

Asian Conference of Religions for Peace

The 2nd Assembly New Delhi Declaration

PREAMBLE

The second assembly of the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace (ACRP II) meeting at New Delhi from 7 to 11 November 1981 is a continuation and development of the same concern and spirit in which in which religionists of Asia came to hold the first Asian conference on religion and peace at Singapore in November 1976 which initiated religious cooperation and common concern for human destiny in Asia in concrete terms.

In the past five years we grew deeper in our conviction that what binds us all is more important than what separates us. On the basis of common experience and strivings in our joint action for the Indo-Chinese refugees, the Boats People's project and the Khmer program we came to realize that dogma divides, service unites.

Our working together in difficult situations has given us the necessary experience for continuing to work together to solve human problems in the future with our spiritual traditions. Mutual understanding and respects among followers of different religions is growing. This is a great step in the right direction we are now committed to continue our strides on the path we have chosen to widen the field of mutual understanding and respect which is the basis for peace

The spectrum of Asian religions –Buddhist, Christians, Confucian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, Sikh, Zoroastrian and others from 16 countries represented in new Delhi gives us the confidence that our activity will produce profound results.

Reality of Asia

We, men and women of religion, are gathered here in the midst of human misery. Agony of suffering echoes throughout Asia. The voices of grief of those whose human dignity is violated and neglected are uttered wherever discrimination occurs. The cry of the poverty stricken, the homeless, the under-privileged, and the

oppressed is heard in vain. Human dignity is not heeded. Social justice is not taken seriously. Violence and conflicts occur too easily. In Asia, a vicious circle manifests itself in the form of discrimination, disparity and violence. These three factors found intertwined anywhere in Asia constitute an intolerable social complex so that we cannot tackle any one of these problems without at the same time dealing with the other two.

Here in India, we are confronted with the reality of Asia: The noble and glorious tradition of the past, overwhelming difficulties of the present, and the uncertainty of the future.

The suffering of the people is often aggravated by the exploitation by rich countries and the rivalry and hegemony of big powers

Within each country, the fruits of economic development are not distributed justly, and the basic needs of the people are not met properly. The arm race escalates not only between big powers but also among poor countries, which deprives people of their fair share in national wealth.

The spirituality of Asia

Asia is the main spring and matrix of almost all great religions of the world. Spirituality which activates the higher nature of humanity abounds in Asia. It is a force which makes us one in spite of our diversity in the ways of expressing it. It is an uplifting force of higher quality within us, which makes ourselves fit and worthy channels for great love and compassion as witnessed and proclaimed by all religions, as the blessing and gift from high. We have to proclaim a renewed humanity rooted in spirituality, in the midst of a spiritual crisis of the acutest kind, which divides the heart of Asian peoples between materialist tendencies in their way of life and their craving of human dignity.

Asian spirituality, we have to admit, has often led us into the transcendental indifference to, and other-worldly escape from, the reality of Asia, thus serving unwittingly the cause of these *status quo*. Spirituality, however, which we are trying to revive through our common prayer and witness is a strength in the midst of weakness, a hope in the midst of despair, and a love in the midst of hatred. It has to be channeled into saving and serving action on the part of those who are activated by it and the test of its genuineness is to be found in its renewing power

of humanization.

Asian spirituality which we witness is a liberating force which enables us to face the dire reality of Asia and transform it into humane and sustainable life together.

Spirituality, by its nature, calls for resonance in the heart of humans, thus uniting them through sharing. Spirituality and community presuppose each other, community without spirituality is a mere collectivity and spirituality short of community is an abstract idealism.

Our assembly itself is an actualization of this spiritual community, where mutual edification, mutual understanding and common sharing are taking place. We sincerely desire to enlarge this spiritual community at local ,national ,and international levels.

Action for peace

Discrimination

The problem of discrimination is widespread and universal, though it may vary in form and gravity from country to country, or from place to place or even from religion to religion. Let us be frank in admitting when we notice discrimination instead of covering it up. In spite of laws and high-sounding programmes of governments, discrimination continues against women, racial, ethnic or despised groups in different countries. There is economic discrimination by one nation against other, by one group against another, by one individual against another. Part of such discrimination with its roots in the old religious traditions, including the caste system, continues even after people change religion. Some religious missionaries discriminate against aboriginals and other despised groups. Religious or linguistic minorities are discriminated against by majorities. All this is part of denial of human rights in one form or another.

Hence it was felt that:

- an Asian Center for Human Rights be set up to keep a watch and look out for areas of discrimination and tackling them on the spot;
- mass media be used to emanate the correct type of publicity for raising world standards and to fight abuse of alcohol, intoxicants and drugs;
- A code of conduct be evolved from the moral teachings of major religions to promote harmony and the value of human dignity.

Disparity

We emphasize repeatedly our understanding reached in previous conferences, that the ultimate objective of economic development is human development. Economic development becomes relevant to this ultimate objective only when it is based upon the consideration of social justice. As a means to implement this, it is highly recommendable to adopt a taxation system on international level by which rich countries submit their due for the benefit of the all refugees and for that of less developed countries, so that all countries come to be more interdependent, knowing that their destiny is bound inseparably with those of other countries

Violence

Having convened ACRP II in a country where the noble tradition of nonviolence was propounded and practised by such a leader of humankind as Mahatma Gandhi, we came to a deeper understanding on the nature of violence, whether it is personal or societal, whether it is overt or covert. Violence begets violence and feeds on violence. Violence especially when used for selfish purposes, naturally results in degradation of human dignity of both perpetrators and the sufferers of violence.

We have to work out as in the case of discrimination, an attitudinal change through education and other processes, so that people forsake violence in their approach to solving conflicts. We have also to work out some mechanisms to contain collective violence, whether military, political or economic, and reinforce such mechanisms which are existent.

Religion in service

Tension in Asia

We believe and proclaim that Asia needs peace for its reconstruction after the ruin of centuries, inflicted on its body and soul by foreign imperialist powers. Hence we urge that the Super Powers abandon forthwith their race to militarize the Indian and Pacific oceans, not to induct sophisticated new technology weapons of offence in this region, to contribute at least one per cent of their GNP to the developing nations for their economic construction, and to lift trade barriers against their goods—barriers which are adversely affecting their trade and development.

We also urge upon the religionists of Asia to have a look within and neither to use religion for political purposes nor allow themselves to be used for political ends, to initiate an inter-religious dialogue at various levels and to promote a deeper and

creative understanding of their religious beliefs and customs so as to cope with the challenges of the modern societies, to do nothing to disparage religious views held by others, and not only to fight against war and arms race—particularly of nuclear arms, but also to emphasize the spirituality in man to lead him on to conciliation rather than to conflict, whether inter-state, inter-religious or intra-religious.

We emphasize the fraternity and sovereignty of all Asian nations on the basis of equality and mutual respect and say to all powers with sinister intentions: “Hands off Asia.”

Education

Education is one of the most promising steps to overcome present and future difficulties arising from ignorance, misunderstanding, prejudice or superstition. But it is not a panacea. Education is like a double-edged sword and its effect comes very slowly; it easily tends to be an instrument of the *status quo*. Education for peace backed with religious insight into the nature of human beings is most desirable.

Education is not solely the matter of school, but is a total process of a society to transmit its values and cultures to the present as well as the future generations. This multi-dimensional approach has to be developed so that people come to acquire more universal, humanitarian values and ways of thinking, which are conducive to world peace.

Mass Media

Mass media are a powerful instrument of expanding knowledge and information. At the same time, mass media can be a baneful tool of moral degradation. To assure a humane use of mass media, it is the responsibility of religion to imbue them with ethical standards.

In present-day society, mass media make it possible to bind a large number of people together, to bind group with group, nation with nation, so that it makes common destiny and solidarity of humankind much closer.

The irresponsible use of mass media has to be watched against for the welfare of whole humanity.

As an effective means of dissemination, mass media have to be utilised properly by religion to influence people's religious sentiment and their code of conduct and to create sound public Opinion.

Women

We rejoice that ACRP II could have strong and active Women and Youth Wings. The future of the human race depends upon these two groups. Some women have risen above the morass of ignorance and subjugation. By and large the position of women continues to be characterized by disparity, discrimination and violence in social, economic and political spheres. This half of the human race must release its potentialities to the full for the future of humanity.

Youth

Youth constitutes the generation of the future. They are the harbingers of a coming new world community, the moulding of which will be assisted by their lofty idealism and a strong sense of justice and self-sacrifice. For the youth to be effective agents of peace, these youthful virtues have to be coupled with the awareness of the common problems in Asia.

To develop this awareness, the- youth of the-Asian countries must be encouraged to have closer relationships and exchange programmes for study and service, through which they maybe sensitized to the sufferings of Asian people and come to know the meaning of sharing them in life together.

Truth, Love and Justice

We appreciate that truth, love and justice are advocated by all religions. Some individuals or groups may interpret religious thought to overshadow the essence of true religion. So we reassert the importance of these values.

Religion witnesses truth. In proclaiming truth, religion performs the mission of releasing people from ignorance and promoting the right use of their knowledge.

Religion witnesses love. To proclaim this love is to practice it. Religion identifies itself totally with the lowliest, the poorest, and the weakest of our fellow humans, to whom we religionists owe nothing less than real love. Religion witnesses justice. Justice is a *sine qua non* of the community and life together. Justice flows out of our understanding of the Creator or the source of our being.

For promotion and sustenance of a just society, continuous light has to be shed on

the essentials of truth and love. Every individual must sincerely, from day to day, practice his or her religious convictions to mould his or her life according to these principles. Thence will flow good human fellowship in the local, national and international fields of human activities.

The theme of collective effort is necessary in this field. Any effort at the projection of an individual image in public work is bound to meet with resistance in the present situation in any community. Promotion of team effort will naturally develop among co-workers the spirit of compassion and sharing responsibility as well as the fruits of labor. This will in turn help in the development and maintenance of the necessary link between different workers and different members of the family to close the employer-employee and the generation gaps. This will be a step toward promotion of peace among workers and families, without which talk of peace will be a farce.

OUR HOPE

Religion makes people live by hope, because people of faith are guided and enlivened by ultimate Hope, even in the face of gloomy realities of the world. We are enjoined to discern 'signs of active hope'. These signs have to be shared by as many people as possible.

We hope:

- to establish an Asian Centre for Human Rights as our concrete action to eliminate discrimination. This will be under the supervision of ACRP Standing Commission on Human Rights, to be set up according to the provisions of the ACRP Constitution;
- to launch development service projects as a joint effort of ACRP religious groups to help those who are suffering from poverty, hunger and disease and, for that purpose, to set up an ACRP Peace and Development Fund;
- to strengthen our research and educational efforts for peace, preferably by setting up a 'Centre for Education for Peace, which is to work out appropriate materials to be made available to ACRP-related religious organizations, and also to develop concern for peace by setting up a Peace Research Institute or a study committee under the auspices of the national chapter in each country;
- to make ACRP an instrument of reconciliation to reduce or solve tensions in Asia, by activating its Commission on Reconciliation, which is expected to deal

with such crucial matters as the Indo-China situation, Afghanistan problem, nuclear disarmament, etc.

We underline the statement of Mother Teresa that works of love are works of peace. We confess that we are not worthy of this noble task of peace because we, men and women of religion, have Committed, even in the name of religion the sins of discrimination, disparity, and violence. In all humbleness, we call upon the power from High to render us more serviceable to our fellow-beings.

May our hope and prayer for peace be realized, and our unity shown here be deepened.

New Delhi

11 November 1981

Reports of Commissions and Workshops