

Service International Malaysia Penang Chapter

NEWSLETTER

2024

ICM 2024 PENANG



***International conference and committee
meeting- 5th December to 7th 2024
Penang,
Malaysia***

International conference, committee meetings and workcamps 4/12/24-13/12/24

The state of Penang, Malaysia, is truly proud to host the 88th International Committee Meeting (ICM) from 5th to 8th December. While digital connectivity has enabled people around the world to connect with one another, this in-person meeting provided an invaluable opportunity for Asian, African, and European delegates to mingle and better understand each other. The meeting, with its agenda, was not exceptional but rather similar to those held by private or public entities, offering fellow members the chance to express themselves, debate, and make important decisions for the future of SCI

Dato Athimulam's contribution

In this digital era, under the presidency of Dato Athimulam, the distinguished NGO, SCI Malaysia Penang Chapter, embraced the honourable responsibility of hosting the SCI International



Conference and Committee Meeting. This immemorial event took place from the 4th to the 8th of December 2024. At this momentous occasion, we celebrate his visionary spirit as a social entrepreneur, wholeheartedly dedicating himself to initiatives of profound significance.

The contribution of Dato Athimulam was honoured with the title 'Dato,' which is equivalent to 'Sir,' in recognition of his outstanding social contributions to the nation.



Congratulations, Dato!

Appreciation to brother Stephen Nah

Let us honour the revered and unpretentious personality, Brother Stephen Nah. Thank you, Brother, for your unwavering dedication, which remains unparalleled to this day. You have proven your commitment by devoting countless hours to corresponding with the SCI headquarters, serving as a fragrant blossom that nurtured an event bearing fruitful outcomes.



Although you have preferred to work behind the scenes, and no accolades have yet been bestowed, we in Penang wish to honour you as a **luminary of SCI Malaysia**



After the event, Stephen Nah and his beloved wife were filled with immense joy as they graciously accompanied the delegates, who were scheduled to depart later, to magnificent and renowned locales for their viewing pleasure.

Appreciation to the outgoing President Lady Alexandra Vasileiou

Likewise, without the gentle and kind-hearted Lady Alexandra Vasileiou extending her gracious hand, I could scarcely envision the unfolding of events that would eventually bloom. My heartfelt gratitude flows to you, dear Alexandra Vasileiou, for your humble and selfless service to SCI. Your contributions shall remain forever etched in the annals of our deepest appreciation.



Thanks to donors and well-wishers

We extend our heartfelt gratitude for the generous financial contribution and steadfast moral support in organising the conference at the Berjaya Hotel. We are confident that our fellow members and keen observers found profound satisfaction in their sojourn in Penang and Kuala Lumpur.

Starting on the 4th of December, participants from around the globe arrived at one of five designated hotels in Penang. Delegates, volunteers, and observers were filled with excitement as they eagerly met new friends and fully engaged in the registration process. Our Penang members were engrossed in the registration, ensuring every detail was furnished correctly and providing any assistance that was needed.



Team works by ladies

Those who toiled and worked around the clock to register and provide information to the delegates and observers deserve our heartfelt appreciation. Veronica, a radiant presence who has been integral to the foundation of all our projects, has long remained unnoticed, her contributions unacknowledged. She, along with the team of ladies and Eric, worked tirelessly in the shadows, without the notice of others. Now is the time to shine a light on their efforts and bestow upon them the recognition they so richly deserve.



SCI Sri Lanka: Towards a Social Contract

I was fortunate to meet with the Asian members of SCI, and Sri Lanka appears to be making great strides in authentically promoting peace, as well as in projects and initiatives that benefit their community. Cheers to their contributions to social building. Retrieving from your Facebook account, which is filled with pictures depicting their social contract with the people.

Officiating ICM

To recall from my vivid memory, HB Wong Exco Tourism and Creative Economy of Penang emphatically emphasized that sustainability is an urgent global matter. He stressed that it is the responsibility of each one of us to remind ourselves not to pollute the sea with plastic and to reduce carbon emissions.



Dato' Sri Prof. Dr. Anwar Fazal, whom I hold in the highest regard, is truly a walking encyclopedia. We are exceptionally fortunate to have him as the keynote speaker. The esteemed professor emphatically highlighted the importance of individual peace, which can transform society and ultimately lead to global peace. The most captivating part of his speech focused on the geological features of Sunda land, explaining how epeirogenic movements reshaped the landscape, ultimately dividing it into the present-day nations of Malaysia and Indonesia. His eloquence left a profound impression on most delegates and observers. Thank you, Dato' Sri.



Ms. Alexandra Vasileiou, the outgoing International President of SCI, delivered an inspiring speech, reminding us about global

peace and sustainability. Dato Athimulam Arujunan, President of SCI Malaysia Penang Chapter, echoed similar sentiments in his speech and extended his gratitude to the sponsors and well-wisher.

The Honourable Wong, VIPs, and delegates were entertained with cultural dance performances reflecting Malaysia's cultural integration and racial harmony. The performances captivated the delegates and observers, who clapped in rhythm with each act, appreciating the vibrant display of cultural unity in this beautiful country, which is endowed with friendly citizens, the stunning nature of this country, as well as its development



The paramount aspiration of this esteemed international organisation is to spread the gentle whispers of peace, illuminate the pressing concerns of climate change, and, most significantly, unite in harmonious collaboration for the noble cause of fostering tranquility.

Heartfelt Congratulations to Elected Officials in the Board of Governance

SCI International Malaysia Penang Chapter extends its warmest congratulations to the newly elected members of SCI's Board of Governance. We are delighted to welcome Antonella di Matteo as our new International President. We also



commend Femi Aganran and Antonios Sifakis for securing another term as office bearers. Also, we congratulate Bert

Verstappen on assuming the role of Acting Vice President.

We look forward to your leadership and contributions in advancing SCI's fundamental objective of promoting awareness of peace

despite the challenges posed by global climate change.

Peace is like a rope woven together from many strands, each representing essential principles: the rule of law, human rights, cultural understanding, social cohesion, and environmental responsibility. True peace also depends on an understanding of society and community, where overcoming egoism fosters harmony. From individual peace to group unity and extending to nations, we can live together as one global family, thriving in happiness and mutual respect.

Work camp

The Workcamp experience unfolds as a vibrant journey of new friendships, formed from the diverse threads of cultures, gently reminding us of our collective path towards a

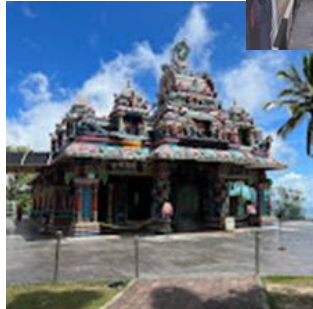


harmonious and peaceful existence. The efforts of our partner organizations are certainly deserving of praise. Notably, three workcamps took place, one of which was at the Cheshire Home, where our fellow international SCI members were seen repairing wheelchairs. The following day, they gathered at the Little Sisters of the Poor to clean windows and carry out other maintenance tasks. The final workcamp, in my view, was a leisurely work experience, enriched with opportunities for exploration

A spirited performance of classic songs from yesteryear offered a much-needed break from the formal proceedings on the third day of the conference. Delegates and observers mingled while enjoying nostalgic favourites, filling the room with enthusiasm and joy. The event created a vibrant and memorable atmosphere.



Delegates and observers who wished to enjoy a holiday were treated to a long journey from



Georgetown, across the Penang Bridge, and along the highway to Taiping. It was an adventurous trip that offered them the

opportunity to learn more about Malaysia. While in Taiping, they explored the town's rich history, enjoyed the beauty of nature and the lake, visited a mineral water factory, and were treated to a delightful dinner. Historically, Taiping is known as a mining centre and was once the capital of Perak state. It is also the wettest town in Malaysia

Nature retreat to bio-diversity Penang Hill

As a few delegates elegantly departed from the conference, others embarked on a delightful journey to the enchanting heights of Penang Hill.



For four captivating hours, four of us ventured together, daring to traverse the ethereal skywalk and the enchanting canopy walk. Though I often wander the charming paths of Penang Hill, I had yet to discover the amazing treasures of its

habitat, a lush tropical forest, a verdant paradise that has been lovingly preserved to this very day.

The Penang Hill Corporation graciously rolled out the red carpet for the volunteers, offering free passes to bask in the beauty of nature's wonders. A heartfelt thanks to Dato Cheok and Mr. Shahril Nizam Cheah for approving these complimentary passes for our volunteers and delegates—your support is truly appreciated!



Meanwhile, the renowned Hindu temple extended its warm hospitality by serving scrumptious food and refreshing drinks to uplift everyone's spirits. In the welcoming setting of the temple's community hall, we gathered for a simple yet profoundly heartwarming experience that truly warmed the cockles of our heart

By

Dr. Lakshmi Gandhan Gesha



SCI INTERNATIONAL MALAYSIA

PENANG CHAPTER

Editorial Corner

Without global peace, environmental sustainability remains questionable

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Introduction

The Earth, which evolved during the Precambrian era, saw the migration of Homo sapiens from East Africa to various continents, where early humans likely lived in relative harmony, focused on survival rather than destruction. However, with the advancement of science and technology, particularly in the digital age, the mere press of a button can now launch an array of missiles capable of traveling vast distances to inflict devastation on another nation, leading to destruction and genocide. This starkly contradicts the principles of the United Nations, which advocate for peace and preventing such atrocities. Throughout human history, struggles, conflicts,

Human rights and international humanitarian law have also contributed to the processes of "world making and world ordering," shaping a framework for global governance and cooperation. (Kinsella & Mantilla, 2022).

and wars have been ever-present. Over time, however, the evolution of human intelligence and shifts in behaviour led to positive changes. As societies progressed, violence gradually became unacceptable, giving rise to the aspiration for an ideal society where people lived in harmony. (Filipec, 2019). These transformations reflect the human capacity to learn from the past and strive for a more peaceful coexistence.

Customary practices have evolved, leading to the recognition of many customs as legal norms. Political developments have shaped constitutional law, while various laws have been legislated to refine business practices in a free economy. Similarly, to bring global uniformity into law, international organisations like the philosophical and legal discourse between social institutions and humanity.

The legal frameworks that govern state operations help establish an international system based on shared ideals. (Ezechi, Onyishi, Okonkwo, & Ogbuka, 2022). Through the creation of international guidelines and the ratification of treaties or agreements, such as those with ASEAN+6 and the European Union, states can cultivate mutually beneficial trade and

development connections. This transformation promotes peace, collaboration, and camaraderie by redefining the nature of international relations and legal frameworks. The ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes the U.N.'s goal of promoting peace through sustainability.

Concept of Peace and Sustainability

Policymakers have difficulty recognizing the link between environmental sustainability and peace (Sayer, 2012). According to Herbet (2012), regulations or initiatives for promoting sustainability may lead to conflict if they lack proper integration. Such fragmented approaches risk weakening the impact of sustainability and peace efforts, especially during global crises like climate change, and trade disputes such as rights of goods origin.

Peace negotiations frequently neglect the environmental issues faced by war-affected communities. Conflicting factions utilize natural resources to fund their war endeavours, resulting in significant ecological destruction, human fatalities, widespread famine, and disease. (Matthew, Brown, & Jensen, 2009). According to Mohammed (2023), oil production in Marib, initiated in the 1980s, led to the establishment of pipelines and the construction of storage tanks. The 2015 conflict inflicted extensive damage on most of this infrastructure, resulting in considerable environmental degradation. Air pollution in Marib has attained critical levels, with 11.8% of the population subjected to elevated pollutant concentrations that heighten cancer risk. Moreover, environmental degradation directly contributes to kidney disorders in 64% of the population and brain tumours in 9.8% (Mohammed, 2023).

Galtung (1969) established a typology of peace that emphasizes the study of positive and negative peace (Galtung, 1969, 1990). In essence, peace transcends beyond the absence of military conflict or organized crime within a nation; it fundamentally encompasses ensuring

the capacity to realize their potential fully. Positive peace pertains predominantly to the eradication of both explicit and implicit crime and violence, which often manifest as racial discrimination, economic inequities, social injustice, gender disparities, and the inaccessibility of health services and education, all of which disregard the potential of citizens.

As such, Galtung equates positive peace with social justice, as both involve eliminating structures that obstruct the path toward an "egalitarian distribution of power and resources"(Galtung, 1969, 1990). Amadei observed that education has yet to fully incorporate the concept of peace, often characterizing it as negative peace rather than embracing a more holistic understanding. Positive peace represents a noble aspiration embraced by individuals who value peace, including people from diverse backgrounds, including leaders, scholars, and practitioners. However, Miller observed that academic literature often reflects an ambivalence toward peace. Positive peace remains mostly theoretical, overshadowed by the dominant focus on negative peace in scholarly discussions (Miller, Kim, & Roberts, 2021). However, Sudan is an example of a negative peace country, overcome by active fighting but enduring issues such as poverty, ethnic divisions, and political instability that remain unsolved.

Can peace and sustainability be achieved?

The relationship between peace and sustainable development continues to be a topic in scholarly discourse, especially in global climate change discussions. The relationship between environmental sustainability and peace is essential, as disputes over resources and the degradation of the environment may impede long-term development and stability. The United Nations (2015) highlights that a peaceful environment can enhance environmental sustainability and promote progress toward development. Research indicates that conflict can negatively affect ecosystems and may lead to the

misallocation of resources, although these impacts are often reversible (Cairns, 2000; Rudd, 2000). In certain nations affected by armed conflicts and violence, the competition for control over natural resources has played a crucial role in funding these conflicts (Le Billon, 2001). By promoting peace, nations can establish conditions that support effective resource management and sustainable practices, ultimately resulting in a more stable and prosperous society. The connection between peace and environmental sustainability for long-term development and to avert potential conflicts arising from dwindling resources.

Moreover, as Galtung noted, such situations can manifest as “yet another form of cultural violence,” further complicating the relationship between peace, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion. Addressing these interconnected issues is essential for creating a holistic approach to conflict resolution and sustainable development.

Researchers have analysed the correlation between natural resources, climate change, and conflict (Brock, 1991; Homer-Dixon, 1999). Some studies have critically examined the political and economic factors contributing to conflict risks and security issues (Raleigh and Urdal, 2007; Dalby, 2013). Recent investigations have explored the relationship between peace and sustainability, particularly focusing on their indirect interactions (IPCC., 2014; Koubi, 2019; Sharifi & Simangan, 2021). These studies indicate the complexity of how environmental factors intersect with social, political, and economic dimensions to influence conflict dynamics.

These investigations highlight the significance of political institutions, economic conditions, and social issues, particularly regarding the security implications of global warming ((Bernauer, Bohmelt, & Koubi, 2022; Hendrix & Haggard, 2015; Uexkull, von, Fjelde, & Buhaug, 2016). However, environmental peacebuilding has

shifted toward bottom-up strategies for addressing the conflicts. This approach moves away from traditional state-centric methods, grassroots involvement, and local community engagement in conflict resolution (Ide et al., 2021). Such a transition recognizes the vital role that local perspectives and actions play in fostering sustainable peace and effectively managing environmental challenges.

Roles of superpower in the context of peace and sustainability

Military interventions by superpowers have often occurred during pivotal moments in global politics, and these interventions frequently lead to unintended negative consequences that heighten instability rather than fostering peace. One notable example is the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was aimed at eradicating weapons of mass destruction. Instead of achieving its intended objectives, the invasion led to prolonged destabilization and persistent violence in the region. The action undermined Iraq's local governance and caused widespread destruction, without producing tangible benefits for the country (Cockburn, 2015).

The arms trade conducted by superpowers with nations embroiled in conflict exacerbates warfare in vulnerable regions, diminishing the possibility of achieving lasting peace (UNCTAD., 2021). The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reports that the sale and transfer of arms to conflict zones significantly contribute to the ongoing violence, making sustainable development nearly impossible (SIPRI., 2020). Furthermore, the extraction of natural resources in least-developed countries intensifies environmental degradation. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, foreign corporations engaged in mineral resource extraction contribute to ecological destruction, fuelling conflict among factions competing for control over these resources (Le Billon, 2001).

Peace is a crucial component of trade and essential to achieving sustainability. However,

global economic policies often fail to support less developed nations, exacerbating inequalities. These policies, crafted by powerful institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, frequently prioritize the interests of wealthier nations, thereby widening the gap between rich and poor countries. Klein (2014) noted that wealthy nations and multinational corporations benefit from the structure of trade agreements, rules regarding the origin of goods, and financial regulations, leaving less developed countries struggling to compete on an equal footing. Another indirect conflict arises from trade wars, which misallocate resources for competitive purposes, undermining efforts to prioritize sustainability and further entrenching global economic disparities.

Johan Galtung's concept of cultural violence explains how violence is justified within the society's core structures. His theory expanded the understanding of peace and violence by including the basic human needs of survival, freedom, identity, and a sense of belonging, which he viewed as crucial for a healthy human life. Galtung also introduced "ecological balance" as a fundamental need, linking environmental destruction and imbalance to cultural violence.

In his 1990 article, Galtung warned that cultural violence could directly lead to environmental harm, such as deforestation and open burning, leading to unsustainable forests, ozone depletion, and global warming. He criticized rapid economic growth, particularly during the Industrial Revolution in Europe, as a major factor contributing to environmental degradation, including the depletion of the ozone layer.

Scholars have expressed scepticism about Galtung's concept of sustainability, particularly balancing economic growth and peace. They question whether the international system can shift away from viewing nature merely as a tool for human development. This critique links with the anthropocentric view rooted in European expansionism and colonialism, which historically

prioritized territorial annexation and economic gains, often at the expense of cultural heritage and ecological balance. These actions not only destroyed historical structures but also contributed to environmental degradation in the pursuit of growth. The North continues to dominate and exploit the South's resources, perpetuating the legacy of European colonialism and exploitation of the environment, thus affecting the sustainability of the affected countries (Turpin, 2017).

Failure of Peacebuilding and lack of sustainability

In the 1970s Johan Galtung introduced the peacebuilding concept to promote peace sustainably and advocated holistic ways to overcome conflict. The security agenda and peace efforts fall under the purview of the UN, focusing on liberal peacebuilding, justice, reconciliation, human development, poverty alleviation, and gender equality. While progress is being made in these areas, the interconnection between natural resources, the environment, and peacebuilding has become increasingly evident. The UN Security Council is pivotal in incorporating climate-related strategies into peacebuilding efforts. The UNSC comprises several entities, including the Peacebuilding Commission, Peacebuilding Fund, and Peacebuilding Support Office, which provide a framework for peacebuilding, climate discourse, and policies. Within this spectrum, each organization has its own set of rules and discourses in its pursuit of peacebuilding and sustainability. Analysing their roles makes it possible to discern their activities and contributions to these efforts.

The global scenario changed after the Cold War and civil unrest led to the liberalisation. Leading how to establish the correct framework for maintaining peace and order in the affected countries, Kant's argument became more influential in building the nation on democratic government and open economics, not following Carl Max's government. (Michael W. Doyle, 2005). The United Nations advocates stable democratic governance, peace, and security, as stated in the 1992 Agenda for Peace. UN Secretary-General in the 1990s affirmed in

favour of the Agenda for Peace (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1992). To ensure peace, peacekeeping effects were carried out with the inclusion of the rule of law, promotion of economic growth, the election process, a sustainable environment, and attention to valuable natural resources (Billon, 2001).

Although conflicts no longer prevail, authoritarianism has taken hold in certain countries, raising doubts about the effectiveness and legitimacy of UN peacekeeping. The UN has acknowledged the shortcomings of the peacebuilding process but continues to assist and support national stakeholders. (United Nations, 2015). Scholars have argued that the UN's inability to maintain peace reflects the broader failure of peacebuilding efforts (Nicolas Lemay & Hébert, 2013). Liberal peacebuilding can be divided into two categories: critical and problem-solving. The critical approach is rooted in Western ideas of liberal peace and questions its compatibility with local contexts (Neil Cooper, Mandy Turner, & Pugh, 2011). The problem-solving approach did not entirely reject liberal peace but focused on assessing how it is implemented in conflict-affected areas.

Peacebuilding is often associated with difficult memories, marked by challenges in the reconstruction process, where sustainability efforts are not adequately prioritized in war-torn nations. Studies have revealed that the management of sustainability and climate change often results in unexpected consequences, including backfires, increased conflicts, and opportunities for new insurgent groups to exploit, all of which contribute to the failure of peacebuilding efforts. Afghanistan serves as a prime example, where peacebuilding endeavours face significant challenges. In Herat province, hydropower project contributed to water scarcity, leading to a complete breakdown in water management, and escalating local discontent and communal hatred.

Since the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, peacebuilding efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been marked by various complexities in conflict resolution. The resurgence of ethnonationalist power has impeded the

development of civil society and the rule of law. The Office of the High Representative, responsible for overseeing the peace process, encountered limitations due to obstacles in democratic reconciliation and the restricted use of Bonn powers. As a result, Bosnia has remained in a “negative peace”. A combination of ethnonationalism, territorialism, secessionism, and militarism has hindered Bosnia's path to EU membership. In response, the UN and EU have supported policies for stabilizing the situation rather than pursuing deep transformation. This approach enabled the entrenched political elites to retain power, distancing their influence from the goals of the liberal peacebuilding framework.

Peace-making is imaginary rather than reality

Pogodda, Richmond, Visoka, and Gëzim (2023) argue that post-war peace efforts, which sought to reshape political structures and establish new regional and global systems, have reached a stalemate (Richmond, 2022). This is particularly evident in post-Cold War peacekeeping efforts. International peace interventions, such as mediation, peacebuilding, and state-building, have become fraught with controversy and challenges. The International Peace Architecture (IPA), established in the previous century to eliminate war, civil conflict, and violence, operates within a sophisticated, multi-layered framework. This approach integrates military and institutional interventions, legal structures, and constitutional developments, all of which are continuously evolving but frequently face significant challenges.

Marxism and socialist philosophies, as a vision for international peace, drove the consolidation of the International Peace Association (IPA) in the twentieth century. Decolonized states in the 1960s paved the way for peace and justice in civil society, science, and technology. The Helsinki Accords in 1975 established human rights and positioned European foreign policy as a potential global model. In 1992, the UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Peace introduced peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and disarmament initiatives (Ghali, 1992). Advancements in trade, law, conventions, and treaties marked the early 1900s. Ultimately, IPA included major players

such as the United States, NATO, the EU, AU, and other regional organizations.

The 2000s witnessed the emergence of an authoritarian and neoliberal peace architecture, which prioritized limited state-building and basic regional security (David Lewis, John Heathershaw, & Megoran, 2018). Capitalism favoured this approach, hoping to strengthen legitimate authority in conflict-affected regions like Afghanistan and Iraq (Herring, 2008). Both the West and emerging powers, such as China and India, supported this model for geopolitical and geo-economic reasons, seeking to protect trade relations, investment, and regional influence (Richmond & Tellidis, 2014). However, the model failed to acknowledge the legitimacy of local governance systems.

Conclusion

Despite decades of international efforts to build peace, the complexities and contradictions inherent in peacebuilding initiatives suggest that true and lasting peace may remain an elusive goal. The interplay of authoritarianism, climate change, and entrenched local power dynamics has frequently thwarted efforts to create sustainable frameworks for peace. While organizations like the UN and the International Peace Architecture have made important strides, their approaches often fail to resonate with local realities, resulting in superficial solutions that neglect the root causes of conflict. This disconnect, combined with the persistence of ethnonationalism and the exploitation of natural resources, indicates that peace may not be achievable in a meaningful way. As history has shown, without a fundamental shift towards inclusive, locally driven processes that prioritize sustainability, the cycle of conflict is likely to continue, casting doubt on the viability of peacebuilding as a solution to global strife.

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