

Sri Lankan Families Need Healing in Post-War Era: Bishop
By T S Thomas

Negombo: Catholic families in Sri Lanka are yet to recover from the horrors of war and violence, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) was told.

Although "the external violence of the protracted war is over, lasting peace is yet to become a reality," said Bishop Robert M. Andradi of Anuradhpura on November 30 while addressing the FABC's eleventh plenary assembly in Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital.

"The Asian Catholic Family: domestic Church of the poor on a Mission of Mercy," is the theme of the bishops' eleventh plenary, which is expected to bring out clear guides for the Church's family ministry in Asia.

More than 140 delegates including Cardinals, archbishops, bishops and various offices and funding partners are attending the November 28-December 4 assembly in Negombo, a Catholic hub, some 40 km north of Colombo.

Bishop Andradi, secretary general of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka presented his country's response to a working paper on Asian families the FABC secretariat circulated among its members.

The report from Sri Lanka underscored healing services for the Catholic families in Sri Lanka and called for training them as peace makers.

Sri Lanka underwent nearly three decades of ethnic civil war between the Tamil and Sinhalese communities leaving many families orphaned with their key members either killed or missing. The war ended in 2009.

The Asian bishops are meeting in the island nation for the first time for their plenary assembly.

Bishop Andradi says the Church in Sri Lanka is placed on a unique position as it is the only organization that has members from Tamil and Sinhalese groups. "This factor enhances our Christian responsibility to continue as peace makers," said the bishops, while stressing constant animation and education in this regard.

"Many want to know what happened to their loved ones. Family life, especially in the North and East of Sri Lanka has been deeply affected by this protracted war," observed the prelates and added that the war's "sad and unfortunate consequences" cannot be underestimated.

The prelate also claimed the Church in Sri Lanka has tried to restore peace in the Lankan families as well as train Catholics to become "peace makers" in society.

The war has left Catholic families poor, forcing many parents to go overseas countries for jobs. "This situation is resulting in a new slavery, dysfunctional growth and development of children," the bishop said.

According to Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment, more than 2 million Sri Lankans, majority of them women, now work abroad. Among them, 88 percent work as house maids.

Nearly 92 percent Sri Lankan migrants go to the Persian Gulf countries. Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, absorb more than 80 of the Sri Lankan migrants, the bureau reported.

Bishop Andradi noted many reports about migrant workers being subjected to unhealthy and unfair circumstances. "Some have returned home with broken limbs, some dead bodies have been flown back with no explanations on their deaths," he added.

The adverse impact of migration on the Sri Lankan families has forced the government to restrict people going overseas for jobs after the end of the civil war. "But much is needed from the Church to address these issues too," Bishop Andradi asserted.

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