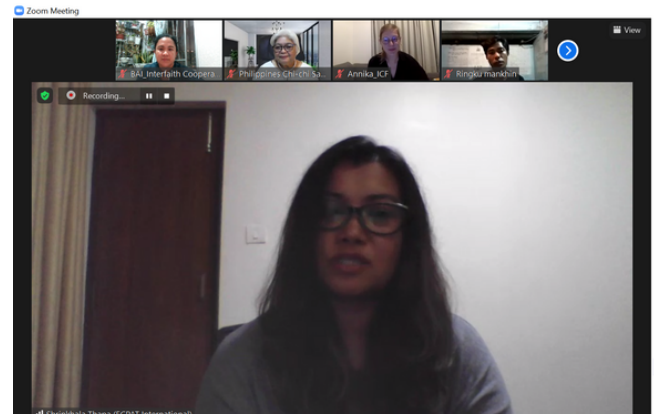
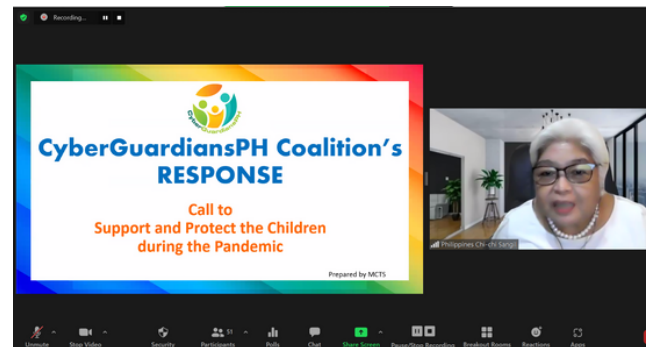
PCol. Templonuevo-Portento focused on the Online Threats to Children, which covered the issues such as the common forms of online sexual abuse and exploitation, effects of Online Sexual Abuse, and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC), and what we can do as individuals and community to address these issues. PCol Templonuevo-Portento gave tips on how we can help to avoid and eliminate this problem. On her part, Atty. Cisnero briefly discussed the issue of the good and bad side of the internet. She gave tips on how we can educate children on the use of the internet. She shared the purpose, risks, ground rules, and safeguards of using the internet. She pointed out ways on how the youth and adults could be role models to the children, and how to help them avoid the dangers of the internet. Atty. Cisnero showed how to Spot the Red Flags of Online Abuse.



On Day 4, the set topic was NGOs Responses to the Call to Support and Protect Children during the Pandemic. Two resource persons spoke on the subject. Ma. Concepcion Sangil is a Core Member and a Coalition Representative of CyberGuardiansPH. She presented how her organization, the CyberGuardiansPH, came into being and what it is doing to address the prevalence of OSAEC in the Philippines. She highlighted the importance of giving education to both children and parents to address the issue. She suggested to the workshop participants to work with schools and communities. She also encouraged the participants to ally with non-government organizations and government agencies in protecting the children.

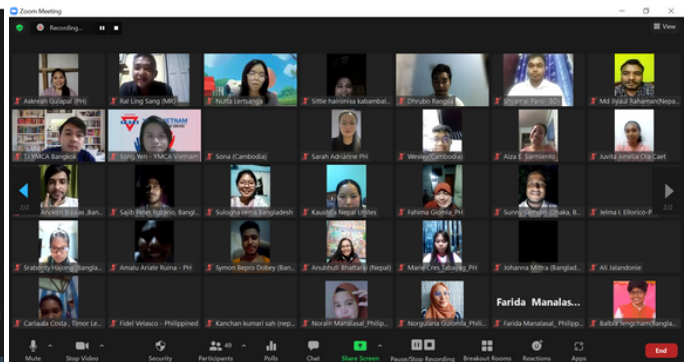
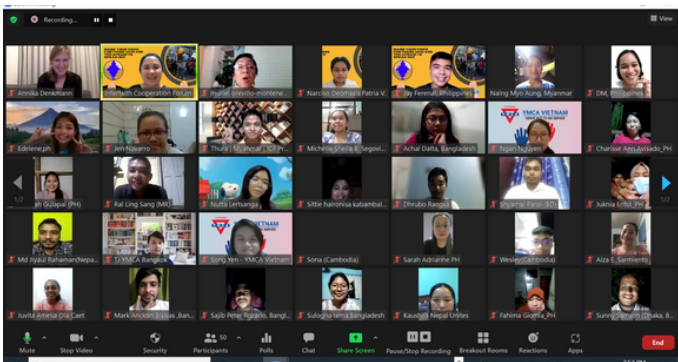
The second resource person was Shrinkala Thapa, the Regional Coordinator for South Asia, ECPAT International. She talked about the work of ECPAT-International, and its campaigns to support and protect children especially in the Asian region. She also shared how ECPAT International promotes its advocacy for children.

After every presentation during the first 4 days, the participants engaged with the resource persons by asking questions, giving comments, and sharing their reflections on the topic at hand.



On the last day, the participants had the chance to discuss among themselves what struck them the most during the last four-day sessions. They also identified ways they can do as individuals to advocate and spread awareness about what is happening to children in the participants' communities, and around the globe.

Sarah Adrianne Mambuay
ICF Thematic Workshop Alumna
 With
Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro
ICF Coordinator



Reflection: “It is our Moral Obligation to Protect our Children”

I have always deemed myself “informed” when it comes to issues faced by our society may it be political, religious/cultural, poverty, health care, and so on. What sparked my interest with this workshop on “No One Left Behind:” Children’s Rights and Welfare, and the Pandemic is the fact that I am a mother and a teacher.

As a young mother, I have always been guilty of exposing my child to the internet at an early age. It makes me proud how my daughter at a very young age is very knowledgeable of things I have no information. I have always thanked the internet for that. But, greater are the disadvantages especially the danger it brings. One time, I saw her playing a mobile game and there were chat bubbles popping up. She was typing something, which alarmed me. I have heard of incidents wherein children are abused and are put into danger because of what we think at first is “normal.” I have always wanted my child to be open to the world, to explore, to learn. However, during the 5-day workshop, I realized that as much as I wanted my child to be exemplary, I have to put my child’s welfare and safety as my top priority. All the presentations of the resource persons brought some realizations on how I can avoid these issues, especially on child abuse and exploitation. I should be the first one to protect my child against all these negativities brought by the modern digital world. Discipline and education start at home. We, as parents, should always be the first one to know about our children.

As a teacher, I have always been open to listening to my students. I am teaching foreign students most especially school children. I try to present myself and make it known that I am someone they can count on. It is a general knowledge that these foreign students are typically shy and conservative and they never talk about something personal. But when they do, I make sure to listen and not brush off their concerns. A simple “How are you today?” could really lighten up a person’s mood. They know that someone actually cares. Just a few days ago, I asked this question to a student and his response was “Oh wow! Thank you very much for asking, and I’m really glad for that.” Some children are unable to talk about problems to their families or friends. Sometimes they are more comfortable with talking to people they do not personally know. And I will responsibly commit myself to this. That I will always continuously empathize with my students.

With all these, I must say, sometimes a child just needs someone they can count on, someone who is willing to listen without judgment. A child needs assurance for their welfare and safety. We should take care of our children not just physically but also mentally and emotionally. Children should not be brought into the world to suffer. It is our moral obligation to protect our children. However, we may not be able always to protect them but we can always prepare them by educating them.

*Sarah Adrienne Mambuay,
Philippines*



Since I had never heard of this topic before, it's both fascinating and shocking at the same time. Especially one of the topics, Online Sexual Abuse and Child Exploitation, which I had never seen or heard about in Thailand before. It could have happened but was not found.

As a member of the YMCA of Bangkok staff and a young leader at my church, I would like to advocate this topic in my own communities. I would like to bring these subjects to the children who live in the slum area (the largest slum in Bangkok, Thailand) where I work and the children at the church. I would like to impart knowledge, self-awareness, educate children that they have the right to live, know what is right, and prevent online sexual abuse. Certainly, I would like to conduct research in the area to see whether there are any cases in the community. I would also like to discuss these things with the leaders of my church so that they can consider about how to raise children, especially their own children so that they are aware of how the covid-19 epidemic impacts their children and how to prevent it.

-Tanakan Junjuan, YMCA Bangkok, Thailand

Day three is all about the steps the government is taking to save the lives of these children and it's good to know that they are taking some steps to help those children. However, knowing the justice system we currently have in the Philippines and how apathetic most people seating in the government's justice system. I believe that it won't have a significant effect. The only way you can help these kids and parents is by educating them and by giving them a livelihood. Because ideas and knowledge about something are only there to guide you, but the reality remains that they don't have anything to feed their family members.

-Deomasis Patria Narciso, Philippines

Looking at all of the problems faced by children, their future is at high risk. Many children are not able to tell their problems to their parents because they are afraid of their parents. Parents should make a comfortable environment to talk about their problems. Parents should also talk about exploitation and online abuse. Guardians should understand the issue. We should make sure that we have clearly understood the issue that the child is facing. The society also should comfort talking about online abuse. They should be aware of the teenagers and youth. While overusing or misusing social media, parents and family member should divert their minds. They should motivate the child to take participate in outdoor games. Youth or children should set reminders on social media. It will help the children or youth to remind how much they have spent their time on social media. Government should make safe websites for children. They should make strict laws and implement them for the people who are involved in online abuse.

In conclusion, we should be aware individuals and society about online abuse and scams. We will get support from all sectors to stop online abuse, scams, child pornography.

-Anubhuti Bhattarai, Nepal



APAY Staff Retreat: Time for Reflection and Renewal

The Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs (APAY) staff went for a two-day retreat on September 23-24, 2021, at Bethany Retreat Center in Cheung Chau Island, Hong Kong. The retreat was an effort to create a safe space designed to reflect and share staff's well-being amidst the current pandemic.

The main sharing and reflecting sessions were based on the "Who Am I and How Am I Doing?" activity. A set of questions was prepared to facilitate the process. The exercise inspired each other to share their feelings, how everyone is doing, challenges and problems facing. It also provides an opportunity for the staff to hear of how everyone copes in these times. The other exercise was to recall favorite songs to sing and listen to and share why that particular song is significant. As music is effective for everyone, it allows everyone to connect easily. The staff enjoyed the activity and were able to get to know each other better after listening to each sharing.

On the second day, a short debriefing session was done. Staff agreed to the idea that APAY should have an annual retreat to assess staff's well-being. A fellowship lunch followed before heading home. The retreat was also a time to have fun-filled activities like Tai Chi, games, singing, hiking, swimming, potluck lunch, and of course, enjoy eating diverse cuisines.

"Emotions and feelings now are not steady, like a life line symbol".

"When I am in the "rock bottom" I seek refuge to my family, friends and to God".

"I hope we can have this "safe space" to have a venue to share our burn out and stress".

"Be kind always, we don't know what everyone is going through".

The staff retreat was planned and facilitated by Ms. Baidido Saganding, ICF Program Officer, Ms. Annika Denkmann, BftW Seconded Personnel, Ms. Sunita Suna, APAY Executive Secretary, Mr. Nam Boo Won, APAY General Secretary.

Though the time was short, the staff hope the retreat has a positive impact and helped renew energy and spirit. Overall, the activity was successful and the staff is looking forward to the next retreat activity.



Bangladesh National Forum organized a Workshop on Healthy Environment to Build Peace

On September 21st-24th 2021, an alumnus of ICF School of Peace 2019, Rinku Mankhin, and members of the Bangladesh ICF national forum had organized a three-day “Workshop on the Importance of Healthy Environment to Build Peace.” The activity took place at the training Centre of Birisiri YWCA of Netrakona District of Bangladesh. Thirty (30) youths from different religions. Sixteen (16) of them were Christians, eight (8) were Hindus and six (6) were Muslims. Of the thirty participants, 13 were males and 17 were females. They come from the different Upazila (sub-district,) such as Dhobaura and Haluaghat Upazila of Mymensingh, Durgapur & Kolmakanda Upazila of Netrakona district, and Modhupur Upazila of Tangial District of Bangladesh. The invited resource persons were Ludia Ruma Sangma, General Secretary of YWCA, Birisiri, and Nisha Nokrek, assistant teacher of Saint Xavier School at Utrail, Birisiri. This small project received support from the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) Small Grant for Local Peace Education, Advocacy, and Networking.

The representatives from the Christian, Islam, and Hindu religious communities, various non-government organizations, and the youth attended the activity’s session on Networking and Advocacy dialogue on Environmental and peace issues. They came from Young Men Christian Organization (YMCA), Young Women Christian Organization (YWCA), Caritas Birisiri Brunch, Don Bosco School and College of Utrail, Birisiri, Birisiri Cultural Academy, and representatives from Students and Artists.



The project seeks to equip interfaith youths to play a vital role in developing a healthy and peaceful environment together in their respective communities.

On the first day, on September 21, the activity started at 5:00 pm. Rinku Mankhin welcomed the participants. He gave an orientation on the program flow and introduced the work of ICF. Among the topics that the organizers included in the program was the connection between the environment and peace. The session also took up the interconnection of the environment and human beings. Furthermore, the participants also identified the issues of the natural and human-made causes of climate change and the effects of climate change on the peaceful life of the community people. Lastly, the participants explored the Role and Responsibility of the Government and Youth in caring for the Environment and Building Planetary peace.

The resource persons used PowerPoint slides to show pictures and documentary videos to deliver their informative and valuable message on the given topics. All the participants very actively participated in the whole workshop period. The methods and activities included the use of small group discussions and presentations.

The methods employed during the workshop were meta card posting, a gallery exhibit and gallery walk, creative peace boat activities, session recap and feedback, reflections, individual and group presentation.

By attending these activities, the participants discovered that environment and peace are interrelated. They identified how human actions have resulted in climate change and brought unpeace to the community. They saw the effects of climate change on people's peaceful life in their communities. The participants presented their thoughts, arguments, and opinions on how they could play a role in preventing the degradation of the environment. They created a conflict map based on the present environmental situations in their communities. Through this workshop, the youth made a stronger relationship with each other and encouraged them to contribute effectively towards building a better and healthy environment together.

During the networking and the advocacy dialogue, the representatives from different organizations shared with the youth participants how their organizations contribute to protecting the environment and peacebuilding in the community. The young participants and delegates also shared their thoughts, ideas, and arguments on how to do their part in peacebuilding while paying more attention to the environment. The dialog was very effective in establishing a good network between the youth and community people. It encouraged them to work together to protect the environment.

The activity included the practical aspect of tree planting. The youth participants planted fifty seedlings around the Birisiri community with the help of the community people. The purpose of the tree-planting program was to spread the undeniable importance of forests in preventing environmental degradation. It is very effective to encourage the youth and the community people to plant trees around their homes and communities. The workshop also developed mutual understanding and stronger relationships among the young people and their communities.



Rinku Mankhin

*Activity proponent and coordinator
ICF School of Peace 2019 alumnus*



Bangladesh ICF Alumnus joined the 21-days Vaccine Registration Campaign

Rinku Mankhin, School of Peace 2019 alumnus and member of the ICF Bangladesh National forum of ICF took part in the 21-days COVID-19 vaccination registration campaign. He was among the 60 other volunteers that joined the campaign project. He worked as the field supervisor of the 20 volunteers assigned in the Birisiri union of Durgapur Upazila. The MaMoni Maternal and Newborn Care Project launched the campaign from July 29 to August 18, 2021. The campaign aimed to ensure that village people register for COVID-19 vaccination so that everyone can stay well and safe from the Coronavirus. The project covered the areas of Durgapur Upazila and other /Sub-district of Netrakona District. Save the Children, a non-government organization supported the project in collaboration with the Bangladesh Government.

MaMoni Maternal and Newborn Care Strengthening Project is a non-government organization funded by USAID. It aims to reduce the maternal and neonatal mortality rate by 2022. The action plan designed to successfully implement the 21-days vaccination registration campaign and achieve the desired goals includes the following activities:

- Two days of Training for the Supervisor and volunteers;
- Distribution awareness leaflets and advertising
- Setting up of registration booths at four designated places;
- Vaccine registration service.



From August 7-18, 2021 the volunteers provided vaccine registration services. Two volunteers managed the registration booth, while the other volunteers went around the villages to urge the people to register for the vaccination. An average of 500 people visited the registration booths. In most cases, more people came to the registration booth than the expected number of visitors. This led to the addition of four or five volunteers to manage the registration booths. The volunteers helped the people fill out the forms, collect their personal identity information, phone numbers, maintain their social distancing, remind the people to wear their facemasks properly.



On the one hand, it was a great pleasure to provide vaccination registration services to the people. On the other hand, it was a great challenge also to ensure our safety as volunteers. We were at risk of exposure to so many people from the communities. About 80% of those who came to register did not wear facemasks and hardly maintain social distancing from each other. We also had to ensure the safety of the people. The government agency, the Surokkha. govt.bd web site that was supposed to support us could not give good services due to the poor internet connection that greatly hampered our work. Lastly, the process of registering and attending to more than 500 people a day during this pandemic was quite difficult.

It was a challenging task as most of the village people were not aware enough of the dangers of COVID-19. Others did not believe in the existence of the virus. The experience was tiresome. The weather sometimes was not cooperative. Sometimes, the rain would pour so hard. On some other days, the sun would shine making the environment so hot. Yet, the volunteers tried to give their best services to the people every day, from 9:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon just so the people could stay safe from the virus.

The experience has taught the volunteers many things, and they are proud to have been able to contribute something towards the safety of the community. As a messenger of peace, one must be determined to serve the people even during the pandemic. This virus will soon go. Unity and cooperation will help the communities overcome the pandemic and any natural disaster. Life is soon returning back to a healthy and beautiful life together again very soon

Rinku Mankhin
ICF School of Peace 2019 alumnus



World YMCA and YWCA Holds Joint Observance of WWoP 2021

The World Young Men's Christian Association and World Young Women's Christian Association worldwide are launching the observance of the World Week of Prayer 2021 (WWoP 2021) from November 7-13, 2021. The theme for this year's World Week of Prayer is "Beauty from Brokenness." Six Writers' Groups and a separate Worship Committee took charge of the planning to produce the booklet of reflections, and to prepare the online worship service on November 12, 2021, at 16 hours CET. Both the Writers' Group and Worship Planning Committee were composed of members of both faith-based organizations. Duncan Chowdhury of World YMCA and Steve Clay of England YMCA coordinated the meetings, in collaboration with Daniela Zelaya and Nirmala Gurung of World YWCA.

The process of producing the booklet took a few months. Six small groups of 4-5 young people from different countries gathered virtually from May to June 2021. A member of the Writers' Group convened each group and wrote the reflection gathered from the group sharing for the booklet. The Committee gathered the six reflections in July and had them translated into Spanish and French. The reflections revolve around the brokenness of the world before, and during the pandemic.

Both World YMCA and YWCA take the task of bringing the good news to the world that is beleaguered with so many problems compounded by the pandemic. Thus, for this year's World Week of Prayer, the World Ys pick up the theme "Beauty from Brokenness" to tell the story of the Christian faith that God heals us amid our individual, and of the world's brokenness. This theme gets inspiration from Kintsugi, the Japanese art of restoring broken pots using lacquer and powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Kintsugi teaches people humility to embrace imperfections and to live purposeful lives even amid brokenness. Its story goes back to a 15th-century shogun who despaired over his broken precious cup. The Japanese ceramist repaired it using sap as lacquer to put the pieces back together and hid the "scars" with gold powder. The shogun was so happy his cup was not only repaired, but it was also reborn to a new life despite its imperfections. The cup became a unique beauty. This art form comes from a Zen Buddhist tradition. However, God speaks through different traditions and heals people of different races, gender, and traditions. Surely, God is a God of life, love, compassion, and freedom, who could not be imprisoned in any religious tradition's box, including Christianity's box.

The Team intended the Booklet of Reflections as a guide both for personal and group meditations within and even beyond the YMCA-YWCA circles. Interested parties could download the Booklet and other Zoom Resources from www.ymca.int/week-of-prayer. The online worship will be streamed live on Facebook @WorldYMCA.



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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 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: Faith Communities have Crucial Roles in Protecting Children's Rights

"Nearly 1.-M tipline reports flagging OSAEC content received by DOJ in 2020." "Child sexual abuse online up 250% in 3 years."

These are just two samples of Philippine newspaper headlines revealing the alarming situation of child exploitation in the Philippines. Non-government organizations now call the Philippines the "epicenter" or the "hub" of Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) in the Asia and Pacific region. The United Nations promulgated the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in November 1989. Thirty-two years later, in 2021, 196 countries signed and ratified the Convention, except the United States. Yet, many countries still tend to leave children's rights unattended. All over the world, there are children caught in the crossfire of armed conflict, child labor, and prostitution among others. What is disquieting is the proliferation of online sexual abuse with the advent of the internet. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Justice Mission (IJM) discovered that in 2014, the perpetrators used around 23,333 of internet protocol (IP) addresses internet-based child sexual exploitation in the Philippines alone. This number rose to 81,723 in 2017, an increment of 250 percent.

This frightening figure foreshadows an unimaginable increase in OSAEC and other forms of violations of children's rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, most children stay at home and use gadgets for online classes and entertainment. In countries like the Philippines, where corrupt people lead the government and are inept in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on people's health and livelihood, OSAEC grow rapidly.

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Adults – mostly parents, relatives, and friends – become the pimps and facilitators of OSAEC. They use poverty as the reason for doing this heinous crime. Children become the most vulnerable and hapless victims. If these monstrosities will continue, the world will have children growing up but burdened with trauma, broken spirits, low self-esteem, guilt, and many other debilitating factors.

While the reality of poverty is there, is it enough reason to “sell” the children to pedophiles online? Where have all the values taught by religions in caring, loving, and protecting children? The claim put forth here is that faith communities have crucial roles in fighting against the abuse and exploitation of children. In the Islamic tradition, children are a trust from Allah. Adults must, therefore, protect them from harm and attend to their needs - physical, intellectual, and spiritual. The Judeo-Christian tradition also looks at the child as God’s gift. The parents and adults have the responsibility to guide and nurture them to the path of righteousness. The Hindu has the same view: to make the children experience love in the family, to guide them to learn, find security and purposive life in society. The Dharma calls upon Hindus to fulfill all these in an honest, virtuous, dutiful way. The Buddhists hold on to the basic principle of doing no harm to living beings. Deducing from this principle, Buddhists not only teach the children the values of Buddhism. They also nurture and protect the children according to these values. Certainly, other living religions of Asia also value children as precious.

Unfortunately, faith communities are slow in putting the religion’s teachings into action. There are children’s ministries in churches, but the issue of sexual abuse in person or online does not receive good attention.

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum is doing only a tiny drop into the vast ocean. There will never be genuine peace when governments, religions, and faith communities do not seriously address the security and safety of children in their homes and elsewhere. There is no peace when adults become the jackals that prowl around and devour the children instead of ensuring their safety. Faith communities must not be complacent, and wake up. The youth from different faith communities must also take up the protection of children’s lives and rights as part of peacebuilding efforts.

