



Institute of Human Rights (IHR) *“Being Defenders of Human Rights and Human Dignity”*

“We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality, and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity...a just, equitable, tolerant, open, and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.”

Background Information

The concept of human rights and human dignity is ancient. The struggle for protecting human dignity is as old as the exploitation of human beings who were traditionally termed as “lesser fortunate”. The idea of human rights has wider dimensions—both aspirational and practical. Human rights principles hold up the vision of a free, just, and peaceful world, and set minimum standards for how individuals and institutions everywhere should treat people. Human rights standards also empower people with a framework for action when those minimum standards are not met. However, the core values of the principles of human rights are based on the protection and advancement of human dignity.

Upholding human rights are acts of maintaining and affirming each person’s dignity. Human rights assume many forms and are shaped by the historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions through which they prevail. Human rights, in practice, are not static but are dynamic and changing, reflecting the socio-economic and political systems in which they are nurtured or negated. The scope and applications of human rights evolve in meaning and social impact as these systems change. Today, human rights have permeated virtually every corner of the world, with its principles embedded in national legislations, enshrined in national constitutions, and included in important international treaties.

Over the centuries, human rights as internationally recognised value encompasses not only the traditional concept of civil and political rights, but also economic and social rights, and a third generation of collective rights such as right to peace, development, and environment. In other words, human rights represent the totality of basic rights that are inherent to every human being since birth; accorded simply by nature of being, and not contingent on other differentiations or characteristics. Although the world has changed dramatically since the time the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted in 1948—for example, its drafters could not have possibly foreseen modern challenges of climate change, digital privacy, and artificial intelligence—its unwavering focus on human dignity continues to provide a solid basis for evolving concepts of freedom. However, the current socio-political climate is highly charged, divisive, and discriminatory. There have been several instances of gross human rights violations in today’s world.

It is imperative to bear in mind that there is no peace without justice and that there cannot be any durable and lasting development without the promotion of broad social progress and better standards of life for all. Rather than advancing to greater freedom, equality, justice, and peace, the world is sliding backwards. Thus, we are now at a pivotal time in human history. The basic principles that undergird human rights for all must be strengthened to combat today’s challenges.

As Christians, we are called upon to combat this epidemic of human rights violations. The kinds of massive global suffering that result from human rights violations in both the civic-political and the socio-economic orders force us to develop effective responses that are grounded in a culture of human rights. It requires first to affirm that all persons are made in the image and likeness of God, and then confront the realities of the lives of millions of people who are caught in the bondage of institutionalised violence. We are called to reiterate our commitment to uphold the values of human dignity and establish a culture of human rights.

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) has historically been at the forefront of the defence of human rights in Asia in various ways. The CCA has been addressing human rights issues in Asia over the past decades.

Institute of Human Rights (IHR)

The Institute of Human Rights (IHR) is a new initiative of the CCA to train pastors and church workers in human rights advocacy and action as well as to understand the principles of human rights and human dignity from Christian theological perspectives. The two-week-long training programme, under the theme '**Being Defenders of Human Rights and Human Dignity**', will aim at training and empowering young pastors and church workers as well as social and human rights activists with the knowledge and skills they require to become human rights defenders in their communities.

The IHR will also focus on human rights and sustainable development goals (SDGs). The agenda for Sustainable Development sets out a vision for "sustainable development grounded in international human rights standards, putting equality and non-discrimination at the centre of its efforts and encompassing not only economic and social rights but also civil, political, and cultural rights, and the right to development". In order to uphold the values of human rights, we need to envisage a world of universal respect for human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity. It is an imperative to promote and protect the values of a just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met in every context.

Universal values enable the SDGs to be truly transformative, by placing the person and their inherent dignity at the heart of development efforts, empowering all people to become active partners in this endeavour. Integrating universal values of human rights into implementation of SDGs will ensure their international obligations which will uphold the values of human rights and human dignity.

In 2021, the IHR will be conducted through a virtual platform (online), facilitated by a team of prominent and internationally recognised human rights experts, advocates, activists, and academicians.

Objectives

- To enable a select group of young prospective social activists and human rights defenders from among pastors and church workers in Asia to develop wider perspectives on human rights;
- To enable the participants to deepen their understanding on human rights and human dignity from biblical theological as well as interfaith perspectives;
- To enable the prospective human rights defenders to develop their skills on application of theoretical and legal human rights instruments while being engaged in defending human rights in their respective contexts.

IHR–2021 Schedule

IHR–2021 will be held from **17 to 28 May 2021** and sessions will be conducted each week from Monday to Friday through Zoom. Therefore, selected participants are expected to make the necessary arrangements to access and secure their own stable internet connection and devices (laptop/desktop/computer/tablet/smartphone, etc.) throughout the deliberations of IHR sessions.

There will be two sessions on each working day of IHR (Mon-Fri in both weeks). Each session will last for 90 minutes (60 minutes lecture time and 30 minutes discussion/reflections). In total there will be 20 sessions/workshops over 10 working days during the entire duration of the IHR.

Application and Selection Process

Twenty-five selected students only will be admitted to the training course. Those who are interested to apply must send the following documents together:

- The duly filled application form for IHR (available for download on the CCA website);
- A curriculum vitae with details on academic qualifications, personal details, and work experiences;
- Letter of recommendation/endorsement from the applicant's member church/ council/ ecumenical organisation/ institution;
- A scanned copy of the applicant's ID or passport;
- An official photograph (scanned digital copy).

The completed IHR–2021 application must be sent along with scanned copies of all supporting documents to bp-cca@cca.org.hk. In case email correspondence is not possible, applicants are advised to fax the application form and other documents to +66-53-247-303.

The deadline for receiving the complete application form with all supporting documents is **10 April 2021**. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Selections will be based on competence, gender, and sub-regional balances, and the applicant's ability to effectively communicate in English.