

5th EMS South & East Asia Regional Forum 9-12 February 2025, CNI Delhi, India

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I. Motive and aims of the SEARF

Invited by EMS and hosted by CNI, member churches of the SEARF, PROK, PCK, CNI, and CSI met 9-12 February 2025 in Delhi, India.

Participants were pointed to the roots of the SEARF, being reminded that the historic urge to meet regularly came from the members who are doing mission work in their respective contexts. They affirmed the importance of this space for partnership in the ecumenical journey of South and East Asia, believing that today's mission work is an ecumenical expression of internationalisation and the equal participation and right of all churches. The uniting theme *JUST PEACE HOPE FILLED VISION & EDUCATION IN SOUTH & EAST ASIA* is also one of the focuses of EMS for the next six years and holds special significance in this fifth successive meeting of the SEARF, as members of the council deliberated and planned concrete steps for working together in the Asian geo-political-economic context and missional challenges. In sharing EMS missional impetus, the SEARF comes together to amplify the solidarity of five churches from three countries serious about finding ways to collaborate and to "be" the change in contemporary contexts.

In his keynote address, EMS General Secretary Rev. Dr. Dieter Heidtmann called on the churches to work together so that great things can be achieved in unity. Together the churches can overcome hatred and oppression; the Church's response to colonialism and slavery provides an example for the way forward. Peace is desperately needed today for Christians all over the world. The Scripture "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" represents the compass for our lives. Turning the other cheek to the bully does not just counteract the effect of the first blow. Similarly, walking the extra mile is the first step toward love. Pinchas Lapide describes Jesus' commandment to love one's enemies through *de-hostilising*. In this context, love is not a pious wish but a strategy that seeks to balance individuals' varying interests as a compass for resolving conflict. Love breaks through patterns of violence and humiliation and makes the vulnerable side of life visible again. Here "Mission in Solidarity" is needed more than ever. We do not have much time left. Now is the time to act! EMS invites its members to participate in the activities of the conference's theme: "Just peace: hope filled vision and education in South and East Asia."

Ecumenical movement in Korea

Observing the role of Christians in resistance and revolution and their transformation for justice in the geopolitical history of Korea highlights the ecumenical movement there as a movement of social action. The task of the church is to fulfil social responsibilities, respond to people's movements, and act in solidarity with them in the context of the network of global

ecumenism. We see in Asia today sharp inequalities in terms of geo-politics, economics, caste, class, gender, religion, and primacy of the market.

II. Sharing Solidarity and Missional Engagement

Discrimination and inequalities based in economic, social, cultural, and religious disparity cause many of the challenges in Korea and India and much of South and East Asia. The nexus of politics, religion, and market factors influences the intersecting oppression experienced in Asia. Threats to religious freedom and economic policies that favour the wealthy, discriminate against individuals, and erode ecological balances represent common dynamics and challenges faced in our context. In addition, commonalities in the fight for survival include the prevalence of fundamentalist national governments and threats from neighbouring super powers that create barriers to justice and fullness of life. One area that needs to be harnessed to tackle these challenges is networking among local units/ dioceses/ congregations/ women, youth, children fellowships instead of working by way of over centralised administration.

III. The way forward for the South & East Asia Regional Forum

Exploring new avenues and spaces to address the challenges SEARF churches face in Asia must become the basis for mission priorities of the SEARF. Participants highlighted the importance of finding meaningful relating factors as an Asian Mission Council in terms of partnering, networking, relationship building, solidarity, spaces for cross learning, and listening to one another's challenges and testimonies.

IV. Future steps and possible networking for the SEARF

As members of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity, we commit ourselves to

- Multilateral mission partnerships
- Accountability, transparency, and responsibility
- A common prophetic witness and the formation of just and compassionate mission policies
- Dialogue and partnership in equality among the churches in South and East Asia
- Solidarity in mission at the regional level
- Multilateral partnership resources and project-based partnerships within Asia

Ideas for consideration:

- Relevance and theological understanding of partnership in the Asian context
New ways of understanding partnership were suggested in some of the presentations, i.e., elevate the fellowship of SEARF between partners into a regional forum in EMS where members convene not merely for exchange but also to go beyond to ensure wider participation.
- Enacting *diakonia* in mission
Concrete expressions might be points of partnership between members of SEARF, always keeping in mind that local personnel know their contexts best rather than partners who enter the host environment.

- “Ecumenical co-workers” rather than “missionaries” is the preferred terminology in possible partnerships.
- Competence as the basis for being invited as ecumenical coworkers with clear roles described between the partner churches may avoid future issues.
- SEARF will continue to be a space for fellowship, solidarity, and working together on specific projects as well as new ways of partnership.
- SEARF could act as a platform to facilitate churches moving beyond their respective boundaries to become more effective in mission.

V. Expectations from the SEARF for the future partnership of EMS member churches

SEARF could contribute to the focus and strategic planning of EMS and its ecumenical and international network among member churches and mission agencies.

Volunteer exchange and engagement in member churches should continue among EMS member churches in Asia as well as be initiated between other south-south partners.

The Regional Forum as an appointed network could function at four levels:

1. Network of General Secretaries
2. Exchange of ecumenical co-workers network
3. Youth volunteer network
4. Women’s network
5. Network of Regional Support Officers (RSO)

SEARF could also form project/ campaign/ issue based partnerships.

SEARF and regional forums could possibly develop a creative and contextual missional focus and introduce inter-cultural and trans-cultural concerns. They might also introduce inter-religious encounters into the family of EMS and draw the attention of EMS Mission Council and General Meetings to the importance of addressing the specific contextual needs of regional members.

Statement Committee Members

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