



## *The Student Christian Movement of India*

### *25<sup>th</sup> General Committee Meeting*

*Kohima, Nagaland*

*1<sup>st</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> June 2011*

*'Blessed are those in the margins, for they shall inherit the Earth'*

The Student Christian Movement (SCM) held its 25<sup>th</sup> General meeting from 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> June 2011. The theme for the meeting was *'Blessed are those in the margins, for they shall inherit the Earth'*. The meeting helped the YWCA in strengthening the whole question of environment which we are committed to work for next three years.

SCM and YWCA of India's partnership in the past has always emphasized on encouraging the young leaders as they are the advocates for change.

### *Structure of SCM and YWCA of India*

As YWCA also works in a regional framework, SCM also has a regional structure wherein the students of different churches work on various issues. The meeting not only addressed the main theme but also highlighted the work of students across the country in different regions. This gave an opportunity to analyze that it will help all our local associations to get involved with these student groups as both the movements are committed to bring social change in the society. Regional reports by all the regional secretaries were presented which gave a clear idea of the structure as well as the various programmes initiated in different parts of the country.

### *Issues Highlighted*

The whole question of Dalits and the adivasis and specially the tribes in the north-east were highlighted. YWCA along with SCM jointly did a campaign in the past to put an end to 'Manual Scavenging' and this helped the YWCAs to look upon the issue of oppression of the marginalized communities more closely. A session on the reality of the people in margins –the Tribals & Dalits was taken up by Rev Awala, where some of the major causes of their struggle were highlighted.

Some of the main causes were:-

- Due to land acquisition, they are forced to work in their own lands as labors.
- Some primary factors that affect the tribes on a daily basis are:-
  - Pollution
  - Climate change
  - Political and social exploitation
- Tourism being the biggest threat to them- Increase in tourism has not only affected the environment but also has lead to human trafficking. Places like Goa, has seen maximum number of rape cases because of the increase in tourism and women are affected the most because of these changes in the society.
- Culture and identities are being affected on a daily basis.

### *Challenges for churches and other NGOs*

One of the major challenges faced by churches and all NGOs like YWCA are to keep themselves engaged in the struggles for justice for the marginalized. It is one of the major decisions which have to be taken by all in order to stop this oppression. All YWCAs across the country should continuously lobby with the government and also network with other NGOs who have been working on this particular issue. SCM along with NCCI (National Council of Churches in India) have been working on this issue and YWCAs should also enter into new areas of work especially for the Dalits and Adivasis either by promoting their artwork (YWCA of India has been using the Dalit paintings and artwork for promotional materials), or by initiating campaigns (signature campaigns) to stop this discrimination.

### *The Question of Peace in Palestine - Challenges for the student communities*

For the past many years, YWCA of India and other like minded organizations have been continuously working for peace in Palestine and this year during the World Week or Prayer, many initiatives were taken to express solidarity with the Palestinians. The issue of conflict between Israel-Palestine was raised during the SCM meeting where the history of the conflict as well as the worldwide action which had been taken for building peace between the two countries.

The main aim is to put an end to the illegal occupation of Palestine in accordance with UN resolutions and international law and demonstrate commitment for inter-religious action for peace and justice that serves all the peoples of the region.

YWCA observed the Word Week of Prayer and Action for Israel-Palestine with other ecumenical partners (CBCI, NCCI and National Council of YMCAs) and came up with a documentary which was screened during the peace week in Jerusalem. These initiatives helped in advocating the issue in a better way and SCM also observed the World Week of Peace by discussing this issue more deeply. A special session on this issue was taken up by Mr. Ranjan Solomon which gave an insight of the history and the current situation in Palestine. This session not only helped in getting a much clearer picture of the issue but also helped in providing future opportunities for YWCA to work with SCM on this particular issue.

### *Key issues that came out during the meeting*

- One of the major issues which came up during discussions among the student groups was the issue of **violence among the tribes** and how they are being displaced due to capturing of land by the corporate. The tribal go through an emotional trauma which leads to domestic violence at. This issue needs to be carefully looked at as because of this liberalization, the farmers are committing suicides and is also leading to different forms of violence. This issue has a direct impact on women and children and they suffer a lot because of these prevalent social problems.
- **Corruption** is another issue which was discussed in detail and it's a challenge for students and student groups and other organizations to take a clear stand against the erupting issue of corruption. It's been more than 100 years of existence for both YWCA and SCM , but it's high time to take a clear position on this issue. Students felt that by combining the religious influence with the social cause will help in reaching out to masses in a better way.
- **Creating a social forum for students and student groups-** By creating a platform for students and young people to discuss social issues is important and by creating a forum would challenge them and enable them to analyze closely the areas of work they have not been able to work in. Also, brain storming and discussing current and burning issues would also help in knowing the views of other groups who are working on these issues.
- **Education among the tribes-** This was another concern which came up as the lands of the tribes are sold off and they cannot access their rights because they lack education. They are employed as day laborers and even if they have their own land, they cannot access their rights or take any revenue from the land. This came up as one of the major issues as the level of awareness for this issue is very low.

### *Challenges*

- One of the major challenges faced to involve young people is that they lack time and they have their professional commitments.
- Less awareness among the youth about social issues as fewer mediums of electronic media are used for lobbying for any particular issue.
- Because of high level of stress , competition faced by the youngsters, they give less importance to social issues
- Less networking between organizations who are working on similar social issues.

### *What YWCA and SCM can do together?*

As SCM has a huge young leadership base and YWCA has always encouraged leadership by young women, so both the movements can work together and can identify young potential leaders.

### ***Activities:-***

- Strengthen the partnerships by joint programs especially on the whole question of rights of the Dalits and Adivasis.
- YWCAs local associations can tie up with the churches or regional heads and jointly take up issues which are affecting young people and specially women
- Fund Raising activities can also be initiated together in order to invest in good community programs
- Involve other like minded NGOs and ecumenical partners who have been working on similar issues
- Getting into creative ways of work by initiating campaigns which would promote arts and crafts of these Dalit communities
- Have a lot of community development programs which would help in getting into new areas of work.
- Organise plays, skits on these issues in order to reach more college groups.

The general meeting helped in creating new ways of working together with SCM and also helped in knowing the student leadership in the various parts of the country. Because of the common issues and concerns, it would help in making the movement stronger by closely working with the student groups.

### ***Feedback on the meeting***

The meeting was very well conducted and it was able to highlight the issue of oppression faced by the Dalits and Adivasis in our country. The question of peace in Palestine was also highlighted during the World Week of Prayer for Israel- Palestine.

### ***Some points of the meeting***

- Excellent student group to work with as they are very strong on issues
- Working on the issue of Dalits and Adivasis for a very long time and the discussions also highlighted the work in different regions across the country.
- Strong regional structures
- Some more discussions on the question of environment should have been included
- Some sessions on 'Key issues and its impact on women and children' could also have been given a platform for YWCA to discuss its initiatives.

