



Christian Conference of Asia

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CCA's Statement on World Health Day–2021 “Building a fairer, healthier world”

The global COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the necessity of prioritising equitable healthcare and access to affordable high-quality services with strong commitments from all stakeholders. The vulnerable and the marginalised communities are still being left behind in testing, treatment, and even vaccination during this global pandemic. Given that over fifty percent of the world's population has no access to social protection or adequate healthcare, the impacts are estimated to be manifold. Fragile health systems characterised, for the most part, by a lack of basic medical care facilities together with under-resourced hospitals are a common trend in Asia.

The theme of the World Health Day–2021, “Building a fairer, healthier world”, is a timely one and helps to address health concerns in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As COVID-19 vaccines begin to be rolled out gradually, there are alarming disparities in access to them across the world. Although the scientific development of the vaccine in record time is a great achievement, it remains to be seen if global political will and moral commitment would supplement the science in bringing about the end of the pandemic.

Contemporary issues regarding vaccine nationalism and vaccine distribution serve as a snapshot of global inequality, and are representative of all the forces that prevent the realisation of equality, fairness, and justice. As the World Health Organisation (WHO) observes, “International collaboration among scientists was critical to vaccine development, but now weak cooperation between nations is a major barrier to achieving worldwide vaccination at the scale needed to end the pandemic.” Several developed countries continue to hoard vaccines, buying up scarce supplies of doses, and in some cases, even preventing the export of vaccines to other countries.

Asian countries are now at a crossroads and are experiencing a critical window of opportunity of public vaccination. The availability of vaccines for import, scepticism towards vaccines themselves, and the general trust in vaccination across Asia has hindered the outreach of COVID-19 vaccines to a large extent. In many countries, access to vaccines, especially for marginalised communities, will remain a challenge simply given the sheer population that requires vaccination. A continuing lack of global solidarity and equity in access to COVID-19 vaccines will undermine efforts towards disease control and further derail the project of achieving a pandemic-free world. It is important for the region to ensure that everyone has the knowledge, information, and access for advanced research and development of these vaccines locally.

There is a great role that churches can play in building trust towards a healthier world, particularly in responding to the pandemic. The myths and misconceptions surrounding pandemic responses, especially vaccinations, must be urgently and emphatically addressed by the church. The trust that communities have towards faith leaders can play an important role in restoring health, healing, and wholeness as we recover from this pandemic. The church is also responsible for providing and amplifying correct information from the right medical authorities during the pandemic. We must also equip ourselves with relevant information and theological reflections of our social and moral obligations to each other in order to eliminate the fear, hesitancy, and misinformation regarding vaccines.

Church-owned healthcare institutions and services also need to shine a light on, and reach out to, underserved populations—the poorest of the poor, the rural communities, the socially marginalised, and those in fragile or conflict-prone areas—striving for their inclusion in vaccination and immunisation campaigns.

There are different models of health and healing ministries supported and sponsored by Asian churches. However, considering the growing need in different places, churches in Asia should promote health-seeking behaviour and take on more responsibilities in their mission and witness towards health and healing. Churches in Asia must be equipped further in shaping Christian witness to contribute to “building a fairer, healthier world”.

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