

Asian Conference of Religions for Peace

The 4th Assembly Kathmandu Declaration

We came together

The Fourth Assembly of Asian Conference on Religion and Peace was held in the ancient city of peace, Kathmandu, Nepal surrounded with beautiful Himalayan Mountains. More than three hundred delegates, observers, guest and others, coming from all over Asia, participated in this Assembly, representing 16 religious traditions and 21 countries.

In this Assembly, our fellowship was enriched with warm concern and friendship shown by new delegations of Democratic people's Republic of Korea, Cambodia, and Mongolia, which came to join us for the first time in our history of 15 years, Korea, a nation divided into North and South came to have a reunion here as co-religionists and it marked a new beginning of hope and reconciliation.

The Assembly was preceded by three meetings of youth, women, and experts, which were held simultaneously and made valuable inputs to the Assembly. Through the whole Assembly, the participation of youth and women was conspicuous. Their emphasis was always on the priority of action and the importance of concrete service activities.

The main theme of the Assembly was Asian Religions Towards 21st Century. It signifies the concern of religions to be future- and action-oriented and holistic in their approach to peace. Future, as we envisage it, is fraught with possibilities as well as dangers. Coming of a high-tech information society in the post-industrial epoch will make science and technology an extremely powerful instrument to mould human destiny and to change the world.

Technology of nuclear fission and fusion, exploration of the space, manipulation of genes, transplantation of organs, and control of conscious and unconscious process of human psyche and so on pose very serious ethical and moral problems. And yet, moral and spiritual development lags behind and will not be able to cope with that of science and technology. Exactly here comes the role of religions to fill this gap and create a world ethos to be shared by us all, irrespective of our religious convictions and to be guide our ways of life in the 21st century.

We cannot be optimistic, because human sufferings and environmental degradation which beset Asia may not be eradicated from this area of the world, even when we enter the 21st century.

Struggles for securing human existence deserving human dignity to Asian people still continue. Religions in Asia have to renew their commitments and efforts for witnessing serving, healing activities for the sake of suffering people.

Enormous tasks are ahead of us. We have to alert people to the reality and problems of discrimination, poverty, illiteracy, disease, hunger, & other social miseries and injustices and help them solve those on the spiritual basis of justice, love and reconciliation. All the more dedicatingly we have to attend to the needs of the socially neglected and destitute people. Special attention has to be given to the status of women and the rights of children. We have to heal the wounds of peoples who have been victimized by historical circumstances and to make them a new agent for shaping a new future.

We talked together

1. Dialogue and Co-operation of Religions for Harmony in Asia

Dialogue and co-operation need to occur at many levels as we seek to enhance the harmony of life in Asia. We must make the best of our opportunities in daily life. Sometimes, unexpectedly, everyday life provides a moment when misunderstanding and prejudice can be transformed into a seed for deeper harmony. Out of our experience of dialogue we know the need to always look for common ground and to be open to new insight with our Asian appreciation of religious plurality. Dialogue and co-operation also fosters the responsibility of praying and meditating for each other and for needy situations in Asia and the world. The fruits of our spiritual journey must connect with the needs of others as we seek to build a deeper harmony in Asia. In our forward planning we anticipate activities such as joint social programs for homeless youth, common action for conventional disarmament in Asia, a children art exhibition with the theme of harmony and 1993 the Year of Inter-religious Dialogue, coinciding with centenary celebrations of the World Parliament of Religions. It is our beautiful responsibility to dialogue and co-operate together in a way that builds abiding harmony.

2. Development and Environment in Industrializing Asia

We are well aware that on the threshold of 21st century, Asia is at the cross road of industrialization and environmental crisis.

An accelerated industrialization is the need of Asia, but never at the cost of degradation of environments. Industrialisation does provide basic needs and helps in keeping pace with modern scientific advancement. Nevertheless, Asia has to keep its identity. Villages have to remain populated. Cities should be stopped to become monsters to eat away environments.

Asia is rich in human resources. Its development may be taken care through spiritual and moral development.

Most of Asian countries spend 60% of its existing meager resources on war machinery. In the name of peace, such a waste must be stopped. Asia should be Nuclear Free, Peace-Zone.

Asia's industrialisation and modernisation should be based on sustainable development. It must be conducted at the grass-root level with peoples participation. Though competitive and free market economics are said to be the key for development, Asia needs more of cooperation and persuasion and indigenous approaches to development.

ACRP shows great concern at the news of holes in ozone layer. Such pollution of atmosphere endangers the very planet Earth. Environmental ethics must be propagated and observed.

The "Green Project" of afforestation has been launched. This should be continued & strengthened all over Asia. We urge ACRP should contribute and coordinate with UNCED in preparation of the formation of "Earth Charter". It will help guarantee our Earth's future sons to daughters.

Industrialised nations (Group of VII particularly) should be persuaded share wealth with developing countries. Cooperation is most required in the field of transfer of technology. ACRP should play its role in "North-South" dialogue for accelerated economic growth of Asia.

To help feed too many mouths in Asia population growth has to be controlled in a proper way.

3. Human dignity & human rights

In Asia, where a deep-seated attitude of discrimination and prejudice endures, the awareness of human dignity is more basic than the recognition of human rights. However, we do not deny the importance of human rights as an effective means of liberation in our struggle to liberate individuals and groups from their inhuman conditions.

Human dignity is the source and guide of human rights. Otherwise, human rights, in

their assertion of claims, tend to become forgetful of the sense of duties and responsibilities concomitant with them. Towards the 21st century, we have to live with nature peacefully. Our respect of nature may be based on the acknowledgement of a proper relation between humans and nature. This demands a new consideration of the rights of animals and plants. The concept of human rights should be extended not only to human but also to animate and inanimate beings. In this connection the right of the future generations to clean environments should also be emphasized. With this broader understanding of human and other rights, we are better equipped for the protection of humans as well as nature in Asia. The Earth is the home of our children. Thus, we urge our Asia countries and governments to ratify and implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the child.

4. Peace Education for a New Life Style and Culture in Asia

The people of religion should cooperate constructively to educate the people, specially the generation moving towards the 21st century, for peace. Otherwise, science and technology will overrun the humanity itself. Since the war beings in the minds of men, the seeds of peace should be sown in the minds of men.

The earlier peace education is started in life, the better. Today, from early childhood environmental education should be part of peace education. In peace education, theory and practice are to be united. Thus, peace research, peace education and peace training must go hand in hand.

Peace education should be introduced in both formal and non-formal systems of education. Peace educational programs should become part of curriculum from kindergarten through the university. Non-formal education is an area with tremendous potential for peace education ranging from family to community and religious institutions.

In order to make education for peace effective, teacher-education is of vital importance. Group activities such as prayer meetings, discussion, seminars, living together, exchange programs, clubs and associations are excellent training ground for the process of peace education. The mass media is a powerful tool to propagate the ideals of peace. Family oriented life-style is the nursery for peace education, ACRP members should adopt an exemplary life-style of simple living and high thinking, cultivate a sense of beauty and be instruments of peace and ACRP Peace Education Centre in Seoul is requested to publish a guide book on "Peace Education" and training.

Continuous communication should be promoted between the ACRP and its national

chapters regarding peace education programs. Professionals and researchers in peace education and training need to be encouraged and NGOs mobilized.

International and inter-cultural exchange is an essential part of peace education. Every national chapter of ACRP is encouraged to establish a cultural wing with a view to promote this.

We prayed together

We fervently pray for the success of the ongoing peace talks on the middle East.

We are very grateful to the people of Nepal and to RAPAN in particular for their warm hospitality. We are also grateful to their Majesty King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya for their participation