

2018 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women
Sylvana Apituley
August 3, 2018 Evening Plenary¹

Representing the GPIB women participated in this Churchwide Gathering, allow me to begin by conveying my sincerest congratulation to the Presbyterian Women of the PC(USA) for this 2018 Churchwide Gathering. We experience and feel that Churchwide Gathering is rich in knowledge and experience, also full of spirituality. The energy that continues to flow and the hope that is still burning—which is given by God to all of us, which radiates and feels during this Churchwide Gathering—gives birth to optimism for the continuity of the witness and service of the church together, in the USA and other parts of the world, including in Indonesia, to present signs of God’s Kingdom in the world, namely creating a more just, peaceful and prosperous world for all. Recognizing the value of the opportunity to attend this Churchwide Gathering, I feel honored to be here and to share our perspective and experiences as reformed women who have theology, serve and testify in Indonesia and the ever-changing world. In this sharing I will focus on some of the advances and challenges of Indonesian women in the context and framework of global ideals so that we see the same points of vision, mission and experience. Finally, I will close this sharing with the hopes and strategic recommendations for all of us.

Indonesian women, including women of the church, have experienced significant progress, while facing serious challenges, in the past two decades, especially in the field of Gender Equality, Women’s Empowerment and the Promotion of Women and Girls’ Rights. The Indonesian commitment to gender equality and women empowerment as well as the promotion of human rights of women and girls is rooted in the mandate of the Constitution and the ideals of national development. This national commitment is also carried out within the framework of achieving global ideals such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the targets of the SDGs. At the same time, theologically the churches wrestled with the vision and mission of service for gender equality, women empowerment and the promotion of women and girls in the spirit of implementing the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1989-1998), the Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace (2001-2010) and the commitments of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (May 2011), which focused on achieving the ideals of Peace in the home (in the community), Peace among the people, Peace in the market place and Peace with the earth. Below I underline some key issues:

Education of Women / Girls

Churches have played a significant role in developing women’s education in Indonesia, since before Indonesia's independence in 1945 until nowadays. Initially through the service of Protestant and Catholic international mission institutions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women's education was held in Sumatra

¹ This manuscript reflects thoughts shared by Sylvana in brief in the August 3 evening plenary during the 2018 Churchwide Gathering of the Presbyterian Women and during her visit to Kansas City with PW in the Synod of Mid-America prior to the Gathering.

(Bijbelvrouw), Java (mainly by Catholic missions in Central Java), Minahasa (Girl's Schools) and Papua (MVVS and P3W). Until today the education of women by church-based as well as a non church-based Christian education foundations are spread in many parts of Indonesia, in the form of formal and informal education. All of them play a key role in closing the gender gap between Indonesian men and women.²

Women Leadership

In terms of involving women in decision making and leadership, churches in Indonesia still need to learn from many parties, including from the Government. In its report to CSW 2018 the Indonesian government reported the significant progress made after taking many steps on the promotion of women in the decision making process in the legislative and executive at national levels as well as at the local levels.³ To this day, generally the participation of women in formal leadership and church decision-making has not reached 10%, only a few churches have achieved the target of 30% among them GPIB.⁴ This is still below the global target of 30% affirmative action and Planet 50-50 projects of global community since the last 10 years. The involvement of women in church leadership is important to ensure justice for women, not only in terms of taking decisions, but also to ensure the emergence of gender-sensitive policies and to protect, to promote and to fulfill women's human rights within the church. Regarding this, it is important to note the presence and key role of Biro Perempuan dan Anak PGI (the PGI's Bureau of Women and Child) PERUATI⁵ in encouraging the acceleration of gender equality and gender justice and empowering women to achieve equality and justice in decision making process within Indonesian churches.

Eradicating Women 's Poverty

² The Indonesian Government notes that gender parity between girls and boys almost have been closed at all levels due to several strategic steps such as: compulsory 12 year education, "Retrieval Remedial" program for prevention of early marriage and drop outs of children that allow them to continue their schooling; developed Model of Child Friendly Cities to promote boys and girls' rights in education.

³ Minister of WECP states that although, women representation in parliament has an upward tendency, it is still dynamic. In 2014 election, there are 2.467 (37%) women candidates out of 6.607 candidates in total. At the same time, there are more women elected in the House of Regional Representative (DPD), in which in 2014, the number of its women parliamentarians increased from 20% in 2009 to 25% in 2014. Furthermore, there are 8 women Minister in 2014-2019 cabinet, 23 women as Regents/Majors and 5 women judges. In 2015, 30 women has elected as Governors/Regent in various area.

⁴ For the first time in its history, four of the eleven leaders of the 2015-2020 GPIB Synod were women (three priests, one layman), Rev. Marlene Joseph, Rev. Elly de Bell, Rev. Maureen Rumeser, Mrs. Sheila Shalomo.

⁵ PERUATI is a feminist theological organization in Indonesia which was founded 33 years ago because churches and PERSETIA see the reality of the lack of leadership of church women and the lack of involvement of women in theological education. PERUATI's missions for transformation and liberation include 3 service fields, namely: church, education / theological education institutions, and Indonesian society. PERUATI now asserts itself more as a dynamic movement while dynamically liberating and transforming the church and society.

The track record of churches in Indonesia in overcoming poverty at the grassroots level can actually be traced since the era of the 80s even further than that. GBKP is one of the best examples of the commitment and work of churches to overcome economic inequality, poverty and strive for the people's economic independence. GBKP develops Credit Union which has succeeded in creating economic independence, increasing human resources, encouraging democratization and strengthening people's movements. The GBKP's CU integrates education and a gender-equality approach as a key tools for achieving it's goals. The Mosintuwu Institute and the Women's School, which was formed by Lian Gogali in Poso, is another brilliant example of how a woman can play a leadership role in facing the complex social problems women and society have experienced during and after Poso' conflict. As an alternative school for Poso women, Mosintuwu Women's School has successfully organized an inclusive learning space for women of different faiths who have been trapped in the religious conflict in Poso. There Christian-Muslim women learn about Poso culture, religions and peace, human rights, people's economy, political independence, as well as reasoning and public speaking skills. The two examples above emphasize the contribution of churches in strengthening initiatives and responsibilities of the Indonesian government to overcome the impoverishment of women, especially rural women, and improve their welfare.⁶

Women Peace Maker

On the leadership of women in reconciliation and peace making, Indonesia is one of the countries with the best examples. There are many valuable best practices can be a positive learning about how women play a critical and constructive role in managing pluralism, weaving interfaith dialogue, transforming conflict, seeking recovery/healing of victims, encouraging reconciliation and peace. Women members and leaders of Churches in Pasundan (GKP), Christian Church in Java (GKJ), Christian Church in East Java (GKJW), Protestant Church in Moluccas/Maluku (GPM), Christian Church in Central Sulawesi (GKST) and Protestant Church in Timor (GMIT) have exemplified this field. While women of the Evangelical Christian Church in Papua (GKI di Tanah Papua) show leadership in survival, resilience and the ability to overcome violence and multiple discriminations. Indonesian churches are grateful for the commitment for interfaith dialogue and peace initiatives by several key actors through their various strategic programs, such as: Peace Train for Interfaith Youth and advocacy for women's human rights by MADIA and ICRP; as well as Moslem feminist scholars members of Rahima, Fahmina & Alimat movement, who have been playing key roles in fostering a dynamic steps and movements to achieve

⁶ Law on Rural Development has integrated gender perspective so that men and women can have equal access and benefits from rural development. Government of Indonesia grants conditional cash transfers to poor families with women and school-aged children, and credit schemes for poor women to promote their household economy. The National Team to Accelerate Poverty Reduction, with special emphasis on women as one of the targets.

gender equality and justice in families and communities. In April 2017 these three organizations successfully held the First International Seminar of Women Ulama (KUPI) in Cirebon-West Java, that produced strategic recommendations for addressing sexual violence, child marriage and natural destruction. This past year, interfaith women from different faith tradition have paid special attention to the agenda of preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism. Their contribution in this agenda is invaluable for the Indonesian government, as their work for peace and interfaith dialogue that focuses on social justice is one of the best ways to prevent and deal with violent extremism and terrorism.

Eliminating VAW & Trafficking in Person

Eliminating VAW and Trafficking in Person is still a serious and challenging issues in Indonesia.⁷ Meanwhile, the capacity to handle and prevent VAW needs to be improved, both by the Government and by the civil society organizations, including by the church. Over the past 10 years many things have been done. Among other things: the government has developed mechanism for prevention, protection and promotion of the rights of women and children (the National Commission on Anti-Violence Against Women, the National Commission on the Protection of Child); increase the capacity of system for rehabilitation of women-children victims/survivors of violence at all levels through Integrated Services for Women and Children Victims of Violence; enhancing legal framework through issuance of the “lex specialist laws” on the Elimination of Domestic Violence; as well as the Protection of Women and Children in Social Conflict Areas. On the other side, GBKP and GKP established integrated service systems for community-based victims including the Women Crisis Center. While GPIB started a movement of building a culture of justice and peace in family and community life, as well as building a system for handling and preventing violence against women and children. Women of GPM has established GASIRA Women Crisis Center.

Indonesia’s human trafficking rate is very high; this is mainly related to the high number of Indonesian migrant workers abroad. Regarding this problem, the Indonesian Parliament has launched Anti Trafficking Law 2007, the Government established a national task force on trafficking in person with 21 members of different ministries, repatriated 5,668 Indonesian trafficking victims identified abroad, provided short-term shelter and services to more than 441 trafficking victims; launched Three Ends Campaign (Ending violence against women and children; Ending human trafficking and economic economy gap of women) and initiated community watch of anti-trafficking in 20 provinces. GMIT is one of the churches that is seriously dedicating their work and services to overcoming and preventing this trafficking in person, given the very high cases and violence against migrant workers from East Nusa Tenggara (NTT).⁸

⁷ Komnas Perempuan RI (Indonesia Woman’s Commission) data, violence against women reported and handled during the past 3 years tends to increase: in 2015 there were 321,753 cases; in 2016 there were 259,150 cases; in 2017 there are 348,446 cases.

⁸ In 2017 there were 58 cases of death of migrant workers from NTT served by GMIT

Conclusion and Recommendations

Indonesian women realize that behind all the problems of discrimination, injustice and violence is a long, complex and interrelated history of unequal power relations. Which involves not only men and women, rich and poor, but also involves unequal power between rich and developed and/or poor countries.

Therefore, it is important for women movement to also overcome the root causes of the problem. The strength of church women in Indonesia in overcoming all kind of discrimination, injustice and violence come from their faith and spirituality. They have proven their resilience to face their own struggle as well as their families and community's problems. Faith to God's generosity and partiality for the weak and the marginalized/the oppressed, and commitment for the call to manifest the message of the Gospel of Luke 4:18, have and will continue to inspire and energize women to be faithful in their work and mission to restore the human dignity of victims and perpetrators, and to transform the church and society in general.

However, we women from various churches in Indonesia are aware of a number of homeworks to be done, among others: reviewing and renewing the teachings of the church about God, human and nature, about the church, salvation, other religions and about the call to spread the Gospel, so that these teaching do not hinder the mission of the church for liberation and transformation; renewing the traditions and practices of the church to be more just for women and other vulnerable groups in society; the churches are called to be more responsive to the surrounding social problems. Moreover, church women are committed to ensuring women's continued and full engagement and contribution in all concrete agendas of churches to achieve justice, peace, prosperity and integrity of creation in Indonesia and in the world. Therefore, it is important that we all work together. Real ecumenical cooperation such as the 2017 Global Exchange in Indonesia by the PW-PCUSA needs to be developed with various innovative strategies and programs to make the local and global agenda of women churches become reality.

I thank you!

Sylvana Apituley is a minister of the Protestant Church in West Indonesia (GPIB); chair of the Department of Church, Society & Religions of GPIB; senior staff of the Executive Office of the President of the Republic of Indonesia. She delivered a condensed version of this keynote during the 2018 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women, held in Louisville, Kentucky, August 2–5.