



METHODIST MISSION AND ECUMENICAL NEWSLETTER - May 2021

PACIFIC COUNCIL OF CHURCHES – reflecting on Covid-19 impacts and West Papua

Rev James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, shared the following commentary in preparation for a recent Pacific Day of Prayer. Though the statistics are as at March, we can still appreciate the impact of the Pandemic on our neighbours.

COVID 19 Statistics for the Pacific Region			
Country	Total Reported Cases	Total Reported Deaths	Date
Cook Islands	0	0	01/03/2021
Fiji	66	2	12/03/2021
French Polynesia	18,527	141	12/03/2021
Guam	7,756	133	10/03/2021
Kiribati			
Marshall Islands	4	0	12/03/2021
Northern Mariana Islands	153	2	15/03/2021
New Caledonia	91	0	12/03/2021
Papua New Guinea	5,184	45	29/03/2021
Solomon Islands	18	0	12/03/2021
Vanuatu	3	0	12/03/2021
Wallis and Futuna	178	0	15/03/2021
Samoa	3	0	12/03/2021
PACIFIC TOTAL:	28,875	323	15/03/2021

PCC shares impressions from the Pacific community beyond these statistics of COVID-19:

- Struggling health-care systems that cannot handle increased COVID cases with shortages in supplies and space. Though most cases are in and around urban areas, health personnel are concerned about traffic and transmission out into the more rural areas or distanced islands.
- Tourism dependent Pacific economies now see a drastic drop in Gross Domestic Product due to travel restrictions. How will Pacific economies recover and hopefully adapt to changing economic climates?
- With COVID and the impact it has had on the tourism industry, job loss and unemployment have become a major concern for PIC's. This has contributed to a number of social issues that stem from loss of income; such as abuse of children and youth,

unemployment and economic instability, impact on mental health, and drug, alcohol and substance abuse

- Considering all these circumstances, there is also the challenge of coordinating a Pacific response to COVID 19 rather than regionalism or nationalism.

In recent weeks, the number of Covid 19 cases has risen sharply particularly in Papua New Guinea. PCC has expressed solidarity with PNG as the country faces the threat of COVID 19. "Now, perhaps more than ever, we are thinking of you and praying for you as the Covid-19 outbreak. I pray that you and loved ones are safe," Bhagwan said. "In these times, we recall the words of the psalmist "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Ps23:4). We will continue to hold you all in prayer to the miracle working, healing God and also call for support for testing and vaccines for PNG."

Meanwhile, West Papua continues to be held in deep concern and prayer by the Pacific community. West Papuans continue to face racism, discrimination and oppression in their homeland; while their soul, the land is extracted for profit for others and they continue to struggle. The most recent Pastoral Letter from the West Papuan Council of Churches highlights:

- 2,603 security forces deployed in the last 2 years.
- 480 civilians killed in clashes between the security forces TPNPB and 34,461 internally displaced people in the Nduga Regency between December 2018 and March this year.
- 10 people including 2 church workers, 1 person with disability and 1 student killed and 1,000 displaced internally in Intan Jaya.
- Systemic (structural) racism, violations of civil and political rights.
- Influx of 1,470,000 Indonesian migrants over a decade to keep indigenous Papuans as a minority.
- Widescale deforestation for palm oil plantations, mineral extraction with no free, prior and informed consent of customary landowners.

How do we as their sisters and brothers in Christ practice radical solidarity? How are we able to echo their protests, laments and cries for justice and liberation, for self-determination? As they call for the UN Human Rights Commission to investigate human rights abuses in Papua, for real political dialogue and engagement – how do we share their song, sing their song to our leaders?

A Prayer of Intercession from PCC:

Dear Lord, we ask that You draw near and comfort our brothers and sisters in West Papua. We pray that You will guide them on their journey to self-determination and to protect them over the violence they face daily.

We ask that You awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that You have made. Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is. show us our place in this world as channels of Your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live.

Loving God, You have never failed to show Your power and caring by healing people of all ages and stations of life from physical, mental, and spiritual ailments. Be present now to people who need Your loving touch because of COVID-19. May they feel Your power of healing through the care of doctors and nurses. Take away the fear, anxiety, and feelings of isolation from people receiving treatment or under quarantine. Give them a sense of purpose in pursuing health and protecting others from exposure to the disease. Protect their families and friends and bring peace to all who love them.

Heavenly Father, who sees the unseen and notices the unnoticed, help each of us to hear the Hidden Voices of those who pray for release from slavery and exploitation, who suffer the horrors of modern slavery, for all who dream of a better life in another place, only to be trapped, tricked and traded, for all those who labour, forced and unseen, to make our everyday possessions, for all who agonise for loved ones lost into this trade in humans. Help us in our weakness not to seek to oppress others, nor to make peace with any form of exploitation, so that we may give ourselves more fully to the service of your saving love, and be strengthened together as agents of your healing and hope,

God of Justice and Peace, we pray for a world torn apart by conflict and war. A world that lives uneasily in a climate of fear with no clear vision for future days. We pray for a world clear of corruption, we remember the poor, the homeless and those who are stuck within spaces that are toxic or violent. We ask that You help them to find a place that is safe and free of suffering, where they are free from the pain that they currently face. We pray for our churches that it may always be a safe space for our people, we pray for the ministers and the work that they do; may You guide them on their journey of help. We also pray for our congregations; may they do their duty as Christians to create spaces within their own circles that is inclusive of all people and nature.

This is our prayer in Jesus' name. AMEN

RECOGNISING THE MASSACRE OF ARMENIANS AS GENOCIDE HELPS RENEW COMMITMENT TO COMBATING ATROCITIES – Christian Conference of Asia joins in responses to this tragic anniversary

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) joins with millions of Armenians all over the world, especially the Armenian diaspora scattered across Asia, who welcomed the US government's decision to recognise the massacre of about 1.5 million Armenians in 1915 as genocide.

The Armenian churches uniquely represent the Armenian people in the international ecumenical family and have been expressing their concerns, anguish, and pain consistently; they have persistently been demanding recognition of genocide and reparation. The CCA member churches include the Armenian diaspora churches spread across different parts of Asia such as in Iran, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Japan.

The General Secretary of the CCA Dr Mathews George Chunakara stated that although late, the decision of the President of the USA now recognising the massacre that took place more than a century ago as genocide is an honour for those Armenians who perished in the Armenian genocide. "President Biden's decision is a good gesture of reminder to the international community about the pain of millions of Armenian descendants around the world. The Armenian Genocide has serious implications for the Armenian people and the international community ever since the massacre took place. It is also a great opportunity for the international community to renew their commitment to combating atrocities in this troubled world, as well as to work for healing and reconciliation," said the CCA General Secretary.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara further added that the Armenian Church, consistent with its role in the Armenian communities across the world, is the natural vehicle and interpreter of the Armenian protest against the 1915 genocide and of the Armenian demand for justice. However, the history and plight of the Armenians were not known widely among the churches in different regions including in Asia. It is widely believed that around 1.5 million Armenian Christians were killed during massacres and deportation campaigns carried out against the Armenians by the Ottoman Empire. Turkey, the modern-day successor of the Ottoman Empire, opposes the use of the term genocide. Article 301 of Turkey's penal code criminalises anyone who uses the term genocide, charging them with the crime of "insulting Turkishness".

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY - 16 to 23 May

The southern hemisphere observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is in May. If you are planning ahead for local ecumenical services, or looking to incorporate the theme into your Sunday parish worship, resources are available on these sites:

<https://www.oikoumene.org/events/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity>

http://www.methodist.org.nz/mission_and_ecumenical/resources2021



at Christ The King Catholic Church, 260 Richardson Road, Owairaka.

This service will also be broadcast on SHINE TV and social media.

ASIA SUNDAY - 16 May

Asia Sunday is observed annually on the Sunday before Pentecost by member churches and councils of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). This year, Asia Sunday falls on 16 May 2021. CCA will focus the Asia Sunday-2021 with the theme, 'I am the God who Heals You and Restores Your Health' (Exodus 15:26). Resources are available from the MME web pages: http://www.methodist.org.nz/mission_and_ecumenical

Virtual Asia Sunday service on 16 May 2021, which will be led by church and ecumenical leaders from across Asia. To facilitate the participation of people from around the world for the special prayer service, the Asia Sunday worship will be broadcast live on the CCA's YouTube channel and Facebook page. The YouTube livestream link is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvB-djGWjuk> or alternatively follow CCA on Facebook and join the virtual service through Facebook: <https://facebook.com/ChristianConferenceofAsia>

The **online service will be held on 16 May 2021 at 11:30pm NZ time (4:30pm Bangkok).**

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