

The Ecumenical conference on Arms Trade in Asia

24 – 26 February 2008

Responding to the invitation from the Christian Conference of Asia, we the participants of this Conference, including Pastors, Bishops, Activists, Researchers and Policy Makers, gathered in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Representing seven countries (Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Sweden and Thailand) we gathered as people of faith, predominantly from the Christian faith tradition, to listen, understand and respond to the reality of arms trade, and its impact for the peoples of Asia.

Inspired by the Gothenburg process of the Churches in Sweden reflecting on the issue of conventional arms from a faith perspective. We share a common concern that the proliferation of arms is becoming a daily threat to the sanctity of human life. More than 1300 persons die each day, only out of shots from small arms and light weapons. The poorly regulated and illicit transfers and misuse of conventional arms fuel conflict, cause death and serious human rights violations and grave breaches of international humanitarian law, destabilizing countries and regions and undermining sustainable development.

We anguish over the fact that the production and trade of arms is using a considerable share of the financial, human and technological resources that societies have at their disposal. Sustainable futures for the peoples of the world are threatened if we continue to spend annually about 1035 billion dollars on military expenditure! With only 10% of this amount it would be possible to halve the number of people that suffer from hunger and reduce the infant mortality by two thirds. These are but only two examples of involvement towards achieving the millennium development goals.

As people of faith we drew inspiration, both from our scriptures and our respective faith journeys. We grappled with the disconnect between the radical call of our scriptures to affirm life and inclusive communities and our ways of living in fear, co-option, compromise. We reminded ourselves that as people of faith we are called to be prophetic both in our message and life style. As in every prophetic tradition we are called to "denounce" structures, systems and individuals that dehumanize and destroy God's creation. Simultaneously we are called to "announce" the good news which includes a world where there is total universal disarmament and just peace reigns (Isaiah 11:6-9); and "Surely Allah enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good (to others) and the giving to the kindred, and He forbids indecency and evil, and rebellion; He admonishes you that you may be mindful" (from Surah An Nahl 16:90)

We affirm with the UN the understanding of human security which involves freedom from fear harm and want. We believe and proclaim that challenging the forces of militarization and arms trade is essential in our process of reclaiming humanity and indeed the earth for all God's people.

Churches and faith based organizations therefore need to respond to the realities of arms trade

As a first step. One way of doing this is to join forces with other civil society organizations and campaigns. After years of campaigning from civil society, there is now for the first time ever, possibilities that the UN could adopt a universal Arms Trade Treaty. This treaty would establish legally binding universal standards for arms trade.

We, representatives of churches, faith based organizations and NGOs, gathered at this event and declare the following:

- We commit ourselves to further disseminate information and knowledge on the impact of increasing arms trade in Asia.
- We will be in solidarity with other civil society organizations and governments that promote a legally binding and effective Arms Trade Treaty.
- We urge our Churches, Christian councils and Faith based organizations to find ways of supporting the creation of a legally binding and effective Arms Trade Treaty which will make a difference in the lives of the people and the earth
- We recommend that the Churches and faith based organizations initiate/sustain an ongoing ministry of peace and reconciliation

We therefore move to organize a Chiang Mai process, inspired by the Gothenburg process (Sweden), addressing the complex issues of conventional and small arms proliferation in Asia. Towards this end we have formed a Steering Committee to be convened by the Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service of the Christian Conference of Asia