



HEADLINES

..ewsletter of the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs ~ No. 56/ September 2006

1. Youth Commitment to Spirituality, Solidarity and Sustainability

The recently concluded APAY Youth Assembly in many ways brought to light the diversity and the faces of the youth constituencies in the YMCAs across the region and beyond. A total of 136 youth from 18 countries including Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, East Timor, Hong Kong, Korea, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam and from our partners and countries outside the region: Canada, Interfaith Cooperation Forum, Y-CARE, UK and Ireland, and the World Alliance.

The diversity of the participants also reflected the various contexts and levels of involvement, perspectives and understanding of the YMCAs. Some had brought their experiences from the student YMCAs. Some were from their YMCA membership. Others were young professionals or came with their staff perspectives. Yet others were from Boards or had mentors' experiences. Policy formulation, action planning and issue orientation had been a challenge. Yet, the participants, in whatever capacity they came from, represented their movements as young YMCA leaders.

Participants shared their reflections on the theme and YMCA programmes involving young people. Resource persons had facilitated the key conceptual and practical learning experiences on Spirituality, Solidarity and Sustainability for the participants. The Youth *Kampung* (village) formed during the Assembly sent a message of commitment towards youth integration, strengthening of spiritual heritage, peace building, sustainable environment, and solidarity with the community. Commitment to issues of unemployment, HIV and AIDS, gender injustice, economic injustice and education were also highlighted.

The Youth Assembly highlighted the need for greater youth empowerment, participation and contextual understanding of their own realities, in particular about the issues affecting the youth and marginalized sectors of society at the local and national YMCA levels. If this were done, it would add to more substantial, meaningful and discerning deliberations when they gather together again as a regional assembly.

We urge National Movements to review their proposed follow-up actions and to commit support for their implementation. We have also planned to discuss these issues and actions on the YouthNet as a move towards participation in the 17th General Assembly.

2. Plans Formulated for 17th General Assembly

Reflections, visions and actions related to the theme “Spirituality, Solidarity, Sustainability” will take up the core space of the 17th General Assembly. A very participatory programme format has adopted. Some features: Open spaces for Youth and Gender Issues, sub-regional deliberations, partnership sharing, and a process of re-defining the YMCA heritage and our Spirituality, and re-discovering together in solidarity responses to relevant needs within the region

An immersion programme to experience Sri Lankan realities will be organised for youth prior to the 17th GA. It will provide a link between youth’s contextual concerns and the Youth Assembly action plans. Optional Pre- Assembly or Post-Assembly exposures will be organised for others.

The Assembly venue will be the Pegasus Reef Hotel and Palm Village Resort located 24 km north of Colombo, halfway between the International Airport and the city.

3. Youth Share Love and Affection in Tsunami-affected Sirombu, Nias

The YMCA Love and Affection Youth Camp held on 20-27 August 2006 in Sirombu, Nias Island, Indonesia focussed on the importance of play and children’s space in the community seriously affected by the 2004 tsunami. The programme, coordinated by the YMCA of Japan, brought together 25 youth from Japan and Indonesia (Medan and Nias). They implemented play-based activities among school children. The camp also equipped the local youth with programme and leadership skills that they could use in their community. The programme also provided for sharing of fellowship and cultures among the participants and the community.

4. Leadership Roundtable: Building Membership for Mission

The Roundtable on Building Membership for Mission will be held from 15-19 October 2006 at the YMCA of Singapore.

This is a follow-up of the 150th Anniversary global celebration and envisioning process of the World Alliance of YMCAs in Mumbai, India in August 2005. The previous membership consultation was held in 1977. Since then, the composition and needs of our membership have changed dramatically. We need to review and rejuvenate our membership and leadership towards greater relevant Mission engagement.

Thus, this Roundtable will engage the key volunteer and professional YMCA leadership, in an in-depth review of profound changes in the YMCA, the membership, and their roles in fulfilling the contextual mission of the YMCA towards the transformation of society. It will explore strategies and best practices for building a membership that is sustainable and participative in the YMCA Mission. The aim is to strengthen a mission-driven YMCA, with the membership responsive to the contextual realities of the region and respective countries.

Registration deadline: [5 October 2006](#).

5. Community-based Approach to Poverty Alleviation and Sustainability

**NOTE: Scheduled for 3- 8 October, this Workshop has been
POSTPONED TO 12-17 NOVEMBER 2006.
Inconvenience Regretted**

To be held in Manila and the Pangasinan Province, Philippines, this Regional Training Workshop will focus on a community-based approach to poverty alleviation and sustainable development. The theme will be “*Alleviating Poverty, Building and Creating Sustainability for Life*”.

It is aimed at strengthening the capacity of YMCA volunteer and staff leaders in poverty alleviation and building sustainability. In the spirit of building a learning community, it will draw from the spirituality, cultures, traditions and wisdom of the community and the participants, learning to become more mindful of the community in order to become effective in working towards poverty alleviation and sustainability. Participants will be engaged with a local community to seek new insights into poverty and sustainability. Community-based approaches, appreciative inquiry, adaptive learning, enabling partnerships and other approaches will be used. **Registration deadline will now be 15 October 2006.**

Details already circulated to National Movements; also see Website.

6. Spirituality and Peace-building in Indigenous Communities

This **Spirituality and Peace-building Workshop** for indigenous populations is jointly organised by the Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCAs and Interfaith Cooperation Forum in Jorhat, India on **4-9 November 2006** (*postponed from September*).

The aim is to bring together 25 grassroots participants from indigenous communities including people working closely with them to provide opportunities for sharing about their spirituality and how it integrates them with the earth, nature and its ecosystems. The workshop aspires to create a bridge between indigenous religions/faiths and other religions to build a respectful understanding and dialogue between religious traditions and how we could all work together to build peace with justice.

7. Building Capacity Towards Gender Responsiveness and a Gender-just Society

A Training-of-Trainers Workshop ~ **Capacity Building for Women in the YMCA Towards Gender Responsiveness and a Gender-just Society** will be held on **November 5-10, 2006** in Chiangmai, Thailand.

This regional programme is in recognition of the need for developing women’s capacities and to enhance their leadership to work in partnership with men, to be responsive to issues and concerns affecting the communities we live in and serve, and the world. It also recognises the need to continue to promote gender equity in all aspects of our life and the life

of the YMCA. Workshops tackling thematic issues and related skills will make up the programme, in addition to exposures, resource sharing, action planning and contextual worship.

We invite YMCAs to send women leaders engaged in gender-based programmes and/or willing to implement them, and those who with the commitment to conduct echo-training when they return to their home YMCAs, to this Training Workshop.

Details of the programme have been circulated to the National Movements and are available at the APAY website

8. Faith and Mission Workshop- Worship Study and Planning

For the YMCA, a community of faith, daily devotions and reflections, in a participatory and ecumenical manner, are an important inspirational aspect of its life. To strengthen this aspect, a Contemporary Mission-Faith and Worship Study and Planning Workshop will be organised on **6-10 December 2006** in a Retreat Centre, about 20km from Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The workshop will evolve and formulate contemporary creative liturgies reflective of our varied, and diverse indigenous cultures (including music, songs, prayers, poems, dance, etc). This process will also help participants examine participatory and interactive ways of expressing the Contemporary Mission and Biblical Reflections (*former Quadrennial Plans' proposal for "Participatory Bible Study"*). The Worship resource and related materials will further developed for use at the 17th General Assembly and published for wider popular use.

9. Mission-based, Action-oriented Youth and Gender Exchanges

The APAY is committed to promote **Youth Participation and Leadership Development** and gender responsiveness and realise **Gender Equity** at all levels of the YMCA. To this end we are facilitating youth and gender exchanges for sharing and learning.

We invite movements to participate in the Youth Exchange to develop young leadership and to enrich YMCA thrusts and programmes on youth engagement in social issues such as peace-building, unemployment, education, and HIV and AIDS.

Similarly, we invite movements to send a staff or volunteer to participate in the hands-on gender exchanges to experience and learn about women's empowerment and the engagement in gender-based issues within the Movement.

We particularly invite Movements engaged in these youth and gender specific concerns that may also wish to receive such exchange participants to contact the Secretariat.

Details of these programmes are found at the APAY website and National Councils.

10. 24th Advanced Studies Programme to begin on 30th October

The 24th Advanced Studies Programme will be held from 30 October – 3 December 2006 at the YMCA Wu Kai Sha Youth Village, Hong Kong. There will be 14 YMCA secretaries at this year's programme: China (1), Hong Kong (1), India (2), Japan (1), Korea (3), Myanmar (2), Philippines (1), Taiwan (2). In solidarity with the Africa Alliance of YMCAs, we have provided a scholarship for a participant from the Gambia YMCA.

11. Let's Protect the Household of God - APSYW Youth Week

We urge movements to join our ecumenical partners in celebrating and reflecting on the theme "Youth Protecting the *Oikoumene*" during the Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Week (APSYW) from 15-21 October 2006. This is an opportunity to reflect on our responsibilities as stewards of God's creation and to educate and motivate young people to act towards a sustainable future for all. YMCAs are encouraged to use the EASY Net Resource Book and Poster that have been circulated to the Movements, or its on-line version for the celebrations.

12. Reminder: Appeal for support of Mission in Action Programmes

Support is still needed for some of the 10 short-listed Mission in Action Programmes (MAPs) focussing on Community Building action programmes. We encourage National Movements to support these YMCAs in need of multi-lateral partners from the region.

13. Upcoming Events ~ October to December

15 – 19 Oct	Roundtable on Building Membership for Mission	Singapore
15 – 21 Oct	Asia Pacific Students and Youth Week	Movements/EASY Net
30 Oct – 3 Dec	24 th Advanced Studies Programme	Hong Kong
5 – 10 Nov	Regional Workshop on Capacity Building for Women in the YMCA Towards Gender Responsiveness and a Gender-just Society	Chiangmai, Thailand
12-17 Nov+	Training Workshop on Poverty Alleviation and Sustainability	Manila/Pangasinan, Philippines
4-9 Dec +	Spirituality and Peace-building in Indigenous Communities *	Jorhat, India
6 – 10 Dec	Participatory Worship and Liturgy Workshop	Colombo, Sri Lanka

* ICF ~ *Interfaith Cooperation Programme, joint programme of APAY, CCA and EED*

+ *Please note change of dates for these programmes*

REGRETS

WE SEEK YOUR UNDERSTANDING FOR THE NEED TO POSTPONE THE PROGRAMMES MARKED (+) DUE TO CIRCUMSTANCES. INCONVENIENCE CAUSED IS REGRETTED.

14. Concluding Remarks ~ Empowering and Engaging Youth in YMCA and its Mission

I want to focus on a major move we had made in response to the Leaders' Quadrennial Roundtable (LQR) deliberations in 2004. The LQR had identified the urgent need to focus on youth constituency, its nurture and retention. We had proposed to provide youth with their own space and time to gather as an Assembly, rather than meet as a 2-day preparatory Youth Forum prior to the General Assembly. The LQR had raised concerns about the state of our youth focus, at all levels.

Our firm belief was that youth should have their own space and time to explore issues and deliberate on them at their own pace. There were sceptics. There was apprehension – that youth would not find a place in the General Assembly. There was even talk that this was a move to prevent youth from attending the General Assembly! To the contrary – it was to increase youth participation and to grow youth leadership. The Youth Assembly finally took place from 26 August to 1 September with 136 participants from 18 countries. We had registered 142, but unfortunately some did not receive their travel documents on time.

It was a reflection of our General Assemblies – the diversities in representation and expectations, the differing levels of YMCA experience and participation, but with a richness of its own. But it was a Youth Assembly. It was focussed to raise youth concerns on three concepts, as expressed in the theme: *YMCA Youth Strengthening Spirituality for Solidarity towards Sustainability*. Its conduct was in the hands of the Youth Participation and Leadership Committee and representatives from the sub-regions.

The Youth Forum in Mumbai held prior to the 150th Anniversary Celebration of the World Alliance and the adoption of the Paris Basis in August 2005, had cautioned us in their “Postcard from Mumbai”, “*There is nothing more critical to the survival of the YMCA for another 150 years, than the involvement and empowerment of youth at all levels of our Movement.*” This is the youth’s call for a shared leadership to achieve a common vision and mission together.

The theme focussing on *YMCA Youth Strengthening Spirituality for Solidarity towards Sustainability* was at first glance conceptually loaded, and possibly “unattractive” or “not cool” for young people. The Youth Assembly was different to different people. The Assembly explored the conceptual bases in practical, participatory, interactive and experiential processes, with a camp-out and teach-in on sustainability in a forest reserve; participatory dialogue and workshops to interact and listen to youth voices from other faiths on multi-faceted perspectives of pluralism, and for peace-building and harmony. Participants actively shared stories of their engagements in youth concerns and the community related to our YMCA heritage, the community and YMCA mission imperatives in *Challenge 21* in the Youth *Kampung* (Village). In the traditional Malay Village in Malaysia, there is a very close community spirit of caring and sharing. This was the spirit our youth participants showed amongst a very diverse community of nations as they shared their stories.

The teach-ins and workshops raised sufficiently, awareness of the issues of solidarity in diversity, building peace and harmony; about the environment and sustainable living for the present and the future, for the Assembly to come up with 15 “Actionables” to back up their statement on their key concerns: Strengthening Spiritual Heritage, Increasing Youth Integration, Building Solidarity with the community, Peace-building and Sustainable Future. Underlying all these was the strong spiritual basis we have as a Christian movement, as believers in a God who sustains and prospers us all as we seek to extend God’s reign of love to all.

Interesting reflections after an overnight experience in a forest reserve: *when I was sleeping out in the camp, whether it was heaven or hell, it was up to me, my attitude.* Another reflection was from one who looked around from high up among the canopy of the forest trees, 100 feet above the ground...and saw children playing, people going about their daily-live work, *it was like the world was one.*

We need to learn more about the reality of our youth constituencies – there is much truth in the call in the Youth’s Postcard from Mumbai. We cannot be complacent and glibly say we have a strong youth constituency. The Youth Assembly has shown that we need to build a wider base for our youth constituency. It has shown us the need at all levels for the development of specific growth-focussed, mission-oriented youth events to attain our hope and aspirations for greater youth participation and leadership in the movement. For too long we have lived with the illusion that our youth constituency is strong (of course, there are exceptions where it is very strong and we can learn from their experiences!). This Assembly has shown us there is much work to be done. And, the action has to take place at the Local and National levels, not only at the regional level.

Just consider the above two reflections how true...how often we forget it is up to us, to examine our attitudes and to change our attitudes.....and how often we forget that in the midst of our diversities, we are still One in God’s own Creation.

May the Lord bless us and keep us all as we journey together in empowering youth for the YMCA Mission.

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With Executive Secretaries Shella Quezada-Zagada and Lakshan Dias

Visit our Website: www.asiapacificymca.org

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UNITED NATIONS DESIGNATED DAYS AND EVENTS TO REMEMBER

This section of brief notes on United Nations Designated Days and Events September~October 2006 (adapted: UN Website sources) is an awareness-building feature.

International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict, 6 November

In 2001, the UN General Assembly declared 6 November of each year as the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict. In taking this action, it considered that damage to the environment in times of armed conflict impairs ecosystems and natural resources long after the period of conflict, often extending beyond the limits of national territories and the present generation. The Assembly also recalled the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which emphasised the necessity of working to protect our common environment.

International Day for Tolerance, 16 November

At the initiative of UNESCO, 1995 was declared the United Nations Year for Tolerance, and it saw the launching of a worldwide campaign for tolerance and non-violence. The International Day for Tolerance grew out of the momentum of that Year.

Building tolerance and trust in diverse communities is not done overnight. It takes time and commitment. Building tolerance requires access to education. Intolerance is often rooted in ignorance and fear: fear of the unknown, of the "other", other cultures, religions and nations. Intolerance is also closely linked to an exaggerated sense of self-worth and pride: notions taught and learned at an early age. Therefore, we need to place greater emphasis on educating children about tolerance, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Universal Children's Day, 20 November

The UN recommended that all countries institute a Universal Children's Day, to be observed as a day of worldwide fraternity and understanding between children. The date 20 November marks the day on which the Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, in 1959, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1989.

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the creation of Universal Children's Day reflects the growing recognition that children are important and valued members of society, now and in the future. Universal Children's Day celebrates children just for being themselves. It reminds us that children need love and respect to grow to their full potential. It is a day to listen to children, to marvel at their uniqueness and all they have to offer.

World Television Day, 21 November

The World Television Day was established to encourage nations to exchange cultural programming focusing on peace, security, economic and social development. The day November 21 was chosen because the first World Television Forum was held on that day in 1996, where media figures organised to discuss the increased significance of television in the world.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November

“Violence against women remains pervasive worldwide. It is the most atrocious manifestation of the systemic discrimination and inequality women continue to face, in law and in their everyday lives, around the world.” – Kofi Annan

The UN has designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to organize on that day, activities to raise public awareness on the problem. Women's activists have marked 25 November as a day against violence since 1981. The date came from the brutal 1961 assassination of the three Mirabal sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic, on orders of Dominican ruler Rafael Trujillo.

On November 25th, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence also begins. This year marks the 16th anniversary of the campaign focused on “Celebrate 16 years of 16 Days: Advance Human Rights ↔ End Violence Against Women”. In 2006, The 16 Days campaign celebrates activists who have made the campaign a success and honors women human rights defenders who have suffered intimidation and violence for their activism and/or have given their lives fighting for gender equality.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, 29 November

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is observed by the United Nations on 29 November each year. On that day in 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181(II), which came to be known as the Partition Resolution. That resolution provided for the establishment in Palestine of a "Jewish State" and an "Arab State", with Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime. Of the two States to be created under this resolution, only one, Israel, has so far come into being.

The International Day of Solidarity has traditionally provided an opportunity for the international community to focus its attention on the fact that the question of Palestine is still unresolved. The Palestinian people have yet to attain their inalienable rights as defined by the General Assembly, namely the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty and the right to return to their homes and property from which they had been displaced.

World AIDS Day, 1 December

Around 40 million people are living with HIV throughout the world and that number increases in every region everyday. World AIDS Day, 1 December is an opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV and AIDS. This year, it is up to you, me and us to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS and end prejudice.

The theme for the World AIDS Day 2006 is focused on *accountability*, which has been the constant theme of World AIDS campaign throughout 2006. It will be promoted on 1 December with the slogan, ***Stop AIDS. Keep the promise.***

International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, 2 December

"On the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, let us reaffirm the inherent dignity of all men, women and children. And let us redouble our efforts so that the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — 'no one shall be held in slavery or servitude' — ring true." Kofi Annan

The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, 2 December, recalls the adoption of the UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.

International Day of Disabled Persons, 3 December

The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons, 3 December, aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and to mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life. In 2006, the theme is "*E-Accessibility*" which is based on the goal of full and equal enjoyment of human rights and participation in society by persons with disabilities.

International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development, 5 December

The International Volunteer Day offers an opportunity for volunteer organizations and individual volunteers to make visible their contributions, at local, national and international levels, to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Over the years, rallies, parades, community volunteering projects, environmental awareness, free medical care and advocacy campaigns have all featured prominently on IVD. Encouraging more people to volunteer is a 365-days-a-year task. If you consider the committed work of volunteers of all ages around the globe, carrying out every imaginable kind of activity, IVD should be a day that never ends.

International Civil Aviation 7 December

In 1996, the General Assembly proclaimed 7 December as International Civil Aviation Day. The Day had been declared in 1992, by the Assembly of the International Civil Aviation

Organization (ICAO), a United Nations specialised agency, to highlight and advance the benefits of international civil aviation. The purpose of the global celebration is to generate and reinforce worldwide awareness of the importance of international civil aviation in the social and economic development of States, and of the role of ICAO in promoting the safety, efficiency and regularity of international air transport.

Human Rights Day, 10 December

*"Human rights are our common heritage and their realization depends on the contributions that each and every one of us is willing to make, individually and collectively, now and in the future."
- Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Human Rights Day is observed every year on 10 December to mark the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The celebration of Human Rights Day reminds us of all that has been achieved, but it should remind us even more of the ongoing relevance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and what still needs to be done to advance human rights. Some suggested activities for the celebration include: making UDHR available in every public place, annual awards, forming human rights communities, creating human rights spaces in the villages, neighborhood, etc., human rights walkway / murals, traveling textbooks: painting public vehicles with UDHR, public readings, training youth to teach UDHR to children, develop oral history projects about human rights experiences, youth caravan, street theatre, seminars, conferences, etc.

International Mountain Day, 11 December

International Mountain Day is an opportunity to create awareness about the importance of mountains to life, to highlight the opportunities and constraints in mountain development and to build partnerships that will bring positive change to the world's mountains and highlands.

International Migrants Day, 18 December

In 1997, Asian migrant organizations began celebrating and promoting the 18th December as the International Day of Solidarity with Migrants. The date was chosen because it was on 18th December 1990 that the UN adopted the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrants Workers and Members of their Families.

The IMD is an opportunity to recognize the contributions made by millions of migrants to the economies and well-being of their host and home countries, and to promote respect for their basic human rights. We encourage organizations to join the global solidarity movement for the promotion and protection of the rights of migrants and to call on governments to ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

Adapted: UN Website