



HEADLINES

Newsletter of the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs ~ No. 58/ November 2006

Sri Lanka YMCA Withdraws as Host of 17th General Assembly

After much consideration and discussions, the National Council of YMCAs of Sri Lanka has in the interest of ensuring a well-participated 17th General Assembly graciously withdrawn as hosts in view of the prevailing situation in the country. We thank the Sri Lankan YMCA for all the preliminary preparations and the very difficult decision that they have had to make. Let us continue to pray for Peace and Life in Sri Lanka.

In view of the time constraints, the Officers have decided that the Secretariat will immediately seek an alternative venue that will be announced soon.

1. Vietnam YMCA's Typhoon Relief Work in Danang ~ Report

We thank the YMCAs of Australia, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Taiwan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Houston YMCA, and World Service, YMCA USA for their immediate response in support of the Vietnam YMCA's efforts to carry out relief and rehabilitation work in Central Vietnam caused by Typhoon Xangsane on 6 October. (Report/Pictures available on our Website.)

Luu Van Loc, the Executive Director of Vietnam YMCA writes: *"The YMCA of Vietnam, the local governments and the families (200) receiving relief from the 2 communities in Da Nang city would like to thank you infinitely for your generous support to help them overcome difficulties after the disaster. Although, they don't know you personally, but via the YMCA of Vietnam, they have already accepted you as their very good friends who share in their joys and sufferings. You are indeed the good Samaritan. On their behalf, once again, I would like to thank you for your prompt and generous contributions. All of us never forget your openhandedness and your sincere sentiments."*

2. New Executive Secretary (Youth and Gender) Selected

We are happy to announce the selection of **Ms. Cristina A. Dalope** as Executive Secretary for Programmes with focus on Youth and Gender to replace Ms. Shella Quezada-Zagada who completes her contract by 31 December 2006. She will officially join the executive staff team w.e.f. 1 April 2007 due to commitments in her current position as General Secretary of the YMCA of Pangasinan (Dagupan City), a position she has held since 1995. She attended the

Advanced Studies Programme in 1999. Tina has also been the Secretary of the Association of Professional Directors of the YMCA of the Philippines. She is active in training and activities connected to children's rights, youth and women development.

We express our appreciation to those who have shown keen interest to serve in the YMCA at the regional level.

3. Nominations for Election as Officers in 2007

National Movements are reminded to submit Nominations for the positions of President, Vice Presidents (4) and Treasurer for the Quadrennium 2007-2011, **by 28 February 2007**. Relevant documents have been sent to all National Movements in October 2006.

4. Leadership Roundtable: Building Membership for Mission

Thirty-three YMCA volunteer and staff leaders from Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, and Singapore met for the Roundtable on Membership and Mission in Singapore on 15-19 October 2006. We also welcomed two exchange staff from the YMCA of Shanghai with the YMCA of Singapore.

Rev. Samuel Stephens set the tone of the Roundtable through his opening presentation. He called on us to see the people of Asia - the poor, the hungry, disadvantaged; people crushed by political, economic, or racial oppression, with our mind's eyes. While we "see" these situations, only a few are really passionately committed to creating change. He urged that as a membership movement there was need to develop the diversity of our membership to carry out and fulfil our mission. We need active mobilisation, motivation and multiplication of our membership to move forward with our current priorities. We need leaders aware of issues that surround them, genuinely committed and able to respond creatively in a changing context and mission.

The participants took to heart various issues and perspectives of membership, leadership and mission. Case studies on the Indian and Korean YMCAs were presented focused on YMCA Membership and Mission in the Changing Society. The General Secretary challenged the Roundtable to search for new paradigms as we acknowledge the significant changes in our membership. How do we in response shift from rhetoric and myths to action, moving members especially youth and women from being a mere presence to become active participants and dedicated, inspired leaders. Group discussions considered best practices and challenges in seeking new paradigms for membership, leadership development and mission.

Visits were made to community-based volunteer (members) programme: a Uni-Y initiative in community, a Community Centre of Metropolitan YMCA, and church initiated community service centre.

Some of the key concerns and recommendations (not in order of importance) that emerged from the discussions include:

- Training and capacity building for volunteers and staff at all levels, to increase membership understanding and involvement in carrying out the YMCA mission, to lead and be led;
- Increasing communication about YMCA mission, values as well as the various forms of community work to expand the limited view of the public about the YMCA; Sharing of YMCA stories, listening and spending time with members, especially young people;
- Continuous research and understanding of the changing needs of the people and communities, etc. and creating forums of interest groups to connect members and people through needs-based and family-based programmes;
- Continuous youth leadership development including provision of resources and space for leadership responsibilities;
- Developing model constitutions and policies that are relevant to the realities of the communities;
- Opening membership of issue-oriented committees to all, including associate members;
- Networking with church organisations, Y's Men's Clubs and related groups, understanding that we are all members of the body of Christ;
- Communicating and implementing what had been discussed at the Roundtable.

Participants were cautioned against sinking into the 'country club syndrome', becoming complacent, so engrossed with the comforts created that we forget the reason for our being!

5. Building Capacity ~ Enabling Women to Transform YMCA and Communities

Working in partnership with both women and men in enabling communities to live in peace and justice was emphasised by the participants and resource persons during the recently held Regional Training Workshop for Women in the YMCA on 5-10 November 2006 in Chiangmai, Thailand.

The fifteen women leaders, a majority of them young leaders (a refreshing change) affirmed the importance of gender balance and mainstreaming gender in development approaches in the work of the YMCA. They internalised gender-related concepts and acquired skills that would support their work and role in the YMCA. In action planning, they examined ways to transform the YMCAs as a model of gender equity. They shared their personal commitment to promote greater gender equity and responsiveness to all in their own YMCAs and at different levels and seek the appropriate space as partners in God's mission. They have planned to conduct echo-training and gender-related workshops to build awareness and to foster action on gender-based violence, feminisation of poverty, sexual and reproductive health. They have also proposed to study and analyse situations of gender inequalities and discrimination that exist in the YMCAs and various societies in the region and to review YMCA policies and practices in leadership and governance.

Exposures provided enriching insights and inspiration from women community leaders and the villagers in attaining sustainable communities that value respect and cooperation among all members as well as the nature.

Our appreciation to the participants and the movements that had supported the training programme, the resource persons: Rev. Dr. Sirirat Pusurinkham, an activist and an ordained minister at the Church of Christ in Thailand; Ms. Lynnsay Francis the Regional Coordinator of Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development; Ms. Ruengrawee Ketphol, Consultant – Asia Foundation; Ms. Monruedee Laphimon, Southeast Asian Consortium on Gender, Sexuality and Health; Ms. Phanomwan Yoodee, Associate General Secretary and Naline Pusateawa, Acting General Secretary, Chiangmai YMCA, and Dr. Hope Antone, Executive Secretary, Christian Conference of Asia.

Advance Human Rights, End Violence Against Women

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence falling on 25 November to 10 December 2006 marks its 16th anniversary. Since 1991, the 16-Day Campaign has been worked to increase the visibility of violence against women as a human rights violation. Various groups around the world have used the Campaign to seek legal and judicial reform, and use international human rights instruments to address violence against women as a human rights violation, increase support services for survivors of violence and to enhance prevention efforts for better health and security. We encourage your YMCA to participate in the global campaign to end gender-based violence.

6. Poverty: Building and Creating Sustainability for Life

This Training Workshop was held in a grassroots community in the Tondol Barangay on Anda Island in Central Luzon, Philippines on 12-17 November. Fifteen participants from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam and EASYNet were exposed to how grassroots communities were engaged in ensuring their livelihood through sustainable participatory initiatives they developed and implemented. Main skills shared and practiced were that of “appreciative inquiry”, and learning how to change our mindsets, to listen and develop a spirit of “mindfulness” to be sensitive and see God in the other person. The participants also experienced an overnight local home-stay in the Tundol and Imbo villages.

The reflection on the experience was most encouraging. The participants were able to discuss and learn about the community’s involvement in changing their future and that of their children. Women were actively involved in many of the initiatives of protecting the environment and building a sustainable livelihood. A participant reflected that she had not really experienced what it meant to feel “insecure” until she experienced the home-stay in this small village with a poor family. *“They did not have much but they offered to us what they had. We saw their hopes for their future. We learnt of their community initiatives to protect their environment for future. Financial gains were not the main expectation from their community initiatives, but the confidence in their efforts to protect the environment for future generations.”*

The participants proposed various actions to be undertaken at different levels. Some of these actions include:

- Identifying new issues related to poverty and sustainability in specific areas, e.g. migrant workers, refugees,
- Using the community-based approach in poverty reduction, eradication programmes, integrating the YMCA with the grassroots,
- Promoting environmental protection programmes and activities,
- Networking for knowledge/information exchange and capacity building.

Prof. Elmer Ferrer of the University of Philippines and an initiator of the Community Based Resource Management initiatives in coastal communities facilitated the learning processes with the support of two CBRM volunteers and leaders of Peoples' Organisations in the area. Executive Secretary Lakshan Dias and Elsie Borreo, Acting National General Secretary assisted Prof. Elmer in the training.

7. Postponed ~ Spirituality and Peace-building in Indigenous Communities

Postponed:

- 7.1 *Spirituality and Peace-building Workshop for Indigenous Populations* jointly with Interfaith Cooperation Forum, Bogra, Bangladesh, 4-9 December 2006 to 2007 at the advise of the host National Movement in view of prevalent situation.
- 7.2 *Faith and Mission Workshop*, 6-10 December 2006 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to a later date/venue in view of the Sri Lanka YMCA's decision to withdraw as hosts of the General Assembly.

8. YMCA Japan STEP II Participants in Hong Kong

The 14 senior YMCA Secretaries undergoing a 70-day STEP II Programme, visited the APAY and YMCAs of Hong Kong from 2-5 November as part of their training exposure. They discussed regional perspectives on YMCA Mission and learnt about the community outreach work of the YMCAs in Hong Kong. They joined the Advanced Studies Programme (ASP) in a session on Contemporary Theological Perspectives focusing on Ecumenism. They also joined them on an exposure to urban poverty guided by the Society of Community Organisations (SoCO). Another exposure was to learn about the migrant labour situation in Hong Kong. The visit was mutually enriching for the participants of STEP II and the ASP.

9. Congratulations!

We congratulate Ms. Phyllis Tan who has been appointed Chief Executive Director designate of the Metropolitan YMCA, Singapore at the 60th Anniversary Thanksgiving Worship on 11 November 2006. She succeeds Mr. Eu Eng Kong who has served as the CEO for the past 16 years, on 1 January 2007.

We congratulate and wish Mr. Eu God's blessings on his retirement after a total of 43 years of YMCA service in various capacities. He started his service with the Metropolitan YMCA as the warden of the Palmer Road YMCA Hostel soon after his graduation. We thank him for the support and collaboration extended to the APAY.

10. Upcoming Events ~ January to March 2007

DATE	PROGRAMME	VENUE
Jan 26 – 31	PCG Tsunami Response, Sri Lanka (Meeting/Site Visit)	Colombo, Sri Lanka
Feb 2 – 4	YMCA Networking Workshop, Focus on Host Countries: Working with Migrant Workers	Manila Downtown YMCA, Philippines
Mar 7 AM PM	- APAY Nominations Committee - NGSs Meeting	Chinese YMCA, Hong Kong
Mar 8 – 10	- APAY Executive Committee Meeting - Standing Committee Meetings	Chinese YMCA, Hong Kong
Mar 11 – 15	Partners' Solidarity Visit to YMCA Ulaan Bataar, Mongolia (Proposed – Pending advise from Mongolia)	Ulaan Bataar, Mongolia
Mar 25 – 30	PCG Tsunami Response, India (Meeting/Site Visit)	Chennai, India

11. Executive Committee and Related Standing Committees Meeting 2007

The Executive Committee Meeting will be held 8-10 March 2007 at the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong. The Related Standing Committees will also meet to review and deliberate on their work of the Quadrennium thus far and to consider key concerns and issues in view of the 17th General Assembly in September 2007.

Moving away from normal practice, the National General Secretaries will meet in the afternoon of 7 March 2007.

Pending advise from the Mongolian YMCA, the Seoul YMCA and National Council of YMCAs of Korea (before end November) we have tentatively scheduled a solidarity visit to Ulaan Bataar following the Executive Committee meeting from 11- 15 March 2007. *More information in December Headlines.*

12. Concluding Remarks ~ Building the Road as you Walk it?

“Build the road as you walk it....” These words from Prof. Elmer Ferrer at the recent Training Workshop on *Alleviating Poverty, Building and Creating Sustainability for Life*, sounded negative to me when I first heard them. Surely this cannot be the way we should be working? We know that we need to plan ahead, to ensure we attain our goals, and achieve the desired results. But after reflecting about them on my 6-hour long journey back to Manila from Anda in Pangasinan Province, I realised the wisdom in these words. Of course, we have a target of what we hope to achieve. But we never know what challenges we will face as we try to reach it. There may not even be a “road” leading to it!

We passed through many rural villages and provincial municipalities along the route from Anda Island in the Pangasinan Province. To my “surprise”, there was traffic congestion in many sectors of the road we got stuck at many places. Our objective was to get back to Manila as early as we could, but we were not in control of the condition and situation of the road we were travelling on.

Prof. Elmer's words in my mind, is pointing out to us that we could be in control of what we want to do, if we wanted to, but we would have to make it happen. We would have to know the road (and traffic condition). In building a road, we would also need to know the ground conditions, material to build with and the direction to which we were building the road.

Back to the events in October and November - we have been stressing more proactive actions for increased membership engagement in working towards our contextual mission, for increased gender responsiveness within our YMCAs, for increased participation and leadership opportunities for youth and women. We have our goals, but *are we building the road as we walk it?* Or are we satisfied with the road and traffic conditions towards that goal? Do we know and appreciate the road conditions we are moving into or travelling along?

Should we not look within the *wells of our own communities' wisdom and knowledge?* Surely we know the road to go. Surely, we can and have the knowledge *to build the road as we walk it!* Thus *building the road as we walk it* can become a key motivation for us as we seek to do the God-given mission to the YMCA and to us. We can make connections and build relationships to help us build and improve the road as we move along. We can be connectors, builders, and bridges to all.....with the community and within the YMCA family.

The Lord bless us and keep us as we journey together, *building the road ahead of us* with the wisdom from within our *wells of knowledge* and the heritage of our membership and our Mission.

Yip Kok Choong
General Secretary

With Executive Secretaries Shella Quezada-Zagada and Lakshan Dias

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