

Young Christian leaders from Asia begin “YATRA” in Cambodia



Shakespeare Sigamoney, YATRA participant from India, brought a drum to Siem Reap to signify struggles of Dalits for social justice which, he says, is an integral part of interfaith harmony.

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Exploring realities of multi-religious societies and discovering new ways of working together as faith communities to promote justice and peace, young Christian leaders from Asia have gathered in Cambodia to take part in a two-week training programme called Youth in Asia Training for Religious Amity (YATRA).

The training initiative sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC) started on 8 June, with a prayerful opening ceremony at the Metta Karuna Reflection Centre in Siem Reap, founded and run by Sister Denise Coghlan, known for her work with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997.

At the opening ceremony, some thirty participants were present, each between the ages of 20 and 35, coming from Cambodia, Thailand, India, Philippines, Indonesia, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Taiwan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, East Timor, Indonesia, Japan and China.

A first-time initiative of the WCC's programme for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, the training will develop the knowledge of its participants in the areas of Christian self-understanding and witness in multi-faith societies, ecological, economic and gender justice from an interfaith perspective, as well as inter-faith peace-building, healing and meditation.

The history of conflict in Cambodia, Asian spirituality, as well as teachings of justice and peace within Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, will be among the themes addressed by the YATRA participants.

“In contexts where religion often is used to perpetrate violence, participants of the YATRA will discover and discern effective means to transform its use for peace-building and justice

instead,” said Rev. Dr Peniel Rajkumar, the WCC's programme executive for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, and organizer of the training.

He explained that the term *Yatra* literally means pilgrimage in various Indo-Asian languages, which corresponds well with the WCC's call for a “pilgrimage of justice and peace” issued by its 10th Assembly in Busan.

Among instructors in the YATRA training are Vannath Chea, Cambodian researcher and political analyst, Sunila Ammar from the Christian Conference of Asia, Dr Clare Amos, the WCC's programme executive for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, Dr Meera Baidur from the Manipal Centre for Philosophy and Humanities in India, Kasta Dip from India Peace Centre, Emma Leslie and James O' Keefe from the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Athena Peralta, WCC staff member, Rev. Dr Martin Sinaga from the Jakarta Theological Seminary and Rev. Dr Simone Sinn from the Lutheran World Federation.

The YATRA training will continue in Siem Reap until 21 June.