



Tokyo Declaration 2021

The Ninth Governance Assembly Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP) / *Religions for Peace Asia*

Preamble

The pandemic of COVID-19, which has impacted negatively across all spheres of human activities since late 2019, remains a harsh and deadly challenge against the global citizens. People of the many faith communities are also not immune. The COVID-19 virus prohibits us from gathering at churches, temples, mosques and other places of worship and forces us to change the ways of conducting important rituals and practicing of our faith traditions.

The Ninth Governance Assembly of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace/ACRP (*hereafter* called the Tokyo Assembly) also known as *Religions for Peace Asia* was originally scheduled to take place in Tokyo, Japan in October 2020, at which we would have celebrated the 50th anniversary of the First World Assembly of *Religions for Peace*, held at Kyoto, Japan in 1970. While it was delayed for a year due to the COVID-19; the delay was in no way a setback. We, resonating the vision and mission of ACRP, are convinced that the postponement gave us a valuable opportunity to reaffirm our determination *for* and commitment *to* carrying out our concrete actions on the ground.

The Tokyo Assembly was convened *online* for the first time with the center stage being set up in Tokyo from October 17th to 22nd in 2021 under the theme, *Asian Religious Communities in Action: Moving towards an Inclusive, Healthy, Prosperous, Peaceful Asia*. Representing a wide range of the faith communities in Asia and the Pacific, about 1,500 people, including official delegates, from 21 countries during the past six days, participated in the Tokyo Assembly, which was hosted for the first time by *Religions for Peace Japan*. ACRP is deeply grateful to the host chapter for its assistance in convening the Tokyo Assembly.

The Tokyo Assembly approved a totally revamped Constitution build around the Governance Assembly (124 delegates) and the Executive Council (47 delegates) and added two new bodies, namely, the Advisory Council and the Board of Asian Trustees. It approved the *interim* membership of Timor-Leste, its newest member to add to the 21 member nations: Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Korea (Democratic Republic of), Korea (Republic of), Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand, representing 52 per cent of the world's population.

Our Challenges in Asia

Even though the 21st century is said to be 'the Asian Century', Asia is not yet at peace and this necessitates genuine efforts for further reconciliation among the Asian nations and their minorities. The people of Asia are seriously

concerned about the on-going arms race and the global existential threat posed by nuclear weapons. The Korean Peninsula is still in division as the last afterimage of World War II. Intra-state and inter-state conflicts and confrontations are being witnessed in many parts of Asia. The participants in the Tokyo Assembly are concerned about conflicts and bloodsheds in the Asia-Pacific region.

Though tangible economic growth has been achieved in Asia, quite a few countries suffer from economic recession and poor governance, under which the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Dignity of all forms of life both animate and inanimate in Asia is endangered, therefore, education to raise awareness of the dignity of all forms of life is highly demanded. The voices of people, whose human rights are being violated, should be clearly heard. Problems such as human trafficking, child labor, child marriage and other customary wrong behaviors lead to gender inequality and violate human dignity. Religious, ethnic and cultural diversity are in jeopardy in Asia, and they are being worsened by religious, political and ethnic extremism. The degradation of the environment, which constitutes another attack on the dignity of life, is widespread in Asia. Climate change is labeled now as climate “crisis,” which has posed severe challenges to human survival and development. All countries are the victims of the climate crisis.

Our Reaffirmation for Asia

Through intensive discussion, the Tokyo Assembly affirmed that Asia with its rich religious and cultural heritage is ready in countering the aforementioned challenges and even threats. Deeply respecting differences and diversities, the people of Asia, fully cherishing pluralism, have come to realize that we share the sense of family-hood amongst us and are proud of our Asian spiritualities, which call for resonance in human heart and urge us to unite through sharing with and caring for one another. The beauty of Asia is therefore symbolized by such terms, including compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, togetherness and inclusiveness in the context of human relationships and coexistence with nature.

The Tokyo Assembly has become a historic landmark in evolving the organization into a movement of implementing concrete actions. In addition, the Tokyo Assembly has become a showcase of the achievements of ACRP's flagship projects, which constitute such prioritized project areas as 1) human trafficking, 2) education on the dignity of all forms of life, 3) conflict transformation and reconciliation, 4) development and environment, and 5) the advancement of youth leadership. The narratives of success and challenging stories shared by the committed members of ACRP motivated the Assembly participants to advocate transformation for *our* Asia into a more inclusive, healthy, prosperous and peaceful abode for all the peoples in Asia. We are also convinced that we must commit more to the implementation of a variety of programs/projects: *actions, not only words*.

In retrospect, the preparation for the Tokyo Assembly began with an important principle, which was derived from the widely known *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) adopted at the United Nations in 2015: “Leave nobody behind.” The word, “inclusive,” contained in the sub-themes of the four Commissions, stemmed from the preceding maxim. Constructively benefiting from the keynote address and the discussions in Plenaries and Commissions, the Tokyo Assembly became a forum where the ways and means of how we could become a driving-force in contributing to a better Asia have been displayed.

The themes of the four Commissions were: (a) Education for Peace and Human Dignity, (b) Human Rights and Well-Being for the Vulnerable, (c) Reconciliation for Social Cohesion drawing on the situations in the Korean Peninsula and Myanmar and (d) Development and the Environment in Diversifying Societies. A late arranged session was given to Afghanistan, drawing on input from Japanese NGOs personnel still in the country.

We, the participants in the Tokyo Assembly, hereby reaffirm that ACRP is a multi-religious organization, which promotes common actions amongst faith traditions and religious communities across Asia and the Pacific working for peace, religious harmony and community cohesion as this multi-religious cooperative organization is working for peace at regional, national and local levels. This is the hallmark of ACRP. Through ACRP activities, diverse religious communities in Asia discern “deeply held and widely shared” moral values such as peace and reconciliation, promoting the dignity of all forms of life, constructing just and harmonious societies, advancing sustainable development goals. ACRP is determined to translate these spiritual and moral ideals into concrete actions. As the members of religious communities across Asia, we make a unique contribution to the promotion and actualization of peace in Asia, based upon our grassroots communal reach, our spiritualities and our abilities to work across ethnic and religious boundaries.

It was highlighted in the Women’s Pre-Assembly that women are the agents of change but face challenges like gender inequality, economic injustice and human rights violation. Some of the concrete steps identified to overcome these challenges were: education for all men and women on gender rights, justice awareness and capacity building on all tiers of the society and government including regulated use of social media platforms.

ACRP values the important role that the youth play in dealing with the issues we face and that they are vital partners in our mission. We commit to continuously encourage, empower, and engage the youth in our work. We pledge to create a platform for youth involvement and our support in their projects and programs.

Being fully mindful that the Tokyo Assembly is a platform where we reaffirm what we have accomplished in terms of our engagements in concrete activities, we exchanged our inspirational views both on Flagship Projects and COVID-19 and Asia’s Religious Communities. For instance, the backdrop of our action stems from our Asian spiritualities. In accordance with a paradigm shift whenever it occurs, people of the faith communities may respond to the change in order to give adequate assistance for the vulnerable and the wounded. In addition, we could listen to the voices of those who live in the countries in trouble such as Afghanistan, Myanmar and the two Koreas. As a result, we did reaffirm that we redouble our efforts in carrying out humanitarian assistance in those countries.

Call for our Common Actions in Asia

Through the intensive discussions in Plenaries and in Commissions, further very useful and pragmatic recommendations were tabled. We, the members of ACRP and its 22 national chapters, are hereby determined to carry out the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: We promote, advocate and implement through interreligious dialogue and collaboration the ACRP flagship projects, namely 1) Awareness Raising of the Dignity of All Forms of Lives, 2) Anti-Human

Trafficking, 3) Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, 4) Protection of the Environment and 5) Youth Leadership Development.

Recommendation 2: We aim to be fully committed to and implement through interreligious dialogue and collaboration the programs/projects/activities to be articulated in the ACRP new Action Plan.

Recommendation 3: We aim to generate funds to carry out the flagship and other projects and utilize the Board of Asian Trustees, which will be formed in due course.

Recommendation 4: Asian and Pacific religious leaders encourage their communities to become-vaccinated *if they so desire* for the common good because ‘no-one is safe until all are safe’, and they and their communities advocate and promote in collaboration with R/P International the fair and just distribution of the vaccines and their manufacture to prevent the further spread of the COVID-19 virus, especially in the poorer nations.

Recommendation 5: We engage the youth members in decision-making processes at all levels as the youth are not only the ‘hope’ for the future but also the ‘hope’ of the present.

Recommendation 6: We engage women in decision-making process at all levels as change makers along with men, as they complement each other.

Recommendation 7: We implement humanitarian activities for the people of the Democratic Republic of Korea through the Korean Council of Religionists (KCR) in collaboration with the Korean Conference of Religions for Peace (KCRP). We promote the process for the signing of a peace treaty between the two Koreas. Peace education be advocated for achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Recommendation 8: We make committed efforts in peacebuilding and reconciliation for Afghanistan, Myanmar and other countries, where the victimized and the marginalized raise their cries. We continue to pray and commit our actions to realize peace, rapprochement and social cohesion for the peoples of these countries in deep sorrow and devastation.

Recommendation 9: We are engaged in the activities for the elimination of nuclear weapons and in the discussion of the pros and cons on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to advocate conversion of the defense budget towards funds for promoting peace related activities.

Recommendation 10: We advocate with governments, international organizations and faith communities for peace dialogue on inclusiveness, togetherness and environmental protection also using social media platforms in a positive way such as peace videos, presenting position papers, public rallies, prayers, conferences, seminars and webinars.

Recommendation 11: We network and engage in global partnerships in line with the SDGs to promote solidarity, cooperation and sharing of best practices with one another.

Recommendation 12: We reiterate the social responsibility of the religious communities, by actively carrying out

interreligious dialogue and cooperation, and advocate the spirit of equality, respect, inclusiveness and mutual learning. We also take concrete action to implement the principles and strategic actions of ACRP, reach consensus and make joint efforts to address climate change, protect the environment, and create a sound ecological environment, bearing in mind that peace education and environmental education need to be linked. We further jointly build a community of all life on earth, and leave behind a clean world for future generations.

These recommendations mesh with the six strategic goals of *Religions for Peace* International: (1) Promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies (2) Advance gender equality (3) Nurture a sustainable environment (4) Champion freedom of thought, conscience and religion (5) Strengthen interreligious education and (6) Foster multi-religious collaboration and global partnerships.

ACRP is grateful to *R/P* Japan for its generous contribution of ¥ 30,000,000 (approximately US\$ 273,000) to the implementation of the ACRP flagship projects within the scope of the coming five years and for its support of the ACRP secretariat.

**Adopted at the Ninth Governance Assembly of ACRP
on October 22nd, 2021**