



ACRP in Action: Its Vision, Mission and Flagship Projects

ASIAN CONFERENCE OF RELIGIONS FOR PEACE (ACRP)
RELIGIONS FOR PEACE ASIA (RFP AISA)

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1. Introduction

Religions for Peace International, now with its headquarters in the UN Plaza in New York, was founded in 1970 with its First World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan. It now has 124 member countries and works closely with the UN. Based on the tenets of truth, justice and human dignity, its members are active in their home countries.



ACRP 8th General Assembly

In 1976, the **Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP)**, also known as **Religions for Peace Asia (RfP Asia)**, was formed and now represents over half of humanity. It is the world's largest regional body of religiously inspired people working for peace and interreligious harmony.

2. ACRP's Member Countries

As of January 2020, it has 21 member nations in the Asia-Pacific region with Timor-Leste scheduled to join late in 2020:

Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand

3. ACRP's Vision

ACRP promotes common action amongst faith traditions and religious communities across the Asia and Pacific region for peace, religious harmony and community cohesion. Multi-religious cooperation for peace at regional, national and local levels is the hallmark of ACRP. This cooperation includes but also goes beyond interreligious dialogue and bears fruit in common concrete action. It fights against religious perversions such as terrorism and abuse. It constitutes a powerful network for mutual cooperation and cross-national and interfaith support.



ACRP Executive Committee meeting in 2019

Through ACRP, diverse religious communities discern “deeply held and widely shared” moral concerns such as transforming violent conflicts, bringing about just and harmonious

societies, advancing sustainable development goals, caring for the earth, promoting nuclear and conventional disarmament, protecting human rights, and promoting the equal dignity of all forms of life. ACRP translates these shared moral concerns into concrete multi-religious action.

4. ACRP's Mission

The mission of ACRP is to promote Asian spiritualities and interreligious awareness and harmony as well as global and regional cohesion in the pursuit of peace, justice and human dignity and to uphold and develop the various religious heritages and spiritualities of the Asia-Pacific region in accordance with the authentic values of religion and spirituality. ACRP translates these shared spiritual and moral concerns into concrete multi-religious action.



ACRP Executive Committee meeting in 2019

5. ACRP's Flagship Projects

With the determination of the members of ACRP to make the organization a more action-driven organization and to nourish it to be a movement, and not just a platform of meetings, ACRP has identified the ACRP Flagship Projects in April 2019 with five prioritized project areas, namely 1) human trafficking, 2) education on the dignity of life, 3) conflict transformation and reconciliation, 4) development and the environment and 5) advancement of youth leadership.

1) Human Trafficking

Human trafficking covers such multi-faceted issues as sexual exploitation, forced labor, illegal organ trafficking, domestically forced labor and forced crime, etc. According to the International Labor Organization, the victims of human trafficking number over 40,000,000 people.



RfP Philippines' project: "Preventing Human Trafficking"

The Philippines and Indonesia, in particular, where many cases of human trafficking are being reported, are determined to eradicate human trafficking cases through mental care programs for the victimized women and girls and through offering training courses for care-

takers.

Human trafficking is not an exclusive problem of the developing countries. The developed countries, which are regarded as the beneficiaries of human trafficking, bear responsibility for curbing the cases of human trafficking throughout the region. ACRP led by the Asia and the Pacific Women of Faith Network (APWFN) and *Religions for Peace Philippines* carries out an advocacy program for anti-human trafficking.

2) Education on the Dignity of Life

ACRP strongly believes that the respect for human dignity and human rights are fundamentally important pre-requisites to eradicate poverty and racial and religious discrimination. From an educational perspective, in particular, we spare no efforts in propagating such universal values throughout the Asia-Pacific region.



RfP Bangladesh's project: "Preventing Child Labor"

Aiming at the empowerment of the vulnerable such as women and children, ACRP through its national chapters are engaged in advocacy activities against child labor, child marriage and child trafficking, and those for improving the status of women in societies and promoting self-support in communities, while re-affirming their fundamental rights in households, villages and cities and offering opportunities for vocational training. Education on the dignity of life is a pan-Asian issue.

3) Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation

Quite a few intra-national and regional conflicts are being witnessed in the Asia-Pacific region. As a priority, ACRP through the relevant national chapters is promoting peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula and bilateral dialogue between Bangladesh and Myanmar regarding the Rakhine state of Myanmar, the so-called Rohingya refugee issue.



A consultation for peace in Northeast Asia

For peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula, the *Korean Council of Religionists* (KCR) and the *Korean Conference of Religions for Peace* (KCRP) are regularly engaged in informal consultations. And *Religions for Peace Bangladesh* and *Religions for Peace Myanmar* in consultation with the secretariat in Tokyo are exploring appropriate opportunities in building a platform for bilateral dialogue.

4) Development and the Environment

In the Declaration adopted at the Eighth ACRP Assembly held at Incheon in the Republic of Korea in 2014, a recommendation for action was incorporated: that “National chapters...establish environmental programs of planting at least one tree every year...” In response, various national chapters of ACRP, including *Religions for Peace Japan*, carry out programs for environmental protection, including forestation programs. In particular, the young leaders of ACRP are very active in this field.



CCRP's project: Interfaith Exchanges and Shared Future for Mankind

In addition, the *China Committee on Religion and Peace (CCRP)*, which is chairing the Working Commission on Development and the Environment (one of the taskforce ACRP Working Commissions), convenes annually an international seminar on environmental issues. CCRP's endeavors help in strengthening the commitment of ACRP to a critically important issue of the environment regionally and globally.

5) Advancement of Youth Leadership

It is often said that the youth are the hope of the future. But ACRP is of the view that the youth are the hope not only of the future but also of **the present**. With this conviction, ACRP is engaged in the process of empowering young leaders of the organization, convinced that the empowerment of the youth stems from their own initiatives.



APIYN Youth Peace Camp in 2019

ACRP sees the value of the ‘APIYN Camp’ organized annually by the *Asia and Pacific Interfaith Youth Network (APIYN)* in Seoul (2014), Phnom Penh (2015), Manila (2016), Jakarta (2017), Yangon (2018) and again in Manila in 2019. In these camps, a large number of young people in the faith communities in the Asia-Pacific region became committed to challenges our region faces. ACRP also offers subsidies to programs/projects initiated by the young members of the selected national chapters.

6. Other Projects in Recent Years

ACRP in collaboration with *RfP International* and *RfP Nepal* provided immediate survival relief and temporary shelters to villagers badly affected by the Nepal April-May 2015 earthquake. Since 2017, ACRP has extended its assistance to improving villagers' living

conditions by building temporary houses and giving vocational training for the women in those villages.



A fact-finding mission to inquire about the damages of Nepal earthquakes

In September 2017, the Secretaries-General both of *RfP* International and ACRP released an urgent joint appeal for members of the *RfP* network to respect the inviolable human dignity and actively protect all vulnerable people in the Rakhine state, calling for the cessation of violence. In collaboration with *RfP Bangladesh*, in the meantime, the *RfP* family has acted quickly in raising funds to assist the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.



Project for the Rohingya refugees (delivering relief supplies)

National chapters of ACRP such as Australia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka among others are very concerned with the protection of children's rights. They have been engaged in advocacy programs and carried out national projects.

Environmental protection including climate change is another issue, being directly addressed by many national chapters of ACRP such as Australia, China, India, Japan, Mongolia and Myanmar with their respective programs/projects. In particular, *RfP* Japan has carried out an impressive afforestation project in cooperation with the Saitama prefectural and Tokorozawa City governments.



RfP Japan's afforestation project

Many ACRP national chapters such as Australia, Bangladesh, Philippines, Republic of Korea and Thailand joined their national programs, celebrating UN International Days, which include the UN Interfaith Harmony Day and the UN International Day of Peace. ACRP attaches great importance to the partnerships with UN agencies, inter-governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, etc. The national chapters of ACRP are an effective apparatus for partnership building. The Queensland affiliate of the Australian

chapter in 2014 established the G20 Interfaith Summit which continues each year alongside the G20 Summit of the world's political leaders.

In terms of ACRP's partnership with governmental authorities, 'Religions for Peace Advisory Forum on National Reconciliation and Peace' was convened three times in Myanmar in 2018 and 2019. In these fora, not only religious representatives but also governmental and military representatives have met face to face and carried out very fruitful consultations for reconciliation and peace in their country.



A photo, Religions for Peace

7. ACRP's Leadership

ACRP has a governing board composed of member nation delegates with an executive council led by the co-presidents with a moderator and deputy moderator and an executive secretary-general. The co-presidents are:

➤ **Professor M. Din Syamsuddin (Indonesia, Muslim) *Moderator**

Dr. Din Syamsuddin is Professor of Islamic Political Thought at the National Islamic University, Jakarta. He served as President of Muhammadiyah from 2005 to 2015, as well as President of the Indonesian Council of Ulama during 2014-2015, and now (2015-2020) is also Chairman of the Advisory Council of the Indonesian Council of Ulama. He also served as Special Envoy of the President of the Republic of Indonesia for Interfaith and Inter-civilization Dialogue and Cooperation from November 2017 until September 2018. He has been active on interfaith dialogues and cooperation, as he became Presidium of the Inter-Religious Council – Indonesia as well as Chairman of the Center for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilizations (CDCC), and Chairman of the World Peace Forum based in Jakarta.

➤ **Emeritus Professor Desmond Cahill (Australia, Catholic) *Deputy Moderator**

Desmond Cahill OAM is Emeritus Professor of Intercultural Studies at RMIT University, Melbourne and chair of Religions for Peace Australia. After his theological and psychology education in Australia and Rome, he developed his academic expertise in immigrant and refugee movements, including cross-cultural communication and second language education. It also includes the study of multicultural and multi-faith societies, particularly the governance of religion and religious diversity. He is a world expert on child abuse in faith-based institutions. He is a foundation member of Victoria Police's Multifaith Council, and formerly chair and a long-standing board member of the Australian Multicultural Community Services. In 2010 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia by Queen Elizabeth for 'his services to intercultural education and to the interfaith movement'.

➤ **Archbishop Heejung Kim (R.O. Korea, Catholic) Co-President**

Archbishop Kim is Archbishop of Kwangju and has served as Representative President of the Korean Conference of Religions for Peace since 2018, President of the Committee for Promoting Christian Unity and Interreligious Dialogue of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Korea (CBCK) since 2005, member of the Episcopal Commission for Doctrine since 2005, Chair of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) since 2006, member of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue since 2007 and of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity since 2008 and also member of the Special Episcopal Commission to Promote Beatification and Canonization since 2008.

➤ **Venerable Li Guangfu (China, Taoism) Co-President**

Master Venerable Li Guangfu is from the Han ethnic group and was born in China in 1955. He later became a Taoist priest. Since 2002, he has been the host of the Zixiao Taoist temple in Wudang Mountain and President of the Wudang Taoist Association. Now he is a standing member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Vice President of the China Committee of Religions and Peace and President of the China Taoist Association.

➤ **Ms. Lourdes Mastura (Philippines, Muslim) Co-President**

Maria Lourdes Salma Veloso Mastura is President of the Interreligious Council of the Philippines, Religions for Peace. She is also a trustee of the Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC). Under previous presidencies, she was a commissioner in the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women which is directly under the Office of the President. As the Dean of the College of the Sultan Kudarat Islamic Academy, she helps in the administration of this institution which was founded by her husband, Datu Mastura, and named after his ancestor Sultan Dipatuan Mastura Kudarat.

➤ **Reverend Nichiko Niwano (Japan, Buddhist) Co-President**

*Rev. Nichiko Niwano is president of Rissho Kosei-kai, which is a global movement of engaged Buddhists who strive to apply the teachings of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the foremost Buddhist scriptures, in their daily lives and contribute to world peace. He firmly believes in walking on the Buddha's Way side by side with other members. He is an honorary president of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (RfP) International, a co-president of the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace (ACRP), and the president of the Religions for Peace Japan (RfP Japan). He previously chaired a plenary session during the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in 2000. His writings published in English include *Modern Meditations*, *The Inward Path*, and *My Father, My Teacher*.*

➤ **Dr. Lilian Sison, (Ex-officio, Chair of Asia and Pacific Women of Faith Network, Philippines) Co-President**

Dr. Lilian Sison is Director of International Relations and Programs at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. She has wide experience over three decades in University administration and curricula development,

including senior academic posts as Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Rector of Academic Affairs and Research. In addition to her academic work, Dr. Sison is engaged in faith-based advocacy in her capacity as Secretary General of Religions for Peace (RfP) Philippines and Chair of the Asia Pacific Women of Faith Network (APWFN). She organized multi-faith action programs and capacity building projects on mental health and trauma healing for women, internally displaced youth, the armed forces of the Philippines and in Child Protection Programs in the conflict areas of Central Mindanao. As Chair of APWFN she is currently working on a program in advocacy against human trafficking. Dr. Sison has given presentations in international meetings and conferences in many parts of the world, sharing good practice in faith-based action programs.

➤ **Mr. Narayanapillai Vasudevan (India, Hindu) Co-President**

Mr N. Vasudevan, as a senior Gandhian peace activist and firm believer in ahimsa (nonviolence), has devoted his life to the promotion and propagation of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. He is currently the Secretary-General of Religions for Peace India (New Delhi). At present he is the Director of the Indian Council of Gandhian Studies in New Delhi. For five years, he was General Secretary of the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh, an institution founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1932 for removal of 'untouchability' and for upliftment and welfare of the under classes. He also served as Secretary of the National Gandhi Memorial (Gandhi Samadhi) at Rajghat, New Delhi for four years. Mr. Vasudevan is associated with several non-governmental organizations such as the Gandhi Peace Foundation, the Violence-Free India Foundation, the Global Campaign for Creation of Departments of Peace (DoPs) in national governments, Shanti Sena (Peace Brigade), and the Gandhi Media Centre.

Secretary-General

➤ **Reverend Nobuhiro Nemoto (Japan, Buddhist)**

Since 1980, Nobuhiro Nemoto has been the Liaison officer at IARF (International Association of Religious Freedom) secretariat at Frankfurt, program officer for the UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) in Geneva, Head of RKK Public Relations Section, Deputy Director of RKK External Affairs Department, Minister of RKK Tsuchiura and Kobe Dharma centers, Director of RKK External Affairs Department, Special Advisor for interreligious cooperation, Chairperson of Donate A Meal Peace Fund, member of the RKK board, member of WCRP Japan board, head of the WCRP Japan Task Force for refugee assistance and Executive Specialist of the Secretariat Department and Co-president of NPO JEN (Japan Emergency NGO). He has engaged in assistance activities for the refugees of Vietnam, Cambodia, Kurdistan, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, and Afghanistan. He has completed the master's course on Human Security at the University of Tokyo. He is now a doctoral candidate in the same program.



ACRP Executive Committee Meeting in 2019