

IV WORLD CONGRESS ON RURAL LIFE THE SITUATION OF ASIA¹

I. The Economic, Social-Cultural, and Religious Situation of Asia

The Continent of Asia is composed of South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bhutan etc), Southeast Asia (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Brunei, Singapore, East Timor, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos) and East Asia (China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan). Asia is the world's largest and most populous continent, located primarily in the eastern and northern hemispheres. It covers 8 % of the Earth's total surface area (or about 25 % of its land area) and with approximately 3.5 billion people, it hosts close to half the world's current human population. There are 120 million Catholics in this region representing 11% of the total population of Catholics all over the world.²

The Economic Condition

Asia is very rich in natural resources, such as petroleum, forests, fish, water, rice, copper and silver. Manufacturing in Asia has traditionally been strongest in East and Southeast Asia, particularly in the China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, India, the Philippines, and Singapore. Japan and South Korea continue to dominate in the area of multinational corporations, but increasingly China and India are making significant inroads. Many companies from Europe, North America, South Korea and Japan have operations in Asia's developing countries to take advantage of its abundant supply of cheap labour and relatively developed infrastructure. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the economies of the China and India have been growing rapidly, both with an average annual growth rate of more than 8%. Other recent very high growth nations in Asia include Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

Religion and Culture

Asia is very diverse in terms of religion and culture. Over 80% of the populations of both India and Nepal adhere to Hinduism, alongside significant communities in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bali. Many overseas Indians in countries such as Burma, Singapore and Malaysia also adhere to Hinduism.

Buddhism has a great following in mainland Southeast Asia and East Asia. Buddhism is the religion of the majority (from 90-98%) of the populations of Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Japan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Laos. Large Buddhist populations also exist in Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, and Malaysia. There are small Buddhist communities in Indonesia, India and Bangladesh. In many Chinese communities, Mahayana

¹ Presented by Rachel V. Polestico, Deputy Director of SEARSOLIN, during the IV World Congress on Rural Life, Rome, June 24-27, 2012

² Summarized from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia>

Buddhism is easily syncretized with Taoism. The Communist-governed countries of China, Vietnam and North Korea are officially atheist, thus the number of Buddhists and other religious adherents may be under-reported.

The world's largest Muslim community (within the bounds of one nation) is in Indonesia. South Asia (mainly Pakistan, India and Bangladesh) holds 30% of Muslims. There are also significant Muslim populations in China, Malaysia, southern Philippines (Mindanao).

In the Philippines and East Timor, Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion; it was introduced by the Spaniards and the Portuguese respectively during the 14th century. The Catholics comprise close to 80% of the population in the Philippines and 98% in East Timor. In other countries of Asia, the Catholics compose no more than 2-6 % of the population.

Roman Catholics in Asia

Region	Total Population	Catholics	% Catholic
East Asia	1,528,384,440	13,853,142	0.90
South Asia	1,437,326,682	20,107,050	1.39
Southeast Asia	571,337,070	86,701,421	15.17
Total for Asia	3,537,048,192	120,661,613	3.00

From the Census of the 2012 Annuario Pontificio (Pontifical Yearbook) published in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_by_country

In East Asia, China has 9,797,353 Catholics which is only 0.75% of its 1.3 billion people and South Korea has 5,324,303 Catholics or 10.9% of its 48,846,823 people. In South Asia, India has 17,068,177 (1.58%) out of its 1.08 billion people; Pakistan has 1,283,117 (0.79%) of its 162.5 million and Sri Lanka, although predominantly Buddhist has 1,428,612 or 7.12% of its 20.06 million people. In Southeast Asia, aside from the Philippines' 75 million and East Timor's close to 1 million Catholics, Indonesia has 7.3 million and Vietnam has 5.5 million Catholics representing 3% and 6.7% of their populations respectively.

Incidence of Poverty in Asia

The percentage of people who live below the poverty line has been estimated for the different countries of Asia. Most of the countries of Southeast Asia such as East Timor, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Myanmar have people living below the poverty line at 42-31%. Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam have essentially very low incidence of poverty down to 13-4% like the countries in East Asia like China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. India, Pakistan, Bhutan and Sri Lanka have rates between 25-23 and among the countries of South Asia, Bangladesh has the highest percentage of people

living below the poverty line. For the whole of Asia, the average percentage of people living below the poverty line is around 22%.³

East Asia had by far the strongest overall Human Development Index (HDI) improvement of any region in the world, nearly doubling average HDI attainment over the past 40 years, according to the report's analysis of health, education and income data. China, the second highest achiever in the world in terms of HDI improvement since 1970, is the only country on the "Top 10 Movers" list due to income rather than health or education achievements. Its per capita income increased a stunning 21-fold over the last four decades, also lifting hundreds of millions out of income poverty. Yet it was not among the region's top performers in improving school enrolment and life expectancy. Nepal, a South Asian country, emerges as one of the world's fastest movers since 1970 mainly due to health and education achievements. Its present life expectancy is 25 years longer than in the 1970s. More than four of every five children of school age in Nepal now attend primary school, compared to just one in five 40 years ago. Japan and South Korea ranked highest among the countries grouped on the HDI (number 11 and 12 in the world, which are in the "very high human development" category),

The best estimates for global poverty come from the World Bank's Development Research Group, which has just updated from 2005 its figures for those living in absolute poverty. The new estimates show that in 2008, the first year of the finance-and-food crisis, both the number and share of the population living on less than \$1.25 a day (at 2005 prices, the most commonly accepted poverty line) was falling in every part of the world. This was the first instance of declines across the board since the bank started collecting the figures in 1981. In South Asia, the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty is now the lowest it has been since 1981, falling from 61 to 36 percent between 1981 and 2008. The World Bank credits the investment programs to countries that have been tied to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programs of the countries.

Half the long-term rate of decline is attributable to China alone, which has taken 660m people out of poverty since 1981. China also accounts for most of the extraordinary progress in East Asia, which in the early 1980s had the highest incidence of poverty in the world, with 77% of the population below \$1.25 a day. In 2008 the share was just 14%. The International Food Policy Research Institute has shown that despite the world food-price spike, people's assessment of their own food situation in most poor and middle-income countries was better in 2008 than it had been in 2006.⁴

³ Summarized from the data taken from *CIA World Factbook* webpublished in *Index Mundi*
<http://www.indexmundi.com>

⁴ These findings were published by the Economist during its June 24, 2012 issue in
<http://www.economist.com/node/21548963/> and in the Poverty Analysis section of the World Bank's
Poverty Reduction and Equity section of <http://web.worldbank.org/>

II. The Degree and Quality of the Implementation of “Caritas in Veritate” and its Incidence in the Realities of Asia

Even if there is a decrease in the percentage of people who are living in extreme poverty and hunger since 1990, the 755 million in Asia who are still living below the US\$1.25 a day standard represent a large proportion of humanity. The call of “Caritas in Veritate” for integral human development for every and all persons as children of God is louder than ever before in Asia today. The number of smallholders languishing in poverty and hunger has increased because of the growing competition for land. The Indigenous Peoples have been driven out of their ancestral and sacred homelands and have joined the numbers of the indigents in the countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Cambodia, the Philippines. Small fishermen lost their source of livelihood and have to eke a living as delivery boys and construction workers in Bangladesh. Women and children who lost their farms have to sustain themselves in however way they can.

The Need for Integral Human Development as Proposed by *Populorum Progressio* and Reinforced in *Caritas in Veritate*

The cause of this increasing impoverishment and displacement of our people is the new phenomenon of the commercialization or the corporatization of agriculture. It is unimaginable that land that provides for the basic needs of peoples is “Ambushed by Greed” for profit. This is the conclusion of a group of civil society organization (CSO) leaders who met last June 2011 in Bangkok, Thailand to discuss about the recent alarming events that continue to impoverish the most vulnerable sectors of Asia. This workshop brought together CSO and community representatives working on land rights from ten countries to examine and analyze the impacts of “Public and Private Partnerships for Land Investments”⁵.

The Chitagoong Hills of Bangladesh has been turned to 18,211 ha of rubber and tobacco plantations. Some 2 million hectares of Indonesian forests have been cleared for oil palm production. Special Economic Zones have been created out of the 67,000 ha of ancestral lands of the Agtas in the Philippines. Farmlands have been turned into housing subdivisions for the rich people of Nepal. About one million hectares in Cambodia and 415,000 hectares in Laos of agricultural and forestry lands have been earmarked for exportable food and biofuel. The sacred and holy places of our ancestors have been converted into tourists spots. Thousands to million hectares of lands have been changed into uses that do not produce food and deprived the people of their main source of livelihood and foundation of their culture.

⁵ This workshop was organized by the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC) and the International Land Coalition (ILC) with the cooperation of FAO-RAP. The cases and the analysis discussed during the workshop is published in Lok Niti, Journal of the Asian NGO Coalition: Land Grab: Changing the Terrain of Land Tenure’ Volume 18/1 2012

Human Development in Our Time

The cases presented also examined the processes in which this wanton grabbing of large tracts of land happened. What we call as land grabbing has very legal and legitimate names – Special Economic Zones, Food and Barn Energy Project, Projects under the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Joint Venture Corporations and the like. These lands have been grabbed legally, extra-legally, or when all else fails, illegally.

Our governments with the powerful people in the government made laws that made entry of the large corporations easy and assured of the return of their investments at the expense of the people. In Indonesia, it is easy to get a company application approved, be illegible for bank credits and have the right to exploit the forest. In Nepal, the government imposed the privileges of companies with the use of military power. Corruption in the government and the officials in charge of land transactions facilitate the process of land acquisition amidst people's protest. Worst, there are cases when local leaders are made to cheat their own constituency, the farmers are made to compete with other farmers or the indigenous groups, the poor are made to fight with the other poor.

There are positive and negative effects of this new form of invasion into our sovereignty. The negative effects to the very vulnerable sectors of our society are overshadowed by the very positive campaign banners flaunted by our governments to make the governments look good in the world. "The Hungry Feed the World", "Small Land Holders Surrender their Lands to Plantations to make Land more Productive", "The Poor Sacrifice for the Rest of Humanity". To sugar coat these activities further, there are agrarian or forest protection laws enacted but seldom or very slowly implemented or there are promises made but are always broken.

There are very tragic impacts of this state of affairs from the case studies. There are poor farmers in India who are committing suicide because of the loss of their lands. Being one with the CSO leaders in this issue, "We cannot allow this to happen". Such is also our resolve. We have identified the enemy and we understand the process, and we now plan what we can do to arrest this practice that causes untold misery to the most vulnerable sectors of our society.

Development of People, Rights and Duties, and the Environment

The stakes are very high if we are not moved to action now, we can be overtaken by events. The corporatization of agriculture outpaced our CSO participatory organizing processes, of the use of sustainable agriculture for making land productive for the next generations to come, of building a market where the poor can exchange goods and services, of preserving their way of life and their culture. The corporations with the governments moved in at such a speed and we wake up one morning and realize that forests, the farms and the gardens disappeared.

The indigenous peoples will lose their simple ways of life that preserve the forests and nature. The small holder farmers without their farms will become “armers”. The children will grow up robbed of their culture. The displaced spirits, according to the beliefs of the indigenous peoples, will be upset and cause flooding and earthquakes and because people will no longer be in harmony with nature, will be predisposed to violence. The world will be very unstable because of the disenfranchisement of the majority who would have nothing to lose and no future.

From the experiences of struggle of our colleagues, we also know that that certain actions can be done. In Nepal, community owned forests can be turned from degraded gray to lush green. In Bangladesh, the Association for Realization of Basic Needs (ARBAN) NGO accompanied the displaced people by organizing them and to demand for their rights as well as facilitating for them to get the basic services for housing, health, education, livelihood and credit. Mass action and social movements in India and Bangladesh have reversed decisions and programs of the governments that are deleterious to the people. Collaborating with the media, the CSOs and the People can counterbalance the power of the market-government-military.

Cooperation of the Human Family

The reasons for the rush for Asia’s farmland is for large-scale production of food, biofuel, livestock and other products to secure the food needs of wealthy countries. This is driven by rising food prices and the search for alternative source of energy. In Asia, these land acquisitions have been led by rich neighboring countries, particularly capital-rich Arab Gulf States and the prosperous countries of East Asia. China, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Japan and Saudi Arabia controlled over 7.6 million cultivable hectares overseas by the end of 2008⁶

In these cases, the people who are affected became aware of the injustice that they were subjected to and took the initiative, with the support of some CSOs, to demand for their rights and to their land, to life, and to preserve their environments. In some cases, small successes have been achieved, in some cases aggressive negotiation and continued advocacy are still going on to implement pro-people policies.

CSOs from China, Japan, and South Korea also bring the issues of injustice to their own governments to stop exploitative ventures. There is also a campaign from a different front to imbue private companies with corporate social responsibilities (CSR) to guide the way the make business in other countries.

There are efforts of the FAO to formulate the Guidelines for Responsible Agricultural Investments, and as the Yale University studies show, there are openings for engagements with the International Financial Institutions to also see the side of the poor in their financing of these agricultural investments.

⁶ Kugelman, Michael and Susan Leventstein, eds. (2009) Land Grab? The Race for the World’s Farmland. Washington DC, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Many of the CSOs that are working on the injustice issues in their respective countries are not necessarily Catholics but these are also faith-based or rights-based organizations. They also promote the social teachings of the Church in their constituencies. We are in common with them in upholding the principles of integral human development based on human dignity, respect for life, promotion of human rights, common good, strengths of associations and participation, subsidiarity, dignity of labor, stewardship, preferential option for the poor, and solidarity.

III. Presence of Catholic Inspired Organizations in Asia

Most of the Catholic Church structures in Asia incorporate a Social Action Center and Commissions for Justice and Peace. The Bishops also set up the Catholic Bishops Conference as a venue for discussion and planning for the Church including social action. The effectiveness of the actions and persistence of the advocacies depend on the zeal of the Bishop or priests, support institutions to help the Church, and commitment of the communities.⁷

In East Asia

In South Korea, part of fast growth of the Church can be attributed to the Church's relatively positive perception by the general public for its role in the democratization of South Korea, its active participation in various works of social welfare, and its respectful approach to interfaith relationship and matters of traditional Korean spirituality. It also includes the underground Church in North Korea as part its responsibility in promoting the right to one's religion in an environment where it is considered a crime to profess one's faith.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 by the Communist Party of China, Catholicism, like all religions, has only been permitted to operate under the supervision of the State Administration for Religious Affairs. All worship must legally be conducted through state-approved churches belonging to the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA), which does not accept the primacy of the Roman Pontiff. In addition to overseeing the practice of the Catholic faith, the CPA espouses politically oriented objectives as well. Liu Bainian, chairman of the CPA and the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China, stated in a 2011 interview that the church needed individuals who "love the country and love religion: politically, they should respect the Constitution, respect the law, and fervently love the socialist motherland.

Before the end of World War II the Catholic Church had a very minor presence in Taiwan based mainly in the south of the island and centred around Spanish Dominican priests who came here from the Philippines in the 1860s. The end of World War II and the following years saw a mass migration of religious communities from mainland China

⁷ From the Census of the 2012 *Annuario Pontificio* (Pontifical Yearbook) published in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_by_country

as Communist persecution began to take effect. The early open support of the mainland bishops for the KMT and non-participation of the Catholic Church in the democratisation struggle of the island have limited the integration and development of the church among the Taiwanese. The Catholic Church operates one university in Taiwan, the Fu Jen Catholic University.

South Asia

The missionaries who came to India were especially careful to help the local charitable institutions by tending to the sick, both spiritually and physically, and performing other works of mercy. Catholic charitable efforts in India have been extensive. The Jesuits' educational institutions, although never succeeding in missionary activities, had left a prestigious impact through their education institutions. Education has become the major priority for the Church in India in recent years with nearly 60% of the Catholic schools situated in rural areas. Even in the early part of the 19th century, Catholic schools had left its emphasis on relief for the poor and welfare.

The Catholic Bishop's Conference of Bangladesh, founded in 1971, is the General Body of the Ordinaries of Bangladesh. The purpose of this Conference is to facilitate common policy and action in matters that affect or are liable to affect the interest of the Catholic Church in Bangladesh and to be of service to the country at large. Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country, but relations between the communities are generally quite good, but there are sporadic incidences of violence against Christians such as a bomb attack on a Catholic church in 2001.

The Catholic Church in Pakistan is also active in education managing leading schools like Saint Patrick's High School, Karachi, health and other social aspects of daily life in addition to its spiritual work. The Catholic Church runs 534 schools, 53 hostels, 8 colleges, 7 technical institutes and 8 catechetical centers, according to 2008 statistics.

The Nepalese church continues to grow and become more active. A convent was inaugurated along with a training center in western Nepal in June 2006, a first for western Nepal.^[13] Catholic Relief Services conducts many programs in the country, including counteracting the trade in women and children and aiding those affected by floods and landslides. In 2007, Nepal adopted an interim constitution. It guarantees each citizen the "right to profess, practise and preserve his/her own religion as handed down to him/her from ancient times". However, it expressly forbids people to convert others to their religion.

Southeast Asia

The second half of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s were also marked by violence against Catholics in Indonesia in particular and Christians in general. However former president Abdurrahman Wahid, himself a leader of Nahdatul Ulama, one of the biggest Muslim organisations in Indonesia, has made several contributions in reconciling the simmering antipathy among the different religious groups. As recently as 2010, there

were incidents where Catholics and other Christians were banned from celebrating Christmas services

In East Timor, the Roman Catholic Church remains very involved in politics, with its 2005 confrontations with the government over religious education in school and the forgoing of war crimes trials for atrocities against East Timorese by Indonesia. They have also endorsed the new Prime Minister in his efforts to promote national reconciliation. In June 2006 Catholic Relief Services received aid from the United States to help victims of months of unrest in the country. The number of churches has grown from 100 in 1974 to over 800 in 1994.

The Catholic Church has great influence on Philippine society and politics. One typical event is the role of the Catholic hierarchy during the bloodless People Power Revolution of 1986. Then Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Manila, Jaime Sin called on the public to march along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue and force dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos to step down which occurred after seven million people responded. The Overseas Filipinos have spread Filipino culture worldwide, and have brought Filipino Catholicism with them.

The Catholic Church in the Philippines is involved in education at all levels. It has founded and continues to sponsor hundreds of secondary and primary schools as well as a number of colleges and internationally known universities. The Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila University, La Salle Brothers-run De La Salle University, and the Dominican-run University of Santo Tomas are listed in the "World's Best Colleges and Universities" in the Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings.

In 1983, the Malaysian Consultative Council on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism (MCCBCHS) for dialogue was formed to represent their interests with the authorities. In the same way and with a spirit of ecumenism, the Christian Federation of Malaysia consisting of the Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical churches was formed in 1984.

At the beginning of 20th century, there were about 23,000 Catholic believers, 55 churches and chapels, representatives of such monastic orders, social and educational institutions (e.g. orphanages, schools and a seminary, college). In 1975 the Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees was established for protection of moral values and social work, including the urgent problem created by the refugees from Indochina. Some Thailand Roman Catholic orders (Religious of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres) take an active part in fight against human trafficking.

The issues of continued restrictions on Catholic life in Vietnam and the nominating of bishops by the Pope without or with insisted by local government approval of Vietnamese bodies remain obstacles in bilateral dialog. The Catholic Church continue to grow in Vietnam although.

IV. The Rural Teaching

The International Catholic Rural Association (ICRA) Asia held its forum last November 29-December 2, 2004 in Taiwan and then ICRA International Council delegation visited some of the members in the Philippines and Thailand from December 3-10, 2004. The Populorum Progressio Institute (PPI), Southeast Asia Rural Social Leadership Institute (SEARSOLIN), and the Foundation for the Rehabilitation and Development of Children and Family (FORDEC) are the main members from Asia and actively organized this conference.⁸

The Forum on Resource-Based Development

The theme of the forum was “Resource-Based Development for the Agri-Rural World” and was attended by around thirty participants from Asia as well as delegation from Italy, Canada and the United States. Dr. Vincenzo Conso, the ICRA General Secretary and Dr. Matthew Wang, the ASICRA President welcomed the participants to the forum and to Taiwan while Dr. Anselmo Mercado of SEARSOLIN introduced the theme of the Conference and the participants.

Dr. Vincenzo Conso, the ICRA Secretary General, set the tone of the Forum by emphasizing the critical role of Asia-ICRA in enabling the organization to work for agricultural development through the farmers in Asia and also to contribute towards the international nature of ICRA. He reminded the participants of the opportunities in Asia for the Church to care for our brothers and sisters in sharing our riches and in fighting for social justice.

Country Reports

In the light of the theme of this forum, there were several sharing of country experiences highlighting the ability of local people in mobilizing their resources for development. Searsoliners Veerayut Ruchirek and Sahaphon Sangmek showed how from small savings that the first members contributed, the Credit Union League of Thailand (CULT) has grown to be a national bank providing various services to the members all over the country. Dr. Amporn Wathanavongs work with the children of Thailand with the donations from various groups was also presented. Fr. Bipin Pani of the Catholic Charities of India and Fr. Benny of the Association for Social and Human Advancement in India gave a multi-media report of their work with the tribal communities especially in protecting their resources and in developing their entrepreneurship. Fr. Gregorius Utomo of the World Food Day Farmers’ and Fishermen’s Movement in Indonesia expounded on the dangers of the control of agricultural seeds by multinationals that are promoting the use of genetically-modified seeds. De Susapto from Bina Swadaya talked about community empowerment among the forest villages in Western Java. Bishop Antonio Ledesma, S.J., D.D. from the Prelature of Ipil commented that in the Philippines, the same struggle for land, seeds, technology, capita, market, and peace found in other

⁸ Summarized from the Report of the ICRA Conference in Taiwan published by Populorum Progressio Institute, Taichung Taiwan, February 2005

Asian countries are also being waged by farmers in the Philippines where attempts to change through people power and agrarian reform have been facilitated through the partnership of the government, the civil society and local communities, the church and the socially oriented business sector.

According to Fr. Richard Devoe M.M., Taiwan's very rapid growth in the last fifty years can be traced to the tremendous organizing work for credit unions and family life that done by the Populorum Progressio Institute (PPI) since 1965. Through the leadership of the young Coady and SEARSOLIN graduate Matthew Wang, PPI trained hundreds of volunteers who then went to the countryside to set up credit unions, organized cooperatives, and gave trainings on agricultural development, family planning and marriage counseling.

Concetto Lanello, the National President of AcliTerra, reported that in Italy agricultural reform is being implemented in order to increase the competitiveness of Italian agricultural products in the global market. However, this reform is very much in line with the rules of the World Trade Organization so it is inadvertently worsening the gap between the better-off northern against the southern farmers and not protective of the family-based farming system that compose 94% of the 2.5 million farmers in Italy.

Continuing the discussion on the issue of globalization, Dr. Robert Gronski, Ph.D. and Brother David Andrews of the Holy Cross both from the National Catholic Rural Life Conference based in the USA, discussed what WTO has done to the farmers in the United States. In the United States, the farming community compose only 4% of the population producing 28-65% of the food for the world market and 60% of food aid. Unfortunately, the farmers are losing control of their farmlands and more and more family farms are being bought by transnational companies. The National Catholic Rural Life (NCRL) works to create awareness among farmers and policy makers of the negative impact of WTO and propose revisions in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture to protect the small farmers not only in the United States but also globally.

Mr. Andrew Rivas from the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) also lamented the decrease in number of US farmers dwindling to only 2 million now exacerbated by the growing ignorance about agriculture. In response, CRS supports programs that overcome hunger, promote sustainable livelihood and food security, and proposals that protect the elements of God's creation.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach

Dr. Anselmo Mercado introduced the concept of the Asset-Based Community Development Approach by invoking the proverbial half-full/half empty glass of water as an analogy how development workers view communities. Rachel Polestico, the Deputy Director of SEARSOLIN, traced the history how SEARSOLIN got interested in the ABCD approach to SEARSOLIN's work. Based on the article about the ABCD Through this pilot study, the key steps of appreciative inquiry, visioning, asset mapping, asset linking, and community organizing were identified. As of 2004, there were

already about eighty (80) SEARSOLIN Alumni trained in ABCD and who are applying their ABCD-based development action plans in their home countries. Gordon Cunningham shared the work of the Coady International Institute in Canada in promoting the asset-based and community driven approaches. It has been documenting examples of these approaches internationally by collecting stories and writing in-depth case studies in Egypt, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Kenya, India, and the Philippines.

The Perspective of the Church on Agri-Rural Development

Mnsgr. Biagio Notarangelo, the ICRA Ecclesiastical Assistant, gave a statement regarding the “Social Directions of Ecclesial Asia”. He reminded the group of the special place Asia has in the Pope’s heart owing to the fact that Christ was born in Asia. In this continent marked by rich diversity of cultures and religions, the social teachings of the Church have so much relevance in the promotion of the dignity of the human being. The Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* in particular emphasized the responsibility of everyone to be involved in the struggles of the farmers, migrants, women and children, especially in the area of education and in the inner development of the human beings.

In the issue of what the Church can do in the modern world, Bishop Antonio Ledesma, S.J., D.D., of the Prelature of Ipil, announced to the conference that the year 2005 is the 40th anniversary of *Gaudium et Spes*. In preparation for this anniversary celebration, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace prepared the compendium of all the encyclicals and synthesis of the social teachings of the Church in the last 100 years.

Recommendations for Asian ICRA

At the end of the Conference the participants recommended the following in order for ICRA to be more of service to the rural world:

- SET UP A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM FOR THE MEMBERS OF ASICRA
- ASICRA SECRETARIAT SHOULD DRAFT SHORT AND MEDIUM TERM PLANS
- DEVELOP A CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM TO HELP ORGANIZATIONS/PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES
- BECOME MORE VISIBLE IN THE ASIAN REGION AND INTERNATIONALLY TO HIGHLIGHT SPIRITUALITY

Fieldtrip in Taichung

After the two-day conference in Hsintien, the participants had another two-day fieldtrip in Taichung with a visit to the Taiwan Agricultural Research Center, the Populorum Progression Institute, the Goat Milk Factory and Marketing Cooperative, and an exposure to new approaches in rural life that combines eco-tourism with agriculture. The Searsoliner of Taichung hosted a dinner for the participants.

Trip to the Philippines

The company of Msgr. Notarangelo, Dr. Vincenzo Conso, Bro. Dave Andrews, Robert Gronski, Conetto Lannello, Steffano Faiotto, and Renato Gaglianone proceeded to the Philippines. In the Philippines, the delegation stayed in Manila for one day in order to have an audience with His Excellency, the Archbishop of Manila Gaudencio Rosales. During this meeting, the Archbishop discussed about the situation of the Church in the Philippines and also of the community foundation that he started in Batangas that he wanted to apply in Manila and hopefully in the entire country.

Then together with Bishop Ledesma, Dr. Mercado and Ms. Polestico, the ICRA delegation went to Cagayan de Oro. In Cagayan de Oro, they met Fr. Balchand, the Rector of the Society of Jesus community at Xavier University. They also visited some projects of SEARSOLIN and the College of Agriculture in Midkiwan and in Baungon. They also had a chance to see the Del Monte Philippines pineapple plantation.

Trip to Bangkok, Thailand

In Bangkok, Thailand, the host was Dr. Amporn Wathanavongs. The group paid a courtesy call to the Apostolic Nuncio to Thailand, His Excellency Msgr. Salvatore Pennacchio at the Chancellery. The group also had the courtesy visit to the Cardinal, Michel Meechai Kitbunchoo, the Archbishop of Bangkok Diocese.

The group briefly visited 2 preschool care centers run by FORDEC. There are almost 200 children from poor urban families regularly attended the service. Because of family poverty these children cannot attend to any paid preschool service thus remains marginalized when they grow-up and attending formal class in primary school.

The group also visited the Credit Union League of Thailand (CULT) where they were briefed about the history of Thailand Credit Union and its operation. With the support and strong inspiration of the late French Jesuit, the movement was first organized by Dr. Amporn Wathanavongs in July 1965 among only 13 members in the slum community of Bangkok.

V. The Degree of Presence of the Catholic-inspired Organizations

The Southeast Asia Rural and Social Leadership Institute (SEARSOLIN) of Xavier University in collaboration with the Asian International Catholic Rural Association

(Asia-ICRA) Network hosted the 40th anniversary celebration of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio* on December 4-5, 2007 at the SEARSOLIN, Xavier University –Ateneo de Cagayan, Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines.⁹

It was attended by approximately 96 delegates from ICRA-Italy (led by Dr. Vincenzo Conso and Msgr. Biagio Notarangelo), Taiwan (led by Fr. Paul Brien, Dr. Abraham Chang and Dr. Matthew Wang), Thailand (led by Dr. Amporn Wathanavongs) and the Philippines (led by Arch. Antonio Ledesma, Fr. Josenilo Labra and Dr. Anselmo Mercado), representing various sectors from the civil society.

The celebration themed “*The Social Doctrine of the Church (Populorum Progressio and Sollicitudo Rei Socialis in Retrospect: Emerging Challenges 40 years after and beyond)*” aimed to create awareness and to respond to the challenges of globalization that are significantly affecting the lives of the marginalized rural folks not just in Asia but globally as well. Fr. Josenilo Labra, S.J., director of SEARSOLIN added that the conference also aimed at coming up with concrete actions to help address the widening gap between the rich and poor nations.

Populorum Progressio is a social encyclical written by Pope Paul VI published on March 26, 1967 on the “development of peoples.” The 40th anniversary celebration stressed on the relevance of the *Populorum Progressio* relative to globalization and marginalization reminding the Catholic faithful of their obligation to help those “seeking a larger share of the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities.”

The conference keynote address entitled “*The Social Doctrine of the Church (Populorum Progressio and Sollicitudo Rei Socialis) in Restrospect*” was given by His Excellency the Most Reverend Antonio J. Ledesma, S.J., Archbishop of the Metropolitan of Cagayan de Oro City. He highlighted the history of the Catholic Social Teachings and stressed on the guiding principles of the *Populorum Progressio* and the *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* to guide our conscience in modern day life.

- The dignity of the human person is in the nature of: 1. *Reason*, the human right and duties to know the truth for the supernatural end “Summum Bonum” ; 2. *Freewill*, the right and duty to love the good and the beautiful to the supernatural end of True, Good, Beautiful; 3. *Conscience*, to do what should be morally good as in the Beatitude; and 4) bodily health of life to attain Eternal life.
- Development which is merely economic is incapable of setting man free; on the contrary it will end by enslaving him further. Development that does not include the cultural, transcendent, and religious dimensions of man and society ... is even less conducive to authentic liberation.
- Human dignity at the core towards achieving a culture of life, a culture of human rights, and a culture of peace and development.

⁹ Taken from the ICRA Conference Executive Summary published in <http://searsolin.xu.edu.ph>.

- With reference to Gregory Baum, *Amazing Church*, 2005, on 1) recognition of human rights; 2) God's redemptive presence in history; 3) Preferential option for the poor; and 4) Culture of peace and religious pluralism. In this Mindanao Week of Peace Christians and Muslims can march together to manifest that we are for peace. When we reflect on the *Populorum Progressio* and the *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Gregory Baum has this reflection (looking back 50 years). There is a paradigm shift that the Church is in the forefront in promoting human rights. In *Pacem en Terris*, concern of the Church in this 40 years is centered on the recognition of human rights.

Rev. Fr. Primitivo Viray Jr, SJ in his presentation, ***“Emerging Challenges of Globalization to Catholic Communities in Asia in the Light of the Populorum Progressio and Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,”*** discussed on understanding globalization in its entirety to include not just its economic but also its religious, cultural, social, political and legal dimensions. Globalization brings hope to those who are able to take advantage of it, but at the same time, pushes the marginalized further into the periphery, citing the digital divide between the wealthy and the impoverished. He addressed the audience to reflect and act on the process of globalization and marginalization of the world.

- Globalization is a phenomenon that expands the interconnectedness of the world, which in one sense is an old concept and yet, in some aspects is something new.
- Globalization is characterized by the different experiences taking in the context of geographical, cultural political, economic and social locations that will influence the way we see it as an opportunity or mainly a threat
- Process of globalizations produced tensions
- Phenomenon of globalizations as accompanied by the process of marginalization and exclusion
- The complexity and interconnectedness have widened and deepened. It now extends to the whole earth, penetrating institutions and the lives of individuals in a more intense and intimate way than before
- Reflecting on the globalizing and marginalizing world based on the principles of subjecthood of all, inclusive relations, transforming relationships and acting in synergy.

In response to the challenges and the inspiration of the social teachings, the participants made the following commitment:

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary celebration of the Church encyclical *Populorum Progressio* conducted at the Southeast Asia Rural Social Leadership Institute (SEARSOLIN), Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines held last 4-5th days of December, 2007, the members of the International Catholic Rural Association and about a hundred participants coming from Italy, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, and the Philippines affirmed the relevance of the social teachings of the Church and committed to a course of action that would foster integral human development, preservation and protection of the integrity of creation and solidarity among the peoples of the world.

While Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* and Pope John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Sociales* serve as moral and ethical guides for the development of peoples emphasizing the dignity of human persons, the stewardship of creation by all and for all, and for solidarity of a world community united in faith and love,

the last forty years are marked with both progress and challenges in meeting the desirable human conditions outlined in the encyclicals. The neo-liberal economic policies that put personal profit before the common good, the cultural erosion brought about by media and the internet, the violence and conflicts caused by injustice, the unsustainable use of nature's resources, as well as governance and political structures that serve the interest of the powerful groups undermine the long years and efforts to bring about authentic human development.

The members of ICRA have in their own organizations and countries implemented programs that further the social teachings of the Church. The Populorum Progressio of Taiwan has promoted cooperatives and the teaching of Christian values among the indigenous groups of the country; the Credit Union League of Thailand has provided training and capital to about 3 million members of the credit union; SEARSOLIN has trained close to two thousand social development leaders in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific; and the Italian members of ICRA labored to protect the rights of workers and interpret the messages of the social teachings as standards for modern societies. It is decided that ICRA as a global organization can do so much more to address the issues confronting the world today.

Being reminded again of the call for everyone to live in the image of his and her creator, to be the gardeners of God's creation, and as fellow farers towards the kingdom of God, we the participants of this conference commit ourselves to the following course of action:

- Continue the study, reflection and praxis of the teachings of Populorum Progressio and Sollicitudo Rei Sociales to inform our work in development
- Work towards the strengthening of family values especially of the youth by exemplifying the culture of life, the culture of peace, the culture of human rights, and the culture of development.
- Promote global solidarity by siding with the poor in our work for justice and peace, bridging the gap between the poor and the rich, and of this generation and the next.
- Champion the care of nature through the promotion and application of sustainable agriculture in the Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand.
- Invoke the teachings of the church in reforming the market and to allow globalisation to also be an instrument for the benefit of the poor.
- Network and link with various groups – the academe, the church, the business sector, the government and NGOs and most especially with the organizations of the poor to promote common understanding and undertakings for the common good.

We call on the grace of God, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the intercession of our Mother Mary in strengthening our resolve and commitment to bless this course of action agreed upon this 5th day of December, 2007.

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