

Reclaiming our Right to Wholeness

A Statement

We are 29 women who have gathered on 8-14 September 2003 in Chiang Mai, Thailand in a Workshop on Asian Indigenous/Dalit/Aboriginal Women Overcoming Violence organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), hosted by the Women's Department of the Church of Christ in Thailand, and sponsored by the Fellowship of the Least Coin, the World Day of Prayer-German Committee and the United Church of Christ in Canada.

We are from indigenous communities in Asia and the Pacific – Aborigine, Bunun, Dalit, Ibanag, Igorot, Kachin, Karen, Lahu, Lawa, Naga, Orang Asli, Papuan, Rungus, Shan, Tayal... We are students, teachers, professors, social workers, pastors, presbyters, writers, researchers, lawyers, directors of church programmes and institutions. We have come not as individuals but as parts of communities that seek and pursue the establishment of peace and justice in the world.

We shared our stories and acknowledged the commonalities in the struggles and pain, the hopes and aspirations of our peoples, particularly of women who continue to suffer from various forms of violence on account of their being women.

- Domestic violence – whether verbal, physical, emotional and psychological – is pervasive. In their homes where they are supposed to be safe, young women suffer molestation by family members, relatives and friends.
- Outside their homes, women do not feel safe, as rape is a constant threat.
- Particularly in controlled or militarized areas, the rape of women – regardless of age – is common. We heard stories of Dalit women raped before their families and other people in temples.
- Women in Indigenous, Dalit, and Aboriginal communities are denied fundamental rights including access to basic needs, health care, sanitation facilities, and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that affect every aspect of their life thus denying them the dignity and pride to live as human beings created in the image of God.

We declare that

- Throughout history, women have been excluded, marginalised, discriminated against, displaced, dispossessed, isolated and alienated by racism, sexism, casteism, and classism.
- Rape occurs mainly because of the prevalent view that women are properties or are mere objects solely for pleasure of and service to their husbands and partners.
- Violence against women is not just a domestic concern. Rather, it is a serious social issue and an urgent human rights concern for many women living in constant fear and insecurity over their lives and safety.
- Gender-based and other forms of violence are systematically used to control, break down and suppress women.
- Indigenous/Dalit/Aboriginal women and children suffer the most in situations of conflicts, atrocities and wars.

For Theological Seminaries and Institutions to

- Strive towards the relevance of theological education to the lives and situations of Indigenous, Dalit and Aboriginal peoples.
- Promote processes leading to the recovery of the positive and liberating elements in indigenous cultures and traditions.

- Veer away from predominantly male-based curricula and organizational structures and to intentionally include the experiences and perspectives of women both in theological instruction and seminary praxis.
- Ensure a gender balance among faculty, staff and students, which may require a re-examination of the processes of recruitment and hiring.
- Give emphasis on Christian Education that will help promote approaches and methodologies that are life-enhancing and conflict-transforming.

For Church Women's Organisations and Movements to

- Provide spaces for women towards self-awareness and self-discovery, which should lead to the empowerment of women towards peace-building and conflict-transformation.
- Facilitate community-building processes among women for mutual support.
- Seek to network with other women's organisations and groups based on a common vision of justice and peace in the world.
- Organise consultations, conferences, encounters and other learning opportunities for women on existing forms of violence against Indigenous, Dalit and Aboriginal women.
- Document experiences and struggles of women against all forms of violence.
- Promote the concerns, aspirations and struggles of women especially in ways women overcome violence.
- Celebrate new knowledge, new discoveries, new commitments in rituals and liturgy.

For the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) to

- Continue to provide spaces for churches in Asia and the Pacific to share, reflect and analyse issues and concerns surrounding women, particularly Indigenous, Dalit and Aboriginal women who suffer from and resist the varying expressions and manifestations of racism, sexism, casteism, and classism.
- Encourage member churches and affiliate institutions and organisations to include the concerns of Indigenous, Dalit, and Aboriginal communities in their agenda as integral to the fulfillment of the ecumenical vision of justice and peace and as a critical component of CCA initiatives towards peace-building and conflict transformation.
- Support the efforts and initiatives of churches, institutions, movements and groups in building peace.
- Facilitate the documentation of the experiences of Indigenous, Dalit and Aboriginal women in resisting and overcoming violence, and in transforming conflict situations.
- Ensure the participation of Indigenous, Dalit and Aboriginal women in CCA meetings and consultations, and thus draw knowledge and wisdom from the richness and diversity of their experiences, values and traditions.