



Christian Conference of Asia

● **Payap University, Muang, Chiang Mai 50000 Thailand**
Tel: +66-(0)53-243906, 243907 Fax: +66-(0)53-247303

The Executive Committee of the Christian Conference Asia which met in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 17 to 19 January 2024 expressed grave concerns about the deteriorating situation in Asia and issued the following statement:

CCA Executive Committee Statement on Current Asian Situation

The Executive Committee is keenly aware that complex realities are being faced in Asia. There is a growing concern in the region due to the increase of religious extremism and fundamentalism in several parts of Asia, accompanied by a rise in sectarian and extremist violence. Interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence of people and communities are affected in countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Southern Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Threats to peace and security in Asia are being aggravated by escalating militarisation, state-sponsored violence, and religiously motivated terrorism. Some of these tensions are not new and have been part of the geopolitical contexts during the past several years. The forces driving many of the persecutions, conflicts, and community tensions faced today are both internal and external to the countries involved.

Since the Myanmar military staged a coup on 1 February 2021, the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi was ousted and the Myanmar military has been carrying out brutal nationwide crackdowns across the country. The security forces have been responsible for mass killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence, and other human rights violations that amount to crimes against humanity. Expanded military operations have resulted in numerous war crimes against ethnic minority populations. Christian villages, churches, and church-run institutes including schools, convents, and clinics in Christian-majority areas have been targeted with airstrikes and artillery shelling. More and more people are fleeing their homes and lands, becoming internally displaced, or seeking shelter in Thailand and other countries.

The displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar languish in refugee camps, particularly in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazaar. More than 980,000 people are dependent on relief and care from the UN and relief agencies. The prospects of their return to their homelands, or of their relocation to resettlement areas, appear bleak.

Ethnic violence erupted on 3 May 2023 in India's north-eastern state of Manipur between the Meitei people, a majority that lives in the Imphal Valley, and the Kuki-Zo tribal community from the surrounding hills. It is with great concern that the Executive Committee heard from various reports that 175 people have been killed since the ethnic conflict started eight months ago, which has not yet been stopped. It is alarming that Christians in both tribes, Kuki and Meitei, which are involved in the clash, have been disproportionately targeted, with more than 120 Christians killed since the conflict started, others displaced, and over forty churches and homes destroyed. About 50,000 people have fled their homes and 12,000 have taken shelter in the neighbouring Mizoram state.

The Executive Committee was apprised of the fact that Asia stands as one of the most militarised regions globally, harbouring seven of the world's largest military forces. The issue of militarisation and the stockpiling of arms in Asia is a matter of serious concern, and militarisation is linked with human rights violations.

The rivalry and competition between China and the USA in the Asian continent continue to be complex. External interventions and the new strategic alliances and agreements initiated by the US with several Asian countries are contributing to heightened mistrust among nations in Asia. This is particularly evident in the rivalry arising from the expanding influences of China in strategic and economic domains. Both seek to influence and seem to then limit what choices nations have. The continuing tensions related to Cross-Strait relations add vulnerabilities to the mission of sustaining peace and security in the region. The tensions related to the South China Sea, especially for control of the Spratly Islands, add further complications. The Executive Committee expresses genuine concern and hopes that peace and well-being for all are prioritised in this region.

The Israel-Palestine conflict has become more complex now as the ongoing war in Gaza has created havoc for thousands of people in the Palestine region of West Asia. Local Palestinian people are being killed and the population is cut off from food and medical care as the bombing continues in the Gaza Strip. Homes, hospitals, and churches have been destroyed. The threat of famine is real, while the attainment of peace and justice appears distant.

The tensions precipitated between Iran and Pakistan along their shared border at the same time as this Executive Committee meeting is taking place is a matter of significant concern not only for Asia but also for the global community. Mutual attacks on each other's territory by both Iran and Pakistan are currently underway. The Executive Committee condemns the escalating violence and calls for a cessation of hostilities so that peace can be restored.

The people of Sri Lanka are paying a heavy price following the reforms that are being insisted on by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other lending agencies. Corrupt officials, identified as being responsible for the crisis by the country's Supreme Court, continue to be at large.

In West Papua, there exists a strong and deep desire for self-determination. The realisation of this human right appears to be distant. Meanwhile, the people remain susceptible and vulnerable to the influence and control exerted by the military, with no discernible path forward.

The Northeast Asian region continues to be subject to increasing levels of conflict. The Korean Peninsula is witnessing rising levels of military activity and there are few signs of peace. The Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches have long worked for peace and justice in the Korean Peninsula, and the Executive Committee encourages the continuation of these efforts with prayers that the hopes for peace and reunification may be realised.

The Executive Committee also noted many more places of tension in the Asia region: the Philippines, Southern Thailand, West Papua, and so on.

Conflict and wars outside of Asia significantly affect the region and its people. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, in particular, has had a notable impact on the economies of several Asian countries. These nations have suffered economic setbacks due to the disruption of export business deals with Russia and Ukraine. In the case of Sri Lanka, the export of its products to these countries has come to a complete halt, further exacerbating its economic challenges.

For the past 2,000 years, Christianity has been a part of the fabric of Asian life, coexisting peacefully with other faiths. It is regrettable that despite Christianity's longstanding presence in Asia, certain extremist groups, often affiliated with the majority religions, still brand or portray it as a colonial mission offshoot. Despite being a minority in most Asian countries, the Christian community has faced increasing tensions in some parts of Asia. This has led to Christians seeking refuge outside their homelands, contributing to a decline in the Christian community. Such persecutions not only result in

the loss of freedom to worship and witness but also highlight the need for a more accurate understanding of Christianity's integral role in Asian history and culture.

The Executive Committee urges the churches of Asia to deepen their bonds with one another and maintain cordial relations with other religious communities in their local contexts. A robust ecumenical and prophetic witness is crucial for showing solidarity with those who suffer, regardless of their religious affiliations. Peacebuilding depends on the prophetic voice of the church as we speak out with the vulnerable and marginalised. These social justice and advocacy efforts carried out by churches are a core aspect of our prophetic witness and are essential to Christian mission. At times such activities are interpreted as being anti-government, with resulting criticism, restriction, and, in some cases, persecution.

Governments must act and stop the inhumane atrocities, crimes, and violence, and so protect human rights and the freedom of religion, belief, and conscience.

As we look to the future, we draw hope from our faith in Jesus, the Prince of Peace. It is in our commitment to Jesus and to each other that hope is found. To represent this hope, we planted seeds as a tangible expression of our prayers and our confidence in God's enduring presence with us all.

The Executive Committee appeals to CCA member churches and councils to continue to pray for the people and communities who live in vulnerable situations in various Asian countries.

CCA Executive Committee

19 January 2024
Chiang Mai, Thailand