

BUILDING BRIDGES, TRANSFORMING LIVES!

"BUILDING BRIDGES, TRANSFORMING LIVES! ", the pulsating heartbeat and theme of the Transform World South East Asia (TWSEA) Poverty & Ideology "Walk & Talk" Conference held from 14-17 September 2015 in Indonesia, drew 140 specially identified leaders (half of whom were key Christian decision-makers of their nations) from the 11 SEA nations.

As often social and economic issues in Southeast Asia are intimately linked to cultural, religious and ideological contexts, participants came together with other like-minded leaders from the region to seek God, consult, learn, share and grow together as 'fire-starters' in engaging others of different ideologies and reduce poverty in the South East Asian nations!



In today's postmodern context of rapid change, progress and innovation, many modern megacities /urban centres with technologically advanced societies exist alongside thousands of traditional, tribal ethnic groups living in rural subsistence villages in this region of Southeast Asia of contrasting disparities where the gap between the rich and poor is continuing to become wider. Although economic growth in Southeast Asian countries has been encouraging in the last two decades, poverty persists with 63.5 million people living under the poverty line (FAO The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014) and is still a major issue in the region with all its consequences in the form of human suffering, low human development, poor health, orphan concerns, human trafficking, etc.

Peppered with prayer to centre every participant in God's purposes and spiced with a colourful multiethnic-multinational opening night parade, this conference initiated the process of Southeast Asian Christians coming together to address the 2 primary concerns of nearly every nation in the SEA region:

- a. alleviating poverty & enabling the poor/homeless to become empowerers of others.
- b. building bridges with others of different ideologies to positively impact the community.
(Southeast Asia has 4 main ideologies - Islam, Buddhism, Catholicism & Communism.)



Powerful models and testimonies of God's wisdom, love and favour to build bridges of peace and hope from various parts of South East Asia set the framework for the conference. A sprinkling of some of these include the touching and transforming of lives by alleviation of poverty through micro-financing and job creation in the rural areas of Myanmar, reaching out to and raising homeless/orphan children in Thailand, transforming slums to produce treasure from trash both physically and spiritually in the Philippines, livelihood and educational projects in Laos, standing up peacefully for the dignity of the poor in Timor Leste, natural farming in Brunei as well as providing systematic healthcare, building wells, providing educational scholarships, creating media awareness of opportunities to empower and equip in Vietnam.

A moving testimony from Cambodia further enhanced the momentum of the conference: "Taking the initiative at one end of a large river to rebuild a broken bridge which had connected two different provincial communities in Cambodia thereby affecting transportation and economy of the 2 communities, church leaders and members were initially viewed with suspicion by the majority of Buddhists living in the surrounding areas. The Christians continued their efforts to build in love and

after two days, Buddhists monks from the opposite side of the river came to partner the efforts to rebuild the bridge by beginning from their side of the river saying, " Let's meet halfway as we join hearts and hands for the communal good!" The Christians's courage to make the first move despite being misunderstood certainly opened doors for better understanding and transforming lives!"

With a Cutting-Edge programme of Practical Workable Models to understand, build bridges and work together harmoniously with others of different ideologies, this conference empowered participants through personal engagement and experience! Witnessing and 'immersion' into interfaith mass wedding celebrations for the poor/ homeless which have tangible impact on every sphere of society such as arts, business, family, education, media, religious institutions and the government, clearly highlighted various avenues of partnership to impact community for e.g. helping and advocating for the rights of the 96 million adults in Indonesia who are poor, homeless and without Identity cards. Participants from the SEA nations were also deeply enriched and enlightened by the depth of friendship and respect wrought by Christ's love with those of different ideologies and distinctly displayed during visits to the Quranic schools and at the interfaith dialogue between Christian leaders and high level Islamic scholars/clerics.



To further facilitate 'hands-on' experiences, there were field trips to some ministries of the House of Love or Yayasan Pondok Kasih (YPK) which for more than 20 years has been a concrete model of loving compassionate service in Indonesia to the homeless/poor/slum communities to positively impact the alleviation of poverty and mobilize the helped to become catalysts in helping others! YPK is founded and helmed by Hana Ananda (Chairperson of the Conference) who embodies the Transforming Power of Christ's love through her engagement with the poor and those of different ideologies such as Muslims, Confucianists, Hindus, etc. by building bridges of love with them that they feel so comfortable to call her 'Mama'. YPK has started medical clinics, pre-schools, livelihood projects as well as advocates for birth certificates and IDs for the homeless who live under bridges, in cemeteries, etc.

Excited about what they had seen, experienced, learnt and prayed about, the SEA delegates engaged with and encouraged one another through the sharing of ideas and resources as they envisioned and presented practical action steps for 2015-2016 both in their respective spheres and nations as in the following:



- CONFERENCES (Prayer; Gen Y)
- BUILD BRIDGES WITH OTHER FAITHS
- EDUCATION (Scholarships; Teachers)
- FAMILY (Seminars, Outreach Camps)
- POVERTY ALLEVIATION
 - Awareness Conference – Business, Env
 - Income Generation/Livelihood Training;
 - Micro- Finance
 - Water Provision
 - Medical Missions
 - Certification of Marriages of Homeless
 - Pilot Village Transformation

To cap this and endorsed by TWSEA Regional Facilitators (Iman Santoso & Juliette Arulrajah), they consecrated themselves before God and one another to be a covenant of promise for the poor and a bridge of hope for those of other ideologies even as they embraced the Million Village Challenge presented by Hal Jones, the TW International Facilitator for Poverty Challenge with a desire to equip the next generation to uplift the lives of the poor!

By South East Asians for South East Asians, this conference clearly underscored South East Asian flavour, ownership and leadership. Strategic, motivating and passionate leaders from each of the 11 SEA nations constituted 95% of the keynote, devotional and plenary speakers as well as the sphere and national dialogue facilitators - ranging from National Presidential Peace Award Winners from 2 nations to wise visionary key national interdenominational leaders to UN- related NGO leaders to strategic Gen Y leaders! They certainly were instrumental in igniting, energizing and nourishing participants with new paradigms and unwavering purpose to 'build bridges & transform lives' through rebuilding vision (identity), restoring values (integrity), repairing broken walls & restoring vineyards!

Indeed, as participants went forth from this conference, their hope was to be poised polished arrows released to birth new dreams, visions, directions, breakthroughs and purposes to transform lives in their unique ways for their communities, their spheres of influence, their nations and the next generations!



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