

Editorial: Practicing Ethics in Action

Ethics in Action begins with the realization that both law and morality have failed the people of many countries, who are today facing incredible forms of cruelty that they have little power to eradicate. Despite all the rhetoric of empowerment, the reality witnessed in most Asian countries is desperation and powerlessness. The two ingredients necessary for any real empowerment of ordinary people are law and morality. If living conditions are to improve, defective legal systems and the failures of upholding ethics and morality cannot be ignored. article 2, a bimonthly publication of the Asian Legal Resource Centre, sister organization of the Asian Human Rights Commission, is devoted to discussing matters relating to defective legal systems obstructing the implementation of human rights. Ethics in Action will be devoted to discussing how movements and leaderships claiming to uphold ethics and morality have failed to promote and protect human rights.

A starting point for such discussion can be the link between law, ethics and morality. While the link is in fact important, it is missing in most contemporary literature, whether religious, ideological or legal. Where spirituality meets law is a question that would rather not be answered by both religious leaders and legal practitioners. This means that there are two separate groups dealing with human rights abuses. While the religious/social group is largely concerned with relief assistance, the legal group is focused on legal redress. Relief work and humanitarian assistance alone does not solve the problems that led to the initial need for assistance. Similarly, legal remedies are not always possible without taking care of a person's primary need for sustenance, shelter and care—whether physical or psychological.

Both groups should remember that today's laws are based on the ethics of yesterday. Moral and spiritual convictions regarding feeding the hungry and taking care of the sick must therefore extend to legal and judicial remedies; it is only within the justice system that the basic rights and needs of individuals can be protected. Assisting homeless children

should be done not only as a way of discharging moral obligations but as a means to promote the right to housing of all individuals.

Religious leaders, social workers, youth groups and other such organizations play a large role in developing and sustaining a community. They have significant influence and resources within their reach. It is in the hope that these will be used to consistently address the denial of basic rights to so many persons throughout Asia and the world that the Asian Human Rights Commission is launching Ethics in Action.

The first issue of this bimonthly journal begins with the case of Rizana Nafeek, a 17-year old girl who was sentenced to death after a baby died while she was bottle feeding him. When the case was made public, not only was there a positive response in raising funds for legal fees to appeal

her death sentence, but worldwide, groups began to question the conditions of migrant workers as well as the use of the death penalty. An interview with Father Roberto Reyes from the Philippines follows, in which he describes the terrible court delays that plague the judicial system in that country, and the effect of this on one particular case that has been ongoing for the past 11 years. The interview explores possible new approaches to deal with such delays in justice. An article on violence against women in Rajasthan, India describes the conditions endured by women there and how the legal system has failed them. In a subsequent article Basil Fernando discusses the principles and work of the Asian Human Rights Commission in promoting human rights and justice in the region. Jack Clancey illuminates the distinction between priests and prophets, and relates this to emerging civil society groups and actions in Hong Kong and Asia. Finally, some reflections and photographs on contemporary problems in Asia end the issue.