

**FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES
OFFICE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION (FABC-OSC)**

Final Statement of the 23rd Annual Bishops' Meet 2018

Bangkok, Thailand

November 19-23, 2018

The 23rd Annual Bishops' meet of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences-Office of Social Communication (FABC-OSC) along with the stakeholders of Radio Veritas Asia (RVA) was held, November 19-23, 2018 at Personnel Development Centre, St Gabriel's Foundation, Bangkok, Thailand. Thirty-eight participants (eleven bishops, twenty-four priests and three lay persons) deliberated on the theme, "The Truth About 'Fake News': New Challenges in Social Communication and What We Can Do About it from a Christian Perspective."

As leaders of social communication ministry of the Church in the Episcopal conferences of Asia and Directors of Language Services of Radio Veritas Asia (RVA), we recognize the paramount importance of social communication as "Gift of God". We renew our commitment to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News of Christ through the means of social communications which technology has made possible in our times.

Guided by the Holy Spirit the assembly devoted to prayer, listening and discussion. As disciples of Christ, who said, "I am the Way, Truth and Life" (John 14:6), we turn to the Sacred Scriptures and the Magisterium of the Church to move forward with courage in our ministry. We are convinced that the Lord in fulfilment of his promises will lead us to complete truth and that the truth will set us free (cf. John 8:32) We also acknowledge the guidance and inspiration provided us by Pope Francis who in his Message for the World Day of Communications, 2018, expressed his hope "to contribute to our shared commitment to stemming the spread of fake news and to rediscovering the dignity of journalism and the personal responsibility of journalists to communicate the truth."

During the four days of study and reflection, we were guided in our deliberations by the scholarly sessions of resource persons. Prof Jonathan Corpus Ong, Global Digital Media, Boston, spoke to us via skype conference about "the Architecture of

Disinformation: Rethinking Faith-based intervention in Asian countries.” He urged the need for Christian leaders to uphold ethics in media and to raise awareness about the moral and social consequences of communication technologies in the everyday life of minority groups and vulnerable communities, and to support their use of digital media for coping and healing.

Citing data obtained from his research, Prof Ong pointed out that the malaise of fake news can be traced to older practices like rumour. Today there are many and subtle ways in which fake news is used to manipulate the mainstream media content; to shape political discourse; for attention hacking; and for dissemination of viral content. Networked disinformation engages architects of disinformation and public relation agents, community level fake account operators, corporate marketing persons and digital operators engaged in political deception.

Faith-based communities must not only reinvigorate discussion on ethics in the daily lives of people but must also engage with sound doctrine to guide them beyond truth and trustworthiness to foster compassion, fidelity, loyalty and prudence.

Professor Edson C. Tandoc Jr. of Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Singapore, in his skype talk and interaction highlighted how social media has become the major source for news for majority of people. More and more people, particularly the youth, prefer social media as a source of news for their entertainment value rather than the more credible and trustworthy sources of information such as the traditional media.

Fr. Joshy Xavier SJ, from Xavier University, Bhubaneswar, India, called for the need to discern information from scriptural and ethical perspectives. As fake news, lies and misinformation are contrary to the values of the Gospel, they should be countered with the Good News. He presented Pope Francis as a model for digital leadership and communication.

Mr. Michael Unland, Executive Director, Catholic Media Council (CAMECO), Germany, showed how we can make new media technologies work for those at the peripheries. Problematic features of digital media contribute to growing polarisation, and politics is engaged in pitting people against each other on the

basis of specific agenda. He called for a greater role that the Catholic community in Asia needs to exercise in developing and promoting ethical guidelines to communicate in a digital world. Christian communicators and communities need to explore ways to influence and shape the platforms and public spaces that determine the way we communicate in order to become more inclusive and contribute to the public good of the whole community. We also need to combine our offline community experiences with online community experiences.

The Assembly proposed the following recommendations:

1. The Churches in Asia must be awakened to the ever-growing phenomenon of fake news and disinformation in the various countries of Asia and must adopt effective pastoral responses to counter it.
2. The Church leaders, especially those who hold responsibility for communications, must collaborate and network with like-minded religious leaders, NGOs, media professionals and other advocacy groups in dealing with common concerns in media.
3. We need to enter into critical engagement with individuals and organisations involved in the creation and dissemination of fake news and disinformation, hold them accountable and raise awareness about the consequences of their action.
4. Pastoral personnel must develop competence in the field of social communication so as to educate and train the Faithful, particularly the youth, in recognising fake news and deceptive communication, and to make them more critical and discerning in their media habits.
5. The Church must recognise her mission to be witnesses of truth and know her potential to provide authentic news and information and become a prophetic voice of truthful and credible communication praxis. As Pope Francis has stated "none of us can feel exempted from the duty of countering these falsehoods (WCD, 2018).
6. We must critically engage in communication that can build communities, especially in favour of those at the periphery, the migrants, the minorities

and the marginalised. Her prophetic mission demands that the Church strives to engage with policy makers to enact legislations and legal safeguards that foster truthful and authentic communication.

7. The Church must make sincere efforts to promote digital media literacy and media education for all in the Church, including pastoral personnel in formation so that they become informed and responsible users of digital media for information, formation, and transformation.
8. We must develop a network of Catholic media professionals and organizations such as SIGNIS, RVA, CAMECO, NISCORT to develop training programmes, undertake research and train people with media competence in all the dioceses to promote healthy communication and to counter fake news. As Pope Francis has pointed out "the best antidotes to falsehoods are not strategies, but people" (WCD 2018).
9. We shall encourage and acknowledge Catholic and other Media Professionals by establishing and conferring annual awards, certificates and other forms of recognition. We shall observe the World Communications Day as a means to create awareness about pertinent issues concerning media.
10. We shall develop an ethical code of conduct for digital communication praxis based on Gospel values, taking into consideration the diverse cultural, religious and social contexts of Asia.