



# Christian Conference of Asia

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## CCA's Statement on Human Rights Day–2021 *“Equality – Reducing Inequalities, Advancing Human Rights”*

The focus of Human Rights Day this year is “Equality”, with the clear call of “Reducing Inequalities, Advancing Human Rights”. This year’s theme places emphasis on inequality as the fundamental or foundational issue in society, with ramifications that go beyond simply the financial or the economic aspect now pervading the world’s social order. Human Rights Day, which is observed on 10 December each year, gives us the opportunity to reiterate our attention on the issues that truly matter—the principles of equality and non-discrimination as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted in 1948.

The cardinal principle of human rights, as stipulated in Article 1 of the UDHR which pertains to equality, states this simple and undeniable truth: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. However, this affirmation is not fully realised, even today. We see an attempt to embody this in the United Nations’ (UN) 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—rooted in a human rights-based approach—which calls for global cooperation to eradicate deep-rooted and systemic discrimination through multi-pronged strategies and quantifiable targets. The human rights standard of equality holds up the vision of a free, just, and peaceful world, setting the bar for how individuals and institutions should treat other people.

A rights-based approach involves three fundamental concepts—equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination. Thus, any situation that contravenes these three ideals is a human rights violation. This includes abject poverty, concentration of wealth, food insecurity, health crises, ecological degradations, social conflicts, and gender and racial discrimination, among others. The United Nation’s SDGs treat each of these inequalities as separate issues, while also recognising their inherent interlinkages. This provides all stakeholders—be they countries, international organisations, or even churches—the ideal framework for cooperation and partnerships, with opportunities for each to come in and participate to the best of their capacities.

As we soon approach the two-year mark of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we reflect on the many ways in which existing inequalities have been exacerbated, deepened, and worsened. However, the question is, why does such inequality exist? Although the world may be healthier and wealthier on the whole as compared to times past, the extremes experienced today are crushing. Poverty has worsened, with millions of people now trapped in cycles of debt. Structural and systemic flaws have widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Vaccine injustice continues to prevail through unfair vaccine distribution and hoarding that goes against international legal and human rights norms. On both local and global levels, inequality gets perpetuated in manifold ways.

On this Human Rights Day, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) calls upon its member churches and councils to be the moral compass of the world today and demonstrate radical commitment to loving and serving one another. It is our spiritual obligation to sustain attention on inequality as an immediate crisis rather than a crisis to be eliminated across 10-, 15-, or 30-year windows. The most important law given to us by Jesus, which is “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”, is inextricably linked to each principle of the UDHR, affirming the freedom and equality of each human being. Being made in God’s own image, we know that each person possesses an intrinsic God-given dignity, and that no one has more of God’s image than anyone else. We must thus direct our attention and resources to serving the least among us, empowering them and protecting them—and this dedication to the uplift of the marginalised and disadvantaged must serve as a barometer of the effectiveness of our diaconal mission in reducing all forms of inequalities that exist today.

Mathews George Chunakara  
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