

Final Statement

BIRA VI

ASIAN CELEBRATION OF 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF NOSTRA AETATE

**The FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA)
Redemptorist Center, Pattaya, Thailand
16-20 November 2015**

1. It is by God's grace and providence that we 87 participants in the Sixth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA VI), from 17 different countries, have come to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* in our Asian context and in our time. We are grateful for the funding we received from Missio Aachen that helped make this gathering possible.
2. In this grace-filled gathering, we have worked together as the Church in Asia retracing our steps along the path of dialogue; praying, reflecting and sharing our experiences and thoughts on the questions of what we have done so far and what we need to do further for interreligious dialogue in Asia.
3. We recognize that *Nostra Aetate* is still inspiring and challenging us to realize the vision of the Church as the people of God in dialogue in our time, facing the interdependent reality of the complex and diverse influences of globalized socio-economic-cultural-political structures, we reaffirm the strong need of the "triple dialogue" with the poor, cultures and religions, in a journey towards the Kingdom of justice, peace and ecological harmony.
4. Through our experience of dialogue and action for the last five decades, we have learned that interreligious dialogue is not only to be a specific pastoral strategy of the Church, but rather an Asian vision of the Church. It is a Church that proclaims the values of the Kingdom without fear, in dialogical collaboration (partnership) with the people of other religions.
5. Struggling against any kind of fundamentalism, terrorism and proselytism, the Church in Asia is called to work together with others as co-pilgrims. In protecting the poor and the environment through our interreligious network, we are not doing social work together, but building a mystical union of God's Kingdom as inter-dependent beings (in the harmony of our relationship with one another and with all creation).
6. The Church in Asia confirms that we cannot engage with others in a real dialogue without having a clear identity of who we are and constantly growing in our own faith. In the pluralistic contexts of Asia, the Church, as a "little flock," is called to learn a *kenotic* (self-emptying) spirit of love and service from Jesus Christ. It is through our humble and open-minded approach that real trust and mutual understanding with others can be established. We are aware of the importance of grassroots interreligious dialogue, which

usually starts from inter-personal friendship and grows to communal action for justice and peace.

7. The Church in Asia takes seriously the challenges of today for all religions: various conflicts and violence, massive poverty and global inequality, the increasing numbers of refugees and migrants, pollution and environmental crisis, corruption and moral degradation, human trafficking and the breakdown of social cohesion, terrorism and all forms of fundamentalism.

8. One of the most urgent challenges in Asia is to proclaim Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, while acknowledging and respecting what is “true and holy in other religions” (*Nostra Aetate*, No. 2). As a community of disciples, we give witness to Jesus through our personal and communal lifestyle of love in three interconnected ways: silence, presence, and story-telling. In an existential silence, we empty ourselves and listen deeply to the voices of the other without judging, with a loving heart. In the depth of our silence, we are aware of Jesus’ presence among us, which is inspiring our journey of interreligious dialogue and action for transforming the world. It is by telling our own story of transformation through Jesus, as individual persons and as communities, that the globalized culture of indifference and greedy consumerism is to be transformed into the gospel-culture of solidarity and sharing.

9. In our common journey with others, we Christians in Asia recognize the importance of basic human communities at the grassroots level, where the dialogue of life and action is going on, especially together with the indigenous people. It is through these basic human communities that the Church in Asia learns the holistic world view and the sacred cosmic spirituality which awake us to take care of “our common home.” We are called to go beyond our comfort zone and to develop a new narrative of dialogue, coming from our common experience, with the hope of rediscovering the harmonious relationship between humanity, cosmos and God for the future generation.

10. We commit ourselves more passionately to interreligious dialogue in Asia in different ways for example:

- To develop local interreligious dialogue and action in the grassroots communities.
- To organize formation programs for interreligious dialogue within the Catholic community (e.g. Seminaries, religious houses of formation and for the laity).
- To promote intra-dialogue between Christian churches and within Catholic institutions.
- To support dialogue activities and forums. (e.g. UN Interfaith Harmony Week).
- To advocate interreligious dialogue and action in the public sphere and cyberspace.
- To provide adequate preparation and pastoral care to the interreligious family.

11. After these days of reflection and sharing of our experiences of and insights on interreligious dialogue in the light of *Nostra Aetate*, guided by the Holy Spirit, we have come to realize again the importance of openness towards the people of other religions and the indispensable role of witness to the Kingdom of God ever growing in the heart of Asian people. Through our sincere commitment to dialogue, “Jesus Christ will be better known, recognized and loved.” (PCID, *Dialogue in Truth and Charity*, No. 39).