

↑Monthly eNewsletter of the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs

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April 2016

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YMCA Leaders of Asia Pacific Re-visit the Mission of the YMCA

The Mission Review Session held on 8th March 2016 prior to holding of the Executive Committee Meetings of the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs was a journey for the YMCA leaders to revisit the mission of the YMCAs in the present day context of our region. Dr. Ahn Jae Woong, former General Secretary of Christian Conference of Asia and former President of the National Council of YMCAs of Korea delivered the keynote address entitled “An Ecumenical and Theological Reflections: The YMCA Mission, Task and Action Revisited.”

In his paper, Dr. Ahn reviewed the current global socio-economical-political trends. He especially mentioned about the climate change, the refugee crisis, the bubble economy of East Asia. He pointed out 15 major challenges that are of utmost importance for us to tackle in the years to come, such as climate change, population growth, gap between rich and poor, new types of diseases, improvement of women's status, growth of energy consumption, etc.

He highlighted the history and evolution of the ecumenical movement in his keynote address. He posed a question, What should be the ecumenical strategy for the development of Asian Ecumenism? He said that YMCA's adoption of the motto containing the prayer of Jesus “That they may all be one”, which became the insignia of the World Alliance symbolizes the unity, brotherhood and ecumenism of the World YMCA Movement. He mentioned that he always advocated that the ecumenical movement should focus on being gospel-centered and life-centered, and also insisted that the ecumenical movement should be involved in mission-oriented, peace-oriented, justice-oriented, service-oriented and value-oriented programs and activities. As followers of Jesus, we have to keep in mind that our common prayer, common fellowship, common witness, common service and common renewal for the realization of the ecumenical ideals and spirit are the important tasks for YMCA movement.

Then he made a synthesis of the Asiatic Ecumenical Movement, which should be characterized as Christocentric in nature, where God-Christ event need to be highlighted, ecclesio-centric in character, where God-Church relation need to be understood and anthropocentric in manifestation, where God-People-World relation need to be interrelated.

In general, the Asiatic ecumenical movement should deal with; crossing national boundaries in order to achieve the ideals of Oikoumene, overcoming theological and ecclesiological barriers in order to be faithful to God, confessing Christian beliefs in order to propagate biblical messages

and witnessing Christian values in order to be good neighbors.

Dr. Ahn also explained the concept of neo-ecumenism, the basic elements of the new-ecumenism could be highlighted as (i) Theo-ecumenics: Our ecumenical vision should have theo-centric emphasis on God as creator, God as liberator, God as sustainer, God as comforter, and God as Redeemer. (ii) Eco-ecumenics : Our ecumenical mission should be eco-friendly so that God's whole creation can be nurtured and (iii) Geo-ecumenics: Our ecumenical task should be geo-contextual so that Asia's unique plurality of religions, cultures, races, languages and thoughts can be affirmed and helpful to flourish.

Finally, he emphasized on building a culture of peace. He indicated that in Asia we live and experience multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual realities. In this multi-contextual continent of Asia, we are called to be peacemakers. He proposed the formation of an Ecumenical Peace Congress for the purpose of policy development on peace building, strengthening ecumenical fellowship for peace building, strategizing for peace education and advocacy work, resource sharing for exchange of personnel and experts, information sharing, articulation of theology of peace and developing an ecumenical pedagogy of peace.

After the presentation of the key note address, there were four respondents from 4 sub-regions of the Asia and Pacific who gave their reflections pertaining to their own context. Mr. Russel Keith Leech, from New Zealand, representing the South Pacific mentioned that the socio-political trends in his region were quite different from other regions. Women's status is much higher in the society, women acquired the right to vote in 1893, the democratic principles are in place in the government machinery, free education is ensured for all people, the pollution problem is much lower than other regions, and all people irrespective of their faith, religion, culture and age do enjoy equal rights. The concern was the number of people who do not profess any religion is gradually increasing in the society. About 50% of the population does not belong to any religion. Only 10% among the Christians goes to churches regularly. The YMCA operates on the values of honesty, respect, caring and responsibility.

Ms. Law Lap Man, from Hong Kong, representing East Asia, in her reflections mentioned the absence of ultra-poor in the society. A society which is dominated by tech-savvy people, there is a big gap between the rich and the poor, people are self-centered, mostly spending their time in cyberspace. Particularly in Hong Kong there is a tendency of political fear, which had its expression in the yellow umbrella movement. The political culture promotes hatred. In the ecumenical sphere, the YMCA need to work to bridge the gap, working with dialogue, sacrificing, respecting each other, thus we can promote culture of peace. The YMCAs are working to promote the culture of love, we have to take sides, if we need to establish peace in the society.

Mr. Soundaram Thacis Thoumiyan, from Sri Lanka, representing South Asia reflected that in South Asia, there are a small group of elites who, along with the small number of middle-class section of the society, are dominating over the vast majority of the marginal people of the society. This is the poorest and deprived area of the region. We have a multi-religious society. In most of the cases, one religion which is majority in a country is minority in another country. Violence prevails in the society, people are self-centered and political party-centered. Communal violence is predominant in the society. In such a situation, we have to search for a new meaning of service and what is the calling for us to be a Christian. We need to carry our Christian mission in the society by serving the people in order to be the true disciple of Christ.

Mr. Maung Maung Win, from Myanmar, representing South East Asia, reflected that the society

is gradually accepting improved technologies. One of the challenges of the country is to deal with the war refugees, the YMCA can work as peace makers for the people in distress. The negative effects of climate change are being surfaced and the flora and fauna are under threat for rapid urbanization, and also for the mega project implementations damaging the eco-system like the big river dams. There is a change in the political system in the country. A civil government is taking over from the military junta, through a peaceful democratic process. The YMCAs being the pioneer of ecumenical movement needs to work more closely with the churches, to bring about unity among various denominations. There is a felt need for us to work with people of other faiths too, to bring about harmony and peace in the society.

After the reflections, the participants met in group discussions by sub-regions and reconfirmed their conviction to make the YMCA a more socially relevant organization by working more towards promoting ecumenism and facing the present day challenges of the world, with special emphasis on peace making.

~ Duncan Chowdhury, APAY Executive Secretary

YMCA Youth Initiatives to Combat Climate Change

Climate Change is the single biggest environmental and humanitarian crisis of our time. The Earth's atmosphere is overloaded with heat-trapping carbon dioxide, which threatens large-scale disruptions in climate with disastrous consequences. Human activities have caused this imbalance in the atmosphere which caused the greenhouse effect and related process. Greenhouse gas emission is the main reasons for the changes in global surface temperatures; these are caused primarily by the burning of fuel fossils.

Rising temperatures are reasons for melting the Antarctic and Arctic ice and are responsible for colossal floods in various parts of the world, which we are now experiencing. Due to global warming the sea levels would rise and many low lying small islands and coastal cities would sink into the oceans. Rising temperatures will cause increasingly severe and long-lasting droughts. Floods and tropical storms will also increase in many parts of the world, wiping out vast areas of crops and causing massive infrastructure damage.

At the COP21 in Paris last December, 190 countries and the EU agreed to a long term goal of net zero greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. This is necessary if we want to keep global warming limited within 1.5 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial level. As YMCAs, we, too, have to play our part to keep global warming within 1.5 degree target.

About 40 Youth Representatives and Change Agents are currently participating in an e-learning course on Climate Change initiated by APAY. Upon completing this e-learning course they will make action plans on climate change and/or tourism related activities to show comprehension and application of their e-learning. Mentors assigned to these youth will provide assistance for implementation of action plans at local and community levels.

Currently, the APAY has provided support for action plans of 10 national movements to combat Climate Change. The projects and activities have a varying degree of creativity, all directed at reducing carbon footprints, promoting low carbon lifestyles. To highlight just a few of the projects, we have a project to demonstrate and teach rainwater harvesting for a local community in a mountainous region; projects fostering eco-culture and initiating little environment protectors in schools; projects on solar energy and recycling to reduce carbon footprints.

WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU, TOO!

If you or your YMCA would like to share your own ideas, activities and initiatives to combat climate change, please send us a short story with pictures.

~ Beng-Seng Chan, APAY Coordinator for GATN

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of YMCA of Taiwan - 2016 General Assembly and AOS Meeting

Right after WWII, a YMCA was established in Taipei, Taiwan. It was a unique YMCA that was formed only by local Christian leaders without any foreign support. Later on, foreign support came to Taiwan to help not only for Taipei YMCA, but also try to unite local Christian leaders in other cities to set up YMCA movements. In 1966, there were four major cities with active YMCAs, which were Taipei (1945), Tainan (1955), Taichung (1962) and Kaohsiung (1963). In 1963, Mr. Profirio G. Miraflores, the Executive Director of Southeast Asia Committee of World Alliance of YMCAs, came to Taiwan and visited all local movements and encouraged them to form a national YMCA movement. Lay leaders at Taiwan YMCAs also had the same vision. After a few years' preparation, on 15th Jan 1966, we had our national YMCA "the National Council of YMCAs of Republic of China". And in 1969 during the 5th World Council meeting, we were admitted as a full member of the World Alliance of YMCAs (WAY). In 1992, we informed the WAY of the amendment of our name to "YMCA of Taiwan".

Fifty years is not that short. As every other YMCA in the world, it is very important for us not just to celebrate but to give thanks to God. The best way for us to fulfill what God wants us to do is to evaluate our achievements so far and renew our mission and vision. It was our honor and privilege to invite Mr. Nam Boo Won, General Secretary of APAY, to be our guest of honor as well as keynote speaker at both General Assembly and AOS under the theme "Anchored on our Rock: YMCA's Responsibility of Society". During his sharing, "Mission Clarity", "Social Relevance" and "Institutional Capacity" were frequently mentioned as the three key pillars for movement strengthening. At the AOS meeting, participants were very enthusiastic in the open discussion. Especially for those young staff, they felt so great to receive such an eye-opening sharing and were also encouraged to feel free to ask any issues or concerns. It was a great time for bridging the generation gap, a great time for learning each other and for fellowship.

During the General Assembly, Mr. Nam not only congratulated us on our anniversary but also shared his 32 years' journey as a professional staff of YMCA and his vision as the General Secretary of APAY in the contemporary regional context. He also offered a few suggestions to the leaders of Taiwan YMCA to consider in the future. First, we should constantly challenge ourselves to seek the contextual mission of YMCA, which is reflective of Taiwan's social realities. Second, we should try to start a "long-term strategic planning" in preparation for another 50 years to go. Third, as a well-established YMCA movement in the region, APAY hopes YMCA of Taiwan can play a more active role in IMC (Inter-Movement Cooperation) to help those movements in need and emerging. For us, these two days are not just two regular or routine meetings, but a very inspiring experience to start facing new challenges ahead.

~ Mr. Gilbert Chin, Associate General Secretary, Taipei YMCA

Luang Prabang, a Seedbed for Laos YMCA

The APAY, together with Chiangmai YMCA, paid a visit to Luang Prabang, the second largest

city of Laos, on 15 – 18 March 2016 to meet with a core group of Christians who are willing to establish YMCA there. The purpose of the visit was to follow up with an initial visit made by Mr. Kohei Yamada, former GS of APAY assisted by Chiangmai YMCA in early 2015. More specifically, it was also to explore and contact potential founding members of the YMCA in Luang Prabang. In this visit, Mr. Nam Boo Won, General Secretary of APAY, was accompanied by Ms. Yuvadee Kantakalung, a Chiangmai Y's Men and Advisory Committee member of Chiangmai YMCA, Ms. Air, a Chiangmai Y's Men member, and Ms. Chularat Phongtudsirikul, Associate General Secretary of Chiangmai YMCA.

During their visit, a gathering was organized with potential core members who are willing to start YMCA in Laos (Luang Prabang). Twenty-two (22) young people, most of them being Christians and wishing to establish YMCA in Laos (Luang Prabang), met with the visitors on 16 March 2016. At the meeting with this young Christians, an orientation on YMCA was made by Ms. Chularat and Mr. Nam, followed by discussions on how to establish and start YMCA in Laos. There were also discussions on membership development and program development. The visitors also visited potential program sites - a garbage hill, a waterfall, handcraft workplace and a craft shop with a view to initiating an environment program as well as an alternative tourism program.

Through active dialogue and discussions, it was decided that the group will have periodical meetings – once a two weeks – to strengthen the membership from the beginning. APAY will provide them with appropriate materials for understanding YMCA – mission, organization, programs, history, philosophy, etc. They also decided to start a program called “garbage project” to help solve increasing wastes disposal issues in Luang Prabang. The project will include environmental educations of school children; providing welfare service to garbage workers; start the program at Phanom village to create a model one, etc. Taking into consideration the social context and level of development, Cambodia YMCA was identified as a preceding model from which the group could learn. Thus, APAY will provide the core members with an opportunity to visit Cambodia YMCA for exposure and learning. APAY will organize a PSG group to support the initiation of YMCA in Laos. The Chiangmai YMCA has committed to joining the PSG from the beginning. APAY will also be responsible for raising fund necessary for initiating membership-building and program implementation. It will send Mr. Beng Seng Chan, GATN Project Manager, around coming June to Luang Prabang to help the group develop an alternative tourism program of Laos YMCA. Upon their return from this short but fruitful visit, all the visitors felt strong that Luang Prabang will be a fertile seedbed for YMCA to grow in serving its people and community. We seek your prayers for the God-given historic task ahead of us.

~ Nam Boo Won, APAY GS

Not interested any more?