



# Global Christian Forum

## COMMUNIQUÉ

### **GCF Asia Regional Meeting “Faithfulness in a Multi-faith Context”**

*Convened by the Global Christian Forum with the aim “to foster mutual respect and to address common challenges together”, a group met at Myungsung Church, Seoul, Korea, on 14 – 16 October 2022. Participants included representatives of the four pillars of the GCF (World Council of Churches, Roman Catholic Church (through the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity), Pentecostal World Fellowship and World Evangelical Alliance), along with church leaders from across Asia, local leaders from Korea and committee members from ecumenical organisations, who gathered to discern together their common witness in the diversity of Asian contexts.*

*Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses!*  
*Isaiah 44:8*

*And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*

*Acts 1:8*

We thank God for the opportunity to be in fellowship, to share our journeys of faith and to learn together about Christian witness in Asian contexts. In a spirit of prayerful trust, we explored some of the challenges to our witness and those things that keep us from being united. We left Seoul with deep gratitude for the gracious hospitality of our hosts, deeply encouraged by the opening dinner that brought together local church leaders and representatives of the government. We hope that this 2nd GCF Asia Consultation will inspire more intense collaboration of churches of different traditions in the many contexts of this region.

Asia is the world’s largest continent with the most diverse sociocultural context and a long history of peaceful coexistence between people of different faiths. While learning of the many trends of both growth and decline of Christian traditions in Asia, we were encouraged by stories of God’s grace and hope as the gospel spread organically, even in contexts of persecution. Yet we also identified concerning challenges, both internal and external to our churches, which demand of us reflection and discernment.

Noting that Asia is home to nearly 60% of the world’s population, we heard many stories and statistics of growth of churches in the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Though some had declared the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the ‘century for Asia’, today Christians only represent 8.2% of the total population, with great variation from country to country. While we are thankful for the growth, we also recognise that most Asian Christians live as minority populations in their countries, and in some of these, persecution is an ongoing reality. Issues of immigration, refugees and migrant workers have also affected the landscape of Asian cultures.

Appreciating the rich and diverse history of Christianity in Asia, we are grateful for the faithful witness of Christians over the centuries and the ways in which Christians in other parts of the world can learn from Asian Christianity – perseverance under pressure, profound theology and practice of hospitality, and the many ways in which Asian Christians enrich their cultures and promote life-giving witness in their contexts.

We recognise the need to evaluate mission efforts of the past and to acknowledge the fact that in some Asian contexts ecumenical partnerships are very difficult and viewed suspiciously by church leaders. However, we also learned the uniqueness of the different approaches to ecumenism in Asia and the varieties of inter-church cooperation. We see this as an opportunity for the particular gifts that GCF brings – an invitation to further cooperation, to listen to one another's faith stories and to offer a space where friendships and trust can continue to flourish.

'Faithfulness in a Multi-faith Context' is crucial in Asia. Asian Christians have lived alongside people of other faiths for centuries. In some places, the Christian presence has suffered persecution and oppression, whereas in others the road to being integrated into local societies has been more peaceful. In the multiplicity of these contexts, some Christians have not always had the confidence in the gospel and the humility to reimagine witness in non-western ways that would bring the gospel of Christ to life in this very diverse region. Moreover, some churches continue to be affected by social and political structures of discrimination in their societies, thus falling short of a faithful witness to Christ.

In the devotions and plenaries, we were challenged to debate how such faithfulness can be re-envisioned and how faith-sharing stories promote a genuinely ecumenical way to communicate our faith and share what is in our hearts. The image of 'mountains and valleys' led to a rich discussion about the dialogical directions of our witness and how we can develop life-flourishing relationships with all people and for the sake of God's creation. We were inspired to pursue *missio agape*, to witness as Christ witnessed, with love, justice, humility and mutual respect as we relate and learn to love our neighbours in multi-faith contexts. Asian Christianity offers a discerning, holistic approach to discipleship that enhances and encourages constructive ecumenical and multi-faith encounters.

The Consultation raised our awareness of existing tensions among churches due to different understandings between mission and proselytism, the challenges of so-called 'sheep stealing' or simply the trend of Christians moving from one tradition to another. We understood that by the exchange of our experiences and practices in the spirit of receptive ecumenism we can help each other in our missionary endeavours and in carrying out together a more faithful witness in Asia.

Finally, we were challenged by the image of a set table or the question, 'who gets to set the table?' and the ways in which power hampers our faithfulness to the way of Christ. We know that while young people are receptive to spirituality, the Bible and Jesus, they are often suspicious of institutional churches and of church leaders. If we are to be faithful in multi-faith and multi-generational contexts, we must be taught new ways to listen, learn and watch as a younger generation participates in setting the table, changes the agenda and teaches us new ways of ecumenism simply by being together, struggling with life's challenges and showing Christ in their care for each other.

Despite persisting differences between our traditions and the many challenges we face, the Consultation ended with a tone of thanksgiving and celebration for all that God has done and continues to do in Asia. The many church leaders committed again to discerning new ways of journeying together and to being open to others God brings to the table, all for the sake of their common witness to God's reign in this vast continent. With gratitude to God, we started and concluded our conversations with prayer for one another, for our churches, our contexts and for the witness of the gospel of Christ in Asia.