

The Second Peace Builders Forum,
Kathmandu, Nepal
October 19-22, 2008



The second Action Asia biennial peace builders' forum was hosted by Action for Conflict Transformation at the Hotel View Bhrikuti in Godavari just outside of Kathmandu, Nepal, with the aim of collecting, discussing and learning from the experiences of peace builders from the different parts of Asia. It furthered the aims of the first forum in Mindanao, Philippines held in October 2006 to identify uniquely Asian approaches in the field of peace building and to deepen the relationships between members of the network throughout Asia. The 2008 forum was supported by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Caritas Nepal, Skillshare International, and the Center for Promotion of Reconciliation and Peace (CPRP), and structured as a set of workshops through which the participants shared their experiences with each other.

The forum hosted over 120 peace practitioners from throughout Asia and the world. The following Asian countries were represented: Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India (esp. Manipur, Orissa, Gujarat and Nagaland), Indonesia (esp. Aceh), Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. Additionally, experts in the field were drawn from the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Serbia, Sweden, USA and Switzerland. Several of the participants were also workshop facilitators and trainers at the forum.

The forum comprised of a number of workshops presented at the forum where presenters used various approaches to share their experiences of peace building and conflict transformation, as well as creative art workshops where participants had the opportunity to try out different artistic forms of addressing conflicts, including yoga, Nepalese thanka painting, traditional Nepalese peace theater and body movement therapy. The combination of the two different types of workshops complemented each other and the creative arts workshops were especially appreciated by the participants.



The array of workshops available to the participants explored issues such as: womens empowerment and gender in India, traditional peace building mechanisms such as the Pukhtoon Jirga of Pakistan, and spirituality and trauma healing in Aceh. Some others concerned Care Nepal's Learning in Peacebuilding, Personal Safety of Peace Workers or

Security Management in Sri Lanka, Peacebuilding and Education Approaches in Indonesia, Conflict Transformation in Myanmar and Indigenous Institution for Peacebuilding in Pakistan to mention a few.

The forum also afforded attendees the opportunity to participate in one of five different exposure visits to gain insight into different aspects of Nepalese civil society and the work of local NGOs. These included a trip to the National Business Initiative of the Nepalese Chamber of Commerce, the National Human Rights Commission, a trek into the mountains to visit the Federation of Community Forestry Users Group, the Rural Women Creative Forum's Working Area (RCWF) in the mountains of the Sindhupalchowk district, and the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, one of only two such ministries in the world.



A publication of the lessons learned and the practical implications of the forum will in time be published by the organizers with the aim to share the ideas that were born at the event with peace builders throughout Asia and the world. As well as contextualizing peace building from an individual outlook it will also comprise the successes and failures of different approaches to conflict transformation from a uniquely Asian perspective.

In addition to being a space for sharing, discussion and brainstorming, the forum also created a venue through which to reconnect to the field, to gain insights into the work of others and to share a common feeling of trust and companionship with practitioners from within the field of conflict transformation. It is a conference about benefiting from the experiences of each other but also of gaining new ideas and inspiration, about building networks and support through one another and to become reenergized when sometimes the obstacles seem too great.

After a week of building relationships and making connections, the forum ended with a celebration of the diversity and the common goals portrayed within the group. As the Filipinos serenaded the audience, and the Sri Lankans made them sing along to their traditional song, and as the Cambodians, the Bangladeshis, and the Timorese brought the audiences off their seats and into circles of bhangra, line dancing, and Apsara dancing, the unity in this diversity burst forth in a conga line where the Indians linked up with the Pakistanis, the Indonesians with the Timorese, the Cambodians with the Vietnamese, and peacebuilders from all across a continent formed bonds that promise to further our dream of a harmonious and productive Asia.



By **Carl Siebing**