

Pyongyang Appeal

Meeting of Steering Group of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reunification and Development Cooperation on the Korean Peninsula

28 October 2015, Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. (2 Timothy 2:22)

Members and invitees of the Steering Group of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reunification and Development Cooperation on the Korean Peninsula (EFK) convened by the World Council of Churches (WCC) met on 28 October 2015 in Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in the context of a visit by the EFK delegation to the DPRK during 23-30 October 2015, graciously hosted by the Korean Christian Federation (KCF).

The EFK visit takes place during the 70th anniversary of Korean liberation from Japanese occupation, but also of the division of the Korean peninsula into north and south – a division which tragically persists and provokes severe threats to peace and human security in the region to this day.

The EFK Steering Group met on 28 October 2015 under the theme "Current Situation and Future Direction of Ecumenical Church Activities for Peace and Reunification on the Korean Peninsula". Participants included representatives of the WCC, KCF, National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK), and of churches and related organizations from the UK, USA, Germany and Canada.

This visit and meeting follows the long history of international ecumenical accompaniment of the churches of North and South Korea, in particular through the WCC, and we reaffirm all ecumenical policy positions issued in this process, especially the WCC 10th Assembly Statement on Peace and Reunification on the Korean Peninsula (adopted on 8 November 2013) and the communique issued by the WCC's International Consultation on Justice, Peace and Reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula (held in Bossey, Switzerland, on 17-19 June 2014).

The Pyongyang meeting is the first occasion on which an ecumenical gathering has been convened on the peninsula itself involving North and South Koreans as well as international participants focusing on peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula.

During its visit to the DPRK, the members of the EFK delegation witnessed a society that is visibly advancing, demonstrating great resilience and self-reliance despite the longstanding and recently strengthened international sanctions.

In visiting the DPRK during this important anniversary year, the EFK delegation sought to deepen their understanding of current realities on the Korean peninsula, to acknowledge the continuing unresolved tragedy of the division of the Korean people, and to strengthen international ecumenical solidarity with Korean Christian sisters and brothers – from north and south – as well as with all people who seek peace, reunification and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula.

During August this year escalating tensions risked spiralling out of control, until high-level dialogue initiated by the DPRK government succeeded in reducing those tensions. We express our appreciation for the efforts of both governments in this regard, including the resumption of separated family reunion meetings which have been ongoing during the period of our visit. However, political confrontation and threats aimed at the DPRK undo the good done through dialogue, and risk closing the door to further dialogue at a time when it is needed most. As the WCC general secretary observed during the period of heightened tensions in August, “Provocation does not offer a path to peace.”

Among other threats to peace and stability in the region, we note with concern the recent reinterpretation of article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and the amendments to the security related bills, allowing for external military action by the armed forces of Japan under the “right of collective self defence”. The fact that intervention in the DPRK had been explicitly cited as a scenario in which this reinterpretation could be invoked exacerbates the latent tensions in the region.

We, as participants in the Pyongyang meeting of the EFK Steering group, issue this appeal to all churches, church-related organizations and people of good will around the world, calling for renewed and strengthened solidarity, advocacy and action for the following purposes:

- Full implementation of the June 15 Joint Declaration and the October 4 Declaration, adopted at the North-South summits held in June 2000 and October 2007 respectively.
- An end to all joint military exercises in the vicinity of the Korean peninsula directed against the DPRK, provocative demonstrations of armed force, and political confrontation and threats, which risk increasing tensions and destabilizing the delicate situation on the Korean peninsula.
- Lifting the economic sanctions against the DPRK which succeed only in harming the most vulnerable, and contribute to maintaining tensions on the Korean peninsula.
- Resisting the confrontational misuse of human rights; ending the antagonistic leaflet campaign against the DPRK; avoiding the promotion of enemy images; eliminating all obstacles to the objective of peace and reconciliation; and seeking the realization of human rights through the promotion of peace and reconciliation.
- The replacement of the current Armistice Agreement of 1953 with a peace treaty.
- Respectful, patient and persistent dialogue between the two Koreas, with the objectives of mutual recognition, peaceful co-existence, reunification and reconciliation.
- Promoting exchanges and encounters between North and South Koreans, and mutual visits by members of the international Christian community and Christians in the DPRK, emphasizing the involvement of young people in such exchanges and visits, in particular young people from both North and South Korea.
- Strengthening the relationship between the KCF and the NCKK with the churches of South Korea, and with the Korean Christian diaspora around the world.

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. (Ephesians 2:14)