Learning From Each Other

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) now has 88 young people in 16 countries who have completed the 14-week program — the Forum’s main activity that explores and teaches about our various identities, including our religious identity; ways that we respond to differences and conflict; the violence of development; and transformation of ourselves and our communities.

Naturally, most of our participants are from Asia; but at the 2012, we also had two Native American women from the United States and Canada and a staff member of a local YMCA in northeast England. We are now in the midst of an important initiative to train a small number of these alumni to be resource people in developing the leadership of our regional interfaith network for peace with justice, or just peace. This process began last September with two workshops — one on community organizing in Sri Lanka and the other on human rights in Indonesia. A third workshop was held in Cambodia on tools for transformation — the use of art, music and drama for education and advocacy on social, economic and political issues.

Six alumni attended our human rights workshop in Indonesia. They included two Buddhists from Cambodia, three Muslims from Indonesia and a Muslim from the Philippines. People in all of these countries are dealing with a variety of human rights problems, whether it is land-grabbing in Cambodia that affects people’s right to housing and a livelihood, or religious intolerance in Indonesia, or extrajudicial killings and disappearances in the Philippines. One criterion for the selection of our participants was their national context as well as their work, their commitment to upholding human rights and their ability to be good resource people in the future. In one of two workshops, our primary attention was on the moral or faith-based perspective of human rights with the participants sharing the teachings of their faiths — Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Naturally, these efforts can only make a small dent in the immense human rights problems that Asia’s people face every day, but we hope that these seven alumni can be valuable resource people, not only for our interfaith network, but also for their own organizations and communities. In this way, it is hoped too that their impact will be greater than their numbers since as resource people they can have a ripple effect creating a stronger human rights culture in their societies in which human rights violations are met with greater indignation and resistance.

We pray for growing justpeace movements around the world. We ask, O God, for the courage and strength to work toward a just peace in our own communities.

Bruce Van Voorhis works in Hong Kong for Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF), a regional network of young Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim and indigenous activists working for just peace in South and Southeast Asia. ICF is a joint program of the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCA’s (APAY) in Hong Kong where Bruce is based and the Christ and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) located in Chiang Mai, Thailand.