

# Education for Peaceful Transformation: The AJAR Learning Centre at Kampung Damai

Asia Justice and Rights

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**T**HE AJAR LEARNING CENTRE AT KAMPUNG DAMAI is a place for learning and reflection on human rights issues and conflict transformation. The Learning Centre is part of the Asia Justice and Rights Society (AJAR), a non-profit organization based in Jakarta, Indonesia, which is dedicated to strengthening human rights and easing deep-seated impunity among countries in the Asia-Pacific region that are experiencing periods of transition from mass human rights violations to democracy.

At the AJAR Learning Centre, grassroots communities and leaders can come together to develop their capacity to fight impunity, celebrate progress made on peace initiatives, enhance the lives of victims, and restore communities that have been damaged by conflict. Known as “Kampung Damai”, or “Peaceful Village”, the AJAR Learning Centre strives to work with these communities by linking them with policymakers and helping them to convey their needs.

## **The Establishment of the AJAR Learning Centre**

The establishment of the AJAR Learning Centre in Bali began with the founding of Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) in 2010 in Jakarta, Indonesia by Patrick Burgess, an international human rights expert with experience working on peace and post-conflict programs in over twenty countries, and Galuh Wandita, who served as the Deputy Director for the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste and as a Senior Associate for the International Center for Transitional Justice in Indonesia. AJAR was created with the goals of strengthening human rights and lessening long-standing impunity in countries in the Asia-Pacific region. These countries include Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar/Burma, Sri Lanka, and Timor-Leste. In conducting its work for human rights and transitional justice, AJAR forms partnerships with other organizations in these countries,

such as Suriya Women's Development Centre in Sri Lanka, Assosiasaun Chega Ba Ita in Timor-Leste, and ND-Burma in Myanmar.

Based on the belief that a lack of accountability, impunity and intolerance are the primary contributors to mass human rights violations, through its educational programs, AJAR aims to embolden national and regional collaborators who strive to end impunity, create accountability for human rights violations, help these organizational partners enhance their knowledge and skills, and access resources necessary for their human rights work.

AJAR's programmatic work focuses on four main components— involving policymakers and representatives through conducting research and producing policy briefs, creating social capital through the development of connections and networks, cultivating abilities through educational opportunities such as workshops and internships, and fostering awareness of human rights issues through various forms of media.

AJAR engages in opportunities for advancing knowledge of human rights issues and bolstering accountability for rights violations through the following activities:

- Holding trainings and workshops related to transitional justice and education about human rights violations at the AJAR Learning Centre in Bali;
- Conducting research and doing advocacy work with other organizations;
- Supporting survivors through local organizations in the Asia-Pacific countries;
- Creating learning exchanges between survivors of violence, policymakers, and civil society members;
- Training survivors, youth and human rights activists in new skills, technologies, and methods such as participatory methodologies;
- Providing technical support to policymakers and civil society members.

Through these programs and activities, AJAR was able to involve 10,156 persons in human rights work across four countries in the Asia-Pacific region during the year 2019 alone. Within the last ten years, AJAR has engaged 29,000 participants in seven hundred thirty-six events and produced ninety publications on human rights issues in the region. More than 8,000 survi-

vors of human rights violations have been supported by its programs and over eight hundred youth from the Asia-Pacific region have participated in its activities. AJAR's online media has reached more than 8,000,000 people in total.<sup>1</sup>

Since its founding in 2010, AJAR's work on educating the public about human rights violations and transitional justice has included training and educational workshops held at the full-time residential Learning Centre at Kampung Damai in Bali. AJAR Learning Centre is located on the southern coast of Bali only five minutes' walking distance from the beach. The residential Learning Centre's facilities can house up to thirty participants at a time and is equipped with two training rooms, a library, audio visual equipment, high-speed Internet access, and spaces to hold break-out sessions.

### **Transitional Justice and Human Rights Education at Kampung Damai**

The AJAR Learning Centre engages participants in training sessions about human rights issues, aids in the development of curriculum for peace and justice, and organizes meetings for national, regional, and international experts on topics related to accountability and transitional justice. The aim of the AJAR Learning Centre is to provide a space for learning and reflection among grassroots communities and leaders on issues relevant to human rights and transitional justice. At Kampung Damai, over six hundred community members, leaders, educators, academics, non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, researchers, lawyers, and individuals from governmental and non-governmental sectors have come together to share their knowledge and experience on human rights issues with the goal of improving their communities for those who are marginalized and at risk of facing human rights violations.

Training curriculums for peace and justice have been developed at the AJAR Learning Centre. These curriculums are then used by leaders and advocates for peace and justice in their communities. For example, in 2018, a Tetun-language manual entitled *Chega no Justisa Tranzisionál: Teaching Materials for Higher Education in Timor-Leste* was released for university educators and civil society institutions at Universidade da Paz, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorsa'e, Centro Nacional Chega!, and others for engaging with students about the historical memories of the conflict that occurred in Timor-Leste. The AJAR Learning Centre is also involved in using participa-

tory methodologies in its training. Through the use of these methodologies, the Learning Centre team engages a diverse group of people from different ethnicities and religions in workshops in which they are able to recognize their learning needs, communicate their experience with violence and persecution, increase their awareness and knowledge of human rights issues, and create a plan for activism.

Specific activities that the AJAR Learning Centre has organized since 2015 include:

- Short courses on human rights and transitional justice in Jakarta and Timor-Leste;
- Producing the *Chega!* comic books based on CAVR, the Timorese Truth Commission, for educational purposes;
- An educational exchange on human rights issues with Pakistani government officials and civil society members;
- A workshop on capacity-building with the Aceh Local Truth and Reconciliation Commission;
- Programs on capacity-building for communities in Buru Island, Kupang, Makassar, Maumere, Papua, Pidie and Yogyakarta;
- Gender Justice Training for activists, practitioners, and educators who work with women recovering from violence;
- A bi-annual course “Foundations for Peace: Revisiting Transitional Justice and Accountability in Asia”;
- An online course on human rights and transitional justice for youth in Bangladesh held in 2020;
- A workshop for the Stolen Children of Timor-Leste held in 2020;
- The development of the “Foundations for Peace: Transitional Justice in Asian Contexts” online course held in November and December of 2020.

The main work of the AJAR Learning Centre centers on engagement with local communities and their leaders on education about human rights, peace, and transitional justice. Holding the view that a lack of knowledge contributes to intolerance and indifference toward others, the AJAR Learning Centre team conceives of education as essential to peaceful transformation.

A key feature of the AJAR Learning Centre’s work is its bi-annual intensive six-day course on Foundations for Peace, through which participants

gain an understanding of human rights and transitional justice in the Asian context. The course aims to engage civil society members across Asia to learn about the key principles of human rights, share professional experiences from working in contexts that are in periods of transition, and gain knowledge on how to pursue accountability for human rights violations. In addition to developing knowledge about human rights and transitional justice, participants are also provided training from experts, the chance to network with others interested in these issues, and an engaging learning atmosphere. The course covers an exploration of participants' own experiences with conflict in the Asia-Pacific region, conflict transformation frameworks, the potential and challenges for various transitional justice mechanisms, specific case studies of transitional justice, and an examination of peace-building processes in theory and practice. By participating in this course, civil society members have the opportunity to learn about how non-formal education influences healing for victims of trauma and how to help those individuals become empowered to assert their rights for transitional justice and accountability for human rights violations.

Another important opportunity available at the AJAR Learning Centre is its annual Training of Trainers workshop. Through this workshop, survivors of violence as well as human rights activists and defenders participate in week-long activities to learn participatory methodologies for working with survivors of gender-based violence. Adhering to the belief in the need to "unlearn impunity", AJAR's Training of Trainers focuses on empowering victims of violence in societies in transition through the combination of legal, psycho-social, and human rights-based perspectives. AAAR utilizes a unique participatory action methodology called "Stone and Flowers" in its training to assist survivors and others in developing a greater understanding of their rights that are safeguarded by laws and constitutions. In this methodology, survivors become directly engaged as researchers who conduct research and develop action plans. Through engagement in this workshop, participants gain knowledge of human rights and transitional justice in Asia, network with others, interact with experts in the fields of human rights and transitional justice and develop skills in participatory action research. The intention of the workshop is for the participants to use the skills and knowledge they gain at Kampung Damai to help victims of violence in their own communities have a voice for peace and justice.

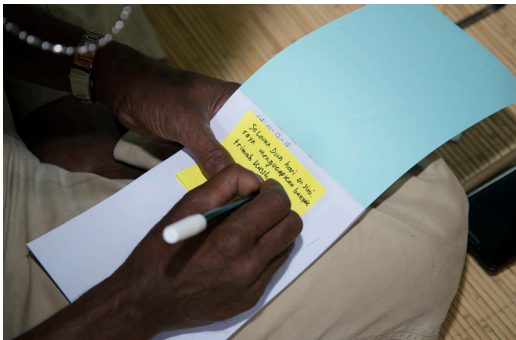
## Participants' Experiences

AJAR and the AJAR Learning Centre aim to help workshop and training participants develop skills and knowledge necessary for helping survivors of human rights violations improve their communities and advocate for transitional justice and accountability for these acts of violence. In conducting trainings and workshops, participants learned about several methods that can be used in creating discussions about transitional justice and healing after human rights violations have occurred. These tools have included: the stone and flowers training, memory boxes, photo storytelling, community mapping, community timeline and resource mapping. Participants in the AJAR Learning Centre's June 2014 workshop on community strategies for supporting victims of violence were particularly enthusiastic about the photo storytelling method, the memory boxes, and the community timeline activity as ways to engage with survivors of human rights violations.

Reflections from participants in workshops and training at the AJAR Learning Centre have provided the AJAR team with an assessment of these activities and methods. Participants have reflected on their work with survivors, finding that developing skills in helping survivors, engaging in self-care, and learning about basic principles can help them more effectively do their work and not harm the survivors. Many participants found the participatory action research methodologies to be beneficial for them and that they would be able to utilize these tools in their own communities. They also have indicated that there is a need to create national level referrals for survivors of trauma and violence within several countries. Participants have remarked that more specialized training could be created to help survivors. In addition to these reflections, some assessment regarding language use at workshop has been done. At the 2014 workshop on community strategies for supporting victims of violence, there were difficulties using Indonesian and English. The program staff altered the workshop activities to accommodate the difficulties by creating groups for English and Indonesian speakers. This allowed for greater understanding, engagement, and trust between participants. Other language speakers also found this change to be beneficial because the newly-created smaller groups were less overwhelming.

Participants in AJAR and the AJAR Learning Centre's various programs have provided comments and reflections on their experiences:







I learned that non-formal education can have a strong impact on healing trauma and informing the victims of their rights. I like what a speaker said about creating the conditions for transformation, but it's the victims who empower themselves. Not us.  
— Participant from the Foundations for Peace workshop<sup>2</sup>

This is the first time anyone has ever listened to us.  
— Participant in the Stone and Flower workshop<sup>3</sup>

This exchange has been enriching and insightful. It has strengthened our knowledge and built solidarity. The experience of Timor-Leste shows how they respect their history through memorials, creating digital archives, documentaries and museums, and building a narrative that is integrated into the school curriculum and textbooks. This is very inspiring and very significant for the learning process in Aceh.

— Tunn Mastur Yahya, member of Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission who participated in an exchange with Timor-Leste through AJAR's programs<sup>4</sup>

I am grateful for this activist school because it gave me the opportunity to learn [about human rights] even though I am from an agricultural background. I can learn together with my friends who have a human rights background... It makes me realize who an activist is: the eyes and ears that will help save the country's dignity and its people.

— Ruben dos Santos, participant in AJAR's "Human Rights and Social Justice for Young Changemakers" in Timor-Leste<sup>5</sup>

Through the work that has been done since establishment, both AJAR and its Learning Centre have accomplished many goals for improving human rights and transitional justice including:

- Creation of ACbit, an NGO in Timor-Leste which works with victims of conflict and gender-based violence;
- Becoming a partner of Indonesia's Coalition for Truth and Justice;
- Development of a television show in Myanmar called *The Sun, the Moon and Truth*;
- Establishment of the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission for which AJAR and other civil society organizations heavily advocated for;

- Creation of a south-south network for exchange about how to create accountability;
- Assistance with developing a reparations policy in the Solomon Islands;
- Assistance with reuniting stolen children from Timor-Leste with their families.

## Challenges

Implementation of AJAR's and the AJAR Learning Centre's program has not been without challenges, particularly since the start of the COVID-19 virus in November 2019.

Ongoing challenges with accountability and transitional justice in the Asia-Pacific region continue. Since the beginning of the pandemic, countries in the Asia-Pacific region have continued to struggle with issues of accountability, corruption, and impunity associated with authoritarian governments.

According to AJAR President Patrick Burgess, resources have been stolen in the last several decades in countries across the Asia-Pacific region and given to leaders and their allies instead of going to ordinary people. Today, these resources, which are scarce, are needed to help pay doctors and nurses, purchase medical equipment, and create hospitals during the pandemic. In addition to this problem, healthcare responses to the pandemic have been thwarted by poor leadership, leading to issues such as violations by security personnel who are tasked with implementing measures for appropriate social distancing.<sup>6</sup>

A survey conducted in early 2020 with survivors of human rights violations from Thailand, Indonesia and Timor-Leste revealed the impacts of impunity on government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the experiences of survivors. The report based on the survey results indicated that the pandemic has worsened inequalities among survivors of human rights violations in the Asia-Pacific region. Experiences during the pandemic can also cause survivors to feel re-traumatized, particularly in countries in which emergency powers are being used to handle the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Way Forward and Future Plans**

Despite the challenges that the Asia-Pacific region faces with peace, justice, and accountability, AJAR still strongly believes that creating social movements for accountability is of the utmost importance. It is important to hold governments and individuals accountable for human rights violations that have been committed. Following the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal No. 16, which focuses on providing peaceful, just, and inclusive societies as well as holding institutions accountable for violating these rights, AJAR aims to work on these goals during the years 2020 to 2022:<sup>8</sup>

1. Upgrading AJAR's technical capacity to deliver virtual trainings, produce remote popular education materials and digitalize reports and testimonies;
2. Working with survivors, their organizations and communities, by putting them at the center of its work to seek redress for violations, to learn from experience and to put in place mechanisms to ensure these violations are not repeated;
3. Collaborating and building solidarity with like-minded individuals from civil society and state institutions to address identified human rights issues;
4. Closely monitoring and analyzing AJAR's plans and approaches to ensure that the organization continues to make effective contributions for sustainable change;
5. Speaking truth to power in order to unveil or uncover human rights violations;
6. Creating learning and knowledge opportunities through south/south and south/north exchanges;
7. Engaging women and young people as change agents using innovative ways of working;
8. Investing in building AJAR's capacity, and the capacity of its local partners, to develop joint plans and ways of working for greater impact and sustainability; and
9. Increasingly working with government agencies and international mechanisms, improving linkages between grassroots movements, regional voices and institutions.

In addition to these future plans, a collaborative seven-day workshop on community strategies for supporting victims of torture and violence conducted in June 2014 yielded further ideas for moving AJAR's work forward in the future. The recommendations for future work included:<sup>9</sup>

1. Creating educational materials that can be translated into multiple languages and for different contexts in order to recognize symptoms of trauma and other mental health problems encountered by survivors of violence;
2. Creating training modules for individuals working with AJAR to better understand how to work with survivors of trauma, including key skills and principles for working with them effectively;
3. Developing relationships with trained psychologists and organizations that can provide support to the AJAR team in working with trauma survivors, including giving them training on appropriate interventions, counseling, and referrals;
4. Providing ongoing training in participatory action methodologies to other organizations working with survivors of trauma;
5. Providing exchange opportunities for those who work closely with trauma survivors. The opportunities could last between one and three months long and provide hands-on training;
6. Creating an organized map of the current services available to trauma and torture survivors in countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

## Endnotes

- 1 Data from Asia Justice and Rights Annual Report 2019, 2020, pages 3-4.
- 2 Asia Justice and Rights Annual Report 2019, 2020, page 22.
- 3 *Ibid.*, page 16.
- 4 *Ibid.*, page 9.
- 5 Mobilising Youth for Change: AJAR Timor-Leste's Human Rights and Social Justice School for Young Changemakers, 6 March 2019, <https://asia-ajar.org/2019/03/timor-leste-human-rights-school/>.
- 6 AJAR President Patrick Burgess commented on the impact of COVID-19 on transitional justice and accountability in the Asia Justice and Rights Annual Report 2019.
- 7 Surviving on Their Own? The Impact of the Pandemic on Vulnerable Victims of Human Rights Violations in Asia, 2020. [https://asia-ajar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WED-20.05-2020\\_REV-1.pdf](https://asia-ajar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WED-20.05-2020_REV-1.pdf)
- 8 Asia Justice and Rights Annual Report 2019, 2020, page 23.
- 9 *Ibid.*