

Message of the Ecumenical Forum on Peace in Northeast Asia

Seoul
September 12, 2015

Committed to Peace with Justice in Northeast Asia

“Christ has broken down the dividing wall” (Ephesians 2:14). While separation and division are global realities, we have seen the power of transformation and potential for reconciliation in Germany and South Africa. As God’s Children of Peace, we are called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) and seek the path toward reconciliation everywhere there is division.

This is an historic moment. The year 2015 is the 70th anniversary of the Liberation of East Asian countries from Japanese Imperialism following the end of the World War II. But the Korean Peninsula was divided immediately into two by the superpowers U.S.A and USSR. The division brought the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, a conflict which recorded 5.5 million casualties and spearheaded a global Cold War and divisions which persist to this day. Despite the end of the Cold War, a final Peace Agreement has never been reached to bring closure to the Korean War. The division of the Korean Peninsula remains, thousands of families remain separated, and the hostilities and enmity of the Cold War continue to be internalized by the Korean people.

The everpresent state of war on the peninsula keeps the atmosphere highly volatile. Skirmishes continue to flare and provocative military exercises continue to generate widespread concerns and tension in a region that is particularly at risk by the preponderance of nuclear power and arms. Indeed the division serves as a tripwire that threatens to engulf the Korean Peninsula and the region in a major conflagration. Peoples in Northeast Asia are longing for peace with justice; Korean reunification is an essential step in this process.

This is also an historic ecumenical moment. 2015 is the 100th anniversary of the witness of the Presbyterian Church in the Korean Peninsula. We have been invited by the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) to the Ecumenical Forum on Peace in Northeast Asia to discuss, reflect on and respond to the pressing faith and ethical issues on justice, people’s security, reconciliation, peace, and peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula. We celebrate and give thanks that God has used these two churches as agents for peace and reconciliation. It is a sign of hope that the PCK and the PROK hold this joint ecumenical forum with the worldwide fellow churches in the Reformed tradition and ecumenical partners. Not only in Korea but among the global Christian community, we are mindful that a costly unity among the churches is a prerequisite to a costly discipleship.

We are more than 120 representatives and leaders of churches and ecumenical institutions coming from various Christian traditions and from 20 countries of the global regions, Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, North and South America. We deeply regret that prevailing condition in South Korea prevented the presence of North Korean brothers and sisters from participating in this Forum. In faith, commitment and enthusiasm we responded to the invitation of this event because we take seriously the issues that affect the well-being of people who bear the brunt of the stranglehold of Empire—systems of military, political, economic domination which threaten peace in Northeast Asia and globally.

The Urgency and Opportunity of this *Kairos* Moment

We have recently witnessed the heightened tensions in the Korean Peninsula. A landmine explosion in the Demilitarized Zone seriously wounded two South Korean soldiers, and US-South Korea joint military exercises have provoked and awakened retaliatory responses from North Korea. This has led to the call for bilateral talks and the making of agreements to ease and de-escalate tensions, including a plan for separated families to meet. However the underlying causes of anger and animosity remain untouched. The enmity between North and South has not been bridged because the power stakeholders in and around the Korean Peninsula are invested in sustaining the conflict and prevent substantive peace processes.

Korean reunification needs to be seen in the context of both Northeast Asia and the world. We named the urgency of addressing growing militarization and xenophobia in Japan, and deplore the efforts to change Japan's peace constitution. The PROK and PCK hosted this event to revitalize and strengthen the ecumenical commitment for justice, healing, reconciliation, and peaceful reunification. The status quo of division in the context of Empire is not working. Over 60 years of unresolved Armistice—of hostility, fear and escalating militarization—is too long.

As people of faith we are called by the Gospel to seek the peace of Christ rather than that of the world, for as Jesus said "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27). The division of the Korean Peninsula and its human costs contradict God's will for the fullness of life. It is a sin against God and humanity. The Church is called transform itself and to engage in healing and reconciliation. However, without resolution of the Cold War hatred and enmities, including among Christians, the Church cannot contribute to peace with justice.

Vision

In this gathering we had the opportunity to listen to varied voices articulating the need to pursue healing, justice, reconciliation, peace and reunification in Korea.

In this gathering we were reminded of our long ecumenical witness begun with the Tozanso Process and including most recently the *Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula* issued by the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. We affirmed related initiatives of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and other partner churches and mission agencies and lifted up our ongoing commitments to hold each other accountable as we accompany the churches of North and South Korea. In this regard, the participation of the Christian Community from North Korea is essential.

In this gathering we were inspired by Jesus of Galilee, who came that "all may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10) and who confronted and challenged the powers that prevailed. We were called to sustain efforts of healing, transforming, nurturing, sustaining peace with justice, and journeying together in the "Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace." Radical transformations are needed so that we as Churches and people of faith may resist Empire and institutions of power. We understood that in supporting initiatives for peaceful reunification of the North and South, we should journey with the Korean people, expressing empathy and solidarity in ways both familiar and new. We engage this urgent

moment with steadfastness and faithful endurance, realizing that reunification is not a prize but a process of healing, nurturing and wholeness.

Commitments

We intend to do the following:

1. Nurture a new *Koinonia* beginning with churches, in which hatred and hostility are overcome, and a transformative spirituality for life is nurtured.
2. Actively encourage and involve churches and ecumenical bodies to continue initiatives for healing, justice, reconciliation, and peace in Northeast Asia, and the reunification of North and South Korea.
3. Provide common platforms for churches and Christians, as well as people of other faiths and civil society, from both North and South to meet together in order to advance towards reconciliation and peace.
4. Develop approaches to peace education and advocacy for peace and reunification. These approaches should be intergenerational, cultivate ecumenical spirituality of resistance to war and violence, nurture theological reflection in our own contexts, and evolve a new vision of a world with justice, peace and a life together.
5. Promote the participation and leadership of women in initiatives for peace with justice in the region, and for reunification of the Korean Peninsula.
6. Invite and encourage all churches in the region to actively participate in the bilateral and multilateral programs and actions that pursue peace and reunification processes.
7. Focus our efforts to seek a final peace treaty that replaces the Armistice Agreement.
8. Commit to support global ecumenical endeavors to contain and delegitimize nuclear power and arms in all parts of the world.
9. Mobilize all new modes of media to highlight the issue of peace in Northeast Asia in order to broaden and strengthen solidarity.
10. Commit to a process of holding peace fora to continue the momentum of this historic ecumenical gathering by encouraging the PCK, the PROK and the NCKC to convene such peace fora biannually, and encourage partner churches globally to prioritize their ecumenical agenda to include action and advocacy on Northeast Asia

Participants of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace in Northeast Asia

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Church of Scotland
Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar
Church of South India
Eglise Protestante Unie de France
Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS)
Evangelical Church in Hessen and Nassau
Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)
Korean Christian Church in Japan
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
Presbyterian Church of East Africa

Presbyterian Church in India
Presbyterian Church in Korea
Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea
Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
Presbyterian Church-USA
Protestant Church of East Timor
Reformed Church in Hungary
Uniting Church in Australia
United Church of Christ in the Philippines
United Church of Canada
United Church of Christ-USA
United Reformed Church
National Council of Korean Presbyterian Churches (PCUSA)

Christian Conference of Asia
Mission 21
World Communion of Reformed Churches
World Council of Churches