

## “ACCEPT OTHERS” – peace-building conference urges fellow Christian youth



“Our appeal to our fellow Christian youth is to accept others who do not share our beliefs. The acceptance of others will help create a world of peace where all people can live together. By accepting each other, we can start to create an equal society that values each individual no matter what ethnicity, gender or religion they belong to. This equality will bring justice for those that have been oppressed, attacked and/or displaced from their homes. It is our responsibility, as young people, to take a stand and help bring this world of peace into ours.”

This was the urgent call of some 45 youth and students from the Middle East and around the world who gathered

in Cairo, Egypt on 31 July to 4 August 2017 for the WSCF Youth Conference on “Peace-building in the Middle East and Overcoming Violence”.

The gathering aimed to highlight the role of Christian youth organizations in peace-building and to provide a space for leaders of Christian as well as Muslim youth movements in the Middle East and in other parts of the world to share the daily life concerns and struggles of their faith communities and how they are working to overcome religious violence and build peace.

The event, held at the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Center in Cairo, was attended by participants from Indonesia, New

Zealand, France, USA, Canada, Kenya, Egypt, Uruguay, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Madagascar, Switzerland, Cuba and Colombia.

Addressing the participants at the opening of the conference, His Eminence Bishop Anba Moussa, bishop for youth of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Cairo, congratulated WSCF for successfully bringing together the youth from the region and other countries to work together for peace. In a Twitter message, Bishop Moussa said, “WSCF aims to establish peace-building in our societies through dialogue, it involves the principles of peace, it is important to seek it through love and community work.”

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# WSCF Youth Conference on Peace-Building in the Middle East and Overcoming Violence

Cairo, Egypt, 30 July to 4 August 2017

We, the 45 youth and students representing Student Christian Movements (SCMs) from Indonesia, New Zealand, France, USA, Canada, Kenya, Egypt, Uruguay, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Madagascar, Switzerland, Cuba and Colombia;

Gathering for the Youth Conference on Peace-building in the Middle East and Overcoming Violence from 30<sup>th</sup> of July to 4<sup>th</sup> of August, 2017 at the St. Mark Coptic Center, Cairo, Egypt;

Coming from diverse identities and cultures, are committed to being in a common dialogue for peace and overcoming violence.

The six-day conference created an open space for us to discuss and learn about the situation in the Middle East and in other countries. Through the various inputs, sharing and dialogue, we have come to the following understanding:

- The Middle East is currently undergoing an Ottoman era state of violence and conflict in which nations are split according to sectarian and ethnic criteria, further intensifying the existing gaps between religions, sects, and ethnicities.
- The churches in the Middle East, holding the dominant thinking that stability ensures their survival as 'minorities', have accommodated with the current established order. This attitude has led churches to a political self-marginalization and to a moral and ethical resignation.
- Violent extremism cannot be confronted without cooperation among the religious communities. A culture of counter violence can only be created in an interfaith platform.
- Youth and children today are raised in violent environments, biased tendencies and religious fundamentalism.
- The fight for political and civil equality united Christians and Muslims in a national struggle for independence under the Ottoman Empire; therefore it is not always the relationship between Muslims and Christians that is at stake but justice, political participation, human rights and national dignity.

- Stereotypes and misunderstanding about the social, political and religious contexts in the Middle East are prevalent and need to be addressed.
- We live in countries where economic, political and religious powers have been using a misinterpretation of the Bible to oppress women, children, immigrants, etc., and to justify wars and occupation.
- The Arab world is characterized by dictatorships, corruption, oppression, absence of the rule of law, deficient constitutional and legislative systems, underdevelopment, social and economic injustices, low status for women and youth in society, absence of critical thinking, and rise of religious radicalism.
- Multi-faith youth coalitions for peace-building are rarely seen or known by the United Nations offices in different Arab and Middle Eastern countries. One-faith (only) youth networks are important and valuable, but multi-faith ones are more important for multi-lateral entities like the UN and even some western donor governments.

## Our message to the Christian youth

After listening to our guest speakers and working together in groups, we have come up with various courses of action that we as young people can do. Our appeal to our fellow Christian youth is to accept others who do not share our beliefs. The acceptance of others will help create a world of peace where all people can live together. By accepting each other, we can start to create an equal society that values each individual no matter what ethnicity, gender or religion they belong to. This equality will bring justice for those that have been oppressed, attacked and/or displaced from their homes. It is our responsibility, as young people, to take a stand and help bring this world of peace into ours. So, we ask that we make this a priority in our lives through every action we do.

## Our message to the churches

As young people, we ask the churches not to spread hatred speech or judgment but to preach love, peace and acceptance for all people as God's creation. We ask our churches to take part in interfaith dialogue, to start building relationships with members of other faiths, so that we may come to understand their beliefs and accept them as brothers and sisters. We ask our churches to acknowledge that we cannot master the truth; we can only approach the truth. Only God holds the truth. As the present youth, we are the church of the future. Because of this, it is important for the churches to communicate with us and to ensure that our opinions are heard. It is part of the role of churches to promote human dignity and to serve the common good.

## Our Call to Action

As participants of the Conference, we are committed to:

1. **Strengthening the already existing interfaith cooperation that promotes peace-building through dialogue, common social action and sacred scripture analysis.**

Our aim is to engage at least 50% of the SCMs of the Middle East in events concerning dialogue, common social action, and sacred scripture analysis. We will do this through the following activities;

- Arts, sports and music to create a space for dialogue;
- Contact with Middle East interfaith network groups;
- Connect with KAICIID to see how WSCF could work with scouts in the Middle East;
- Religious literacy workshops and interreligious dialogue facilitation workshops;
- Promote and discuss Kairos Palestine I and II documents;
- Promote WSCF policy papers on Palestine;
- Promote/encourage boycott of Israeli products.



## 2. Engaging members of SCMs in promoting WSCF curricula on peace-building for youth and students and to cultivate in children a living out of the Gospel in a non-oppressive way.

We aim to involve 50% of the SCMs in the ME who work with youth in their community to establish a safe environment and to adopt WSCF curricula on peace building in addition to regular curricular activities.

- Development of curriculum and e-learning platforms;
- Training of the regional trainers;
- WSCF toolkit for children on conflict resolution, interreligious literacy, eco-justice and peace-building through lessons, songs, drawing books, etc.;
- WSCF e-magazine and social media to include the work of children.

## 3. Restoring and promoting an authentic narrative and image of the Middle East.

We will include all the WSCF regions involved in advocacy and solidarity work on the ME through a social media campaign.

- A social media campaign that includes:
- Testimonies of students and young people from each country in the ME;
- Short videos, documentaries, theatre performances with striking messages;
- Take part in a “world student week of prayer for the Middle East” (21-27 September), a yearly week of advocacy and solidarity for the youth in the ME in conjunction with the annual UN International Day of Peace on September 21;
- Create a WhatsApp Group to promote dialogue online.

## 4. Achieving a liberated approach to the Bible by developing critical thinking among the youth.

We aim to involve at least 50% of the national movements of the ME in incorporating a contextualized and liberated analysis and reflections on the Bible on key issues to the youth.

- Propose a regional/global WSCF common scripture reading of Biblical passages that have been used to oppress others, and to use this as basis for reflection and dialogue among theologians and students from different SCMs;

- Exchange above reflections among the SCMs across the regions;
- Participate in experiential Popular Education Methodology Workshops to acquire the skills, theoretical methodologies and experience necessary to lead this kind of study;
- Incorporate the reading of passages through lens of gender justice.

## 5. Building and strengthening international solidarity to promote peace-building and the voices of young people in international platforms, such as the UN, inter-religious networks and church bodies.

- Exchange program for young people between churches;
- Strengthen connection among the regions on peace-building issues such as migrants and refugees;
- International solidarity exchange programs;
- Form an international interreligious working group among students and youth to enhance cooperation;
- Research and engage in the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) initiative seeking to engage youth in intercultural and interreligious efforts around peace-building;
- Investigate and connect with the efforts led by the UN Peacebuilding Fund that involve the youth and pertain to issues related to youth and peace and security;
- Read up and become conversant on the UN Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security, and relate it to our own work as faith-based and/or faith-inspired entities;
- Promote the efforts and potential of faith-based youth organizations and networks to the various UN offices (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women).

## Request for prayers

We ask for prayers for justice and peace in all countries that are facing oppression, violence and political struggles. We pray for a culture of forgiveness and acceptance of all people. We pray for the civilization of charity. Finally, we pray for all those people who are personally affected by hatred, violence and oppression.

*Ut Omnes Unum Sint—*

**That They All May Be One. ■**

Cairo, Egypt , 4 August 2017

## “ACCEPT OTHERS” ...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Activities during the five-day conference included inputs and group discussions, panel presentations from students on religious extremism in different campuses, exposure visits to interfaith groups working on peace, and developing an action plan for the WSCF Peace-building Program.

Sahat Martin, youth leader and chairperson of SCM Indonesia, shared the rising trend of religious extremism in the campuses, using a survey from the Wahid Foundation in 2016. “There is an increase of acceptance for harsh public punishments such as stoning to death of fornicators,” Sahat said. He noted that religious extremism in campuses are “not just in Islam, but in Christianity too.”

The participants thus called on “the churches not to spread hatred speech or judgment but to preach love, peace and acceptance for all people as God’s creation. We ask our churches to take part in interfaith dialogue, to start building relationships with members of other faiths, so that we may come to understand their beliefs and accept them as brothers and sisters. We ask our churches to acknowledge that we cannot master the truth; we can only approach the truth. Only God holds the truth. As the present youth, we are the church of the future. Because of this, it is important for the churches to communicate with us and to ensure that our opinions are heard. It is part of the role of churches to promote human dignity and to serve the common good.”

Resource persons invited to the conference included Samir Morcos who presented the geopolitical situation in contemporary Middle East; Michel Nseir on the situation of the churches in the context of the different conflicts in the region; Azza Karam on the role of the international community in building peace in the Middle East; Aida Nassif on women and their contribution to the peace-building process; Zahi Azar on how the Middle Eastern churches view their witness today and the role of the ecumenical movement; Nidal Abu Zuluf on peace-building in Palestine; and Ziad El Sayegh on a peace-building framework in relation to the Middle East refugee crisis.

The youth conference is a project of the WSCF global program on peace-building and is supported by the Harold Smith Foundation, Karibu Foundation, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. ■

# Middle East Churches and Peace Building

## A Reading of Today's Reality and Challenges (excerpt)

BY Michel Nseir

### Introduction

Since our theme this morning is focusing on the churches in the Middle East, and more precisely in the Arab world, I cannot but be inspired by late Fr Jean Corbon's book, "The Church of the Arabs", more particularly by the title of a short paragraph entitled "Between the fear of vanishing and the risk of existing". This paragraph is challenging the churches questioning their role in the Arab world. The book was published in 1977, during the early years of the Lebanese war. It was probably conceived in the late sixties, early seventies, when the ecumenical movement was still vibrant with courageous new thinking and strong symbolic actions. It was also the epoch when the question of the Christian presence and witness in the Arab world was a burning one. And it is still a burning one. Unfortunately, many challenges from that period are still relevant today, and sadly, many others, more crucial, have been added. But the existential challenge seems to remain the same: are we to succumb to our legitimate worries, and sometimes exaggerated fears, or should we still keep hope, despite and, I would say, because of the hopeless situation?

### Today's reality

During the last seven years, i.e., from the start of the popular movements in the Arab world, people were always warned—not to say threatened—that the alternative to established regimes is Islamic fundamentalism or, even worse, chaos. Sadly, many churches, and a number of Christians, were more receptive to the alarmist discourse of despotic rulers than others. Many factors led them to choose to accommodate themselves with established situations rather than courageously challenge power. The dominant thinking being that stability ensures their survival as 'minorities' while the popular uprising carries the risks of open-ended instability and the threats of an uncertain future. This attitude led churches to a political self-marginalization and more dangerously to a moral and ethical resignation. However, we can still find among many Christians in the ME, people

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Taken from the presentation by Michel Nseir at the WSCF Youth Conference on Peace Building in the Middle East and Overcoming Violence, 31 July 2017, Cairo, Egypt

and communities who believe that the yearning for freedom and democracy is irreversible, and that constitutes for them a driver to actively participate in the movements for change.

In fact, this attitude of the churches in the region has somehow historic reasons, having almost always lived under foreign domination of different empires, the latest being the Ottoman one. However, in recent history, with the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of Arab nationalism and national states, there were times when the 'minority' feeling—reinforced by the "millet" system—was transcended by Christians who were active, and sometimes were pioneers in political spheres that cross cut the communal barriers. While opposing them to the dying Ottoman Empire, the fight for political and civil equality united Christians with their Muslim compatriots in a national struggle for independence.

Despite the attempts of establishing modern states in the region, both national governments and nationalist political parties failed in addressing the aspirations of their populations. Many people have seen the margin of their political and social involvement drastically reduced, while political Islam was mounting, claiming that it provides answers to all problems. It is normal that in such situation, Christians would have more worries than other components of the societies in which they live. These worries were accentuated by the effects of their dwindling numbers, the economic difficulties and the much reduced space for their political participation. However, a considerable number of Muslims acknowledge that, while Christians have their own reasons to be worried, their difficulties reflect problems within the society as a whole. It is therefore not always the relationship between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority that is at stake but rather justice, political participation, human rights and national dignity.

The situations in Egypt and in Syria are an important case in point.

From this perspective, and to illustrate this dialectical reality of Christians being torn between "withdrawal"/marginalisation and involvement/openness, we can very quickly mention the cases of Egypt and Syria.

In Egypt, in the seventies of the last century, many Coptic Christians were

reluctant to participate in the political life of their country because of the discriminations they suffered. During the early days of the January 2011 revolution, when hundreds of thousands of young people gathered in Tahrir Square to demand their right to freedom, their human dignity, the rule of law and social justice, many church leaders, at least in the very beginning, did not really encourage Christians to be active in the movement for change. But many young Christians chose to join the movement. This allowed them to reintegrate into public life and sphere and they continue to be active in public life, in social networks and newly established NGOs. They asserted themselves as full citizens and not only as a religious minority. Despite the fact that this movement has been hijacked by Islamist political parties, and despite the many violent aggressions they have been victims of, and one could even sadly say because of this violence, young people did not retreat from public life. And we can say that there has been a shift from a passive, somewhat withdrawn, attitude to that of a more assertive and politically motivated posture. This involvement has contributed to transform what could be called the "Coptic issues" into something closer to being "national issues". However, reports received from specialised human rights organisations are alarming when it comes to the present state of liberties in the country. Hundreds of political opponents—among them many journalists—are in prison without trial. Torture and extrajudicial killings have become a common practice. Fighting terrorism has become the leitmotif to justify repression and military rule. We are again far from the dream of 2011.

In Syria, in March 2011, peaceful demonstrations against the Syrian regime were repressed in blood. The churches do not condemn the massacres perpetrated by the regime and fear above all the destabilization of the country. The opposition, peaceful in its early months, becomes militarized, then Islamized and radicalized. The armed conflict swept over Syria and entire regions fall under the control of foreign jihadis of the so-called 'Islamic State'. Abuses were committed against Christians and some Christian villages were attacked. But Christians are not the only and the first victims of the conflict. Latest reports of several United Nations agencies mention that

the armed conflict has claimed more than 400,000 victims, the vast majority being civilians, children, youth, and women. It is difficult to know the exact number of people who have forcibly disappeared, who are being tortured, or the number of abuses in Syrian or in non-governmental armed groups' prisons. More than 6 million displaced persons and refugees within Syria, as in neighbouring countries, live in inhuman conditions. In this tragic situation, the churches, while playing an important role in the relief and humanitarian fields, are still remaining silent when it comes to atrocities committed by the regime, and vocal when it comes to terrorism.

The situation of Palestinian Christians is quite different. Despite their tiny number, Palestinian Christians have always been active in resisting the occupation of their country and its colonisation. The military occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel during the 1967 war with the expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians from their ancestral lands and villages in 1948 did not differentiate between Christians and Muslims. Palestinian Christians do not feel and do not consider that they are caught in crossfire in the conflict (the Jews on the one hand and Muslims on the other). They consider themselves fully Palestinians and claim with all other Palestinians their right to self-determination, freedom and dignity. As it is well stated in the prophetic *Kairos Palestine Document*—a document conceived and produced by Palestinian Christians in December 2009—, self-determination became virtually impossible with Israeli settlements encircling Palestinian towns and villages and cutting them off from each other by a separation wall built on confiscated Palestinian land, as are also the settlements themselves. Freedom and dignity are violated every day by military checkpoints, prisons, especially the open one called Gaza, where a blockade that lasted for the last 10 years makes life hell and provoke periodic wars. In such a situation, asking why the number of Christians and therefore their percentage decreased (and unfortunately continues to decline) in cities such as Jerusalem and towns such as Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and all nearby is to ignore the reality on the ground.

IRAQ:

The drama or the tragedy of the Iraqi people did not begin with the taking of Mosul by the jihadists of the Islamic State and the ethnic cleansing of Yazidis and Christians that followed. Already in March 2003, the US invaded Iraq and dismantled all state structures (army, ministries, administration, police and others). Armed

resistance is organized against the US occupation and is transformed into internal conflict against the political and administrative structures set up by the occupation. The conflict becomes deeply sectarian and opposes Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish. The last years of the government of al-Maliki were a bloody period of repression and exclusion of all opposition, whether Shiite or Sunni. There have also been several waves of attacks against Christians because they were Christians. They were forced to flee Baghdad and Mosul to Iraqi Kurdistan and the Nineveh Plain where they have been expelled by the terrorists of so-called Islamic State. Today, even with the liberation of Mosul and the Nineveh Plain, it will be difficult to imagine how all those who have been uprooted will be able to come back.

To summarise the different realities, we can say that in countries where whole populations are witnessing the atrocities of outrageous wars, where millions have been (and are still being) killed, tortured, disappearing in jails, permanently invalidated, internally displaced and forced to find refuge in neighbouring countries, and where people are uprooted from their ancestral lands, in this tragic reality, it is unethical to single out the suffering of a certain community knowing that the situation is tragic for all people. Therefore, when we talk about the plight of the Christians in the region, we should always keep in mind that it is part of the suffering of all peoples in that region. Unfortunately, these plights are often exploited by some political parties, locally and in the whole world, as well as by some religious groups to fuel islamophobic tendencies and draw negative images of Islam. When we approach the vital question of the Christian presence and witness in the Arab world, our intent is to reinforce a positive engagement for the churches in the life of the nations, to which they belong, being confident that they have a role to play in peace-building.

Despite the globally dark picture of the situation, we should be wise enough to distinguish and differentiate the situation and contextualise it according to the different national contexts. What I want to emphasise is that Christians and Muslims in the region have their histories intrinsically linked, and that military conflicts have been devastating elements for all populations. However, we should not underestimate the policies in different countries that have been harmful to all minorities, and we should be able to analyse the several conflicting religious interpretations that constitute an important source of violence in the region.

## Challenges

- Alongside these specific situations, there are common features to the radical transformation the region is going through and common challenges for all its citizens. Probably the main challenge we might be facing in the region that is affecting more the Christians than any other component of the society could be the identification of the religion of Islam with Arab culture that is exclusive of non-Muslims, where Islam is no longer considered as being the cradle of Arab culture, but is regarded as an indispensable prerequisite of it. Therefore, we are facing several Islamist movements claiming that religious identity and culture are interconnected and constitute a full identity. In a way, this challenge is a reflection of the problematic relation we have always had between what is commonly designated as relation between religion and state.
- Beyond the discriminatory policies in several countries that I quickly mentioned, the whole constitutional and legislative systems in the countries of the Arab world are deficient. This goes with the dictatorships, corruption, oppression, absence of the rule of law, underdevelopment, social and economic injustices, the place of women and youth in society, absence of critical thinking and rise of religious radicalism very often accompanied with high level of violence.
- In this very dark and dramatic situation the whole region is going through, it is extremely dangerous for all citizens, and particularly for the Christians, to lose sight of the great role of their forefathers in the Arab nahda, the awakening of the early 20th century. As it has been demonstrated by several scholars, the role of Arab Christians, together with many others, in searching for inclusive identities in the context of the struggles for independence, democracy and social justice outweighed what the numerical importance of Christians could normally allow (this remains very true in Palestine nowadays).
- It is even more dangerous, in these difficult times, to awaken and exacerbate the particular identities as a result of the frustration generated by the fall of Arab nationalism (now we are witnessing the fall of national Sykes-Picot borders) and the rise of the Islamic State project. It is dramatic to notice the state of decadence we have reached in the Arab world, where we will have to choose between secular dictatorships and religious ones, two sides of the same coin. ■



# WSCF holds first Online GA to amend Constitution

For the first time in the life of Federation, an extraordinary meeting of the General Assembly (GA) was convened online on 22–28 May 2017, successfully involving the participation of delegates from 60 affiliated movements of WSCF out of the 80 with voting rights. The Online GA was called to amend the WSCF Constitution.

The General Assembly as a rule meets once every four years, but Article IV: 4 of the WSCF Constitution allows the GA to hold extraordinary sessions when necessary, provided such measure receives the approval of two-thirds of the affiliated movements.

The process took one year to complete, beginning with the Executive Committee's letter to the national movements on 13 April 2016 announcing the formation of a Constitutional Commission and seeking the members' approval of its proposal to organize an Online GA to amend the WSCF Constitution. On 31 May 2016, the required two-thirds majority (53 votes) approval from the affiliated movements was obtained.

In addition to the Executive Committee's four (4) proposed amendments, the national movements were also invited to send their proposed amendments. By June 2016, SCM Hong Kong had sent three (3) counter-proposals to the ExCo's proposed amendments, while SCM Norway sent seven (7) new amendments to both the Constitution and By-laws.

The 14 proposed amendments were studied and considered carefully by the members of the Constitutional Commission (ConCom). In October 2016, six months before the scheduled votation on 22–28 May 2017, the ConCom sent the 14 amendments to the WSCF member movements, both affiliated and associated, for their study, discussion and consideration. The amendments and all other relevant materials about the Online GA were also uploaded to a dedicated page in the WSCF website and made available to the national movements.

A separate online platform was created and designed specifically for the purposes of the Online GA where delegates of the affiliated movements can log on and cast their votes during the assembly proper. Prior to this, a list of official voters was generated from a process of online nomination and communication.

On 22–28 May 2017, the Online GA was formally convened, and delegates deliberated and voted on the proposed

amendments to the WSCF Constitution and By-laws, as well as on the request for affiliation of SCM Denmark.

Out of the 14 proposed amendments, five (5) were passed with majority votes. These were:

1. **Constitution: Article III. B. Regions (add a 4th point)**

"4. Regional Assembly should take place before the General Assembly."

2. **Constitution: Article VI – Staff**

"2. The General Secretary shall be appointed by the Executive Committee with overall executive responsibility for the Federation. The Executive Committee will then present their choice to the General Assembly for its approval."

3. **By-laws: On the Executive Committee (add an 11th point)**

"11. Regional Committees shall consider the following criteria for the election of one Executive Committee Member and one Proxy:

- Availability and commitment to the life and work of the Federation
- Budget making and accounts reading skills to support the work of the Treasurer
- Communication and social networking skills to support the work of the communications staff member

- Skills in social, economic, political, biblical and theological research to support the work of staff with programme responsibilities, organisation building skills to inform the growth and developmental work of the Federation
- and if possible some experience of fundraising."

4. **By-laws: On the Executive Committee (add a 12th point)**

"12. Minutes of all meetings in the Executive Committee shall be distributed to all Affiliated/Associated Movements no later than three weeks after the meeting has ended."

5. **By-laws: On Committees and Commissions: 2. Personnel Committee**

"2.1 The Personnel Committee shall consist of seven members: one Vice-Chairperson, who chairs the Committee, one Executive Committee member from each region plus one resource person co-opted among the senior friends."

The Constitutional Commission was composed of Georgine Kengne-Djuetane, chairperson; Necta Montes, secretary; Mandy Tibbey, senior friend; Marco Fornerone, senior friend; Annika Foltin and Oscar Reicher Salazar, WSCF regional ExCo members. The Online GA platform was created by SCM Hong Kong. ■

## WSCF recruits senior friend to assist in fundraising

On the recommendation and with the support of the Centennial Fund, WSCF has hired a fundraising coordinator for one year to assist General Secretary Necta Montes in organising, managing and expanding the Federation's fundraising activities globally.

Ms Bes Rifareal, former WSCF Executive Committee member representing the Asia-Pacific Region, assumes this role from her base of work in the Philippines.



In addition to organising fundraising appeals, such as the relaunch of the Give One Be One campaign, she will also be helping the Fundraising Working Group develop a fundraising strategy plan and coordinate its implementation, update and maintain the Federation's donor database, develop fundraising communication materials, and support the preparation of reports and proposals.

A United Methodist, Ms Rifareal's ecumenical involvement goes back to her days as general secretary of SCM Philippines and as staff of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines in the 1980s. She also worked for many years with the international interfaith solidarity movement, Peace for Life, as staff for communications and organisational development.

She considers it a privilege to be given an opportunity to serve anew an organisation she credits for fundamentally expanding her perspective and instilling in her a spirituality committed to social justice and peace. ■

# Centennial Fund urges ExCo to set up GA Reserve Fund



In its annual in-face meeting on 10–13 June 2017 in Ireland, the WSCF Centennial Fund Board agreed to urge the WSCF Executive Committee to set up a reserve fund after the General Assembly (GA)—meeting in an extraordinary session online for the very first time on 22–28 May 2017—rejected the proposed extension of the interval between GA sessions from four to six years.

“In respect of the proposal to lengthen the interval between in-face General Assemblies which would have allowed greater time to accumulate the funding needed to run a General Assembly, the Trustees [...] advise and urge that a General Assembly Reserve Fund be established as a matter of urgency in order to be able to ensure that the GA is held within the four year period from February 2015,” the Board said in its letter to the WSCF ExCo.

The WSCF Centennial Fund has been providing an annual grant to WSCF amounting to 40,000.00 US\$ since 2007 and has made available additional funds during the period of financial difficulty since the 2015 Bogotà Assembly. The Board laments that the Fund has become

the lender of last resort for WSCF, which has put serious pressure on the principal fund.

During the meeting, the Board received reports from WSCF General Secretary Necta Montes, Treasurer Bronwyn Claire and Finance Officer Jean-Luc De la Soujeole on the progress of the transition work and financial status of the Federation. The Board commended the overall progress in implementing the varied transition proposals which include the IRO relocation and regional office studies, the WSCF new staff model, and the first WSCF Online GA.

“We planted the seeds of transforming the structure, management and organizational culture in the Federation in order to strengthen the movements, renew our prophetic role, and demonstrate good stewardship of resources under very difficult financial circumstances,” Necta concluded in her report. She thanked the Board for its steadfast support and in making available funds for strategic work, including the hiring of a Fundraising Coordinator for one year to intensify fundraising and re-launch the Give One Be One (GOBO) Campaign.

Reports from the Centennial Fund Investment Advisory Group (IAG), the WSCF US Trustees Board and the WSCF Canada Board were also received during the meeting. These reports provided information on the performance of CF investments and the different ways the senior friends support WSCF.

In another decision, the CF Board also accepted the nomination of Shali Kapepo from SCM Namibia and WSCF Africa region’s treasurer to be a member of the Board. Shali fills in the student representative position left open by Alex Roubi from Lebanon who resigned from the Board in February 2017 due to travel difficulties.

The WSCF Centennial Fund Board meeting was held at the Mount St. Anne’s Retreat and Conference Centre, Killenard, Portllington, Co. Laois, Ireland. It was chaired and hosted by its chairperson Salters Sterling and attended by Jannes Hutagalung, vice-chairperson, Ilari Rantakari, Bronwyn Claire, Sheryl Johnson, Jean-Luc De La Soujeole, Mathieu Durrleman (IAG), Necta Montes, and Bruce Rigdon who joined via Skype. ■



## WSCF-AP reaffirms IDD focus, adopts global program



Meeting for its 22<sup>nd</sup> biennial session, the Asia-Pacific Regional Committee agreed to incorporate WSCF's global thematic goals and strategies into the region's programs and activities, focusing on the theme, Identity, Diversity and Dialogue (IDD).

The Regional Committee Meeting (RCM) took place on 10–13 May 2017 following the WSCF Asia-Pacific Conference on "Identity, Diversity and Dialogue: Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith". Both events, hosted by SCM Thailand, were held at the Bangkok Christian Guest House and attended by delegates representing SCMs in the following countries: Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Timor Leste.

The Regional Committee, WSCF's highest regional governance body, meets once every two years to set the region's program direction and perform other

functions mandated by its by-laws. The 22<sup>nd</sup> RCM was the first time the regional body met since the WSCF Executive Committee formally adopted the 2016–2019 Global Strategic Plan in December 2015 in Palermo, Italy.

With the Asia-Pacific regional executive, Sunita Suna, assigned concurrently to develop the IDD global program, the RCM agreed to continue focusing its work on this theme. The region already started implementing the 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly mandate on IDD in 2016 through the women's workshop and the School for Ecumenical Leadership Formation (SELF) held in January and October respectively.

For the next two years, the region will focus its efforts on bringing the discourse to the grassroots level by creating spaces in the local SCMs for dialogue on the subject human sexuality.

The region will also link up ongoing local/national activities on eco-justice, peace-building and higher education in the different SCMs with global efforts on

these themes, while also making sure that SCMs in the AP region will engage in and respond to global calls for advocacy and solidarity on these concerns.

The RCM also agreed to prioritize movement building, adopting a measure to form a Task Group that will analyze the dynamics of each SCM and come up with specific strategies to respond to movement building concerns. The RCM is looking forward to further strengthening the movement through this effort, in addition to projects on Ecumenical Transformative Diakonia (ETD), capacity-building trainings, as well as national-level programs and activities.

Aside from program decisions, the RCM also performed a variety of statutory functions, including the election of new officers and members of various committees, amendment of by-laws, and adoption of the budget for 2018–2019. The RCM issued a communiqué detailing its decisions as well as the list of delegates and guests who attended the meeting. ■



# WSCF Asia-Pacific 22<sup>nd</sup> Regional Committee Meeting

Bangkok, Thailand, 10-13 May 2017

WSCF Asia-Pacific held its 22<sup>nd</sup> Regional Committee Meeting (RCM) in Bangkok, Thailand on 10–13 May 2017. The RCM is the highest-policy making body of the region composed of official delegates from the WSCF affiliated and associated members in AP region, WSCF-AP officers and staff, observers and guests. The RCM meets once every two years to perform the functions under the mandate of the WSCF-AP by-laws. Apart from the mandated functions, the RCM is also a space for prayer, theological reflection, dialogue, ecumenism, and celebration. It is an opportunity to learn together as an ecumenical family about issues and challenges confronting our communities.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> RCM brought together leaders from the SCMs of Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Timor Leste, and New Zealand. The RCM representatives participated in all the deliberations and important decisions for the region.

## Delegates of the 22<sup>nd</sup> RCM of WSCF-AP:

Claudine Chionh – Australia SCM  
 Edward Tarun Roy – Bangladesh SCM  
 Susana Rai – Bhutan SCM  
 Thanny Im – Cambodia SCM  
 Herbeth Yohanes Marpaung – GMKI/Indonesia SCM  
 S Shein Thet Nyunt – Myanmar SCM  
 Shu-Hong Lim – Taiwan SCM  
 Sarah Lee – SCM Aotearoa  
 Marcus De Quan Peck – SCM Hong Kong  
 Inbaraj Jeyakumar – SCM India  
 Hiyama Ayumi – Student YMCA/SCM Japan  
 Chung Hui Fan – KSCF  
 Milka Hanook – SCM Pakistan  
 Saman Jayasuriya – SCM Sri Lanka  
 Pitiphan Areeyat (local host) – SCM Thailand  
 Antonio Da Silva – SCM Timor Leste  
 Rajesh Rai – Nepal SCM  
 Immanuel Kitnan – SCM Sri Lanka  
 Nova Sipahutar – GMKI/Indonesia SCM  
 Chung Hui Fan – KSCF/SCM HK  
 John Graveston – SCM Aotearoa  
 Sunita Suna (WSCF Regional Executive for AP) – SCM India  
 Necta Montes (WSCF General Secretary) – SCM Philippines  
 Yong Ting Jin (senior friend & resource person) – SCM Malaysia

## Some of the major decisions and recommendations were:

1. Elected new officers and members to serve the WSCF-AP through various committees as mentioned below:

### Regional Women's Committee

*Ms. Claudine Chionh* – Australia SCM  
*Ms. Ng, Hoi Tung* – SCM Hong Kong  
*Ms. Nova Sipahutar* – Indonesia SCM /GMKI

RCM has recommended inviting another member to the Committee as the regional women's coordinator's position is vacant for the moment.

### Human Rights Justice and Peace Committee

*Mr. Lai Chung Man* – SCM Hong Kong  
*Ms. Ruth Margaret Greenaway* – SCM Aotearoa  
*Mr. Kingson Selvaraj* – Australia SCM

RCM has recommended inviting two nominations from Southeast Asia and South Asia to fill the positions of sub region and volunteer coordinator.

### Standing Committee

Chairperson: *Ms. Merelin Keka Adhikari* – SCM Bangladesh  
 Vice Chair: RCM has recommended inviting a student member to serve this position.  
 Member-at-large (Male): *Rev. Saman Jayasuriya* – SCM Sri Lanka  
 Member-at-large (Female): RCM has recommended inviting a female student member to serve this position.  
 WSCF-AP representative to WSCF Global ExCo (Male): *Mr. John Graveston* – SCM Aotearoa  
 WSCF-AP representative to WSCF Global ExCo (Female): *Ms. Chung Hui Fan* – SCM Hong Kong/KSCF

2. Amended the WSCF-AP by-laws.
3. Approved the document, "Code of Ethics", to use within the WSCF-AP region.
4. Approved the budget for 2018–2019.
5. Proposed the program direction for the WSCF-AP region for 2018–2019.
6. Approved to appoint two staff persons (program and communication) for the WSCF-AP region based on funding availability with an option to work from their home countries.
7. Approved to give annual contribution to the WSCF-AP region by the SCMs based on their financial capacity.
8. Approved to encourage SCMs to apply for a scholarship to support funding for their delegates attending regional-level programs and meetings. Visa fees and local transportation should be taken care of by the sending SCMs.
9. Approved the proposal of the redevelopment project of the WSCF-AP regional office in Hong Kong.
10. Reviewed and revised the WSCF Sexual Harassment Policy.
11. Formed a team for movement building in the AP region.
12. Agreed to send out statements and communique on the 22<sup>nd</sup> RCM, IDD Conference, and the issue of conflict between SCM-HK and WSCF-AP, which was resolved during the 22<sup>nd</sup> RCM.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> RCM is thankful to the outgoing Standing Committee members for their leadership and commitment to respond issues within the Federation. Special thanks to Mr. Immanuel Kitnan, chairperson; Ms. Rosalind Hewett, vice chairperson; Ms. Nova Sipahutar, member-at-large; and members of the Human Rights, Justice and Peace Committee, and the Regional Women's Committee as they completed their roles. The region wishes them well in all their future endeavors!

Bangkok, Thailand, 13 May 2017

# Addressing, acknowledging, affirming sexual diversity and gender identities

## Asia-Pacific Conference on Identity, Diversity and Dialogue: Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith

Bangkok, Thailand, 7–10 May 2017



We, the leaders of the Student Christian Movements (SCMs) from Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Timor Leste, coming from diverse identities and cultures, are committed to being in a common dialogue as we attend the conference of the WSCF Asia Pacific Region on “Identity, Diversity and Dialogue: Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith”, held from 7–10 May 2017 at the Bangkok Christian Guest House, Bangkok, Thailand.

Prior to the IDD Conference, the SCM women held a two-day program on “Sexuality and Gender Identities” on 5–6 May 2017 at the same venue to create a safe space for women to talk about human sexuality focusing on women sexuality.

The four-day conference created an open space for engaging, involving and motivating us to take the following steps:

### Address the issue of human sexuality

We addressed the subject of human sexuality, specifically homosexuality, from social, legal, human rights and Christian faith perspectives. We also discussed the response of churches to human sexuality. Coming from diverse Christian faith traditions, the discussions we debated on the subject reflected our understanding of homosexuality and Christian faith, mainly based on the moral and religious values and the biblical position of homosexuality affirmed by mainline churches that “the act of homosexuality is sin and LGBT people are sinners.” This led to a deeper understanding and discourse on a historical overview of homosexuality and Christianity, Bible and sexuality, faith and theology. The most familiar yet commonly misunderstood text of the Bible on homosexuality, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, stirred us to revisit the text for a broader and proper theological understanding and perspective of God’s punishment to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible.

### Acknowledge that LGBT people are not outside, but inside

We acknowledge that the LGBT people are not outside but inside our church and structures. Their presences are within the churches and inside the WSCF. Discrimination and violence against sexual minorities are the reality in the Asia-Pacific region, including the Christian faith community. Furthermore, because of the lack of support and solidarity by the faith community, many fear coming out of the closet. They also opt to leave the churches and SCMs/WSCF. Those who exclude the LGBT people within the faith community have not acknowledged and welcomed the diverse God-given gifts of the LGBT community, which has barred them to respond to God’s call to perform and fully participate in the mission of the Church to be God’s agent. We acknowledge that we have a difference of opinion and disagreement on the topic of homosexuality within the WSCF. But we are not alone in this. Disagreements



around homosexuality have been tearing apart churches and Christian communities in many parts of the world. But a core part of our mission is engaging these differences and allowing ourselves to learn from them, as well as discovering the significance of the deep unity we share.<sup>1</sup>

## Affirm that every human bears the imprint of God

We affirm that the WSCF has an ecumenical and prophetic identity. This means that we are called to advocate for justice, liberation and peace for all. Every person equally bears the image of God regardless of race, class, caste, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. As every human bears the imprint of God, we have no option but to affirm the dignity of all people. A broader definition of sexuality was affirmed by the SCM women during the women's program that "sexuality is not merely about the body, but it incorporates healthy relationships with the opposite sex, with the same sex, within a community, and with God. It is inter-relational. It is the recognition of the sacredness of our bodies. It is honoring of the sacredness of all creation. It is God-given. It reflects the image of God. It is the totality of a person's identity and being."<sup>2</sup> Continuing dialogue about sexuality and gender diversity affirms our commitment to our own identity.

## Dialogue: the way forward

We concur that our experiences and realities are diverse based on our identities and contexts. Hence, it is important for us to create safe spaces to hear from each other our diverse experiences. We also reiterate that diversity is as important as the air we breathe. The WSCF, gifted with a diverse community, must uphold and celebrate diversity. Therefore, it is urgent to initiate constructive dialogue within our communities—local SCMs with young people as we are motivated by the conference to go back to our own SCMs to initiate a dialogue on the rights of the LGBT community and to embrace the diversity to be an inclusive SCM/ WSCF. As the very motto of the WSCF is: *Ut Omnes Unum Sint*—**That They All May Be One.** ■

Bangkok, Thailand, 13 May 2017

<sup>1</sup> Report and Recommendation on IDD to the 35<sup>th</sup> GA of WSCF.

<sup>2</sup> Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology (AWRC) task group on sexuality, 2000.

# WSCF-LAC meeting to study link among economy, ecology and peace

PRESS RELEASE  
13 July 2017



**A**round 30 young persons from eight countries in Latin America and the Caribbean will gather in Barranquilla, Colombia on 15–18 August to reflect, be trained and plan actions on eco-justice and peace-building.

The regional meeting, "Young People for Eco-justice and Peace: The challenge that we accept", being organized by the World Student Christian Federation in Latin America and the Caribbean (WSCF-LAC), will assemble young people and student members of the Student Christian Movements (SCMs) from different countries of the region to analyze from the regional context the relationships among economy, ecology and peace-building, and to plan small projects within the framework of the WSCF Program of Eco-justice.

The gathering will feature workshops on the main themes, bible reflection from a popular perspective, and planning of coordinated actions for public-policy advocacy with young people and students from the different movements and faith-based organizations. In addition, open conferences will be organized for the entire student body in cooperation with the Corporación Universitaria Reformada (CUR), which has a long history in the processes of academic training and extension work in the field of peace-building.

Invited keynote speakers and facilitators include Dr. Carlos Larrea (Ecuador), the theologian Nancy Cardozo (Brazil), Rev. Gloria Ulloa, president of the World Council of Churches (WCC) for Latin America, and Rev. Milton Mejía, general secretary of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI). Also expected to attend are members of churches and faith-based organizations with a long history in diaconal and public advocacy work on ecological justice and peace-building with justice in Colombia.

There will be emphasis on the participation of leaders and young people from communities that are involved in post-peace agreement transition efforts; they are expected to participate in panels and to engage with other young people from the region on experiences and resistances in the path to peace.

This program is a project of the WSCF global program on eco-justice for 2015–2019. ■

# The un-settling work of indigenous solidarity

## a North American perspective

BY Jacqueline Sookermany, SCM CANADA

For four days this June, a small group of students and WSCF/SCM staff members gathered in my resident city of Winnipeg, Canada for the Indigenous Solidarity Program where we spent time learning about indigenous culture from indigenous members of the community and explored what it means to stand in solidarity with our indigenous neighbours. Winnipeg is not a common travel destination and has a reputation for being cold and inhospitable for much of the year (with a nickname like 'Winterpeg', there isn't a lot of tourist draw). But with the highest provincial population of indigenous people in Canada, and 40% of that population living in the city of Winnipeg, it is a unique space well suited for a conference of this nature. With the mix of cultures and communities this small city has to offer, there are rich resources for learning about indigenous culture, learning from indigenous communities, and exploring the ways in which settlers and the indigenous communities have come together to work toward reconciliation, as well as to hear from the communities where we, as settlers, have more work to do.

Our group was a diverse mix of settlers born in North America (6 from Canada, 1 from the US) and more recent settlers (from the UK, Italy, and Nigeria), each bringing their own perspectives and experience from their personal, educational and professional backgrounds. The diversity of our group allowed us to expand our definition of what indigenous culture and solidarity looks like and to make connections slightly beyond the North American indigenous scope to look at indigenous issues in Nigeria and issues facing the African-American communities in the US. These stories added depth to our discussions about what solidarity and activism looks like beyond our immediate context, while also showing the ways in which each community faces their own distinct struggles in overcoming colonization, corrupt power structures, and discrimination.

We began our conference learning about the land we would be calling home for the next four days, the Canadian Mennonite University. Our first speakers, Annika Reynar and Michael Veith, shared the history of the land we were on with

us, a history spanning from its original inhabitants—the Saulteaux and Cree Nations—and the earliest settlers of the Selkirk Treaty to the present day University and its adjoined urban farm. We also discussed the problems of placeness and story when taken out of context or prescribed unfit meaning; how truth can get lost when we lose the collectiveness of storytelling and history-keeping and instead focus on our own perspective fragments of the whole. Starting our time together sitting on the University's farm, hearing part of the story of how we came to be there, parts of the story that we wouldn't have thought of otherwise, set the tone for the rest of the week—understanding that our stories as settlers go far beyond the spans of our own lives. In addition to our introduction to the land, the following morning we were graciously welcomed to the land by Elder Theodore Fontaine, who would later share his own story of residential schools, as well as his vision of what Canada's reconciliation should look like.

Through the remainder of the week there was sharing from other conference participants including the journey of the Christian Peacemaker Teams' Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights and a bible study focusing on reconciliation (from the text, 1 Kings 21:1-1). We also heard from our other guests, such as indigenous artist Heather Bjorklund, who led our group in indigenous storytelling, drama and dance exercises, and Adrienne Leitch, who spoke to us about the documentary project she collaborated on, *Reserve 107*, which looks at community-facilitated reconciliation efforts between rural Saskatchewan settlers and the Young Chippewyan Nation members whose land they live on. During our conversation cafe and Senior Friends event facilitated by Elder Fontaine, we heard about Elder

Fontaine's experience in Residential schools and how his time there impacted his family and relationships throughout his life. He shared with us some reading from his book, *Broken Circle*, and told us about his vision for repairing relationships between Canadian settlers/government and indigenous peoples. The conversation cafe was also a time for people to share their experiences, ask questions, and to showcase an art project featuring the "94 Calls to Action" from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission embroidered onto Canadian flags. This session was very moving and it was an honour to listen and share with Elder Fontaine.

One of the most impactful experiences for me was walking with the Bear Clan Patrol—a group of community members who patrol Winnipeg's North End every evening to pick up drug paraphernalia and check in with community members. We started our evening attending a weekly event called "Meet Me at the Bell Tower"—a community check-in where North End community members rally together to end violence and poverty in the community. We were able to participate in a smudge and drum song there, before heading out on patrol. Walking through a part of my city that I rarely go to, with people who are invested, passionate and knowledgeable about their community, was inspiring. Seeing how Bear Clan members make a conscious effort to reach out to every person they pass while on patrol and how trusted they are in their community as service members and friends was a prime example of what it means to be an active member of community and how we can create change through relationships and intentionality.

Sharing in these experiences and learning alongside each of the amazing people who participated in the Indigenous Solidarity Program was a blessing. Being able to take on the role of listener and learner as part of my journey of activism and social justice work was so important, as these roles can sometimes be put on the back burner. This experience renewed my commitment to stand beside and not in front of my indigenous friends and neighbours, creating space for them to speak into our shared community and advocating for their leadership in solidarity work. ■

Jacqueline participated in the Indigenous Solidarity Trip organized by WSCF North America in partnership with SCM Canada on 15–19 June 2017 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.





# WSCF-Europe training course on combating hate speech

BY Taylor Driggers, SCM BRITAIN

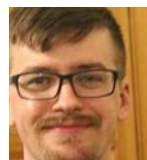


As an American living in the UK, it's been easy to feel overwhelmed as I've watched the events of the past year unfold. It's hard to know how exactly to respond to racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic hate crimes in the wake of the EU Referendum; the election of a US president who built his entire campaign on all manner of hate speech; and both countries' seeming indifference and even outright hostility in response to the plight of refugees worldwide. I'm a bit ashamed to admit that I've spent much of that time staring at my computer screen with rage, wondering what can be done. As SCM Britain's international student representative, I've worked to create inclusive spaces where people can have difficult, challenging conversations about what it means to live with and embrace difference, but have sometimes struggled to put those principles into practice in my day-to-day life.

I'm not sure what I was expecting when I showed up at the WSCF Staff and Officers' Meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania on combating hate speech, but I came away with a renewed desire to engage in healthy and nonviolent conflict, new practical tools to help me do that, and quite a few reminders of why I got involved with SCM in the first place. Alina, the meeting's keynote speaker, was excellent at ensuring that the

workshops were nurturing environments for everyone. The opening workshop in which we all came together to discuss our needs and what rules we should follow in our conversations created a sense that everyone's voices would be heard, and it's something I plan to put into practice at future SCM Britain events.

This also helped enable one of the things I appreciated the most about the meeting as a whole, which was the way we were all given space to learn from each other. The meeting was scheduled in a relaxed way so that even though we were following a structure, it wasn't too rigid, which meant that we all felt like we had time to sit and listen to one another and meditate on each other's words. The variety of the programme, which included role-playing exercises as well as more traditional group discussions, also kept the material refreshing and helped us explore and discover where we stand in relation to issues of hate speech, xenophobia, and the politics surrounding migration, gender, and race. I was struck by how similar the realities we all live with were, and how much the week seemed to be a process of uncovering different ways we could work together—even from afar—toward similar goals.



Time off was equally educational and vital to coming together as a family with everyone at the meeting. I loved the games we played at the intercultural evening, as well as the food, customs, and music everyone contributed; it was a truly special evening that set the tone for the countless conversations that started with the phrase, "In my country..." during the rest of the week. Every aspect of the meeting felt like it tied into the overall aim of the week, as the time we took to learn more about each other required us to set aside assumptions and openly receive the richness of experience being shared with us.

Perhaps the aspect of the Staff and Officers' Meeting I found most rewarding—unexpectedly so—was navigating barriers and differences of language throughout all of this. As a native English speaker, it was a challenging and even fun practice to work around all the common phrases and assumptions I'm familiar with and think instead about the most effective way of communicating my thoughts. It's something I hope to carry forward in my interactions even with other native English speakers. Once again, the need to make sure we were being clear and understanding others correctly was a vital part of our conversations, which themselves were about learning to avoid assumptions, check privilege, and work toward better understandings of each other and ourselves.

I feel like I could go on for ages about every aspect of the week, as I felt like every minute of every day I was learning something new, whether it was in our workshops, the times of prayer and reflection, or conversations with new friends at meal and break times. If I take away one thing from the WSCF Staff and Officers' Meeting, however, it will be this reminder: that communities dedicated to praying together, slowing down and paying careful attention to everyday interactions, and understanding each other are something I desperately need if I want to make the world a better place. I felt safely held within such a community while in Lithuania, and I'm excited for us to continue to learn from each other as we share the progress of our campaigns from afar going forward. ■

Taylor, international student representative in SCM Britain's General Council, participated in the WSCF-Europe Staff and Officers' Meeting and Capacity Building Training Course held in Vilnius, Lithuania on 1–6 April 2017. It was organised within the long-term programme of WSCF-Europe addressing human rights violations, exclusion and discrimination.

## Honoring the life and work of Kyaw Than

We join the churches and the worldwide ecumenical community in mourning the death and celebrating the life and work of one of the Federation's most influential Asian leaders, Prof. Dr. U Kyaw Than, senior friend from SCM Myanmar and former WSCF associate general secretary. An ecumenical pioneer since youth with deep roots in the academe, Kyaw Than is an exemplary personification of the WSCF mission in the university and the ecumenical movement.

Born in Pakokku, Myanmar on 17 December 1923, Kyaw Than's ecumenical engagement began with his involvement in SCM Burma, since then devoting his young life to building the ecumenical student movement in his country and the whole of Asia. While serving as lecturer in history at the University of Rangoon, Kyaw Than was appointed associate general secretary of the WSCF in Geneva in 1950, a post he held until 1956. In this capacity, he traveled to universities in Europe, the United Kingdom, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. But his main focus remained on the ecumenical leadership training of Asian students, addressing SCM campus meetings on the rise of nationalism in Asia and proposing a meeting of Asian SCMs to discuss strategies in the region and to form an Asian council of the WSCF.

Kyaw Than's influential role in engaging the Asian youth in the ecumenical movement is acknowledged by current Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara: "Prof. Kyaw Than was deeply

respected, admired and loved by those who knew him. He lived and witnessed Christ as an unassuming lay disciple, and influenced generations of young Asian Christians and enabled them to shape their ecumenical values over the decades."

Dr. Chunakara also credits Kyaw Than "for building the CCA from its very inception". In his early thirties and already serving as joint East Asia secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the International Missionary Council, Kyaw Than organised a conference of Asian church leaders in Parapat, Indonesia in 1957, which led to the formation of the CCA, then known as the East Asia Christian Conference. In 1968, he succeeded D.T. Niles as CCA general secretary and held the post until 1974. After CCA, Kyaw Than continued to serve the wider ecumenical movement, having been elected in 1975 to the Central Committee and, subsequently, to the Executive Committee of the WCC, which he served until 1992.

Kyaw Than's ecumenical vision transcended the confines of the Church. He championed interreligious dialogue, particularly Christian-Buddhist relations, having served as director of the Training Institute for Christian Participation in National Development (TICPIND), an initiative of the National Council of Churches in Myanmar. As TICPIND director, Kyaw Than focused his work on the development of the Chin people, an ethnic nationality in the northwestern border region of Myanmar, majority of whom have embraced Christianity due to the efforts of the first Christian

missionaries and as a result have been historically persecuted in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar.

Kyaw Than was also a dedicated educator and an accomplished academic. He taught history, Christianity and ecumenism for many decades at various universities in North America, Europe, and Southeast Asia. After graduating with honors from the University of Rangoon, he served on its faculty while earning his master's degree. From 1974 to 1976, he became the William Paton Fellow at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, United Kingdom. He returned to Myanmar in 1978 to teach in theological schools on Seminary Hill, Insein, until 1984. In 1981, he was conferred a DD degree in church history by the senate of the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology. Kyaw Than also served as professor at the Vancouver School of Theology in Canada, and at the University of Oregon, the Lutheran School of Theology, and Yale Divinity School in the United States. In October 1984, he joined the faculty of the College of Religious Studies at Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand.

Around the time of WSCF's centenary in 1995, Kyaw Than infused the Federation anew with his wisdom and unique perspective as a lay ecumenist and academic. He chaired the WSCF History Working Group, which produced the Federation's centenary book, "Seeking and Serving the Truth: The First Hundred Years of WSCF", of which he wrote the foreword. He also addressed the CCA-WSCF Joint Programme 1995, one of a series of joint consultations on university work between the two ecumenical bodies arising out of a covenant that begun in the 1960s and of which Kyaw Than had been instrumental in forging. Speaking on the "enormity of the task" of the Federation, Kyaw Than concluded his keynote address with the following assurance:

"The boat in which we sail is set in the stormy seas. The climate may be threatening. The tempest rages around us and the billows are tossing high. Yet when despair in the darkness seems to be our lot, we come to realize that our Lord who according to our understanding was absent, appears ahead of us walking through the storm! [...] Be of good cheer, it is I: be not afraid."

Kyaw Than passed away in Bangkok, Thailand on 30 April 2017 at the age of 93. ■





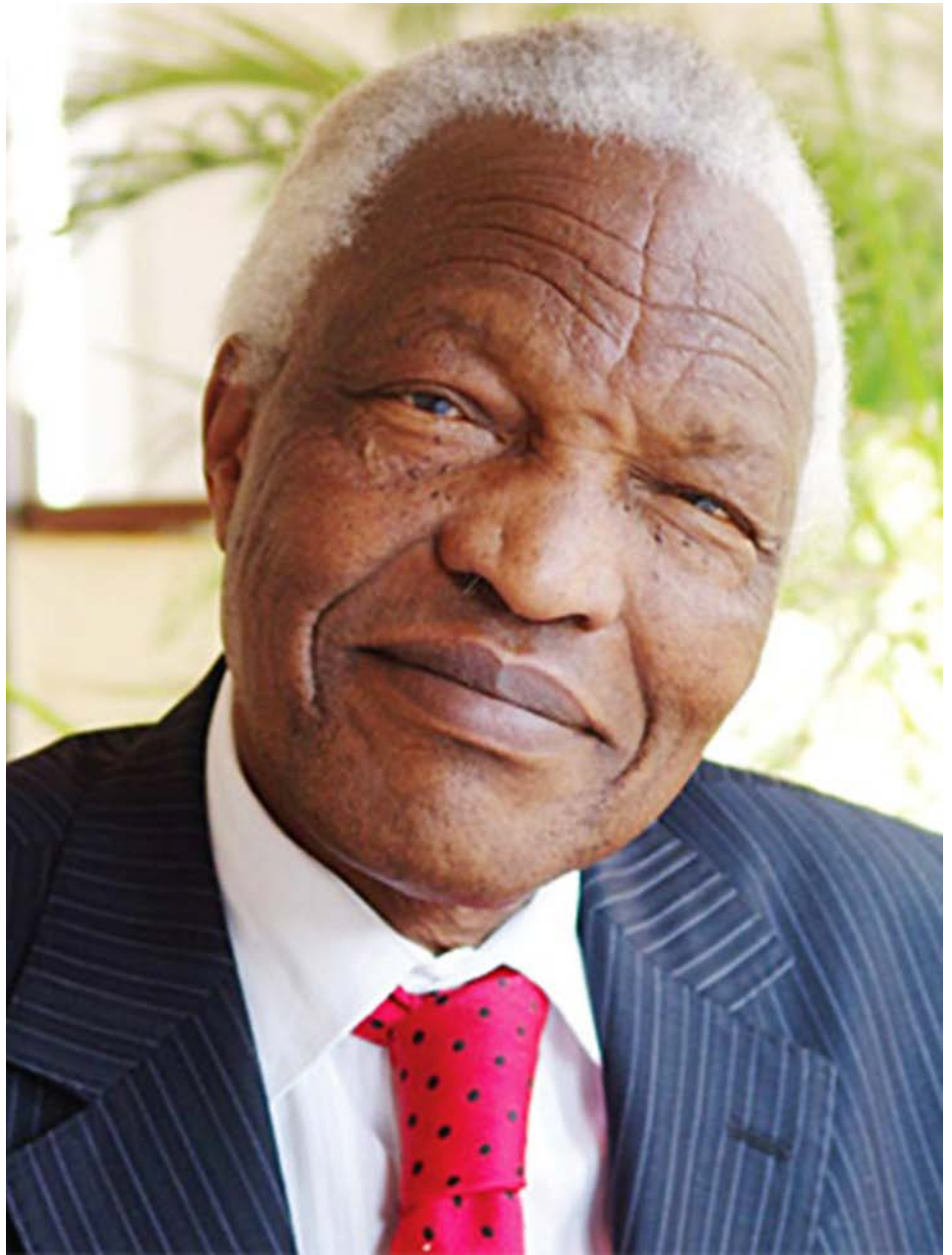
# Tribute to Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat

July 14, 2017 marks another sad day in the history of the World Student Christian Federation with the passing away of long-time and dedicated senior friend, Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat.

Like many accomplished African leaders, Amb. Kiplagat, born on 28 November 1936, had his formation in the World Student Christian Federation, particularly the Africa Region. He was among the key people who worked for the establishment of the Africa Region Office in Nairobi. His commitment and contribution to the life of the Federation was very evident when he continued to serve WSCF as a senior friend. During times when the stability of the region was at its lowest, Amb. Kiplagat was among the senior friends who committed their time and financial resources to revitalize the Africa Region and make the regional office functional again.

Amb. Kiplagat's involvement in WSCF facilitated his entry into the ecumenical movement. He served as deputy general secretary of the Council of Churches in his native Kenya, and as moderator of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) from 1998 to 2006. Current WCC General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit, in his condolence letter to Amb. Kiplagat's family, lauded the ambassador's contribution to the WCC: "As moderator of the CCIA, he brought keen theological and public witness perspectives and vast experiences from the life of his public service. As a moderator, he worked tirelessly to defend and promote human rights."

Amb. Kiplagat took on many roles in public service. An accomplished diplomat, he served concurrently as Kenyan ambassador to France and the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1983. He was chairman of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission of Kenya, and was actively involved in conflict resolution efforts in the continent, particularly in Eastern Africa where he engaged in activities aimed at encouraging community-based peace processes. He was Kenya's special envoy in the Somali Peace Process and chairman of the IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) Technical Committee on the Somali National Reconciliation Conference. He also served as resource person to the IGAD



Peace Process for Sudan from 1985 and, as an independent consultant on peace and conflict resolution, had advised Sudanese civil society on conflict resolution. His efforts to facilitate dialogue among the warring parties in these countries as well as in Uganda, Ethiopia, Mozambique all culminated in negotiated settlements.

Amb. Kiplagat was involved in other civil society organizations as well. He chaired the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) and served as director of the Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Programme of the Sudan Council of Churches in Southern Sudan. He also served on a panel established by the International Peace Academy and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to examine the institutional relationship between the OAU and civil society.

In the words of Olav Fykse Tveit, Amb. Kiplagat will be remembered as "a true Ambassador of peace and reconciliation and a successful career diplomat who played crucial roles in the lives of many, both in his country, Kenya, and in the East African region and the continent of Africa at large." ■

# War

BY Ashley Elaine Jordan

War

The thing that makes a heart cringe at its name  
The three letter word that can make any dynasty fall  
A word that shall never be used lightly  
A word that has death, and regret, and horror  
sealed within its envelope

War

A name that can cut deeper than any knife  
A name that can put more holes in you than any machine gun  
The word that makes your heart pound faster  
than the second hand on a clock  
The word that allows any person to be unrooted  
from where he was planted

War

A name that signifies tears in a mother's eyes  
A name that rings louder than the boom of a canon  
A name that stains clothes with tears  
which are also stained with the blood of a loved one

Don't you see

War does not mean glory, money, peace  
It means pieces of men flying through the air  
As the flag that he was carrying burns on the body filled ground

It does not mean happiness and joy  
It means the devil reaching out through the ground  
And pulling any person within his grasp down to hell

It means children sitting, looking out windows,  
waiting for their loved one to return  
They wait for the dead man that they love  
to swallow them in the tightest embrace  
They sit and wait for something that will never happen

All because of a three letter word  
That can mean the difference between your victory  
And another's life

Ashley is 14 years old. She penned this poem as an 8th grader last year. She is a member of the congregation of Rev. Dr. James Taneti, coordinator of the Transitional Aftercare Network (TAN) of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Chaplaincy Services in the U.S. James sent Ashley's poem to the WSCF North America office, expressing his wish for "these children's voices to heal this wounded world."



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