

Action Statement of the South Asian Jesuits for Living and Sharing the Good News in South Asia

We, the 170 delegates to the first South Asian Assistancy Assembly (SAAA), having met at Mumbai from 22-28 Oct 2001, deliberated on the serious and challenging issues related to our LIVING AND SHARING THE GOOD NEWS IN SOUTH ASIA TODAY.

A deep personal love for Jesus Christ with a genuine commitment to the values of the New Creation shapes our spirituality. In Jesus Christ we encounter the compassionate face of God turned towards the world. In and through him we realise that God loves us and His Spirit fills us with the new life manifested in Christ. As an apostolic body in the Church we are called to be contemplatives in action, walking the way of Jesus in solidarity with those most in need. The Ignatian pedagogy of discernment inspires us to interpret the signs of the times and to listen to what the Spirit is telling us in the present context of South Asia.

Following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, we share with the people what we have received in our vocation, what we try to embody in our own life, personal and communitarian. Against greed for comfort, craving for social status and struggle for power, we proclaim the message that God is the true centre of all life. We stand against the consumerism of our world, which infiltrates also into the life of the Church and of religious communities. We stand for solidarity against every form of exclusiveness, separation and hostility that divides our society. We acknowledge the creative movements of the Spirit in the struggles and aspirations of the poor, in the symbols and Scriptures of other faiths and in the diverse cultural expressions of our people. The orientations given by General Congregations 32 & 34 help us to reaffirm our apostolic priorities and to commit ourselves to this action plan in the spirit of the Ignatian *magis*.

Our Context

Rapid technological change has created a world marked by opposites. We find both intensely painful human problems and a heightened global awareness of injustices and a new search for God and much action for good.

On the one hand, globalisation, religious fundamentalism and ethnic nationalism are the dominant forces confronting us today. The nexus among these aggravates ethnic and religious conflicts in our region. There is also a concerted move of the privileged classes to maintain their privileges and power by imposing mono-cultural religious nationalism on the people. Predatory capital exploiting cheap labour, especially of women and children, manipulation of the media, state and counter terrorism, casteism, religious persecution, economic marginalisation, environmental degrada-

tion, displacement of peoples, cultural erosion and consumerism abound in this region. In spite of its being the home for some of the world's great religions.

On the other hand, it is heartening to see how our people continue to nurture aspirations for a more just society and strive energetically to realise it. Movements like Narmada Bachao Andolan, Netarhat, Koel-Karo, Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and Peace Initiatives in Sri Lanka express the conviction that people must themselves be the primary agents of their destiny. The work of dedicated Voluntary and Civil Liberties Organisations and secular-minded intellectuals is further reason for hope. The heightened world consciousness about human rights, environmental and social concerns, allied with advances in communication technology, make lobbying and advocacy at national and International level a powerful instrument in favour of the poor. We also acknowledge that globalisation has brought about an intense consciousness of human solidarity, particularly in times of disaster.

This situation calls for a renewal of our commitment to and ways of living and sharing the Good News, which should help us to enhance our fervour and passion for the New Creation. In our deliberations we have identified areas of ministry for a renewed commitment.

I. Pastoral Ministry

We understand pastoral ministry as caring for all people, not exclusively for Catholics, in their total and integral growth. Primarily three dimensions will characterize Jesuit pastoral ministry in South Asia:

1. Spirituality which is incarnational, communitarian, prophetic and dialogical.
2. Solidarity by experiencing the life of the poor and actively participating in their struggles for integral liberation.
3. Service which means sharing generously and magnanimously with others what we are and what we have received from God.

Hence we resolve;

1. To immerse ourselves in the liberative aspects of the culture of the local people, their world of rites, symbols, language, myths, feasts and festivals,
2. To share the lifestyle of the poor and participate in their struggles so that we give credible witness to Jesus Christ.
3. To promote Basic Christian Communities leading to the formation of Basic Human Communities built on freedom, fellowship and justice,
4. To participate in movements and programmes for promoting inter-religious and inter-ethnic harmony through the four-fold dialogue of life, action, sharing of religious experiences and sharing of theological reflection (GC 34, Dialogue, 4) and to respect sisters and brothers of other traditions as co-pilgrims.
5. To respond comprehensively to the phenomenon of growing religious fundamentalism (including Christian) and ethnic chauvinism, enter into critical dialogue and be agents of reconciliation.

II. Education

Our educational apostolate aims at accompanying persons to fullness of life and integral development, especially those belonging to the marginalized and exploited sections of society. This apostolate demands of us a high intellectual rigour and a value system to find meaning in life against the artificial needs fostered by consumerism. Our education should enable people to become effective agents of social change and persons with and for others.

Therefore, we resolve:

1. To evolve policies to reserve an appropriate percentage in appointments/admissions for our priority groups in all education institutions.
2. To initiate and join people's movements that demand free and compulsory education from age 6 to 24 declared a basic human right,
3. To start remedial education projects, neighbourhood schools, evening colleges, vocational training and non-formal education in order to serve the deprived sections of society.
4. To create a cell/task force to do socially relevant research, oriented towards advocacy, devising pedagogy programmes and making the advances of science and technology available to the deprived masses.
5. To promote networking among ourselves and with other agencies concerned with the problems of education.
6. To provide teaching material in value education comprising basic elements of all religions, problems of social justice, human rights and environmental concerns, questions of sex-education and issues of civic responsibilities.
7. To carefully review and adapt the IPP with a view to implementing it in all our educational institutions.
8. To share our mission with our collaborators, students, parents and alumni/ae in our educational institutions and thus build effective teams imbued with the values of the Gospel.

III. Social Action

A truly democratic society is participatory at all levels and in different arenas. In reality such participation is beyond the possibility of several groups discriminated against in society. Living and sharing the Good News for us today means working towards equality and human dignity in solidarity with and for these marginalized groups. With this in view, we endorse the JCSA document, *Walking with the Poor*, and resolve:

1. To enhance the solidarity of Jesuits with the poor by making our living quarters functional, simple and accessible to people.
2. To encourage every Jesuit to experience working with people's movements or grass roots organisations at least for a period of one year, especially during formation.

3. To ensure that every province has Jesuits professionally trained in social action.
4. To build up effective advocacy and networking by getting involved in people's movements like campaign for human rights, tribal self-rule, *panchayati raj*, rights for women, refugees, displaced persons and environmental issues.
5. To require that each province identify critical and crucial issues, which need our response and participation.
6. To issue public statements at province/assistanacy levels in situations of grave social injustice and violations of human rights.
7. To network closely among ourselves as well as with other like-minded groups at local/zonal/ national/international levels.
8. To make our personnel, resources and institutional facilities available to people's movements and grass-roots organisations.
9. To support social action by strengthening research and study centres, as well as by a body of resource persons at the Assistanacy level to guide, facilitate and monitor Implementation.
10. To recommend establishing mechanisms at the level of the Curia of the General in order to fight the forces and negative impact of globalisation.

IV. Dalits

Our inspiration is Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen Lord, who struggles along with the broken people, the dalits. We, his companions, share the brokenness of both Christ and the dalits by participating in their struggle to regain human dignity and identity as children of God. We commit ourselves to fight casteism and create a society without caste discrimination, beginning with ourselves, where every woman and man is respected and treated equally.

Hence we resolve:

1. To emphasize dalit concerns at the existing research centres and network with different dalit movements and human rights groups, and allocate sufficient personnel and resources needed for the ministry among the dalits.
2. To opt preferentially for the most marginalized sections among the dalit groups, irrespective of their religious persuasions, while working with all sections to minimize the divisions and differences among them and moulding them into a united and powerful group.
3. To reserve an appropriate percentage in admissions and appointments for dalits in our institutions while offering special programmes to enhance their learning abilities.
4. To develop a spirituality of self-emptying whereby we all have an opportunity to feel the presence of the Spirit in the dalit-awakening.

V. Adivasis/Tribals

Living and sharing the Good News with the Adivasis/tribals of SA demands enabling and empowering them to affirm and to assert their own dignity, and to rise up to take their rightful place in the modern world. It means accompanying them and facilitating their traditional system and leadership to protect the land, forest, water and habitat from all destructive forces. It entails recognizing the diversity among the Adivasis/tribals and, at the same time, building up unity to counter the de-tribalizing forces that negate their distinct identity, culture, social organisation and land rights.

We resolve to attain this through:

1. Assisting them to assert their identity as Adivasi/tribal people in their own right and support their struggle for a due place and share in the larger society, by unifying them into a politically active force by promoting and strengthening Adivasi/tribal self- rule through *gramsabha* and *panchayat*.
2. Advocacy and networking among ourselves and other like- minded groups in each zone for promoting justice, protecting human rights and control over the use of natural resources by arresting the unjust transfer of resources from Adivasi/tribal areas.
3. Focusing our efforts to equip Adivasis/tribals to undertake economic activities to meet their needs and to take control of their production and marketing, thus freeing themselves from economic exploitation.
4. Fostering research among Jesuits and others, particularly among the Adivasis/tribals themselves, to help develop a scientific understanding of Adivasi/tribal culture and society, for appropriate interventions as well as helping to develop a theology based on an Adivasi/tribal worldview.
5. Facilitating proficiency in the English language among Adivasi/tribal students, while upholding the primacy of Adivasi/tribal languages in the early years of education.
6. Ensuring that special investment is made for the education of Adivasi/tribal children, particularly girl children, and training and empowering Adivasi/tribal women to take up leadership roles to bring about social change.

VI. Women

Women, in the wider patriarchal society and in our male dominated Church, have been often treated as inferior and subjected to manifold forms of discrimination and stereotyping. Globalisation and conflict situations have resulted in the feminisation of poverty and labour, and the commodification of women. Living and sharing the Good News today demands affirming the status and dignity of women. Valuing the feminine way of experiencing reality, a Jesuit is invited in the light of GC 34 (“Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society”) to discover the feminine in him, to change his’ mind-set, and to enhance his way of relating to God, world, humankind and creation. This involves empowering women as equal partners in society and the Church. Hence, we resolve:

1. To assist in organising, mobilizing and empowering women by networking with women's groups, making our resources available to these groups, by taking up social and economic issues such as violence against women, sex-ratio, female infanticide and foeticide.
2. To ensure women's participation in the sharing of responsibility and decision-making in our ministries.
3. To involve women resource persons in the formation of Jesuits.
4. To empower school dropout girls, illiterate, displaced and unorganised women like domestic and casual labourers through vocational training and non-formal education.

VII. Youth

Young people constitute a major component of South Asia's population. They play a crucial role in building up our nations. Because of the confusion of values in today's competitive and fast changing society, many of them fall prey to sects, cults, violence, drugs, alcohol, sexual exploitation and other destructive influences. Therefore, living and sharing the Good News with the youth implies accompanying them and forming them as men and women for others.

Hence we resolve:

1. To equip Jesuit youth animators with competence and skills to motivate the youth to get involved in socio-political issues and social service of the poorest.
2. To make Jesuit communities hospitable and our facilities available to the youth.
3. To have in every province a team of Jesuits to plan, implement, coordinate and evaluate youth animation, and make available the necessary funds and resources.
4. To collaborate and network with other youth centres and organisations which share our values.
5. To promote JYMSA's objectives among the unorganised youth.

Accountability Structures

Accountability helps translating good will into effectiveness. We have excellent examples of Jesuits who have internalised the spirit of the Society and have been models. The vertical structures have inbuilt mechanisms of accountability. However, the horizontal aspect of accountability is yet to be fully realised in our mode of functioning. In order to elicit better accountability both at horizontal and vertical levels we resolve:

A. Province/Region Level

1. To promote a culture of accountability through meetings, with prior agenda between consultors, directors of works, superiors and commission co-ordinators, with subsequent minutes and action taken reports, at least once a year.

2. To conduct extended consults in the Province/Region periodically.
3. To strengthen the various province/region commissions by delegating effective powers.
4. To urge major superiors to demand accountability as a normal administrative measure.
5. To ensure that decision-making processes are transparent, as far as possible, so that decisions are owned by the implementing agencies.
6. To utilise Province/Region assemblies and congregations as occasions for review and follow up.

B. Zonal Level

1. To arrange annual meetings of Major Superiors with Commission Co-ordinators.

C. Assistancy Level

1. To revitalize the Secretariats at the Assistancy level.
2. To have Action Taken Reports presented by major superiors at the JCSEA and to promote co-responsibility at the Assistancy level.
3. To strengthen the POI with an appropriate mandate for the smooth implementation of the decisions taken at the Assistancy level.
4. To Improve communication channels and the information dissemination system at all levels.

Conclusion

This Assembly has been an encouraging experience of union of minds and hearts among us Jesuits in South Asia. Our deliberations dealt with some of the major apostolic priorities of the Society in South Asia in response to the challenges of the times. Our “sharing of the Good News” can be authentic and effective only if it emerges from a credible “living of the Good News”.

A dynamic spirituality must animate our works. Hence, the focus of our living the Good News in the coming years would be a deep personal experience of the Spirit of Christ active in our world and a lifestyle characterized by simplicity, hospitality and closeness to the people. The thrust of our sharing the Good News would be marked by networking with other agencies, a culture of dialogue with brothers and sisters of other faiths and all people of good will for the emergence of a new and just society, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ who came to make all things new.