

Southeast Asia Meeting on Women
Majodi Centre, Johor, Malaysia
“Challenges to Women in the Family in the 21st Century”

1. Introduction

1.1 The 8th Plenary Assembly of the FABC which reflected on “The Asian Family Toward A Culture Of Integral Life”, noted that there is a steady erosion of family values, faith and spirituality with the growing culture of consumerism, materialism, and greed. Asian families are vulnerable to the profound social changes, especially under the impact of economic and cultural globalization. Women, who take on the primary responsibility for families in Asia, are faced with many challenges due to these changes.

1.2 This Southeast Asia Meeting on Women II organized by the Women’s Desk of the FABC Office of Laity and Family was inspired by the final working document of the 8th FABC plenary assembly. The participants consisting of thirty- one women, three bishops and one priest came from Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Mongolia, to Majodi Centre, Johor, Malaysia from 27th of January to the 31st January, 2008, to deliberate on the theme “Challenges to Women in the Family in the 21st Century.”

1.3 The objectives of the meeting were outlined as follows:

- To examine the threats and challenges to family life posed by 21st century values, and work culture.
- To examine women’s roles and responsibility in the family, and understand how the challenges hinder women from living her role with dignity.
- To learn from each other and reflect together how we as Church can help promote women’s dignity and help them respond to the challenges of the 21st century.

2 Insights during the meeting were inspired by reflections on Holy Scripture, country sharing, inputs and discussions.

2.1 The sharing of country realities and personal experiences, made participants aware of the multiple challenges to women posed by a world rapidly changing because of economic and cultural globalization.

2.2 Poverty, migration, trafficking of women and children, erosion of family values, materialism and consumerism impact families in the region and are the major concerns of women.

2.3 Women experience violence in the home, in relationships where she is supposed to be protected.

2.4 Women grapple with problems like economic dependence, lack of responsibility of men in the family, alcoholism, gambling and male domination indicative of the patriarchal structures of society.

2.5 Women need to build partnerships and sisterhood to support and bond with each other.

3. Challenges:

- 3.1 Increasing number of breakup of families.
- 3.2 Migration which leaves behind single parent or grandparent headed households.
- 3.3 Trafficking and prostitution caused by poverty, materialism and consumerism.
- 3.4 Focus on increasing incomes, parents working long hours, children left without proper supervised care, eroding family relationships.
- 3.3 Absence of parents is often compensated by material goods.
- 3.4 Double standards of morality and demoralization push unfaithfulness and lead to broken families.
- 3.5 Increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS.

4. Recommendations:

- 4.1 Women need to recognize their dignity and develop a spirituality that affirms their value, their gifts and their potential. This spirituality will enable them to respond to the challenges in the 21st century.
- 4.2 Initiatives needed to build partnership and balance of responsibility of men and women in the family.
- 4.3 Awareness and formation programmes for young boys and girls to help them develop a healthy attitude towards one another.
- 4.4 Advocacy and lobbying for laws that protect the dignity of women.
- 4.5 Empower women through spiritual formation, education and skills training.
- 4.6 The development of couple relationship, shared responsibility and decision making in the family should be an essential component of pre marriage courses.
- 4.7 A mechanism to address women's issues at the diocesan and parish levels.

5. Conclusion:

We believe that the Word of God and the Holy Eucharist which is the source and summit of our Christian life will sustain us in our deep concern for women.

We look to Mary, who during her time faced many challenges as a mother and disciple of Jesus. May she accompany and intercede for us in our journey towards fullness of life for all women.

We thank Bishop Paul Tan of the Johor Melaka diocese for offering us the facilities of the Majodi Centre and personnel to help with the organization of the meeting. We also thank the FABC Office of Laity and Family for organizing the South East Asia Meeting on Women 2 to help the Church in the region to understand the challenges to women in the 21st century.

