

ASIAN LAY LEADERS (ALL) FORUM

Radio Veritas Asia Compound,
37 Buick St., Fairview Park, Quezon City, Philippines

A CALL TO RENEW THE ASIAN LAYPEOPLES’ COMMMITMENT TO AN “INTEGRAL ECOLOGY” FOR CHANGING THE WORLD

Introduction

We, the Asian Lay leaders from 13 countries, have gathered at the Asian Youth Academy (AYA)/Asian Theological Forum (ATF) to share knowledge and common experiences related to the theme: **“Asian Youth, Champion for Building a New World Centering on Peace, Sustainable Development, and Ecological Justice”** from 22nd July to 31st July 2017 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This forum brought together people from countries: namely, Austria, Bangladesh, China, France, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

In discerning the signs of the times through discussions in the forum, we recognize that there are various global problems which threaten to slow, halt and even reverse the ‘Integral Human Development’ emphasized in Catholic Social Teachings (CSTs) that humanity has made in pursuing the common good for all.

The 71 participants in the event representing church-related NGO activists, theologians, and various church workers working for social actions and youth envision an “Asian Lay Council” which could be a representative body to promote dialogue with the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC). It is so that the People of God in Asia could provide collective and timely responses to solving today’s multifaceted problems plaguing our common home.

Discerning the signs of the time

In articulating the local Asian contexts, we find common themes that run through our discussions, such as the destructive impact of an aggressive and limitless developing impulse. We also acknowledge the indifference of youth all over Asia, who feel as if they have no freedom to make informed social, economic, political, and spiritual choices in their contexts. Especially we learn that:

1. Conflict and violence around the world, especially religious intolerance

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- is increasing frequently and intensely, while the income disparity between rich and poor is widening and at its all-time highest;
2. Gender equality has slowly improved but the patriarchal culture and system still affects the political, economic, social, and even religious spheres of the society and church in Asia. Misogyny is still widespread, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas;
 3. There is a limitless and unquenchable consumerism in most parts of the world, making an equitable use of resources difficult. This leads to corruption, poor governance and prevent many, especially among developing nations from achieving democracy and a just economy for their peoples;
 4. There is still a lack of personal and political will to deal with climate change, global warming and other ecological issues;

A missionary call to an integral ecology for and with the people

Inspired by Pope Francis' repeated calls to action, based on recent theological developments on "Integral Ecology" clearly expressed and stressed in his encyclical "*Laudato Si'*" and new strands of missiology, we believe that the solution to these issues is radically Christian (and ultimately universal) in nature. To elaborate, our concept of mission is to be a 'broader sense of evangelization' stressing on 'humanity'. That means to be in solidarity with the poor and marginalized suffering as Jesus Christ himself has done. His radical empathy – becoming utterly human to relate totally with other humans – is what Christians, and indeed everyone, should strive towards. This is the only means to build a bridge and unity amidst diversity.

In the Francis' notion of integral ecology, we find the importance of combining integral human development, gender justice, ecological awareness and knowledge based on the spirituality of "everything is connected" which we interpret "I am because you are" an ancient wisdom from Asia and Africa.

Reading the mystic, St Francis of Assisi's spiritual teachings in relation to other local traditions' views on nature, we find that the dynamic between human and nature goes beyond duality, conflictual, competitive, and exploitative relations. In fact, it is a peaceful, familial, relational and mutually dignifying inter-becoming which provides for its stewards, creates beauty for all, and gives glory to God.

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Consequently, conventional economic theories, based on competition and profit no longer suffice to provide solution to today's world. In navigating the difficult terrain between libertarian and socialist forms of economics, we find that the general principle "everything is interconnected" in the Catholic Social Teachings (CSTs) could be a possible way that promotes sustainable development. Therefore, we reaffirm our Christian values and obligations to develop the human in a holistic manner focusing on "change of the current model of progress."

The Asian Lay Leaders' Commitment and Suggestions

We, Asian lay leaders, continue to respond to and accept the challenge to reach out to the marginalized communities that we are working with. Heeding the call to "love your neighbors", we are deeply committed to building a common home for all. However, this cannot be done by us alone. We hope that governments, the churches, educational institutions, corporations and individuals as part of the civil society will join us hand-in-hand to make our common home a blessing to all. Therefore, we suggest:

1. Asian communities, representing truly diverse peoples and cultures, continue to promote dialogue across communities. In recent years, many movements have surfaced and proliferated with regards to inter-religious dialogue. This is a good development, but we believe more needs to be done in order to counter extremism and violence. There also needs to be a more concerted effort in the regional co-operation to promote human rights for every Asian citizen.
2. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) need to recognize, support and empower the laity by having a dialogue with them at the diocesan, national and the continental level. For this, we suggest FABC to support lay leaders in Asia to form an "Asian Lay Council" as a representative body of the laity. Further, the FABC could help local bishops' conferences in the continent to form "National Pastoral Council (NPC)" which does not exist in many Asian countries in order to promote dialogue with the laity. In NPC, clergy, Religious and laity could discuss, work, and make decisions together for a new vision of being church in Asia. Such a "synodality" or a "process of making a decision together" is one of most important thoughts and deeds of Pope Francis.
3. The business communities in Asia need to be more concerned about the

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marginalized and undertake, more fervently, social responsibility initiatives like “Social (Solidarity) Economy” so that they could support the development of marginalized communities and the ecology. In the same way, all educational institutions should encourage inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue for peace among diverse religions and cultures, which is life itself of people in Asia.

4. The public to commit to, firstly in their immediate spheres of influence, a sustainable lifestyle, by firstly, adhering to the principle of “reduce, reuse and recycle”, and then by participating and creating community and societal initiatives to address ecological issues on a wider scale.

We pledge our commitment to an ‘integral ecology’ for changing the world by joining in the prayer of Pope Francis:

*God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.*

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* [246]