



# World Council of Churches

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## General Secretariat

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Geneva, 1 September July 2021

The Honourable Joseph Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

President Biden,

Collectively, participants in the Ecumenical Forum for Korea (EFK) hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC), have a long history and vast experience of humanitarian and development activities in North Korea, and of advocacy and action for sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula.

In addition to engaging in humanitarian and development activities to help reduce suffering and improve the lives of North Korean people, we promote and support people-to-people encounter, dialogue and cooperation between North and South Koreans as an indispensable basis for peace. As organizations founded on Christian faith and teachings, we believe strongly in the equal God-given dignity and rights of every human being, regardless - among other things - of nationality, political affiliation and beliefs.

We therefore write to appeal to you and your Administration to reconsider the current policy on sanctions against the DPRK.

While we share many of the concerns upon which these sanctions are based, they have failed to resolve those concerns, despite being among the most rigorous, systemic and longest-standing sanctions regimes ever imposed.

Moreover, the direct and indirect effects of the current sanctions have had very serious negative impacts on humanitarian access and action in North Korea. It is often affirmed that sanctions are not intended to harm ordinary people or to prevent humanitarian assistance. But in the experience of many of us in our efforts to provide assistance to people in North Korea, in practice the sanctions have presented major obstacles to such efforts.

The latest FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity indicate an uncovered food gap in North Korea estimated at 860 000 tonnes over the coming months, and have highlighted limited humanitarian access as a key driver of the crisis. In addition to food shortages, reported health crises, and recent floods in North Korea represent a heavy toll of suffering for the people of the country. Several of our organizations are ready and standing by to offer needed humanitarian aid and services as soon as circumstances permit.

In the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we believe that maintaining the current humanitarian exemption process – no matter how efficient the approval process may be – is an important obstacle to this response and ethically improper. Especially in this context, we call for

a new general license for humanitarian goods and services, and an approved banking channel for these purposes.

Furthermore, we consider that the current sanctions regime and travel ban are counter-productive to the pursuit of peace in the region and to the reduction of the risk of potentially catastrophic conflict. In our view, the failure to consider even incremental relaxation of sanctions was a key factor in the collapse of recent efforts at political engagement for peace. The rigid maintenance of 'maximum pressure' sanctions has only served to poison the political environment for dialogue and reduction of tensions. A more flexible policy is needed to create new possibilities for constructive engagement.

We believe that people-to-people encounters are essential for building peace. Policies that prevent such encounters can only entrench conflict and division. Accordingly, we also urge you to bring to a permanent conclusion the travel ban that prevents US citizens from meeting and providing assistance to North Korean people in their country.

We hope that these concerns can be taken into account in the current review of US sanctions policy mandated by your Administration.

Yours respectfully,



Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Saucă  
Acting General Secretary  
World Council of Churches

CC:

Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State  
Janet L. Yellen, Secretary of the Treasury  
Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US Ambassador to the United Nations

*Endorsed by:*

American Friends Service Committee (Mr Daniel Jasper)  
DECC—Disciples of Christ World Communion (Rev. Paul Tche)  
Episcopal Church (US) (The Rev. Cn. Bruce W. Woodcock)  
General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church (Rev. Liberato Bautista)  
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ (Mr Derek Duncan)  
Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church (Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, President & Roland Fernandes, General Secretary)  
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (Jim Winkler, General Secretary & President)  
Presbyterian Church USA (Rev. Unzu Lee)  
Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs (Mr Boo Won Nam)  
General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (Jim Wallace, Lord Wallace of Tankerness, Moderator & Mr Sandy Sneddon)  
Evangelische Mission in Solidarität, Germany (Rev. Solomon P. Benjamin)  
National Council of Churches in Korea (Rev. Lee Hong-Jung, General Secretary)

National Council of Churches in Japan (Rev. Sungjae Kim, General Secretary)  
Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (Rev. Nancy Lin)  
Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau, Germany (Rev. Detlev Knoche)  
United Church of Canada (Ms Patti Talbot)  
World Communion of Reformed Churches (Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock, Acting General Secretary  
for Programmes)  
World Methodist Council (Rev. Dr. J. C. Park, President)  
The Revd David Grosch-Miller (Past Moderator of General Assembly, The United Reformed  
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