

## **Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) - 2026**

17–21 April 2026 | Chiang Mai, Thailand

Theme: ***“Break Every Yoke”***

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### **Asian Youth Amidst Unprecedented Crisis**

Youth in Asia belong to remarkable diversity with incredible potential, experiences, and resilience; they also play remarkable and crucial roles in their families and societies. Asian youth, over sixty per cent of the total youth population in the world, are a dynamic force driving innovation and development, but face innumerable challenges every day. While they possess significant potential for contributing to economic growth, they struggle for jobs, access to quality education, overcoming social inequality, and a lack of opportunities in decision-making. The challenges they are facing and the crisis precipitating are sparking widespread protests by youth-led movements demanding better governance, jobs, and social change. Their anger and anguish are fuelled by frustration with political establishments and intensified with the help of modern digital connectivity. Social norms and customs that are deeply rooted in traditional societies continue to breed gender inequality and marginalisation or alienation of young people from the mainstream of their societies or opportunities for meaningful civic engagement. Asia today stands at the crossroads of a web of social, economic, political, ecological, and spiritual challenges that affect young people with multiple complexities. Young people in Asia are navigating the harsh realities of the contemporary world - conflicts, violence, political and economic instability, unemployment, rampant militarisation, environmental collapse, cultural fragmentation, lack of adequate healthcare, and impacts of rapid technological advancement.

The social impact related to the increased number of “young singles” and the rise in the proportion of young men and women who remain single, as well as the delay in entering into married family life, is manifested in different societies. Such practice among young Asians was unheard of one or two decades ago. Job opportunities for young, educated people have declined steadily throughout Asia, and at the same time, surveys in several Asian countries revealed that risk behaviours such as smoking, drinking, and drug use have increased among young people.

In several Asian countries, Gen-Z and young millennials have become the moral conscience of society, speaking against corruption, injustice, and violence. Youth movements in Nepal (2025), Sri Lanka (2022), the Philippines, Myanmar, Hong Kong, and Bangladesh have demonstrated courage in holding governments accountable, defending democratic spaces, combating authoritarian tendencies, and advocating for human rights.

Young people are among the most vulnerable groups in Asia. Rising unemployment, climate disasters, forced migration, statelessness, trafficking, gender-based violence, extremist ideologies, and harmful spiritual trends have placed Asian youth at existential risk. Many also struggle with mental health crises, loneliness, digital addiction, and identity confusion in societies where traditional support systems are weakening. Yet, in the midst of these pressures, Asian Christian youth continue to show resilience, prophetic imagination, and spiritual longing. They seek justice, communal harmony, human dignity, and meaning and purpose in life despite adversities. It is into this context that AHEYA 2026 reflects on a prophetic biblical call: *“Break Every Yoke.”*

### **“Yokes” that Cripple Asian Youth**

Isaiah 58:6 speaks of God’s desire to free people from yoke, bondage, or enslavements. In Asia today, these “yokes” manifest in multiple forms. The negative impacts of many social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental problems emerging in Asian societies have multiple effects on the lives of young Asians.

In parts of Asia torn by conflict, violence, militarisation, authoritarian, repressive state structures, youth often become the most vulnerable. Many face forced conscription, displacement, or even abduction; others are denied safety for leading a normal life. For young Christians trying to build communities of faith and hope, such conditions mean living under constant fear of assault, displacement, or losing loved ones. The promise of

peace and dignity becomes fragile, and normal dreams of study, work, or family get overshadowed by the raw struggle just to survive.

Abduction of young girls and forced marriage, gender-based discrimination, and outdated social norms remain painful for young people, such as in Pakistan. Young girls and women are often coerced into marriages or relationships with little regard for their consent, rights, or future, robbing them of education, autonomy, and safety. Across different countries in Asia, groups that promote radical ideologies, both religious and political, increasingly force young people into extremist networks; others suffer intimidation or discrimination for their beliefs. Economic hardship, unemployment, underemployment, and unpredictable job markets hit youth particularly hard. The mismatch between education and job opportunities means many young people, especially from rural areas or marginalised backgrounds, face unstable work under risky conditions.

The rapid spread of Artificial Intelligence, automation, and highly globalised industries is transforming the way people work, and young people are at the forefront of this shift. Corruption, weak governance, and institutional failures prevent access to justice, education, health, and fair opportunities, especially for the poor and marginalised. Young people in Asia are not just battling to address external crises, but many face mental trauma too. A persistent stigma around mental health issues prevents many young people from seeking help in colleges and workplaces. Anxiety, depression, alienation, loneliness, and existential despair have surged, especially among youth struggling to cope with rapid social change, urbanisation, economic uncertainty, and family fragmentation. Digital culture, social media pressures, cyberbullying, and the stress of migration or instability intensify this burden. As communities fragment, traditional support systems falter, leaving many youths spiritually and emotionally vulnerable. The ecological crisis is no longer distant for many in Asia; it is already devastating. Floods, storms, rising sea levels, droughts and crop failures uproot entire communities, destroy livelihoods, and displace families. According to recent climate-migration studies in Southeast Asia, climate-related displacement and vulnerability among children and youth have increased dramatically. Gender-based violence, harassment, discrimination, and social exclusion remain widespread realities for many young women and gender minorities across Asia. For those already vulnerable, like the migrants, refugees, ethnic or religious minorities, these threats intensify.

When Asia stands out with exceptionally high levels of internal, intra-regional, and international migration rates in the world today, a large number of young Asians are leaving their ancestral land and migrating beyond their homeland. According to a recent UN report, in 2024 alone, over 72 million people across Asia are forced to relocate to other regions because domestic opportunities are shrinking. Millions of Asian women, children, and young men are on the move, often not by choice, but out of sheer necessity. Poverty, climate disasters, lack of opportunities, or conflict push families to migrate. Many youths are also lured into cyber trafficking scams, online gambling rackets, and phishing and identity theft. Reports estimate that the Asia-Pacific region hosts some of the highest numbers of victims of human trafficking- the modern slavery and forced labour globally.

These overlapping compressions deeply disturb and disrupt young lives, uprooting their hope for a stable future. This cascade of crises burdens many young Asians psychologically, and stripping away their sense of security and dignity.

### **“Break Every Yoke” (Isaiah 58:6)**

In Biblical understanding, the *yoke* symbolises oppression, burdens, exploitation, and systems that dehumanise. Throughout the biblical narrative from the slavery of Israel in Egypt (Exodus 3:7–12) to prophetic calls for social justice (Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8), God’s concern for the marginalised is clear: true worship must be inseparable from justice. God rejects empty ritual, calling instead for a faith that liberates, uplifts, restores, and transforms communities.

For Asian Christian youths, Isaiah 58 resonates profoundly in the contemporary challenges in Asia. Across the continent, young people encounter structural injustice, moral injury, poverty, discrimination, and environmental degradation. The text reminds us that spirituality is never private; it is public and communal, calling Christians to be in solidarity with the oppressed and active participation in God’s mission of liberation. Our faith urges us to embody the unity of Christ through shared mission, dialogue, and ecumenical cooperation

(Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27), thus not merely cultivating personal piety but participating in God’s work of systemic renewal.

Breaking every yoke is therefore both a spiritual vocation and a social imperative. It calls upon Asian youth to recognise themselves as disciples of justice, empowered by the Holy Spirit to confront oppression, restore dignity, and bear witness to God’s kingdom here and now. True faith is active: it loosens the bonds of injustice, lifts the oppressed, and restores hope to communities longing for freedom.

### **AEYA-2026**

AEYA- 2026 will be the Fifth Asian ecumenical youth assembly organised by CCA, continuing a legacy of vibrant youth engagement in Asia. The journey began in 1964 with the First Asian Christian Youth Assembly (ACYA) held in Dumaguete City, the Philippines. The Second Assembly took place in New Delhi, India, in 1984 under the theme “Thy Will Be Done.” After a long interval, the Third youth assembly was held in Manado, Indonesia, in 2018 with the theme “Lord, Send Your Light and Truth to Lead Us.” The Fourth Aeya was held in 2023 in Kottayam, Kerala, India, embracing the theme “Asian Youth Affirming Renewal and Restoration of God’s Creation.”

Building on these rich experiences, Aeya-2026 continues the tradition of fostering ecumenical dialogue, spiritual renewal, and collective action for justice and unity among young Asian Christians. Over six decades, Aeya has nurtured ecumenical leadership, theological reflection, and transformational action in respective contexts among young Christians across Asia.

Approximately 150 young people will be invited to participate in Aeya-2026, representing a wide spectrum of Asian youth. Participants will come from CCA member churches and national councils of churches, youth desks, and national youth empowerment bodies, as well as regional ecumenical youth networks and Christian youth organisations. They will reflect diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds, spanning South, Southeast, East, and West Asia, as well as Australasia, ensuring a truly inclusive and representative gathering of young Asian Christians.

The Aeya-2026 is expected to be an intercultural, inter-confessional, and inter-contextual platform where Asian youth can deepen their Biblical understanding, share experiences, develop action strategies, and strengthen regional solidarity. Scheduled to take place from **17 to 21 April 2026**, in **Chiang Mai, Thailand**, Aeya-2026 will serve as a vital platform for selected Asian Christian youth to come together in an ecumenical platform and deliberate on the yokes that bind them and discern ways to break every yoke.

### **Selection of Participants**

Youth (aged between 20 and 35 years old) who are interested in attending Aeya–2026 are encouraged to submit their applications with the endorsement of their respective CCA member churches or councils, or other recognised ecumenical organisations and institutions. Selections will be made based on an assessment of the applicant’s commitment to their church and the ecumenical movement in their local contexts, as well as ensuring gender and confessional balance, and fair national and sub-regional representation.

CCA will cover the expenses for board and lodging, as well as local transportation of all selected participants during the period of their participation (17-21 April 2026). Limited international travel bursaries will be available, upon request, for selected youth from countries of South and Southeast Asian sub-regions in accordance with the CCA Travel Subsidy Policy. However, part of the travel costs to be covered by the sending church/organisation or by the participants themselves. Participants from South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Australia are expected to cover the travel costs, and seek support from their churches or organisations, or self-sponsor their participation. CCA will cover all other expenses in Chiang Mai during their stay for the Aeya.

The deadline for receiving applications at the CCA Secretariat is **30 January 2026**.

**Application Form for Aeya–2026:** <https://forms.gle/bpX7vXG5h3DRppwg8>