

Asia West Pacific Section Executive Secretary's Report

FWCC World Plenary 2024

Dear Friends now, and in the future,

It is a tender time for Friends in Asia West Pacific. Over the last forty years, much has improved economically for hundreds of millions of people across our region. But not all fruits have been sweet. Sometimes in the air there is a smell of forest smoke burning beyond our hinterland. Sometimes eyes are sore from desert sands carried from far away. Our children cough to the smog of factories and fossil fuels in our choked cities. There are days it can be hard or dangerous to breathe, and we dare not walk out. [We have lost the blue of the sky.](#)

We see fewer birds and hear less kinds of song. Above us carrion birds twist and turn, spying and living off the mountains of garbage. And at night, in hundreds of cities across our beautiful region, looking up into the darkness, people cannot see, and some have never seen, the beauty of stars twinkling in their serene glory. The very sight of our galaxy, crossing the night sky, has disappeared.

We have screens and internet, but many of our rivers and streams carry strange foam and undrinkable water. After the extreme heat, our monsoons arrive, more saturated with rain. Vigorous storms fill the drains, spill out across streets and into houses and across towns and farming land. The seasons shift, and grow hotter. The snow of Tibet and Himalaya melts twice as fast now, glacier ice dams break, and many rivers across Asia carry the brown muddiness from flooding upstream and deforested places. It is precious earth carried from the headwaters to the estuary and even out to sea.

The Pacific waters rise around and over islands. When king tide comes, a father laughs at his children swimming across their living room. But he isn't easy. In another generation or two there will be no island left. The people will have to find new homes, and their culture will be lost with the rising waters.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, there are new tornadoes. In Australia we watch the bushfires burning our country, and now there are fire tornadoes, and the water poisoned by fire retardant. We see bats drop out of the trees in the tens of thousands because of heat waves.

In Asia, there are many marvels of buildings and freeways and even superfast trains. But so much is thrown away there, as everywhere else across our planet. The plastics are used once and left for future generations to clean up. In our cities, selling so many things, we notice the epidemic of loneliness. So much money to make, and to need to make, but so little meaning, so little affection, so little account for differences or need. So much disinformation, too, about the "other," about minorities, about the best motives of the corporations and the surveillance of governments.

Our screentime grant us information, but not deep listening. For those who live in safe places, with secure futures, there is the puzzle of plenty, and the passivity of privilege. With it can come fear of the slightest loss, and keeping firm grip on power, so decisions are kept just to the chosen few. In tree-filled suburbs, houses are surrounded by high walls, razor wire, and electric fence, forgetting that wealth has made them prisoners in

their own homes. Instead of government spending on life, armies are prepared to strike across straits and demilitarised zones. Helicopters fly in to clear out Indigenous people from their ancestral home. Security agencies manage metadata, police point machine guns, corporate security guards lock gates, and lawyers serve legal summons. They don't seem to listen to farmers who want a better price, neighbours who treasure natural places, students who ask for freedom, workers wanting fair pay for labour, unemployed tired of hunger, the infirmed weary of being overlooked, or the girl who just wants to walk safely to school. It takes guns and tanks and water cannons and jet planes and cyber experts and opinion media and a particular kind of deskjob, to hold this hardness of heart and to run a system at such a level of control and supervision.

When it can be hard to breathe. Sometimes there is no protest, and no discussion. When someone asks, just say instead, "I saw a buffalo yesterday." It is safer, and you will live, or keep your job, one more day.

In such a world, to find, understand and live out our interconnectedness, to experience the necessity of Ubuntu, is both a wonderful truth and an important skill. But Friends in Asia Pacific face three challenges.

Firstly, our small meetings and churches are separated by enormous distances. From Melbourne to Madhya Pradesh, from Bhopal to the island of Bohol, from Seoul to Sydney, from Daejeon to Dunedin, our scattered groups live far apart, a minority amongst half the world's population.

Secondly, we can learn so much from others' journey of faith. So we want to strengthen links with Woodbrooke, Pendle Hill, Silver Wattle, the Settlement, and in our own study groups, to experience time-friendly Quaker learning, and connect our youth and wisdom. We seek to strengthen the connections between Quaker schools, from Sohagpur to Hobart to Tokyo.

We know kindness is a strength not a weakness. Our Section can build networks of peace. Just as the corporations and arms trade work across countries, not just within them, we know that we may also need to work and pray together to build peace across the enormous distances, to reduce conflict in our lives and towns, and the threat of war and nuclear annihilation engulfing our whole region.

To share our lives and live in the Spirit a little more, FWCC Asia West Pacific's Section Gathering now meets each year, alternatively online and in-person. All Friends are invited, but we know that finding a week for travel, being able to afford it, getting a visa that will allow it, and deciding in conscience that climate justice requires it, are significant questions for each and all of us to also must answer.

Yes, being together is a joy. But Whenever Asia West Pacific Section Friends gather, or meet online to speak about climate, or peace, or consult annually with clerks to see how the Spirit prospers amongst us, or to learn more about Quakerism, we use English. It is our third challenge. Friends in Asia may be more familiar speaking Hindi, Cantonese, Korean, Japanese, Cebuano, or Tagalog, or Maori. So our Section is re-committing ourselves to language inclusion. We can learn from Friends Peace Teams Asia West Pacific pioneering its language inclusion approaches, building a grassroots movement.

Yes, we are few in number. We live far apart. We speak different languages. But our beloved Asia West Pacific needs us, and we need each other. By remembering we are connected, that Ubuntu is the most obvious and ever-present reality of being alive, we are finding a way to trust the love and truth in our hearts, that we might walk cheerfully in our hearts across the many miles that merely geographically separate us. We want to see a blue sky, and the stars at night, and for us to know each other more in the Spirit. Please pray for Friends in Asia West Pacific, and all the ways of peace and life and willingness we need to sustain all of us in our Section.

Adrian Glamorgan

Hiroshima Day, 2024