

World Council of Churches
Asia Desk



**REPORT:
ASIA REGIONAL GROUP MEETING
2003**

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AND

REPORT FROM WCC ASIA DESK TO ARG

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

ASIA REGIONAL GROUP MEETING

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA,
24-28 NOVEMBER, 2003

REPORT

The Asia Regional Group of the World Council of Churches met in Kuala Lumpur (at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre, Kuala Lumpur) Malaysia from 24 to 28 October 2003. It included ARG members and representatives of Asian Churches from 16 countries in Asia and ecumenical partners from Europe and North America.

Participants

Mr. Richard A.D. Siwu	Indonesia, ARG Member,
Mr. Ad Mook	Head of Asia Team, UCN, Netherlands, ARG member
Bishop Duleep de Chickera	Sri Lanka, Member of WCC CCDD Commission
Dr. Feliciano V. Carino	Philippines, ARG Member
Dr. Hermen Shastri	Malaysia, WCC Central Committee Member
Dr. Ipe Joseph	India, ARG Member
Dr. Prawate Khid-Arn	Associate General Secretary, CCA
Dr. K.B. Rokaya	General Secretary NCC Nepal
Bishop Samuel R. Azariah	Pakistan, WCC Central Committee Member
Mr. Anthony Row	Malaysia, President, CCA
Mr. Caesar D'Mello	Director, CWS Australia
Mr. George Tumyr	NCA Country Director, Laos
Mr. Israel Paulraj	Sri Lanka, Treasurer CCA and ARG Member
Bishop Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus	India, WCC Central Committee Member
Mr. Joyanta Adhikari	Director, CCDB, Bangladesh
Mr. Somchai Obboon	Thailand, Deputy General Secretary, CCT
Mr. Victor Azariah	Pakistan, General Secretary, NCCP
Mr. Wati Longchar	WCC-CCA Theological Education Consultant
Mr. William H. Dangers	Church World Service USA
Ms Chia Chun Tsai	Taiwan, WCC Central Committee Member
Ms Frieda Mangunsong	Indonesia, WCC Central Committee Member
Rev. Bill Harris	Australia, Director, Diakonia, Asia Pacific
Rev. Ebenezer Joseph	Sri Lanka, General Secretary, NCC S-L
Rev. Khamphone Kounthapanya	Laos, ARG Member
Rev. Smith Ngulh Za Thawng	General Secretary, Myanmar Council of Churches
Rev. Subodh Adhikary	General Secretary, NCC Bangladesh
Mr. Hansulrich Gerber	DOV Co-ordinator, WCC
Dr. Mathews George	Asia Secretary, WCC
Ms Joyce McNulty	WCC Asia Desk (former staff)
Ms Ursula Davoudi	WCC Asia Desk

Apologies Received:

Dr. Kang Moon Kyu	Korea, WCC Asia President
Rev. Toshi Yamamoto	Japan, WCC CCDD Member
Dr. Samuel Lee	Korea, WCC Central Committee Member
Ms Li En Lin	China, ARG Member
Rev. Huh Chun Jung	Korea, ARG Member
Mr. Leo Bashyam	Christian Aid, U.K
Ms Hannelore Moll	BfdW, Germany
Ms Margarete Koltai	Diakonia, Sweden
Ms Prof. Woraporn Tharawanich	Thailand, WCC Central Committee Member
Rev. Bao Jia Yuan	China, China Christian Council
Mr. Lesleyde Guzman Capus	Philippines, NCCP

Opening Session

Worship

The Meeting began with opening worship, led by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Julius Paul, President, and Rev. Dr. Hermen Shashtri, General Secretary of the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) along with other officers of the CCM.

Our Journey to Emmaus

The reading was from Luke 24, vv13-32. Bishop Paul likened ecumenical meetings to the Journey to Emmaus, saying there is a strong dimension of hope and faith manifested in all discussion. The enormous significance of God's Kingdom overrides our common values and there is a close connection between the decisions we make and the life and presence of Christ among us. Bishop Paul welcomed all present at this important meeting, which among other things would discuss the essential question of the "reconfiguration" of the World Council of Churches and the Ecumenical Movement. Christianity seems to be growing more and more exclusive, while the ecumenical agenda is for a people-centred church. We must find a way of renewing our ecumenical spirit and commit ourselves to being a people's movement, like the disciples on that road to Emmaus.

Greetings and Welcome

Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, Asia Secretary of the World Council of Churches, said it was a pleasure and privilege to welcome all the participants and briefed them on the objectives of the meeting. The ARG had not met together in 2002 and consequently this was the first meeting of the Group since the Colombo meeting in July 2001. Bishop Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, member of the Executive Committee of the WCC, Dr. Prawate Khid Arn, Associate General Secretary of CCA, representing the CCA General Secretary, Dr Ahn Jae Woong, and Bishop Julius Paul, President of the CCM all brought greetings and welcomed the participants.

Bishop Zacharias stressed the significance of the present time of transition for the World Council and the Ecumenical Family. Dr Konrad Raiser was leaving, having completed his mandate and the new General Secretary, Rev. Sam Kobia would be taking over the reins as the first African to shoulder the responsibility of leadership. The new 21st Century has brought new aspects to the life of the Council and the Movement. In an effort to respond to the increasing violence witnessed all over the world, the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) was inaugurated with the new millennium. Now both the terror we have witnessed and the war on terror have brought a real crisis of violence to our world. Numerous conflicts are being waged along religious, ethnic, economic and other lines. One legacy left by Dr. Raiser is the proposal for a new configuration of the ecumenical movement and the discussions generated on this thus far. Following on from previous discussions, a meeting of a selected group of people have been held recently in Antelias, Lebanon, at which Dr. Shashtri had been one of the participants. At this ARG we must think and act to provide important and much needed Asian input into these key discussions, aimed to mould and formulate the future thought and action of the Council.

Dr Prawate Khid Arn, Associate General secretary, bringing greetings from the CCA and from Dr. Ahn Jae Woong, mentioned the ongoing and closely interrelated problems still needing to be tackled in Asia, including poverty, unemployment, drugs, AIDS/HIV, refugees and migrants, and political domination by the most powerful nations. The churches are being challenged again and again to become the Church of the People in Asia, even in their minority status, needing to take on the defence of human dignity and human rights and of life in all its fullness. He expressed thanks to the WCC and especially the Asia Desk for the support given to Asian churches and hoped that with the help of the ARG, God's work would be made more visible in the life of the churches and the community in Asia.

In his message, Bishop Julius Paul spoke of the recent political changes in Malaysia with the stepping down of Dr Mahathir and the appointment of the new Prime Minister. Dr Mahathir had given Malaysia an infrastructure which would enable it to face the future, on the premise that "Big is Beautiful". Now perhaps the country needs the new government to place greater stress on human values. He said that the Church in Malaysia, though a minority, plays nevertheless a significant role in the life of the people.

Thanking the speakers, Mathews George said he was pleased that this ARG meeting was further extended following the extended meeting in 2001. In fact 33 participants had been able to come, 23

representing Asian Churches and CCA, 3 from ecumenical partners in Europe and North America and 5 from WCC governing bodies and also staff. He regretted that not many of the women invited had been able to be at the meeting. He expressed a special welcome to those who were able to attend, including Dr. Andrea Mann from the Anglican Church of Canada who was present just for the first day. Whilst in the past the ARG had had a role in planning the use of funds available for WCC's diakonal work in Asia, its present task was wide ranging in discussing, recommending and identifying priorities for programmes and future ecumenical involvement in the Asian region and bringing the concerns of the churches and peoples of Asia to the notice of other programme desks within WCC and to other churches, ecumenical bodies and ecumenical development agencies of the world.

The participants introduced themselves.

The Asia Secretary stressed the importance of the different items on the agenda and said that only two sessions could be devoted to country reports. Input from the Asian Churches into the reconfiguration discussion would be very significant, and he hoped that it would lead to further ongoing discussions at every level in the churches which would help with a response to this proposal.

There would be three reflections on Diakonia and Justice, bearing in mind the study process being followed by the Diakonia and Solidarity Team as proposed by the Advisory Group at its meeting in South Africa in 2002. A global study process has been initiated by the Diakonia and Solidarity team in co-operation with JPIC Team and an Asian Consultation will take place in 2004. Mathews reflected that the participants also needed to take the opportunity to consider the Theological Education programme which Wati Longchar would be reporting on, and to look at the situation with regard to ecumenical development cooperation in Asia, both within and outside WCC coordination, endeavouring to analyse current trends and trying to evolve a strategy on how to proceed. He explained that the meeting would also give time to considering the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), as the plan is to put specific emphasis on Asia in the year 2005. Mr Hansulrich Gerber, co-ordinator of WCC DOV Programmes, was present to give an insight into how DOV is working so far and to ask for concrete suggestions on how to move forward and highlight Asia in that focus year. Africa and the Sudan had been the subject of focus in 2003 and North America will be highlighted in 2004. Finally, Mathews commented that it would be good to have some concrete proposals on what issues/programmes should be prioritised in WCC future involvement in Asia, which can be taken back to the house for the consideration of other teams in WCC.

Analysis on ' Emerging Geo-political Trends in Asia'

Mr. Anthony Row, a member of the CCA Presidium acted as Moderator for this session.

Mathews George presented a paper on the 'Emerging Geo-political Trends in Asia' highlighting the most significant points. A very positive view of Asia in the 1980s was proved unfounded by the financial crisis of 1997. (That crisis was in fact a global crisis which first became evident in Asia.) Now, six years on, things are gradually improving. Nevertheless there are still some serious difficulties to be faced, including political instability, corruption, violence, poverty, unemployment, religious activism and the struggle for human rights and justice.

Asia currently has an unacceptable level of poverty, even in those countries with a higher growth rate, over 50% of the world's poor are living in Asia on less than US\$1 per day. 294 million people are undernourished in South Asia alone. (More than half of Asia's young children are believed to suffer from protein-energy malnutrition). A key challenge for Asia is to focus attention on improving basic social services, especially in urban areas and particularly primary health care and education.

In the economic field there is too much emphasis on high growth rates, meaning that sustainability is not emphasised and is not ensured. Asia needs to unlearn its old habits which produce a "bubble" economy and find new ways of building sustainable economies. The current urban explosion can be seen as both positive and negative. There is a similar rush of movement from the rural to the urban as was witnessed in the West at the time of the Industrial Revolution. Mega cities are developing at an unprecedented rate, Tokyo has an estimated population of 27 million, and it is anticipated that Asia will have at least 267 cities with over a million inhabitants by the year 2015. This phenomenon is due to increasing trade through commercial links within the region and with the West. Vast sums of foreign investment have come to some areas, but this development is uneven.

In the subsequent discussion, Mr. Subodh Adhikari pointed out that the Biswa Itjema brings together at least 2 million Muslims every year.

Expressing appreciation for the paper, Dr. Ipe Joseph commented on Asia's complacency with regard to its own development. He saw the non-convertibility of the Indian Rupee as a protection for the Indian economy.

Thanking and appreciating Mathews for this broad overview on Asia, Bishop Samuel Azariah raised some points of concern: 1) There were crisis situations before the 1997 crash, it was not such a sudden unexpected phenomena. 2) He found the paper highlighting some blame on Islam. There is need to give a more in-depth evaluation of the role of the Christian Church's religious violence throughout the World. Christian behaviour is often the cause triggering Muslim reaction.

Bishop de Chickera commended the broad scope of the paper. He said that the statement on Sri Lanka needed to be toned down. Relations were good in the past, but strife between the religious groups, Buddhists, Hindus and Christians is growing these days. We should give equal focus to Christian fundamentalism also when we talk about Buddhist or Hindu fundamentalism. Account should be taken of spiritual values. Every religion has pro-life and anti-life elements and often there is a dichotomy between extreme violence and hospitality.

Dr Feliciano Carino underscored these points made by the Bishop. The most aggressive religious body is the Christian Church. The Pope's claim that the third millennium would be a Christian millennium in Asia was highly aggressive in a non-Christian context. The China Inland Mission has been renamed with the aim to Christianise China. These forms of aggression must not be indulged in, as others will naturally respond in the ways open to them. Variations in the economic conditions in different parts of Asia are becoming more and more evident. The demographic dimensions of Asia are breathtaking. 60 to 65% of the world's population lives there. (300,000 people live in one housing complex in Hong Kong alone). Some of the fastest recovering economies are seen in Asia.

Bishop Zacharias welcomed this well-prepared paper, which gave a view of Asia's realities in the political, economic and social fields, at the same time showing the contradictions and the need to achieve complementarity. He believed that Asia needed an inner strength to be upheld in this situation of globalisation. Asian culture must be strong and unite people. We need positive thinking. Whereas economics cannot always bring change to the quality of life, education can. He saw a strong need for quality education. On the role of the Church, he regretted that the mainline churches have often been inert and inactive in the face of the militancy of extremists and aggressive evangelism by other groups.

Dr Rokaya, referring to the Nepal situation, pointed out that the Maoists were waging war to bring the King under the constitution, the army under the power of the elected government, and the government to serve the people. They had made known their demands, which were not accepted. These were for (1) roundtable talks, (2) an interim government be set up, in which the Maoists would have a part and (3) a new Constitution be formulated in consultation with the people and empowering the people. They would be willing to accommodate the King under the constitution but not as an absolute monarch. In general, public sentiment is not against the Maoists as reported in the West, and now support is growing even in Kathmandu.

Dr Richard Siwu commented that the historical burden of the churches does not make the ecumenical task easy in Asia. Most of the Asian churches were born in colonial times, based on Western culture and the complexity of colonialism is still alive within the Christian community today.

Dr. Wati Longchar commented on the wide range of complex geopolitical trends evident in Asia. He still saw a ray of hope in the vibrancy of Asian people's movements. It was important the churches listen to the voices they are raising.

Ms Frieda Mangunsong commented on the part on Indonesia, saying that some leaders advocate greater regulation, pushing for the introduction of the sharia law. Though many Islamic leaders have been educated in the US and are more moderate, they must listen to the majority. Christians also

have some say, though they are a minority. Mentioning the story of a fundamentalist sect, she emphasised the complexity of aspects influencing human behaviour.

Mr. Israel Paulraj commented on Sri Lanka's decision to make the Sri Lankan Rupee convertible. They had also opened up visa restrictions to all the citizens of SARCC. He believed regional poverty was now at its highest level for some time. In the country itself he regretted the lack of co-operation between the political parties. They are dependent on the West and therefore they need to work together for the benefit of the country. As a result of globalisation, though world commodity prices have risen, the price of Sri Lanka's raw materials has remained as low as before.

Commenting on the references to Malaysia, Anthony Row said the non-Muslims in the country, mainly of Chinese and Indian descent, have been a balancing factor in the development of Malaysian politics. While the Malays have political power, it is the Chinese and Indians who are most closely involved in running the economy. Thanks to these large communities in the population, the government will not allow the imposition of Sharia law. Mr Mahathir pegged the Ringgit and worked to establish economic independence and stability, believing that Malaysia must take care of its own destiny and not be colonised again. With regard to the church, the Christians in Malaysia did not understand why the government was funding mosques and asked for similar support for the churches. In the last CCA General Committee, the General Secretary of the NCC USA told of the struggles of the Council to make its voice heard. The middle voice of reason has been lost and must be found again. The NCC had spoken out against the war, though this was not widely known in Asia. *We need more communication and interchange of information between NCCs in different countries and regions.*

The fact that Asian Christianity is generally seen as a Western religion and that everywhere Christians are in a minority, except in the Philippines and East Timor, was again pointed out. Fundamentalist Islam did not exist a few years back. Now there is a lot of Christian freelance missionary evangelism. As examples, in India many US evangelist groups are operating under the name of Indian churches, whilst in Vietnam and other places, many Western missionaries go in with business visas.

Mathews responded to the questions and comments and thanked all those who have enriched the discussion through very lively participation and dialogue.

Second Day

The second day's proceedings started with worship led by Rev. Khamphone. Mr Ad Mook was the moderator for the day. During this session he welcomed several participants who had arrived since the start of the meeting and also Mme Kumbek, a journalist who writes for the Straits Times.

Dr Carino presented his paper, 'Theological Reflection on Diakonia and Justice'. Recapping briefly, he defined the meaning and place of Diakonia for the Christian community. When Diakonia and Justice are linked, the call is not only for acts of mercy and compassion but also the need to tackle root causes and seek social and political change, dealing not only with poverty, but also with oppression. Many Christians' view the world of other faiths as a passive world where this work can be carried out in the 21st Century. Religions have taken on greater prominence in determining the affairs of economic, social and political life. Human community and social order are difficult to uphold where political evil or political good, political friendship or political enmity are split along religious lines, and such a world is fraught with danger. Despite any new economic or technological mechanisms favouring the development of a global community, such a community cannot emerge unless people of different religious traditions and faiths are given sufficient space to live together as creative components of a more inclusive political community. In the light of these developments, there is the need to reconfigure Christian diakonia and all aspects of Christian work.

Making particular reference to diakonia amidst the changing nature of war, he said that this poses serious dilemmas to our historical work for justice, peace and reconciliation. Tracing the history of war and its different former manifestations, which have not themselves completely disappeared, he saw two new dimensions of war which had now developed more prominently. Wars of ethnic and religious connection have taken over the world stage in places and forms not seen before. On the other hand there has been the bureaucratisation of war, war waged at a distance using highly sophisticated technological instruments and very deadly weapons. The result is a reduction of moral or social damage at home even when the damage abroad is immense. Pointing out that service to war

refugees, relief and reconstruction, etc. have been major expressions of Christian diakonia in the past, he wondered what Christian diakonia means in wars where religious identity is the critical definition of the warring parties and where so-called "Christian Nations" are the attacking forces. He wondered if there could be a common inter-religious response to the humanitarian needs arising from the conflict, and how people of various faiths can come together to join in seeking peace and bringing about a structured agreement among the world's nations allowing all the different cultures, languages, religions and ways of life to flourish and prosper together.

Finally, he wondered how to define the nature of Christian diakonia amid all the distortions or anomalies of current international life; including unilateral interventions into the life of nations in the name of the war on terror; blatant disregard for international conventions and nearly total disrespect for established international organisations including even the Charter of the United Nations; and division of the world into an "axis of good" and an "axis of evil". Whilst "faced in nearly every aspect of our lives by the borderless winds of globalisation, in the political field we are bounded by the singular military superiority of the United States". In Asia, as probably in other parts of the world, there is no room for Christians to be smug about their service or "deeds of justice". There are some serious questions we need to ask ourselves about who we are and what we are doing here.'

In the following discussions the place of diakonia was emphasised as one of the ongoing key aspects of the life and ministry of the Christian Church though it has not always been given its true importance. People continue to yearn for justice. Both aspects of the idea, of Justice through Diakonia, and Diakonia through Justice must operate. In some way over recent times there has been a kind of genetic manipulation in our attitude to diakonia. Of the three basic tenets of the church; Liturgy, Koinonia and Diakonia, diakonia was taken out and the main emphasis was placed on Faith and Order. Now there is division on matters of Faith and Order and a Special Commission has been set up. Diakonia, part of the very essence of Church life and ministry, has been taken out of the hands of the churches. The agencies have taken it over. If the Church is to be the true Church it must bring back diakonia to within the Church itself. There is a need to understand the role of institutions, the question of diakonia and partnership, with different levels of relationship (e.g. big/small, powerful/weak). When war was feared imminent, Christians responded with protest, with the Pope and other Church leaders and bodies making clear statements against it. However, neither Bush nor Blair responded nor took any account of what they said. Though they call themselves Christian leaders they did not listen to the voice of the churches. Diakonia in the world context, as provided by the UN, the ICRC and other agencies, came under attack. In this new context, the helping hand was treated as a combatant. What meaning therefore does diakonia have in such a situation?

The Church has been operating in a very complex situation. How can those on the margins influence ideas and concepts? According to the FAO, 800 million people in the world are starving. How can we make an impact? Are we asking the right questions? What in fact is development and what kind of development is needed? How can the churches at the margins influence the centre? Now we are seeing smiling terrorists and the difficulty is that the violence and physical suffering that they bring is negated by their own willingness to die. The context and methodologies of war have been drastically changed. The attacks on humanitarian organisations in Iraq happened because they were seen as legitimising the American occupation. The cessation of hostilities by the Americans meant that, for one side, the war was over and the time for reconstruction had come, yet for the other side the war was not over. In effect this was a war without a clear start or finish and which is still ongoing.

National Situation Analysis

Participants from various countries took part in discussions on national situation analyses including the church and the ecumenical scenario in respective countries.

Mr Subodh Adhikari said that there were complaints that the Peace Treaty made with the former government on the Chittagong Hill Tracts was not being implemented. The present government was the alliance of four Islamic parties. The situation in the Hill Tracts could get worse. There has been trouble with the Hamadir group, when the Islamic community surrounded the Hamadir mosque, claiming that it was not Muslim, giving rise to rampant violence and an extremely poor law and order situation. In fact much of the violence seems to involve criminal elements. Bangladesh has many "godfathers" supported by musclemen and weapons that are readily available. About 15 to 20 people are killed each day. The present government has a two thirds majority in Parliament but is facing case

after case brought against it by the former government. With regard to the ecumenical situation, NCC Bangladesh held its 24th AGM on 11 October. One new member church was accepted. Work is going ahead steadily on the Christian Marriage act, on the rules covering marriage and divorce. A move is afoot to form a new "Christian Federation of Bangladesh", promoted by some churches which have never previously advocated unity. Meanwhile, the 'Pastors Act Together' group came to the NCC to organise an ecumenical service in which 50 churches participated. Also in response to NCC's invitation, 20 Christian lawyers met together on the NCC campus.

Dr Ipe Joseph reported that NCCI is celebrating its 90th anniversary in 2004. He reported that there have been several cases in the courts concerned with anti-conversion laws. Happily where there have been threats of death to the people charged, eg in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, the cases have been moved to other courts after the intervention of the Supreme Court. In effect, anti-conversion laws have been passed in four states, Tamil Nadu being the most recent example. Now the candidate wishing to convert to Christianity must produce an affidavit to the magistrate affirming that he or she is acting on his/her own free will. The baptising pastor must also produce an affidavit to the court. It has happened that people pronounce the words themselves, once the pastor has put them in the water. Now there is some questioning whether baptism should continue to be an essential requirement to become a church member. The Baptists do not agree. (Officially Christians are said to represent 2.63% of the whole population, though some say 4 to 5%.)

Several unhappy incidents have drawn the attention of the outside world this year. A train was stopped and a girl from Assam was mass raped in the conflict between Biharis and Assamese. Apparently there was recruitment for jobs in Assam, but the Biharis who wanted to apply were sent away. Subsequently with the apparent collusion of officers in Bihar, the train was stopped with the sad consequence mentioned. Meanwhile there has still been no clear resolution concerning the conflict over the temple in Ayodhya. An excavation was carried out to see if the claims about an original Hindu Temple were correct, but the findings were inconclusive. Many people were hurt in the bomb blast in Mumbai, which was an indication of a sick society. Christian Fundamentalism in India is alive and well. Many missionaries preach the gospel of affluence/the power gospel. The Indian mainline churches have come full circle in the last two years. Serious leadership problems are evident, but local village congregations are flourishing. A joint celebration was planned between the Roman Catholic Church and NCCI, which also worked closely with the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

Early in 2004, from January 16-21, the World Social Forum will be held in Mumbai, under the theme "Another World is Possible". WCC, CCA and many other Christian partners will all be taking part in it. Ipe hoped there would be good Christian co-operation, particularly in India, and a big impact.

A peace initiative will be presented by faith organisations seeking how to build up communities of peace. On the political front, the people of India and Pakistan have no quarrel between themselves. Cricket matches have been resumed and a regular bus service between the countries inaugurated. A group from Pakistan visited NCCI about 9 months ago and now the Church of North India will send a team to Pakistan. There will be some representatives of NCC Pakistan visiting India in January next year when WCC and CCA will organise a Consultation on Children. There can be some difficulty with obtaining visas. Elections are due shortly in 4 states and there are hopes the BJP may be out in 3 of them. NCCI is actively encouraging people to vote for non-religious parties.

Rev. Dr. Richard Siwu presented the country situation in Indonesia. Following the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 the *Reformasi* (Reformation) era began with promises of freedom and democracy. Freedom of expression and the press are now guaranteed. Two further developments are significant. Under the Presidency of Abdulrahman Wahid with Megawati Sukarnoputri as Vice-President in 1999, they introduced a system of regional autonomy, changing from the former fully centralised system of government and more recently in 2003, under the Megawati administration, new General Election regulations have been introduced. This means from 2004 General Elections will no longer be organised by the government but by an independent election committee. In common with all members of Parliament, both national and local, the President and Vice President will be directly elected by the people and not by the People's Consultative Council. Implementation of these reformasi changes is not proving easy. Once regional autonomy was introduced, some richer regions/provinces e.g. West Papua (Irian Jaya) and Aceh, declared independence from the Republic of Indonesia. The present war is a result of the political disturbance arising from disagreement between the Acehnese and national government on this claim for independence. The national government believes the integrity of the

nation state of Indonesia would be jeopardised if Aceh achieved its independence. In preparation for the 2004 General Election at least 50 political parties have been legally recognised and registered and are competing to gain the largest possible share of the total of 550 seats. Some leaders of the six main threshold parties who participated in the 1999 election are beginning to manoeuvre for coalition. The big question is who will be the next elected president.

The issue of human rights is under consideration in two bills, the bill for jurisdictional crime regulation, introduced by the Department of Justice and Human Rights, and the bill for religious harmony, introduced by the Department of Religion. These have raised concerns among non-Muslims regarding their own citizenship rights and many protests, particularly from Christian communities. Though the majority of Muslims are tolerant, the revival of fundamentalism involving a small number of people is causing anxiety in non-Muslim communities. They could interfere in the political sphere of the state by pushing for enforcement of the Islamic Shariah under the Constitution or some state regulations. In common with the regulations for a national system of education recently approved by Parliament, both these bills include elements of the Shariah to be implemented in the everyday life of citizens. In the face of growing Islamic fundamentalism there is a noticeable awakening of evangelical and charismatic movements among the Christians, which are committed to personal or mass evangelisation in the old fashion. Many members of the traditional churches tend to be evangelical or charismatic and are not slow to join in mission across denominational lines. This is one of the crucial issues faced by the Indonesian mainline churches today, most evangelical and charismatic Christians being highly intolerant of the established churches and other religions.

Rev. Khamphone Kounthapanya, member of the ARG and CCA General Committee member reported on Lao situation. A free market economy has existed in Laos since 1986. This year a new policy was introduced facilitating foreign investment up to a maximum of US\$2 million. There has been improvement also to the road and transport infrastructure. On religious questions the country is divided between 97% Buddhist or Animist, 2% Christian, 1% other faiths. There is a certain amount of religious freedom, though with some harassment by local or regional authorities. Many missionaries have been coming in as businessmen and this is not helping the local churches. In 2003 a decree officially recognised other religions as well as Buddhism. The Lao Evangelical Church is recognised but no evangelism is permitted. It has been working on small social projects covering clean water, primary schools, mobile clinics and helping in the fight against drugs and HIV/AIDS. A new decree on religion was made known to all church leaders by the end of 2002. Thanks to the efforts of the Asia Desk of WCC, the first official visit to Laos by a WCC General Secretary had taken place this year. It had helped to establish relationships, in particular with the Buddhists by the presentation of some hospital beds to the Supreme Buddhist Patriarch by Dr. Konrad Raiser. Christians are co-operating closely with the other groups in all their projects aimed to benefit the people. Some new churches are founded each year and special importance is given to the training of pastors and lay leaders. The Lao Bible is being revised jointly with the Roman Catholic Church. Capacity building for the second generation of leaders is being organised with the help of Asia Desk. Yet more programmes are still needed to upgrade the capacity of the people. Thanks to the support of Norwegian Church Aid, one Lao student is currently studying at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong. In response to questions, it was clarified that Buddhism is not the state religion and many Christians have become members of the Party and hold important positions in the government.

Rev. Dr. Hermen Shashtri reported on the situation in Malaysia. He recalled Malaysia's history, beginning with the migration of people from Sumatra in Indonesia, followed by the arrival of colonial powers greedy for access to the spice trade and trade with China. Over the centuries they brought in Chinese and Indian migrants to work for them. The Malays themselves are closely tied to their religion (Islam). The Chinese and Indian communities have grown and today constitute large minority groups. The Constitution protects all the ethnic groups, while giving a special place to the Malays and Islam, causing interplay between the different groups and the socio-political climate of the country. Dr. Mahathir offered dynamic leadership at a crucial time, taking a strong stand even after the 1997 financial crisis, protecting the country's national reserves and integrity. He brought together Malay nationalists working to protect the rights of Malays and their religion, while building bridges with the other races, the Chinese being the larger group. This has ensured him strong support and provided equilibrium between Malay (Muslim) and non Muslim interests. Malaysia has benefited from an economic boom. Main political leadership is in the hands of the Malays with space for the Chinese and Indians in economic life (a share in the prosperity cake). This equilibrium can be maintained with some flexibility as long as prosperity is high. Though living standards in West and East Malaysia are not the

same both are developing rapidly, even so some fear the Eastern states, Sabah and Sarawak, might want to break away.

Malaysia (with a relatively small population of 22 million) is governed as a parliamentary democracy based on a Federal Constitution. While Islamic, it is progressive and moderate. Some developments on the Malay side evoke concern in the other groups. Islam is the official religion and following 9-11 Mahathir identified Malaysia as an Islamic State (though this is not stated in the Constitution). This is not based on any other model, Malaysia is the model. The freedom of the other ethnic or religious groups is recognised. In religion, the other groups have ceremonial functions at a symbolic level, but with the privileged position given to Islam, the Muslims have something more. The Constitution provides for family law and individual civil rights of Muslims to come under Sharia. Those calling for an Islamic state want to extend Sharia to include criminal law. It is a kind of evangelistic endeavour to return to the notion of a pristine state as when Mohammed was alive (cf aims of some Christian evangelisers). Islamisation and protection of their own race and religion is attractive to many. Urbanisation and new prosperity provide some counterbalance. People are against the US but eat at McDonalds. A growing middle class and more moderate intellectual elite supports the present government. The Christian minority are united in trying to make Christian ideas and doctrines known. Recently some Christian books have been banned (mainly translations, some about conversion) including an Iban Bible which had been in use for hundreds of years. Malay Muslims insist that the word Allah can only be used by Muslims. Apparently while national leaders aspire to unity, there is a new very conservative attitude among younger bureaucrats who fear the secularisation promoted by the West. Other Islamic states such as Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt are joined in common cause with Malaysia against US influence and to reject any aggression directed against Muslims. Some joint meetings have been held in Malaysia. Militant groups are not tolerated. The Government has set up an Anti-corruption Commission and a Human Rights Commission. The judiciary is officially independent though judges are government appointed. (In the case of Anwar some claimed they were not independent.) The Internal Security law is still applicable. Basic human rights are based on the UN Charter, though some aspects are seen as Western values. Though freedom of religion is provided for in the Constitution, Muslims need authorisation of the Sharia court to convert, but will never get it.

Rev. Smith from MCC reported on Dr Konrad Raiser's visit, who, with Mathews George had been received by the Prime Minister, General Khin Yun and had had a fruitful and cordial discussion with him. On 30 August, the Prime Minister made a public statement on the Myanmar political Roadmap, in 7 steps. At the Bali ASEAN Heads of State Meeting, there had been some thought that Myanmar might be expelled, but afterwards all the leaders, even Mahathir and Thaksin, spoke in support of the new Roadmap. The main proposal is for the reconvening of the National Convention, but no given timeframe was announced, nor was any indication given of who the representatives at the Convention will be. These two points can maybe be seen positively, with the idea "let's work it out". The people tend to think positively, knowing confrontation does not succeed. Some international pressure might help. A new Constitution will have to be drafted and hopefully could be followed by a general election. Buddhism (making up about 90% of the population) is the main religion in Burma, which claims to be the only Theravada Buddhist nation. The military rulers have used Buddhism for their own purposes. MCC represents the protestant part of the church in Myanmar. About 25% of Christians are Roman Catholic. Its main programmes work for Peace and Reconciliation through dialogue, and Diakonia with a ministry of service. Work is also done in the field of integrated rural development and on the issue of HIV/AIDS. MCC enjoys a cordial relationship with the Myanmar Catholic Bishops' Conference (CBCM). They are also in contact with the Myanmar Evangelical Christian Fellowship and Myanmar Christ's Mission Co-operation Board, which are not considering marching together with the MCC, although relationships are more cordial than formerly, especially at leadership level. A yearly week of prayer for Peace and Reconciliation was instituted in 2002, from the end of September to 4 October (St Francis' Day), and will continue. A joint seminar was held between the CBCM and the MCC, with 13 representatives from each and a joint pastoral letter was signed.

Dr Rokaya reported on the Nepal situation and said that it was a few months ago that the King dissolved the Parliament and now he is ruling with the army. This has given rise to fear and uncertainty throughout the country and is also affecting the economy. Following the breakdown of the cease fire, after the King refused to accept the conditions proposed by the Maoists, following on from 7 months of relative peace, many innocent people are now being killed by the army, under the pretence of Maoist encounters, giving the impression that the army is in control of the situation.

Amnesty International and the Scandinavian countries have protested about this situation. Many eminent persons have also spoken up saying the government should parley with the Maoists. The three-point proposals made by the Maoists, as already mentioned, were rejected by the government who wanted the Maoists to surrender their arms and accept the maintenance of the present political system. It is suspected some foreign powers may be behind the breakdown of negotiations. An unstable situation would allow outside meddling in the affairs of the country. The army's killing spree continued even as the talks were being held and in the face of the hard line taken by the government, the Maoists went back to fighting.

The political parties have now lost their grassroots support. The Maoists are advocating that the people should be allowed to choose what government they want. There is escalating violence on all sides, and room for action by the international community. The Maoists are not out of control, they are more disciplined than the army, even though the Americans have listed them as a military threat. The world needs to hear the truth about the real situation in Nepal, through balanced reporting. While it is claimed that the Maoists have claimed 10,000 lives, in effect it is the Police and the Army who are doing most of the killing. Furthermore, overseas aid is not reaching the poor, it is going to the army to buy arms or line people's pockets. There is no need or reason for giving further aid to Nepal for the time being, it would be preferable to put pressure on the government to bring the necessary changes.

The NCC Nepal was founded in 1999, as the Council of Churches, but in view of people's antagonism because of strange conceptions of the WCC, it has been renamed the National Christian Council. Dr Rokaya, having been encouraged in his role as Founder-President up to June 2003, was now the General Secretary. Thanks to the support of the local Christian societies in East Nepal, the NCCN was asked to offer active membership to the Nepalese Christian churches. Dr. Ipe Joseph of NCCI and Rev. Joseph Ebenezer of NCCSL attended the meeting. The committee comprises a small number of independent churches. Originally coming together for Bible study, the members formerly had no idea about human rights or women's rights. An interfaith interaction meeting held on the last day went well. After that on 26-28 October Dr. Ipe Joseph successfully led a women's church leaders' training programme in Kathmandu.

In July, in an effort to encourage church leaders to think about such issues as war, 45 pastors met to discuss the whole situation. Agreement was reached to set up a human rights group, to work on behalf of all Christians in Nepal, known as CEPJAR ('Christian Efforts for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation'). 12 members were nominated, with Dr Rokaya as Co-ordinator. On 19 November an inter-religious consultation for peace building was held to consider the role of the religious community in building peace. As the first speaker, Dr Rokaya read out the first chapter of Isaiah, up to v. 17. The next event on the calendar now will be the Capacity Building Programme for Pastors from N. Nepal which will be held on 27, 28 and 29 December. 99.5% of Nepalese Christians are protestants, though Catholics are running schools, etc. There is need to work with the Catholic community and internal capacity building will also be important, to build up institutional capacity.

Help is currently needed in clearing up the confusion regarding the position and role of the UMN. The erroneous linking of UMN with the work of the churches in Nepal has been the source of problems. In effect UMN has no mandate to be involved with Christians in Nepal, it is simply an NGO working in the field of development. If anything, its presence has impeded the churches' contact with the outside world. A meeting of about 55 church leaders in the Khatmandu valley therefore has affirmed that as UMN is not allowed to participate in religious activities and has not contributed to the growth of the churches, UMN must be recognised merely as one of several outside NGOs working in Nepal. In consequence, it is immaterial to the Christian community and churches whether it remains in Nepal or not as it is kept aloof from the local churches.

Mr. Victor Azariah said that Pakistan finds itself in the forefront of terrorism. The Community of Islam sees the present conflict as a Holy War and the need for all to stand together. Afghanistan and Iraq, both Muslim countries, had been attacked and threats have been made against Iran and Syria. It was difficult for the Pakistanis to get out of their situation. He had had the opportunity of meeting with the President of Pakistan with Konrad Raiser at the time of his visit. Democracy in Pakistan currently involves the application of martial law, where some people consider General Mushraff a Dictator. Muslims, Hindus and Christians have separate representatives in the parliament, following a general election on fractional representation. There is a significant number of Islamic religious leaders in Parliament. They want Sharia law to be introduced on their own terms, but this is not presently

possible. The President is holding back the fanatics, so they will not act against the image of Pakistan. The Pakistan economy is facing problems, especially with the defence budget. Multi-nationals are buying up the country's assets, including government assets. Meanwhile the Christians are conscious of their responsibilities and are opposed to war and to any threat to independent nations.

Rev. Dr. Ebenezer Joseph reported that happily, though the peace process was in difficulty because of disagreement between the two political parties of the President and the Prime Minister, the cease-fire agreement was still holding. The monitoring mechanism was working despite some defects. After the failure of previous talks the LTTE has this time put some proposals on the table. Now this constitutional crisis, which arose after the talks had stopped, has to be solved and a way found to get the parties together again. Even prior to the President's intervention some problems had been met (e.g. there is no mechanism to implement the verdict of the monitors, and there are also new camps and new areas of control not catered for). Furthermore the latest LTTE proposals did not take account of Southern sentiments, nor was the matter of human rights in the North properly dealt with. Now the move by the President in the Prime Minister's absence showed clearly the lack of consensus between the parties. The President expressed serious worries re. problems of national security. As she holds executive powers, the cease-fire agreement is illegal unless signed by her. The UNP government did not keep her properly informed of developments. Her move has given rise to a lot of international pressure, and the President has confirmed her commitment to the peace process, saying she did not in fact officially declare an emergency, as the papers were not signed. Now negotiations are proceeding to find an agreement between the parties. The outcome will be a key issue for the people of Sri Lanka and 15 December has been fixed as a deadline. Meanwhile the Norwegians have suspended their facilitation role.

So far the peace dividend has not reached the people. The cost of living continues to rise rapidly. No proper arrangements for resettling refugees have yet been made. There is room for other forces to exploit the situation. Privatisation has increased enormously in recent months and there is control on all materials including water (though the courts say this cannot be implemented). The Churches are calling for the continuation of the peace process and that there should be no return to violence even if it fails. There could be a federal solution, permitting cohabitation. Violence against the churches has increased in recent months, which might be promoted by groups with political ambitions. There have been moves to restrict or ban conversion, not allowing any religious organisation to propagate its religion and carry out social service. Relations between the different faith groups have been strained. The Buddhists alone are allowed to propagate Buddhism. Others can practise but not propagate their faiths. The Ministers responsible for the different faith groups made proposals, but the matter has been put on cold storage after the Christians appealed. The churches need to address these serious issues and work with the other groups. Much of the problem is caused by the aggressiveness of incoming Christian churches and missionaries as well as a few native churches. All Sri Lanka's religious groups are experiencing these moves towards fundamentalist attitudes and religious revivalism backed by economic advantages. NCCSL, the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Fellowship of Sri Lanka need to find a way to work together. A pastoral letter has been sent out to the people, asking them to have patience and stay calm. Another letter, signed jointly with the RC Bishop will go to the government soon. The Church is in some way identified with the Norwegian flag. Action by the people of other nations has significant impact and Sri Lankans are currently living under the shadow of India and the US and other countries.

Ms. Chia-Chun Annie Tsai, from Taiwan shared information and said that churches in Taiwan witness to and identify with the suffering, struggle and hope among people of Taiwan. The Church speaks at international ecumenical occasions for the voiceless and against international isolation.

Mr. Somchai Obboon reported on the situation of the present Thai government which is well accepted by the people. After the APEC meeting, Mr. Thaksin spoke of a "new generation of Asian leaders". He has been compared with Mr. Mahathir but they have different personalities and ideas. Without prior consultation the government went in with Bush and sent Thai soldiers to Iraq. The scheme for medical services for only Bt. 30 per consultation has brought the resignation of some doctors. The income from the scheme, which has not been well thought out, will only cover 50% of the costs in some areas, so local hospitals will not be able to survive. With his aggressive economic policy, Thaksin is counting on 8% growth in 2004, proposing that Thailand will be considered a developed country by 2015.

Responding to questions on the church's attitude to sex trade problems, it was said that formerly rice and agriculture were Thailand's main sources of income. Now the industrial and service sectors, including tourism which brings in foreign currency, have taken over. It is very difficult to go against the people in power. They claim there are 650,000 people with HIV/AIDS, but the figure is more likely to top one million. CCT is working with other faiths and people at the grassroots to bring the issue into the open, since as a minority, with only 200,000 people, alone it will not be able to change people's lives. Attitudes and life style must be changed to bring improvement. Unlike Nepal, there is no problem with the monarchy, people accept it as a symbol of national unity which should not be criticised. A number of other points raised in questions were also clarified. Another major issue Thailand is facing is due to the cross border migration and illegal migrant workers from other countries in Thailand.

At this point, Mr. Antony Row drew attention to the important issue of Migrant workers in Asia, and he asked for details on WCC's programmes in Asia to address this concern..

Mathews said that WCC has been involved in this programme through CCA for the past several years, ever since the Lantau Island Consultation in 1993 reached an agreement between WCC and CCA. He said that this was a question which called for more detailed discussion later in the meeting. However, Dr. Khid Arn, CCA Associate General Secretary was asked to give some input clarifying CCA's position. He said that CCA's first reaction was to appoint a Consultant, and later to entrust responsibility for this issue to inter-cluster co-ordination, with a special person in charge. Later the Executive Secretaries for International Affairs, Justice, Development and Service and URM were called on to follow up on this issue. URM was assigned the migrant problem. Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons were covered by the Development service and International Affairs. The Asian Migrant Centre was an organisation founded and set up by the CCA, operating in Hong Kong. The work with migrant workers was thus handed to a new secular NGO and the Church was in some way left out. The churches themselves also needed to be actively involved. Action on uprooted people in the Mekong Sub-region involved helping refugees in Thailand from Laos and Myanmar, through bilateral co-operation between CCT and the MCC. Last year there was also some follow up with the Indonesians in Indonesia, CCA was more active in the Southern region and the NCC Sri Lanka was also active in helping refugees. CCA is keenly interested in being involved with this important issue, but means are lacking. Available finances have been drastically reduced. Beth Ferris, Co-ordinator of the WCC Diakonia and Solidarity Team convenes a Global Network meeting each year and CCA sends representatives to this meeting regularly. In fact WCC is more involved in this question in the Middle East and Africa.

Reconfiguration of the Ecumenical Movement

Mathews George recapped on the discussions on 'Reconfiguration the Ecumenical Movement' so far, which had originally been reflected in Dr Konrad Raiser's report to the Central Committee meeting in 2002. In 2003 the idea was further developed. Dr Raiser presented a new paper at a meeting with ecumenical partners in April 2003 and there was further follow up discussion at the most recent Central Committee Meeting in August 2003. Specific discussions took place in the Policy Reference Group Meetings and a general discussion in Plenary. A group of selected invitees, belonging to the ecumenical movement, from all parts of the world were invited to meet in Antelias, Lebanon earlier in November. 5 people were proposed as participants from Asia, Father K.M. George (Orthodox, India) Dr. Hermen Shashti, as the General Secretary of an NCC, Dr. Ahn Jae Woong, General Secretary of CCA, Rev. Lee Jung Huh, from the Mission and Evangelism Commission, Ms. Le Garcia a youth representative from the Philippines and one additional proposal, Dr Ninan Koshy. Three of them attended the meeting as Dr Ahn Jae Woong and Rev Lee Jung could not attend the meeting due to visa problems. Dr. Raiser, Rev. Sam Kobia and Ms. Beth Ferris went from WCC Geneva.

Dr Shashtri, presenting an interim report on the Antelias Meeting ("From Antelias with Love"), said the discussions on the topic are still at an exploratory stage. A diverse network of people, some clergy, some lay, had met in Antelias, all from the ecumenical movement, (as opposed to WCC itself). Rather than being asked to represent their own constituencies, participants were asked each to speak in his or her own individual capacity. People's experience and the context of their work had been taken into account in the selection process. Unfortunately only about one week before the meeting started, Lebanon's immigration policy was modified on a reciprocal basis in response to requirements by some countries including the UK, Korea and others. In the end there were fewer representatives from the 2/3 world, than from the Western hemisphere.

Reconfiguration: In the 50 years of the ecumenical movement a number of changes have shaped its course. Institutionalisation of the movement has grown over the years. Even right at the start of the WCC, Faith and Order, and Life and Work already existed as institutions. WCC has emerged as a trustee of the ecumenical movement/or as a privileged instrument.

There have been similar parallel developments in the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical world, and generally a growing consciousness of ecumenism has emerged. Relationships have developed between the Roman Catholic Church and the other denominations, even including Evangelicals. In each country there is an active group and growing alliance. There has been an emergence of Church-based NGO- style global fora, which are not exactly church, but active proponents advocating on one specific issue. Lastly at the local and regional levels there has been the emergence of new players on the ecumenical landscape. For many years there was no contact between CCA and the FABC, but now there is a close relationship and even future RC partnership in the CCA is not ruled out. There are also many evangelicals or Pentecostals in some national bodies. The reason for thinking of reconfiguration is to take in to account these numerous different developments, giving rise to a new ecumenical architecture, which seems to call for a reconfiguration of the movement. This follows on the CUV (Common Understanding and Vision) process. WCC should serve the cause of the one ecumenical movement, as a sort of mother body, able to bring these diverse manifestations together.

Those at the Antelias meeting recognised that we are not yet ready to decide the shape of the future, but all the participants agreed we must begin a process of re-visioning the ecumenical movement for the 21st Century. How do we see the ecumenical movement, as a people's movement or as a people- or life-centred movement/vision (as opposed to an institution)? There are various possible entry points into the discussion. Any findings need to be submitted to the Central Committee. All the different questions/issues must be taken into account, for one example what to do about African instituted churches or independent churches, who want to be part of the ecumenical movement?

There seem to be many intersecting circles of ecumenism (see Dr Raiser's paper). One question raised was whether ACT can continue to function as at the present time. Some proposals were made on what principles should guide the discussions. Finally a concrete set of questions was drawn up, which might be helpful for those participating in future discussions. There is a strong and widespread feeling that this issue has to be tackled. There is a multiplicity of converging issues. Funding for the meeting was provided by the supporting agencies. Christian Aid has called for the inclusion of some countries into the ecumenical partnership configuration. New partners are in evidence, e.g. Roman Catholic Church, Evangelicals. The Joint Working Group has been impatient, believing that its discussions were having no impact on WCC decisions. Leaders of many Asian and African churches say they are deprived of active participation and influence. They do not want the role, presence and influence of the 2/3 world to be diminished.

Rev Shastri said in the ensuing discussion that some indicated a lack of consensus on this whole question. There is a lot of misunderstanding. The world has changed and the context in which we find ourselves is different. Pressure from the agencies has caused concern in the Central Committee. Is it the churches or the funding agencies who are directing the WCC?. Everyone is struggling with this question. As Dr Raiser's paper shows the whole issue of institutionalisation has become a problem. The church itself is a movement. The founding fathers of the movement did not envisage institutionalisation. Some churches in the South have felt the agencies are trying to set the ecumenical agenda and are behaving like the IMF or World Bank.

Dr. Carino gave as a dictionary definition of "configuration"—"putting various pieces together to take on a particular shape". He wondered if the present discussions were linked with a follow-up meeting to the CUV a few years ago in Bossey (involving much the same kind of people as had been called together this time) at which Ipe Joseph and he himself was also present, on the proposal for "a larger ecumenical fellowship called the Ecumenical Forum". As at Antelias a continuing committee for further discussions had been set up then. Were these two separate dreams or are they one and the same? They seemed driven by the same problems.

It was explained that the Forum idea was not well received yet in the WCC constituency. The Orthodox churches among others had found it hard to accept, (WCC would no longer be a fellowship of councils of churches) but this left the original problems still unsolved.

Saying Dr Konrad Raiser is not alone in driving this debate, Mathews George said that several ecumenical agencies were enthusiastic of the proposal for such a discussion. However, it is a known factor that certain tensions between the WCC and some agency partners exist. Some agencies had wanted to set up a separate platform for Diakonia and Development. Some of them feel that they have no proper or decent status in the decision making bodies of WCC. The question of whether the agencies should have a place in the WCC governing body needs to be finally discussed and decided by the WCC Central Committee or Assembly. WCC has made provision for a Diakonia and Development Commission, of which several ecumenical development Agencies are members, so that their voices can be heard on this platform.

For Bishop Zacharias 'reconfiguration' is our latest initiative. Though not generally accepted the Forum idea did have some influence. It is important to weigh up the pros and cons and the positive and negative aspects, taking account of changing realities, the pressure from the agencies and other aspects. *At its inception WCC was begun to be a union of the churches in a broken world. Since then the centre of gravity has shifted. The churches in the South are larger and more numerous.* The CUV Study Group met in 1998 and presented its findings to the General Assembly in Harare. The idea of a Forum, a new wider body, was picked up and a thinking process began. A Special Commission was set up to consider the place of the Orthodox in the World Council. Churches work in association with the WCC but need not be full members. The basis is a fellowship of churches.

Bishop Zacharias added; in a new configuration, account must be taken of the Roman Catholic Church, the now numerous Pentecostal and Evangelical churches, and how to bring in the Christian World Communions, the Funding Agencies, the Regional Ecumenical Organisations and all the other partners in the worldwide ecumenical family. WCC would then be seen as a facilitating partner for this new ecumenical movement, which could even involve people from other faiths. *If we can do things together, we should not do them separately.* However the Forum idea will bring instability. If we move away from the present structure will we successfully become a new structure?.

Rev. Smith remarked that as long as 20 years ago, in 1983, towards the end of his tenure as General Secretary, Dr Philip Potter had spoken of WCC not as a movement, but as a body providing leadership, already referring to the problems arising from institutionalisation. He recognised there were forces in existence against the aims, purposes and values of the ecumenical movement., such as Justice, Peace and Reconciliation, Human Rights, etc.

Fely Carino said that M.M Thomas described the ecumenical movement as a fellowship of a few hundred friends, from different movements. There had been about 3,000 of those original friends, now most were passing away. Dr Carino confirmed that fellowship of friends had been an exciting movement, a movement of commitment. Unhappily, there seems to be no- one following on to take their place. Recently asked to give a course on ecumenism by the Lutheran Theological Seminar in Hong Kong, he was dismayed by the lack of interest shown by the class of 12 Theology students. Only one knew something about the ecumenical movement and two from Korea who had had lectures had never heard of WCC or CCA! They lacked any kind of enthusiasm and seemed rather a bunch of technocrats trying to redesign a movement which meant nothing to them. Wati Longchar said the youth movement involving SCM and YMCA had also become institutionalised. There is a big generation gap, not easily bridged. Many theological students have no courses on ecumenism at all (others may have courses on ecumenical history, but none on ecumenical theology), a problem which needs to be raised with the Theological schools. Rev. Smith expressed concern on these questions in his own constituency where lay youths and students (SCM, YMCA, etc.) had been the very founders of the ecumenical movement. He endorsed the need for WCC to interconnect with the Federation of Theological Schools and push for all the ecumenical theological institutes to offer one same comprehensive course on ecumenism, so that upcoming generations can know what it is all about. This can only be implemented by intentional programming. It was confirmed that in Indonesia and Philippines, Campus Crusade proves more attractive than the SCM which has drawn less and less young people to it over the last decade. (Even in the working group on the WSCF, there seem to be signs of disinterest and lack of knowledge.) Efforts should be made to reinvigorate these institutions

and make them more interesting to young people, who these days generally tend to be more inward looking.

Particularly stressing the important role of women and youth, Rev. Smith said in every country the churches will need to revitalise their ecumenical role and ensure they are equipped with the necessary knowledge to fulfil it. Underlying the call for reconfiguration there now seems to be some undercurrent to do with the agencies and the world hierarchies, though at the beginning the call for a Forum and the idea of reconfiguration both came out of the CUV discussions. The Forum was not intended to bring dissension, but it was thought the one ecumenical movement could have such a wider consultation, embracing all sectors of Christendom on the Globe. In the last analysis, as the churches of God, we must go where the Spirit will lead us.

The importance of having a vision and purpose was underlined by Mr. Anthony Row. What is the vision here?. What does WCC want to achieve? Mr Hansulrich Gerber said there had been a feeling in Europe that the movement was in crisis already for a number of years, particularly among the agencies and NGOs. Any satisfactorily functioning and well-oiled machine gets rusty after a time and then may become a decrepit monument. Changing funding patterns have brought some of the problems. Whereas formerly funding came from the mainline churches, now it is the agencies who provide most of the necessary finances. Michael Taylor's book spoke of "Agencies, not Angels". Even Church leaders themselves are nowadays less interested in the ecumenical movement. (Cf. the moves back to denominationalism.). The people in the pews are more interested in the benefits and experience which a movement can give. The Church, as the body of Christ in the world cannot properly be identified as part of any other body.

Dr. Ebenezer Joseph wondered what the ecumenical movement and the world council have represented for the ordinary church member in the pew. 'Now we see tension between the WCC and the Development agencies, one has the money, the other has the members. The days of the development agencies are probably also numbered once the money dries up.' Sometimes there must be an end and a new beginning, remembering Christ's saying "Unless a grain of wheat fall into the earth and dies, it cannot bear fruit". Bishop Azariah said in all fairness we must recognise the ecumenical movement has spoken to the needs of Asia and Africa in the past, in its work against Apartheid and other expressions of racism, in its defence of women's rights and in combating violence, but this has not trickled down to the people in the pews. The Asian churches' dependency on money has been too strong and this has bottlenecked the whole situation.

Ms Chia-Chun Tsai told the story of a young man who, in lieu of military service, went to Malawi as a volunteer, and through his own commitment and energy and with the help of the congregation in his mother church in Taiwan, was able to provide at first medical supplies and later a new hospital for the local people. She felt it a pity that whenever Church leaders come together, they seem to be always seeking outside funding. Until we give from our own resources, and make ourselves responsible for answering other people's needs, we do not know what we can achieve. She called for the provision of more opportunities of encounters/exchanges for young people who can contribute to the ecumenical movement.

Dr. Richard Siwu said most Indonesian churches are involved in reflection as individual churches, including reflection on the Decade to Overcome Violence turning to the Living God for guidance. When the Council of Churches in Indonesia became the Communion of Churches (PGI), more evangelical churches joined and there is often quite a gap between the local congregations and the ecumenical movement, which represents a serious problem for ecumenical fellowship.

Hermen Shashtri said the discussion indicated the level of interest evoked by the whole reconfiguration question. He called for the widest possible, broad-based discussion on the issue, from the global and regional levels down to the level of the local individual churches and the members in the pew. All institutions today seem to be in crisis to some degree or other. The UN itself, even many of the international evangelical organisations were all passing through troubled times. The world has changed drastically and it behaves us all to adapt to the changes. There is room for greater flexibility and for ensuring better efficiency and effectiveness in our activities, including in our relationships with the agencies. At the same time we have to search for the heart and soul, fire and passion, which has kept the ecumenical movement alive until now. If indeed the ecumenical movement is to be God's instrument to serve a broken world, God will still be with us, but without His help it would be an illusion

to think we can recreate that fire and that power. It is logical to want to reinvigorate SCM, but there too, if the fire is missing there is no point. The movement must evolve and for that purpose we must seek out new constituencies where God's passion and fire are evident. Maybe it is presently more predominantly evident among the NGOs which have become the modern expression of people's movements. In Malaysia one such movement which inspires young people is led by a Muslim with a very ecumenical vision of the world, speaking the same language as we do. In this day and age, maybe someone like this could be the catalyst for our needed transformation. We have to search out and capture that special passion where it can be found, with its potential of mobilising people and giving them some spiritual enrichment.

Third Day

The Decade to Overcome Violence

Bishop Samuel Azariah, from Pakistan and a member of the WCC Central Committee, was Moderator for the third day

The proceedings of the third day started with a worship led by Ms. Freda Manung followed by a theological reflection on Diakonia and Justice led by Bishop de Chickera.

Starting and ending his presentation with the reading from Luke 22, vv 24-27 (to which he compared John 13 vv 12-15 and Matthew 20 vv 24-28), Bishop de Chickera said that Diakonia was instituted with Christ's washing of the disciples' feet. From the root word for diakonia, we are familiar with the concept of service, minister, ministry, servant-hood and also "servant church". Diakonia as it serves justice is service for transformation and change and should not enhance existing rigid structures. It seeks to restore the intention of the Creator God and it is a prophetic service ministry, involving cost and risk.

In diakonia all are servants. Hierarchy has no special significance in a situation of reciprocity. The master washed the disciples' feet and they must be ready to wash each other's feet. All need to listen to each other and to be prepared to ask forgiveness. Everyone must seek to empower the other. Everyone is a servant, from the smallest individual unit, to whole communities and all human kind. There is symbolism in the feet. Servant ministry must take account of people where they are planted and also of the burdens carried, the hardship they are suffering. The person who wants to be the greatest must seek to be the servant. The human thirst for power and status is still a matter of struggle for Christians today. Self-criticism is important for our Christian wellbeing and is a source of life and spiritual enrichment. Linking this with transformation and the ministry of transformation, as in the parable of the wheat and the tares we have to recognise that we have all sinned and that we cannot uproot justice overnight.

The Servant Lord is present with us as we work for people's justice and dignity. We need to recognise his presence in all cultures and peoples. We should be a church with the most inclusive theology. Any wealth we have or distribute is not our own, but held in stewardship. The Asian churches need to make this very clear, with dignity, to the funding partners. We also need to understand that if God is with the churches and peoples of Asia to be of service, God will provide the resources. If the resource God gives is poverty, then we have to acknowledge the ministry of the poor church, or church of the poor, a church endowed with deep spirituality. It is to the shame of the Asian churches that we had to learn about the church of the poor and basic communities from the churches in South America. If we become a church for the poor or with the poor, we may one day claim to be a church of the poor.

In countries like Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, etc, where a small Christian church is in a vulnerable situation in the face of an oppressive regime, we must draw again on the biblical concept of a remnant community. Christian values need to be preserved and passed on to coming generations. God is present among the vulnerable. He will use these remnant communities to hold on to his values for future times. Even if the situation remains static over ten years, this is no sign of failure, but can rather be seen as success. We must find the means to empower the smaller churches to retain their dignity and their faith in their vulnerable minority situations. There is a need not only to be Christian Asians but indeed Asian Christians, with a specific Asian Christian spirituality. In the case of a despotic dictator ruling your country, you must work quietly for change. Though Jesus, as a Jew had inherited

the Jewish idea of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”, he challenged it. In Christian spirituality there can be no idea of revenge.

When Jesus spoke of service, he said, “I came not to be served but to serve and to give my life in ransom for many”. Risk and the Cross, the spirituality of the Eucharist are absolutely central to Diakonia for Justice, with this concept of the need to serve and to give one’s life as a ransom. The Eucharist offers us two special symbols, in the one cup, in the broken bread. The one cup is shared by people from all different backgrounds and classes. All lips touch the one cup. Maybe all are being called? The broken bread is distributed and everyone gets a little. There is enough for all if everyone is content with little. One cannot engage in the Eucharist and hold on to a position of power and privilege. In Diakonia for Justice there can also be enough resources for all, provided people are prepared to share. In the light of present outside circumstances, the Church in Asia is called today to move on from its past dependency and uncertainty of purpose, to a new era of its history and to take on the role of a Servant Church.

DOV Asia Focus -2005

Mathews introduced the session, explaining the need for some decisions to be taken in WCC in early 2004 for the preparation of the focus year on Asia in 2005. This year the focus had been on Africa, specifically on one country, Sudan. Should the year for Asia cover the whole of Asia, or might it be that after Konrad’s visit the idea might be to concentrate on one or two or three countries—Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Indonesia? There are problems in every country, but in our next DOV Staff group discussions we have to decide how we want to proceed. In this situation it would be good to get the feed back from Asian churches. The WCC-CCA Joint Liaison Group meeting held in Jakarta in June 2003 also discussed this.

Mr Hansulrich Gerber, co-ordinator of DOV programmes, said in the presentation that he made, that the Decade had arisen from a challenge made to the WCC at the Johannesburg Central Committee meeting in 1994, on the need for something to be done about the violence in South Africa inherited from the Apartheid era. After the Programme to Combat Racism, now followed the Decade to Overcome Violence, the “overcome” being inspired directly by the hymn “We shall overcome”, with its real name as the definition: “Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace”. The programme constitutes an invitation to churches and individuals to embark on a spiritual journey, involving creative study and reflection. The UN has embarked on a parallel “Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World”. Though the title sounds triumphant, the Decade involves a call to the churches themselves to repentance for their own complicity in violence.

Themes have aimed to cover the root causes of violence. Latin America’s input has stressed there can be No Peace without Justice. A lot of attention is focussed on the problem of religion and violence. It is good to talk about it, but the right vocabulary must be found. Why is criticism so often applied only to Muslims and certain groups? The question of identity and people’s insecurity in their own identity is also evident.

The Decade is reaching out to the larger ecumenical movement, including the Roman Catholic Church. It has also aroused interest among some non-member churches. The Study Guide is in its third printing. As violence becomes more and more in evidence, it is important to increase the visibility of work directed towards reconciliation and peace.

Many actions are taking place, not all centrally documented. A number of different ongoing initiatives include work on peace building and disarmament, on violence against women, an interfaith consultation in Bossey on Religion, Power and Violence, and in 2005 the World Mission Conference will place important emphasis on DOV.

Particular attention is being paid to the problems of 1) domestic violence, and the need to break the veil of silence about it; 2) violence coming out of globalisation as a source of impoverishment (cf privatisation of water resources, etc.); 3) militarism – child soldiers, guns more easily available than bread, the big percentage of GDP going on armament in many places.

The ensuing discussion revealed a different level of understanding and context in Asia. The fear was expressed that the Decade, like others before it, will just end up a celebration without any meaningful

ongoing impact. Such actions can become ritualistic and lead to final expressions of self-satisfaction and triumphalism. Doubt was expressed of the triumphal sounding terminology, the shift from the idea of "combat" to that of "overcoming". M.M Thomas had spoken of "spirituality for combat", a concept which was lost here. Westerners seemed to have difficulty with the idea of struggle (cf the French term "*vaincre*" – "to defeat"). Finding the appropriate language was very important. What was the underlying ethos? A change in Asian terminology with reference to non-violence was reported. "Anti-violence" is seen to be more active and creative.

Stress was put on the issue of the unseen violence underlying the daily experience of many of the people and churches in Asia, which is visible only when it bursts out into the open.. This was structural violence, the hidden violence of the powerful and greedy. Most other types of violence link in with this structural violence. With a sort of modern "democratisation of violence" this kind of ongoing daily situation is now becoming evident throughout the world. Formerly certain bodies within society were authorised to use violence, now everyone is using it, whether authorised or not.

Ms Mangunsong drew attention to the need for translation of the study guide for the people in the pews, the official languages of WCC being accessible only to a small minority. She quoted her experience of a Bible study on domestic violence taken up with the women in one church, slowly overcoming the taboos preventing discussion of something not usually talked about. A picture had emerged of domestic and economic violence, and conflict situations within families. The same topic had been offered in various bible studies, but only the women had taken it up. There was great need to tackle it at male level, taking in the church leaders and Bishops as well.

It was important to emphasise that Peace and Justice have always been a matter of concern for the WCC from the very beginning. The DOV is a new way of focussing on the question.

The participants then divided into three groups to consider the question of priority issues for Asia and how the Focus on Asia in 2005 should be directed, whether to cover the region as a whole, or specifically concentrate on certain countries and issues, with CCA as the Primary partner.

Rev. Smith was the rapporteur for Group I, comprising 8 members from 7 different countries. Seeking to avoid any hint of triumphalism, and weary of the overworked concept of reconciliation, the group had centred its discussions round 3 "Ps" – Power - Pain - Peace. The misuse of power is one of the major root-causes of conflict, violence and war, bringing suffering and loss of properties, identities and lives. There are many forms and features of manifestations of violence through the misuse of power, by the misuse of:

- state power, military power, religious power, cultural power, family power, wealth/money, globalisation, consumerism, etc.

The Group's suggestion for the 2005 focus on Asia was to have a study programme/project/process (facilitated by WCC and CCA) seeking to provide a survey and comprehensive account of the Asian Churches' (ecumenical) experiences in dealing with conflicts, violence and wars; reflecting on the lessons learned or unlearned from mistakes, failures/successes (if any) in various Asian countries.

The result/findings are to be shared with WCC, the REOs, World Confessional Bodies, ecumenical partners, etc. and with the wider constituencies.

NB. It was underlined that in all study, reflection and implementation, it is imperative that special attention is paid to the multi-faith and multi-cultural dimension.

Ad Mook reported on Group II, covering 4 countries in Asia and 3 ecumenical partners.

Envisaging the idea of a campaign making use of the world wide web and story telling about experiences of dealing with situations of violence, they proposed focus on **the CCA Assembly theme "Building a Community of Peace for all"**. Issues for attention specifically mentioned were ethnic issues, women trafficking and domestic violence / violence in family life, and inter-religious relations, with in the background the large looming context of globalisation.

Though the group had felt some reluctance about making a geographical selection, if a specific country was to be chosen for attention, they suggested this might be **Sri Lanka or Indonesia**.

Dr Rokaya expressed thanks to his group of 6 persons from 5 different countries and one ecumenical partner.

Group III saw the need for the Ecumenical Movement, the Churches and WCC to be agents for change and servants for peace. Jesus was proposing an alternative model of government and behaviour and we need to place much stronger emphasis on the Bible and Biblical Truth. Recognising the enormous scope of addressing the question of violence, we need to go back to examine root causes (e.g. such as poverty, politics, etc.) and undertake serious self-criticism and repentance, recognising the violence operating within the churches and being manifested within and by Christian communities. The Church must work with other communities to address violence and seek to bring peace. We also need to develop our own mechanisms to provide the churches with accurate information permitting them to decide how to proceed in their own work for peace.

A plea was made, in the light of the earlier Bible Study, for the idea of the Church as a servant for peace to be incorporated into the theme.

Mathews said the two proposals from Group I and Group II were on the table suggesting various action plans during the focus year. How to proceed with programmes to focus on Asia in 2005. There were two **concrete proposals for the consideration**:

Group I, suggested a study process in 2005

Group II, proposed to work around the theme, “Building a Community of Peace for All”.

Thinking of the wide implications of the issue of structural violence, Anthony Row wondered if the focus would be exclusively owned by the Asian churches, or whether churches from other regions would also be involved. He was told that this will all depend on the conceptualisation.

In a detailed discussion most participants agreed with the idea that there can be a wider theme for DOV Asia focus, and as the CCA General Assembly theme is very much related to this idea it is a good idea to adopt the theme related to Peace in Asia.

Mr. Gerber said he thought it would be best to keep the focus Asia-wide, permitting the use of examples from different countries to illustrate certain issues. He asked for stories about Asian experiences to be placed on the web-site, where special pages will be reserved for the Asia focus.

Referring particularly to the Group I proposal, Bishop de Chickera wondered how this new WCC initiative could be expected to bring new inspiration to the work of the Asian churches who had been struggling with issues of violence for the last 30-40 years already. Other participants believed the way forward was to go beyond CCA and WCC and work with all the people in the wider community, including those of other faiths.

Hansuli clarified that the WCC Assembly had decided to initiate the DOV, the Central Committee concretised the idea and plans, but the WCC does not own the DOV programmes. It is open to all and still new momentum and ideas are coming. There is no copyright. This is a continuation of what the Church has been doing for many years, but in our time questions can come in new ways and new means of communication are available. Not only is WCC not the owner, but it cannot do the work alone. The Logo is available for use by anyone wishing to use it, either in its original form or with modifications. Users are asked to post their own suggestions and initiatives on the web-site, which is also available for registering stories.

Ecumenical Development Co-operation and Asia Policies of Ecumenical Partners

Mathews George reported that Ms Hannelore Moll of Bread for the World was unable to be present for health reasons and Mr. Leo Bashyam of Christian Aid had had an accident in Bangkok on his way to Malaysia which prevented his coming to ARG meeting. He called on the other representatives of the ecumenical partners present to share the policies and programmes of their respective organisations in the Asia region. Mr Ad Mook, head of the Asia Team of the Global Ministry of the Uniting Church in the

Netherlands, Mr George Tumyr, Regional Representative for Norwegian Church Aid, based in Vientiane, Laos, Mr William H. Skip Dangers, of Church World Service, USA, Mr Caesar D'Mello of Christian World Service, Australia and Rev. (Deacon) Bill Harris of World Diakonia, Asia Pacific Region, from Australia, all then provided input on the work of their organisations covering the Asia Region and their own part within that work. Ad Mook explained the complexities faced by the agencies when they prioritise preferences to work with church and non-church partners. He challenged the ecumenical partners agency colleagues to understand the realities of the churches and related bodies whenever they make priorities in a particular country. Whose priority we set at the end is the question that needs to be confronted by the Northern partners. Caesar D Mello expressed his happiness to work with and through Church partners in the Asia region and as much as possible CWS Australia is committed to working through church partners.

Several questions were raised on ecumenical partners' involvement and work with churches in Asia. The question on WCC-ACT relations and ACT's relations with Churches in Asia also was raised during the discussion. A question was raised on the rationale of a Muslim individual, head of a non-Church organisation representing Asia in the governing board of ACT International. Mathews said that he did not have any idea about the selection of a member to Executive Committee of ACT or the election of this particular member to ACT Executive Committee, although he had heard about this only from two other ACT members from the region. Mathews said that he raised this question with ACT colleagues and was told that a non-Christian member from Bangladesh was nominated by LWF. Based on this information, Mathews expressed a concern to LWF colleagues in a joint Staff Group meeting of WCC and LWF.

The participants pointed out the wider implications of this kind of practice which will affect the Churches in Asia as Christians are living as minorities in Asia. **It was emphasised that WCC and other global ecumenical bodies need to provide a platform and opportunities for Churches in Asia to demonstrate their leadership and credibility in society.**

The Asia Secretary was requested to bring this matter to the notice of the concerned leadership of WCC and ACT.

Fourth Day

The fourth day's programmes started with worship led by Ipe Joseph and that was followed by third theological reflection on Diakonia and Justice. God's love is the deepest foundation of diakonia and it is best expressed in one of the most used verses, John 3:16. Incarnation thus becomes the expression of the diakonal nature of God. Jesus himself summarises his ministry as the servant of all. " For the son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many". At times, we are tempted to think that diakonia is confined to the ministry of ordained deacons and deaconesses. Another tendency is to limit diakonia to acts of charity, relief and rehabilitation. The demand of our time is that we engage ourselves in the struggle for justice through prophetic diakonia. What is more urgently required is the intervention of the churches in the socio-political situation of the world. Diakonia is a meeting point of all religions as our diakonal mission is for all. Overcoming violence and building communities, struggle to alleviate poverty, combating HIV AIDS, building up democratic societies and standing together for all causes of human rights are some of the things inter-religious diakonia can engage in. Anything which enhances life is what finally counts. Diakonia can enhance life to its fullness.

Discussion on Ecumenical Theological Education in Asia

Mr. Wati Longchar reported on ecumenical theological education in Asia through WCC-CCA joint programmes. He explained the efforts so far made to help bridge the gap between the churches and the theological colleges in the region. The comment was made that with no training in ecumenism, human development or management tasks, many present-day theological students think that pastoral work is all they need to do and it was hoped the proposed future actions planned would help rectify this.

Fely Carino thought courses in pastoral theology and migration would be valuable in view of the massive migration from rural areas into the cities.

Report of the Asia Secretary to the ARG – ‘Ecumenical Response to Asian Issues’ (Appendix– 1)

The Asia Secretary presented a detailed report on the activities of the Asia Desk during the period 2002-2003 and also a brief account of the programmes of various teams/ desks of WCC in Asia.

The participants received the report with appreciation and noted the increasing collaboration between WCC and CCA in organising programmes in Asia.

While commenting on the sharing of information about other WCC teams’ programmes in Asia and giving an overview about the total picture of WCC’s various involvement, a question was raised on how far Asia Desk is involved in the co-ordination of all these programmes in Asia. The Asia Secretary replied to this question by saying that each team’s mandate is different depending on programmes and facilitation. But the regional desks play a role in bringing better coherence and co-ordination and also facilitating assistance in establishing links with churches/ NCCs in a particular region and with concerned staff in an REO. This is a common practice in the house and all regional desks perform this function as this is one of the basic mandates and functions of the regional desks. The Asia Desk also facilitates this role and most of the teams/ desks seek the co-operation and assistance of the Asia Desk for their programmatic involvement in Asia and keep the Asia Desk informed of their activities, only very few staff prefer to do things in their own way. Mathews felt that the phenomena of “parachuted ecumenism” of WCC, as described once in the past by CCA, is no longer applicable and that WCC is committed to introducing better co-ordination in Asia related programmes within the house and in the region as much as possible.

Asia Desk Programme Plans : Priorities and Strategies

The Asia Secretary presented the programme plans of the Asia Desk which had been approved by the D&S Team and the WCC leadership.

It was proposed that as recommended at this session, priorities for future action need to be focussed in certain programmes/ issues:

Based on the earlier discussion on WCC’s role to address the issue of Migrant Workers in Asia, WCC was asked to take a lead in organising a Consultation of Asian Church leaders on

- **Uprooted People in Asia with focus on Migrant Workers.**

Based on the proposal in an earlier session on the DOV Asia Focus, it was proposed that WCC organise

- **A Consultation on the Survey of Asian Church’s involvement in Peace and Reconciliation.**

The theological reflections and discussions over the last three days underscored the significance to deepen Asian Church’s understanding on diakonal mission and it was proposed that an Asia regional

- **Consultation on Diakonia and Justice** be organised

Rev. Smith said a planned visit to China by Christians from Myanmar this year had had to be cancelled because of SARS. He hoped it could take place at some appropriate time in 2004, or otherwise that a Chinese group could visit Burma. China’s influence was very important for Burma and direct contacts with Chinese Christians would therefore be very valuable. He pointed out that in countries such as Myanmar, the value of ecumenical solidarity was difficult to assess, WCC support, encouragement, special attention and understanding had been of vital importance to the churches over the years and was deeply appreciated.

- **Asia Desk was requested to facilitate the visit of MCC leaders to China**

Dr. Rokaya said that the Human Rights situation in Nepal is deteriorating and international pressure is necessary to ensure peace and reconciliation in the country. He said that WCC and CCA had facilitated his participation at the UN Human Rights Session in 1999 Geneva and that was an occasion for him to meet with Ms. Asma Jahangir from Pakistan who was UN Rapporteur for Extra-judicial Killings. As an outcome of his conversation with her along with Mathews and Clement John at

Clement's residence in Geneva, Ms. Jahangir made an official mission to Nepal to enquire about the extrajudicial killing situation in Nepal.

- **Called for WCC's continued attention/ monitoring on Human Rights in Nepal and was requested to be involved in advocacy at the U.N**

The problem of churches confronted with legislation on biotechnology in their countries and the need for some kind of capacity/ awareness building on the subject was raised. Antony Row said that WCC has not done anything on this in Asia or that Asian churches are not aware about WCC's involvement in Asia. Mathews responded to this by saying that **WCC has been addressing this issue for a long time and Martin Robra has been in touch with CCA colleagues too.**

- **It was proposed to seek help from Rev. Martin Robra, WCC.**

Ad Mook thought the Uniting Church in the Netherlands might also be able to help as they had been involved in lobbying the European Union in Brussels.

The need for more awareness building programmes among Asian Churches on HIV/AIDS was proposed. Mathews said that **WCC Health Mission Desk has already been involved in various programmes in Asia mainly through CCA and other partnership programmes like SAEPP and MEPP and this co-operation and joint programmes will be increased in 2004.**

Ms Mangunsong drew attention to the problem posed to some smaller churches by the call for all to pay membership dues. She wondered if there could be some arrangement made for group contributions, as she feared otherwise some members would be lose their membership in WCC. Indonesian member churches are often not very aware of the ecumenical movement, unless it is at the time of WCC Assembly once every 7 years. She hoped some work could be done at the PGI Central Committee meeting or Assembly on how churches can be part of the global ecumenical family and how to participate in decision making. Mathews reported about the membership contribution dues of several Asian churches and also the decision of WCC to suspend the membership of certain churches which were non-cooperative or not responding to WCC's requests for membership contributions over the past several years.

Closing Session

The participants expressed a deep appreciation to WCC Asia Desk for organising the ARG which several Asian Church leaders representing various constituencies and also ecumenical partners were able to attend. They affirmed the need for annual ARG meetings demonstrating WCC's visibility in the region and WCC's willingness to accommodate ideas and views from the region for the world body's programme planning and sharing of information with its constituencies.

Mathews George expressed thanks to all the participants, the local host - the Malaysian Council of Churches, CCA and their staff and all who contributed to making the ARG meeting a success.

The meeting closed with a prayer and reflection led by Rev. Bill Harris.

REPORT FROM WCC ASIA DESK TO ARG

Report from Asia Desk to the ARG Meeting 2003

Ecumenical Response to Asian issues: WCC programmes in Asia

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has responded to emerging issues and concerns in a number of ways through various programmes and other ecumenical involvement during the period of 2002–2003. Let me try to list some of these responses from the World Council of Churches to the issues in Asia, which are pertinent in today's Asian context.

Asia Desk and WCC's Programmes in Asia

Asia Desk is one of the seven regional desks within the Regional Relations and Ecumenical Sharing (RRES) Team, which has been known since January 2003 as the **Diakonia and Solidarity Team** after the restructuring of programmes. Since its inception the WCC has placed central importance on serving human need and reaffirming the churches' commitment to diakonia (service), "so that all may experience fullness of life". During 2002-2003, the Diakonia and Solidarity team worked to strengthen ecumenical co-operation in diakonia in order to respond to the needs of marginalised groups. While many groups and partners in various regions are engaged in diaconal work, the WCC's unique contributions are its emphasis on building relationships and its priority on capacity building of churches and ecumenical organisations so they may better fulfil their own diaconal mission. The specific activities included in the promotion of regional perspectives in ecumenical responses to regions are promotion of dialogue and consultation and facilitation of regional groups. The role of the regional desks in WCC is significant in ensuring the coherence of WCC and other partners' relations with the regions and in integrating the voices, priorities and perspectives of the regions at the global level.

The Asia desk during the years 2002-2003 also worked closely with the partners and networks in Asia and coordinated with other teams in WCC programmes in Asia.

To achieve these goals, the D&S team focuses on four priority areas.

- **Sustaining Relationships for Solidarity and Witness,**
- **Creating Space for analysis and Reflection,**
- **Building Capacities and**
- **Developing a Coherent and holistic approach.**

As the role of the D & S team through Asia Desk has been envisaged and mandated, the Asia Desk tried to work within the framework of the following principles: Solidarity with the marginalised and excluded communities, expressed in the churches' commitment to justice and compassion, Strong belief in the churches' contribution to promoting transformation and change at all levels,

WCC General Secretary's Visit to Asia

WCC General Secretary Dr. Konrad Raiser visited six Asian countries in 2003 – Myanmar, Laos PDR, Thailand, Pakistan, India and Indonesia.

Dr. Raiser's visit to Myanmar, Laos and Thailand was the first official visit to these countries by a General Secretary of WCC. In India, he was able to attend an international consultation on marginalized communities (Dalits) and in Indonesia he attended an international consultation.

His visits were helpful in strengthening our common ecumenical relations and togetherness and also an opportunity to express the ecumenical family's solidarity to the churches and people in these countries.

The Asia Secretary made arrangements for the WCC General Secretary's visit and programmes in Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar and accompanied him to these countries. Mr. Clement John, Intentional Affairs Secretary made arrangements for the General Secretary's visit and programmes in Pakistan and accompanied him to Pakistan.

When Dr. Raiser completes 11 years of his service to WCC as General Secretary, he has already visited all Asian countries where WCC has member churches, except East Timor.

Relations with CCA and NCCs

The Asia desk continues to coordinate all WCC's relations with the REO, CCA. A joint liaison group functions for WCC-CCA relations and programmes and the Asia Secretary is a member of this group. The CCA has decided that the Asia Secretary be an ex-officio member of the CCA General Committee.

The Asia Desk keeps in regular contact with all NCCs in Asia.

Relations with ACT, ECLOF

The relation between ACT and Asia Desk has improved since a new Asia Appeals officer has joined ACT. In several areas, joint collaboration of programmatic involvement has been taking place (Eg. North Korea, East Timor, ACT Asia partners' meeting, etc.).

The Asia desk has been trying to assist the ECLOF Co-ordinating office to retrieve the capital investment borrowed by some organisations in Asia which has not been paid back.

The Asia Secretary has been deputed by WCC leadership to be a member of the International Director Board of ECLOF.

Asia Sunday Worship at WCC Chapel.

It has become a practice since 2001 that the staff of the Ecumenical Centre observe Asia Sunday on the following Monday at the WCC Chapel under the leadership of Asian staff at the Ecumenical Centre. In 2002, Rev. Francisco Vascondeles, Moderator of IPTL, East Timor led the worship on the theme Timor Lorese: Hope for New Life and in 2003 May, Bishop Dennis Dutton led the worship on the theme "For we are neighbours".

Participation in programmes and visits

The Asia Secretary participated in various Asia Desk programmes and related activities in Asia and other countries during 2002 – 2003 which was mainly to promote sustaining relationships for solidarity and witness among member churches in Asia, the regional ecumenical organisation –CCA and ecumenical development agencies/ mission boards.

2002

January

- Meetings with NCC Bangladesh, Church of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Baptist Church, Preparatory meeting of Capacity Building programmes of NCCs (January)
- Meetings with NCC Singapore
- Meetings with East Timor Protestant Church, Roman Catholic Church, Government officials (East Timor)
- ACT Asia Partners' Consultation, Bali, Indonesia

February

- WCC –CCA Consultation on Church leaders in Indochina, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- Meetings with CCA Staff on WCC programmes in Asia, Hong Kong
- Meetings with NCC Korea, PCK and Korean ecumenical diakonal organizations, Tenth Anniversary of Korean Society for Mission and Service in Asia, South Korea

March

- CCDB Round Table Core Group meeting (Geneva)
- WCC-CCA Strategic planning meeting and preparation for SAEPP Consultation (Geneva)

April

- Indonesia (PGI Crisis Centre) Round Table programme planning meeting (Geneva)

May

- Interview process and selection of CCDB Director, Bangladesh
- Meeting with Amity Foundation, Hong Kong
- CCA-WCC Liaison Group meeting, CCA General Committee, Taipei, Taiwan
- Asia Sunday worship at WCC Chapel focus on East Timor, Geneva

June

- Annual meeting of Ecumenical Network of Amity Partners (ENAP), (Dublin, Ireland)
- Meeting of Asian Network of Dignity of Children programme, Bangkok, Thailand
- ARG Core Group meeting, (Bangkok, Thailand)

July

- WCC-CCA Consultation on Church's Mission in Combating HIV AIDS, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- WCC-CCA Consultation on Towards' social and Human Development in South Asia, Colombo, Sri Lanka

August

- Asia plenary at WCC Central Committee (Geneva)

September

- Ecumenical partners' Consultation on SAEPP (Geneva)
- WCC-ACT staff team visit to North Korea (North Korea)
- Meetings with Churches in Beijing (China)

- Visit to China Christian Council, Shanghai, (China)

October

- General Assembly of church of Christ in Thailand
- CCDB Round Table meeting, Dhaka, Bangladesh

November

- NCC Philippines Round Table , Geneva
- East Timor Round Table, Geneva

2003

January

- Consultation of Ecumenical Enablers' Team in Asia (EETA), Bangkok, Thailand
- SAEPP Consultation Preparation and South Asia NCC General Secretaries' Meeting, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- Visit to Christian Hospital Chandragona inauguration of the New Block, Chittagong, Bangladesh
- Foundation Stone laying of CCDB Hope Centre, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- Dan mission Consultation on Witness and Service, Liselund, Denmark

February

- Accompanying WCC General Secretary during his official visit to (Madras) India, Laos

March

- Accompanying WCC General Secretary during his official visit to Thailand, Myanmar
- SAEPP Forum Meeting, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Partners meeting on Rehabilitation and Reconstruction in Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka
- CASA India Round Table, Haryana, India
- Visit of Chinese Religious Affairs Bureau officials and Amity Staff to WCC. (RAB's Visit to partners in Norway, Germany and Switzerland 20-29 March – organised by Asia Desk and ENAP, Geneva.

April

- Visit of China Christian Council (CCC) leaders to WCC
- Seminar on Church in China (CER and Asia Desk), WCC Geneva

May

- Visit of 13 Korean Church leaders to WCC and Switzerland (WARC & Asia Desk), Geneva

June

- Visit of 21 Korean Students and Theological teachers to WCC, Geneva
- WCC- CCA Liaison Group Meeting (CER & Asia Desk), Jakarta, Indonesia
- CCA Joint Programme Committee meetings, Cipayang, Indonesia

July

- Indonesia Round Table Core Group Meeting, New York, USA

August

- *WCC Executive and Central Committee*

September

- Consultation on Christian Marriage Acts in South Asian countries and its negative impacts on religious minorities. (Asia Desk, NCCs in Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka), Colombo, Sri Lanka
- REO General Secretaries meeting (represented CCA) , Bossey, Switzerland
- Consultation of WCC-REO and Ecumenical Agencies, Bossey, Switzerland
- NCC Philippines Round Table Meeting, Manila, Philippines

October

- MCC RT Core Group Meeting, Utrecht, Netherlands
- CCDB RT Core Group Meeting, Utrecht, Netherlands

November

- CCA –WCC Interfaith Consultation on HIV AIDS, Bangkok, Thailand

Updated Website on Asia Desk

The Asia regional part of WCC website has been updated with more information on various Asia related information.

Programme on Dignity of Children

As part of our effort to empower the Asian churches in their ministry with children, especially with the marginalised children, a meeting of the national and regional network of churches and ecumenical bodies involved in ministry among marginalised children will be held in Asia in collaboration with CCA's Faith, Mission and Witness programme on the theme - Affirming Fullness of Life and Dignity of Children for a Better tomorrow

Creating Space for Analysis and Reflection

The overall purpose of this programme is to facilitate adequate space for reflection, dialogue, mediation and action on ecumenical diakonia and development at the national, sub-regional and global levels and the building of South – North and South –South cooperation. The Asia desk helped create spaces in Asia for ecumenical reflection and action. The Asia Desk has endeavoured to be sensitive to the specificity and particular needs of the region and, on that basis, has provided advice, interpretation and mediation.

Asia Regional Group

WCC Regional Groups were established in 1972 with the original purpose of screening projects coming from the regions. After the consultation in Larnaca (1986) and the World Consultation on Resource Sharing in El Escorial (1987), the role of regional groups was largely redefined and since the Morges Consultation (1998) and the restructuring of WCC after Harare (1998), the regional groups have been mandated with specific objectives to assist WCC member churches and partners to strengthen reflection, coordination and joint action in international ecumenical development cooperation, to assist the WCC regional desk on analysis, concerns and programmes, analysis and interpretation of the socio-economic and political development in the region, identify priorities and recommendations for ecumenical actions in the region, contributing to planning and initiatives of new ecumenical diakonial activities and complementary actions, etc.

The last meeting of the Asia Regional Group was held in August 2001 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Although the membership of the ARG is composed of 13 members – 5 from WCC and 5 from CCA constituencies and 3 from ecumenical partners from Europe and North America, to the last meeting several members of WCC member churches, NCC General Secretaries and Asia Secretaries/ Desk officers of several ecumenical agencies also were invited.

In 2002, the planned meeting of the ARG was not held as there were budget constraints in WCC. However, a meeting of the Core Group of the ARG was held in conjunction with a WCC/ CCA meeting on Dignity of Children in Bangkok on 21-22 June 2002.

Dialogue on partnership and ecumenical sharing

The Asia Desk played a role in facilitating dialogue between churches and ecumenical bodies in Asia and ecumenical development partners and mission boards in relation to ecumenical sharing of resources and strengthening relations between churches and ecumenical bodies in the South and the North.

Coordination of Round Tables

The Asia Desk currently coordinates the following Round Tables or ecumenical resource sharing mechanisms in Asia:

- Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh
- Christian Conference of Asia
- Indonesia (PGI) Round Table
- National Council of Churches in the Philippines
- Myanmar Council of Churches
- East Timor Round Table (Ecumenical partnership for reconciliation and Reconstruction in East Timor)
- South Asia Ecumenical partnership Programme (SAEPP)
- Amity (China) Round Table
- Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Programme (MEPP)

The CASA Round Table is still a listed Round Table of WCC's resource sharing mechanism within the ecumenical family. However, for the past 8 years there have been problems existing in CASA-WCC relations for various reasons. Since a new leadership has assumed responsibility in CASA the relations between CASA and WCC have been improved. The new Director of CASA visited WCC Asia Desk within the last two years along with three other senior staff and has had discussions. The Asia Secretary attended the last CASA Round Table meeting for one day which was held in Delhi in March 2003.

The new resource sharing mechanisms initiated in 2002 and 2003 are East Timor Round Table, South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme (SAEPP) Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Programme (MEPP) and Amity (China) Round Table.

During 2002 and 2003, the following Round Tables and Core Groups of Round Tables met:

- CCDB RT Core Group in Geneva, April 2002 - Core Group
- Myanmar Council of Churches, Rangoon, October 2002 – Round Table
- CCDB Bangladesh in Dhaka, October 2002– full Round Table
- East Timor, R T, December 2002, Geneva
- NCC Philippines, RT, December 2002, Geneva

SAEPP Forum meeting, March 2003, Colombo.
NCC Philippines, RT, Manila, September 2003
MCC, RT Core Group, Utrecht, October 2003
CCDB, RT Core Group, Utrecht, October 2003

New initiatives in ecumenical sharing of resources

Ecumenical Partnership for Reconciliation and Reconstruction (EPPRET)

Even since ACT International announced its withdrawal from the support to YSAONA, the social development department of the IPTL, East Timor protestant church, the IPTL, has been requesting WCC to facilitate a resource sharing mechanism to assist YASONA and IPTL to continue their programmes and projects. The Asia Desk in consultation with the ecumenical partners organised a meeting of the church leaders from East Timor and the East Timor Round Table mechanism was established. A needs assessment of YASONA was conducted with the assistance of three ecumenical partners (CWS Australia, CWS USA and UCN Netherlands) and with the assistance of the ACT Asia Appeals Officer. The report of the assessment team will be circulated soon and the dates for the next meeting will be fixed.

South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme (SAEPP)

The SAEPP is an outcome of the ecumenical response to the needs of the churches in South Asia. This was initiated by the Asia Desk in collaboration with CCA to assist and accompany WCC and CCA member churches through five South Asian NCCs. SAEPP aims to promote coordination, and cooperation and closer linkages among churches and NCCs, ecumenical partners from Northern countries, CCA and WCC. The main foci of this partnership programme are: Assist the churches to deal with the growing menace of – HIV AIDS problem in South Asia, Equip the churches in Peace and Reconciliation ministry, Inter-religious co-operation and Capacity Building. Twelve ecumenical partners are accompanying five South Asian NCCs in this programme.

Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Programme (MEPP)

The CCA - WCC VLC Ecumenical Forum which has been functional for more than two decades is now passing through a transitional phase. A meeting of the Forum which met in Hong Kong in November 2001 decided to explore new ways of working together especially with the churches in these countries. It was felt that the Churches in all three countries in Indochina are officially recognised by governments in these countries and now the global ecumenical family's responsibilities will be to work together with Churches in respective countries and strengthen their activities. At the same time, it was noted that CCA has two programmes focusing on these countries – a Mekong Sub regional programme and an Indochina programme which both cover three of the Indochina countries. A more concrete plan for a common programme to work with the churches in Indo-China was emphasised as a priority. In the context of these priorities, discussions have been going on between WCC, CCA and Churches in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. As an outcome of this, a proposal has been made to start an integrated programme involving six countries in the Mekong sub-region. The Asia desk in collaboration with CCA will be facilitating a consultation of the church leaders from these countries, ecumenical partners who are operational in these countries, and also representatives from CCA and WCC. The consultation will be held in Geneva on 10-11 December 2003 where a proposal chalked by CCA in consultation with the churches in these countries based on the frame work of Mekong Ecumenical Partnership (MEPP) will be presented and discussed.

Amity Foundation (China) Round Table

The Core budget of Amity Foundation (China) has been co-ordinated by the Asia desk for several years. But in a changing context of the priorities and preferences of the Northern ecumenical partners, it has become difficult to continue the coordination of bilateral arrangements and funding mechanisms and the partners have suggested to have a more appropriate mechanism in which all partners, or at least most partners, could be present to discuss Amity's programmes and budget proposals. As an initial process of discussions, it was agreed that WCC Asia Desk will convene a Round Table meeting of all Amity partners. The Round Table meeting will be held in Geneva on 10-11 December 2003.

NCC Philippines Round Table

The last meeting of the NCC Philippines Round Table decided to discontinue the NCCP Round Table. Over the years several ecumenical partners withdrew from the round table mechanism due to various reasons and a few remaining partners were not in a situation to support the council with adequate funds. In this situation, the last meeting of the NCC Philippines Round Table was held on 25-26 September where it was decided to discontinue the Round Table meetings.

Consultations and Study programmes

The Asia Desk has organised / facilitated/ sponsored the following consultations and study programmes during the year 2002-2003:

Preparatory meeting of the International Peace Conference in the Philippines
Ecumenical Response to Social and Human Development
An Ecumenical Agenda to Combat HIV AIDS in South Asia

Christian Marriage Act in Pakistan and Bangladesh
Interfaith Conference on HIV AIDS
Peace and Reconciliation in Indonesia

Building Capacities

The specific objective of the Capacity Building programme is to strengthen the capacities of member churches and partner organisations to use sustainable and holistic methodologies which include strengthening theological reflection as a basis for diaconal work and promotion of a holistic approach to development. The Asia Desk has initiated capacity building programmes in Asia through several churches and councils with an effort to build up capacities of potential leaders of the churches and councils. In 2002-2003 Asia Desk assisted the Capacity Building Programme of:

- Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)
- Kampuchea Christian Council, Cambodia,
- Lao Evangelical Church, Lao People's Democratic Republic
- NCC Bangladesh
- NCC Sri Lanka
- NCC Philippines
- China Christian Council, China
- South Asian NCCs Forum -SACC
- NCC Pakistan.
- Protestant Church in East Timor
- NCC Nepal
- Myanmar Council of Churches
- Communion of churches in Indonesia (PGI)
- Organisational Management Training for Church leaders in Asia
- Leadership Development Training for Church leaders/ NCC staff in North East Asia.

Ecumenical Enabler's Team in Asia (EETA)

The Asia Desk jointly with the CCA initiated an Ecumenical Enablers' Team in Asia. The aim of EETA is to provide assistance and expertise to WCC and CCA member churches in their capacity building/leadership development programmes which will help ecumenical formation and building up of more efficient leadership in ecumenical councils and churches in Asia. Several of these resource persons have been taking leadership in organising trainings in countries such as Cambodia, Nepal, Bangladesh, East Timor, Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan and other sub-regional and regional level trainings in organisational management development.

Developing a coherent and holistic approach

The specific objective of this programme is to implement a holistic approach by the WCC and the churches towards meeting the human needs of the marginalised. Various projects and programmes supported by the Asia Desk in the past two years have helped to meet the needs of Asian churches and ecumenical organisations.

Coordination of multilateral solidarity supports

Multilateral solidarity support includes the support to the diaconal work of the churches and related organisations through accompaniment and advice and as needed to ensure that projects supported through multilateral sharing resources and channelling of financial and other resources to churches and related organizations with the twin purposes of strengthening their capacity to respond to the challenges facing them and supporting their common witness in society. During 2002 and 2003, the Asia Desk assisted several churches and ecumenical bodies in Asia through the coordination of multilateral sharing, which include:

SCM in Sri Lanka, WSCF Asia Pacific; Christian Conference of Asia (Mission and Evangelism, Justice Development and Service, Women, Faith Mission and Unity) ;; Kampuchea Christian Council; Centre for Legal Aid Assistance, Pakistan; Centre for Legal Aid Service (CLAS), Lahore, Pakistan, Asian Human Rights Commission; Documentation for Action Groups in Asia, Hong Kong; Nepal Christian Council, Church of South India Jaffna Diocese; PGI Indonesia; Communion of Baptist Churches in Bangladesh; Church South India Synod, Madras India; NCC Sri Lanka; NCC Philippines; Rehabilitation Centre for Sexually exploited Children, Cambodia; Myanmar Council of Churches; Korean Christian Federation, North Korea; Church of Ceylon, Evangelical Church in Vietnam, Lao Evangelical Church, Mercy Foundation, Taiwan, Dhatri Mongal Samiti, Bangladesh; CASA India; CCDB Bangladesh; Sunday School Programme of Baptist Churches, Bangladesh; Rehabilitation of rescued women in difficult situation, Church of Pakistan, Raiwand Diocese, Pakistan, Cambodia Christian Women's Association weaving and tailoring programme, Cambodian Christian Women's Association Spiritual Training programme, Deaf and Blind School in Jaffna, Sri Lanka; English Training of Church Workers in China; Skill Training Ministry in the Hill Country of CSI Jaffana Diocese, Sri Lanka ; Lay Training of Lao Evangelical Church; Promotion of Livelihood Education for Development and Grassroots' Empowerment, Bangladesh, Promoting a Culture of Peace and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka through skills of Conflict

Managements; C.S.I Youth Institute for Leadership Training for Dalit Christian Youth, Changanchery; Asian Human Rights Commission project on Disappearances – Healing and Reconciliation in Asia; CCA HIV/AIDS Interfaith Consultation; Coordination of the World Social Forum meeting in Bombay, India.

Women's local initiative grants: Asia Desk assisted several women's local initiatives of women's programmes on self empowerment, rehabilitation, capacity building and sustainable development in countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India. Support in 2002 and 2003 includes:

Apana Ghar - women's rehabilitation project, Pakistan, Committee for Asian Women (CAW), Thailand, Capacity building training of women in Kanyakumari Diocese, CSI, India; Income Generation for Bangladesh Rural Women – Dhatri Mongal, Lace Making project of CSI Kanyakumari Diocese; Rehabilitation of Girl Children project of Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bapatla, Andhra Pradesh, Cambodia Christian Women's Association, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Travel subsidies/ travel grants, and facilitation of ecumenical participation: During 2002-2003, participation and travel of several Asians in various international conferences were facilitated and travel grants for theological students were provided by the Asia Desk. Japan (2), Korea (2), Philippines (2), Bangladesh (1), India (3), Hong Kong (2), Indonesia (1), Thailand (1), Sri Lanka (4).

Strategic Initiative Fund (SIF) Projects : The SIF of WCC which enables the Diakonia and Solidarity team to respond to strategic, and emerging solidarity needs of churches and ecumenical partners in different regions helped 11 programmes and projects in Asia such as: Consultation of Northern Ecumenical partners and Church leaders on SAEPP; Promoting Peace and Reconciliation in war-torn Jaffna Peninsula in Sri Lanka; Ecumenical Enablers' Team in Asia and Curriculum Development ; Survey on Migrants from the Mekong Sub-region in Thailand; Formation of Ecumenical Disabilities Advocates Network (EDAN) in Asia ; Study Consultation on Christian Marriage Acts in Islamic Countries ; Peace Building Participatory Workshop, Cambodia/ Hong Kong; Consultation on Politicisation of Religion and future of secular democracy in India; Theravada Buddhists and Christian leaders' consultation, Myanmar; Peace and Conflict resolution training for Inter-religious leaders in Nepal.

Programme on Promoting Dignity of Children

The programme on dignity of children with an aim to empower churches in their ministry with children, especially to find ways to advocate for the rights of children and also to develop an appropriate regional approach to promote the dignity of marginalised children was implemented in Asia through regular information sharing. A regional consultation was organised in collaboration with CCA in November 2001 and follow-up programmes -- six national consultations were organised in collaboration with CCA and NCCs in Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Malaysia during the year 2002. A mapping project of Children's organisations is being carried out. The Asia Desk is assisted with support of an Intern, Ms. Ruth Lee from U.K, provided by Christian Aid.

DOV (Decade to Overcome Violence) in Asia

Since Asia Desk took the initiative of launching the DOV programme in Asia in collaboration with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in November 2000, the message of DOV has been promoted in WCC constituencies during the visit of Asia Secretary and participation in various programmes.

In 2002, programmes in the Philippines and Malaysia were supported with financial assistance for their organisation. Asia Desk has been involved in the coordination of a DOV related Consultation to be organized in Asia by WCC DOV Coordinating office in collaboration with CCA.

Programmes of other WCC Teams and Desks in Asia

The co-ordination of regional programmes of WCC has been one of the mandates of the regional desks in respective regions in the post Harare restructuring process. I am pleased to report to the ARG on some of those programmes and activities implemented or carried out by different teams of WCC, which have been shared with Asia Desk. I hope this will help us to understand WCC's programmatic involvement in Asia in 2002-2003.

Several of my colleagues from different teams / desks systematically shared information with Asia Desk from time to time about the programmes of their own respective desks and this was helpful to uphold a regional perspective within the house and also to share it with the Regional Ecumenical Organization, CCA.

Programme on Uprooted People: The programme on Uprooted people which was part of the IRT is now placed as part of the Diakonia and Solidarity Team and the Coordinator of the D&S Team Dr. Beth Ferris continues to be in charge of this programme, especially advocacy at the U.N and other international bodies, coordination with international humanitarian NGOs and project supports. The programme of support to partners working with Uprooted People extended assistance to six partners in Asia. These partners are Children's Rehabilitation Centre, Philippines, Hong Kong Christian Action, and Unlad-Kabayan, Philippines; Batis Centre, Philippines, OfERR (Sri

Lankan Refugee Rehabilitation organization) India, and CCA Migrant and Refugee programmes. (Staff: Dr. Beth Ferris)

Church and Ecumenical Relations: The Church and Ecumenical Relations Team now functions as a special programme under the general secretariat with the same functions, responsibilities and mandates. As has been in the past the CER has been in close contact with WCC member churches and Councils in Asia.

The WCC-REOs annual meeting, which is coordinated by the CER Team, was held in November 2001 in Cyprus, 2002 and 2003 in Geneva. Asia Secretary attended the 2001 November meeting as a representative of the RRES Team and in 2003; the Asia Secretary attended the meeting representing CCA on the request of CCA General Secretary as he could not attend the meeting. The CER organised a WCC staff team visit to China in March 2003 in which four WCC staff teams were involved: Church and Ecumenical Relations (Hubert Van Beek), Mission and Ecumenical Education (Carlos Ham, Simon Oxley) and Faith and Order (Kristen Storch). It was planned as a joint programme with the Asia Desk and the Asia Desk was involved in planning and preparation of the visit, but the Asia Secretary could not join the trip at the last minute due to other commitments. The CER organised a meeting of WCC member churches in Indonesia, which was held in Jakarta in October 2003. **The CER will be organising a Asia Consultation on the Global Christian Forum which will be held in Hong Kong in April 2004** under the theme: *"Jesus Christ in Asia - our journey together with Him"*. The consultation will explore the possibilities of engaging Christian churches and organizations in Asia from a wide range of backgrounds in common reflection on their witness and unity among the Asian people. The meeting will build on already existing conversations and partnerships between Christians in Asia and will contribute to the global Forum process from an Asian perspective. (Staff: Mr. Hubert Van Beek)

International Affairs: The International Affairs Team monitors the situation in different Asian countries and responds to crisis situations in different countries from time to time through Press releases, public issue statements, lobbying and advocacy at the U.N level on human rights. The human rights programme of International Relations sponsored the participation of several Asians at the U.N Human Rights Commission Sessions in 2002 and 2003 and they were able to be engaged in human rights advocacy at the UN level. The International Affairs team was one of the sponsors of the International Consultation on Peace organised by the NCC Philippines which was held in Manila in 2002. A follow-up meeting of the Manila Conference was held in Seoul, Korea in 2003 October in which also the IA team participated. The International Affairs team organised a Consultation on Peace and Security in South Asia in July 2003. Several statements related to Asia have been issued from time to time. A statement on an ecumenical pastoral solidarity visit to Pakistan was organised by the IA Team. The IA team has been closely monitoring the human rights and political situation in countries such as Indonesia, especially in West Papua and Aceh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. (Staff: Mr. Clement John)

Inter-religious Relations: The Inter-Religious Relations Team organised a Consultation in Hong Kong and has been in touch with churches in India and monitored the situation on Hindu-Christian dialogue on religious conversion. A meeting of selected WCC staff and a group of Hindu leaders was organised by the IRD staff at WCC during the visit of the Hindu religious leaders to Geneva. (Staff: Dr. Hans Ucko)

Justice Peace Creation: The **Youth Programme** of WCC organized an international consultation on Peace Building in a Multi-religious Context, which was held in Manado, Indonesia from February 27 to March 6, 2001. The Youth Desk implements its World Youth programme in Asia through the Youth Desk of CCA.

The JPC team supports different programmes of Asian churches, especially on issues related to globalisation, ecology, climate change, theological exchange programmes, etc.

The JPC team was a sponsor of the prep. COM meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development which was held in Bali, Indonesia in 2002. The networks in India dealing with issues on **Ethics and Climate Change** organised a Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change which was held in New Delhi in November 2002. The contacts with and assistance to ECTWT continues. In 2003, JPC's Climate Change programme cooperated with WACC and AISL in a workshop on new convergent technologies in Korea. (Staff: Dr. Martin Robra)

The Youth Programme of WCC has been cooperating with CCA to address the concerns on Youth in Asia. Together with CCA Youth WCC Youth programme supported ecumenical youth work in various Asian countries with Ch Fr. 120,000 in 2002 and 2003 as part of the World Youth Programme. The WYP includes both national and regional activities in Asia. The Youth Secretary provided leadership in a leadership training programme of NCC Pakistan and also joined WCC General Secretary's visit to Pakistan in March 2003. The WCC Youth will organise an Inter-religious Youth Meeting in Asia in collaboration with CCA Youth as part of a series of WCC seminars on Youth and Peace Building. (Staff: Rev. Freddy Knusten).

Mission and Ecumenical Education Formation: The Mission and Ecumenical Education Team fulfilled part of its mandate through involvement in the CCA's Asia Religious Educator's Forum and took part in an event in September 2003 and supported the programmes. (Staff: Rev. Simon Oxley). The lay training network, **OIKOSNET** is working in close cooperation with ACISCA

The **Ecumenical Theological Education** programme jointly carried out by CCA focuses on three main areas of concern such as Developing a Culture of Peace, Integrating HIV AIDS concerns in theological school curriculum and Leadership Transformation with emphasis on Gender Justice. A Consultation of theological college teachers in India with emphasis on DOV will be organised in Bangalore India in early December 2003. A colloquium of doctoral students was organised in India in 2003. In collaboration with ATESEA, a Consultation on Transformation of leadership was organised in Manila in November 2003. A training for archivists from theological colleges in Asia will be organised in 2004 May. (Dr. Nyumbura Njoroge and Dr.Watti Lontachar)

The Team Coordinator Dr. Carlos Ham participated in the WCC Staff Team visit to China in 2003. From the **Mission and Evangelism** perspectives, three proposals have been made in order to focus on WCC's work in China: a space should be provided for the China Christian Council to contribute to the process towards the 2005 World Mission Conference, especially on the theme of healing and reconciliation. For this purpose the CWME could provide funds to do some research in the rural areas on the practice of health and healing. A School for Evangelism will be organised in Asia. Mission and Evangelism's Ecumenical Letter on Evangelism published an article on Evangelism in China. (Staff: Dr. Carlos Halm).

The URM programmes in Asia are being implemented in close collaboration with the CCA's programme cluster Faith, Mission Unity. WCC URM provides substantial financial support to CCA's Urban Rural Mission programmes. WCC URM provided assistance for a Consultation on Afro-Asian solidarity to overcome the negative impact of globalisation in the developing world. (Fr. Kwami Labbi)

In 2002 and 2003, WCC's **Scholarship programme** supported 13 students from 6 Asian countries (Bangladesh 3, India 2, Korea 4, Myanmar 1, Nepal 1, Philippines 1, Sri Lanka, 1). In the first half of 2001, 5 students from 3 Asian countries were granted scholarships (Korea 3, Japan 1, and Philippines1). (Ms.Tara Tautri)

The **Health and Mission Desk** supported several programmes of different churches in Asia. Financial assistance has been extended to HIV / AIDS programmes of the Christian Conference of Asia. Three projects have been assisted in Asia to develop Curriculum focusing on HIV AIDS Concerns as part of theological education in Southeast Asia, Myanmar and South Asia. These programmes were organised in collaboration with the WCC-ETE/CCA theological consultant. Health Mission Desk jointly with Asia Desk and CCA organised a preparatory meeting for a WCC-CCA Consultation in South Asia which WCC, CCA and South Asian NCC staff attended. A Consultation on 'Combating HIV AIDS in South Asia and an Ecumenical Response' which was organised by Health Mission Desk and Asia Desk in collaboration with CCA was held in Colombo in August 2002. (Staff: Dr. Manoj Kurian)

Faith and Order will hold its next Plenary Commission Meeting in Malaysia from 28 July to 6 August 2004. There will also be a younger theologians' conference parallel to the event which will be sponsored by CCA and FABC. There may also be a regional meeting of the members of the Plenary Commission prior to the event, but still this has to be confirmed. (Staff: Rev. Alan Falconer). The F&O is engaged in a study on Ethnic Identity, National Identity and Search for the Unity of the Church and in this study process very strong involvement is involved. A study has been commissioned within this frame work on Fiji which has an Asian dimension too as ethnic Asian issues are very much alive in Fijian contexts. (Staff : Kirsten Storch). An input on the theological reflection on peace and justice process of the F & O, was shared at the CATS IV held in Chiangmai in August 2003. A similar input within the frame work of DOV will be shared in a meeting of the representatives of theological colleges in South Asia which will be held in Bangalore India. A Consultation of younger theologians from the South on the theme 'Interrogating and redefining power' will be organised by Faith and Order in Chiangmai, Thailand in 2003. (Staff: Rev. Dr. Deenabandhu Manchala).

WCC Press Releases on Asian issues: The Public Information Team of the Communication Cluster issued several press releases in 2002 and 2003 concerning Asia. The following is a list of Asia-related WCC Press Releases;

2002

- UN Commission on Human Rights: WCC addresses serious human rights situation in Papua, Indonesia
- The economics of evangelism: an ecumenical challenge in Bangladesh
- Bangladesh: struggling to survive
- 'Another world is possible' - Ecumenical team maintains critical stance for Fourth (Ministerial) Session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Bali, Indonesia
- East Timor: hope for new life
- Pakistan killings: WCC calls for perpetrators to be brought to justice
- Ecumenical delegation to visit churches in Pakistan
- WCC pastoral delegation to Pakistan learns extent of Christians' trials and tribulations

2003

- WCC general secretary to visit Asian countries Christian minorities not alone
- WCC visit to Laos: Raiser stresses co-operation for peace and reconstruction
- On visit to Thailand, Raiser suggests response to globalise violence: "Overcome evil with good!"
- Myanmar: Raiser points out discrimination against Christian minorities, affirms role of interfaith dialogue

- Pakistan foreign minister says Islamic leaders should thank European and US Christian churches
- WCC to denounce increasing violence against Dalits in India
- Pakistan: blasphemy laws "a source of victimisation and persecution of minorities"
- A seminar on the church in China
- South Asian churches on "long and arduous journey" to peace
- WCC in solidarity with Sri Lankan churches

The Communications Team sponsored three journalists from Asia and accredited them to the Central Committee meetings in 2002 and 2003.

Three staff from the Communication department attended a meeting of the Global Network of Ecumenical Communicators held in Bangladesh and after the meeting they attended several programmes including visits to rural areas organised by NCC Bangladesh and CCDB through the requests of the Asia Desk.

Colleagues at the Public Information Team are engaged in a process of updating the list of Asian ecumenical journalists in cooperation with the Asia Desk. (Staff: Sara Spicher, Juan Michel)

Coordination of WCC activities in the region

In the last joint meeting of the ARG and PERG, members of the group raised concerns over the lack of a policy of coordination and cohesion within WCC for programmes that are being implemented in Asia and the tendency of WCC teams or staff to bypass the local ecumenical bodies. WCC was accused in the past several years by Asian Churches and the Regional Ecumenical body, CCA of having a policy of "parachuted ecumenism". That means, WCC staff members plan programmes in Geneva and find a local partner elsewhere in Asia through their contacts, quite often bypassing the REO or National Councils or even local churches. CCA has been challenging this policy of WCC for some time. This was raised in WCC-CCA Joint Liaison Committee meetings in the past. But, the situation has been improving and more visible signs of co-operation and coordination are now taking place and the Asia Desk has been playing an important role to keep up this good spirit of mutual cooperation and coordination by working with churches and councils in the respective regions.

As it is mandated and envisaged, one of the functions of the Diakonia and Solidarity Team is *"to co-ordinate the development of WCC responses to regions in collaboration with other teams, through systematic information sharing with staff about developments and activities in the regions, and assistance in the identification of regional priorities and in WCC visits and programmes in specific regions"*. The D & S team has been trying to fulfil this task through regional desks. The Asia desk has tried to uphold this spirit and endeavoured to respond to this mandate in order to facilitate WCC's regional approach with better cohesion and understanding of the region and its realities and specificities.

I have been trying to draw a map of WCC's concerns with regards to Asia and also the global ecumenical organisation's programmatic involvement in Asia. I have been in this position for little over three years, but the fact is that, like several of my other colleagues, I joined the staff of WCC during its worst period financially within its existence over half a century. Well, as it is described in Charles Dickens's novel "best of times and worst of times", every individual and organisation will have to face this reality of facing the best and the worst times in history. The WCC has been facing financial difficulties for some time and this has affected WCC programmes and the availability of human resources to implement the programmes. The style and nature of our work and the system and structure of the Council has also undergone changes in the past few years. In the midst of the changes that have been taking place in the global ecumenical movement, we try to continue to cope with the heavy workload and to adjust to the realities and challenges that we are facing in our day to day work.

Mathews George Chunakara
Asia Secretary

28 November 2003