

100th Anniversary Conference of the Great Korean Revival 2007

Presentation by

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Mr. Moderator, Honourable Ministers and Ecumenical Colleagues,

I am honoured to be invited to speak at this important event – the 100th Anniversary Conference of the Great Korean Revival 2007, sponsored by the National Council of Churches in Korea and the Christian Council of Korea.

Today we recognize not only a watershed moment in the history of Korean Christianity, but an equally important crossroads for the church now and in years to come. In many books of church history, the event we commemorate this year is called “the Great Pyongyang Revival of 1907”, named for the city in which it was centred. Looking toward the future we may wonder: where will the next great Korean revival take place. Will it once again be in Pyongyang?

The worldwide ecumenical family has for the last four decades appreciated and admired the role of the Korean Churches in the promotion of peace and unification of the peninsula. The WCC’s fellowship, through its accompaniment of the process, has learned much from your initiatives and efforts. Despite many difficulties and obstacles, you have been consistent and persevering in your struggle for peace and justice in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. It has been a costly witness. Members of the clergy, laymen and laywomen have made tremendous sacrifices in this endeavour.

Experience shows that the journey towards peace and justice is not easy in societies that are fractured by violence and conflicts. The WCC’s fellowship is well aware of these factors, as the Council came into being at a time the world was emerging from the horrors of the two world wars. It was against this background that the WCC’s First Assembly at Amsterdam in 1948 spoke of the importance of the churches’ contribution to peace in international relations through the Council’s life and work:

“The establishment of the WCC can be made of great moment for the life of the nations. It is a living expression of fellowship, transcending race and nation, class and culture, knit together in faith, service and understanding. Its aim will be to hasten international reconciliation through its own members and through the cooperation of all Christian churches and all [people] of goodwill. It will strive to see international difference in the light of God’s design, remembering that normally there are Christians on both sides of every frontier. It should not weary in the effort to state the Christian understanding of the will of God to promote its application to national and international policies”

Your efforts to promote peace and unification of the Korean peninsula reflect a commitment to remain faithful to the principles enunciated in this statement of the First Assembly. The World Council of Churches is privileged to have accompanied you in these efforts from Tozanso in 1984 to the present date.

About a month and a half ago I spoke in Amman, Jordan at a conference with the theme – “*Churches Together for Peace with Justice in the Middle East*”. The purpose of that conference was to launch the Israel-Palestine Ecumenical Forum, an instrument to catalyze and coordinate new and existing church advocacy for peace. The aim of participants is to end the occupation of Palestine in accordance with the UN resolutions and demonstrate their commitment to inter-religious action for peace and justice that serves all people of the region. The Middle East, like the North-east Asia region, remains a flash point that could ignite a major conflagration in the world. The plight and sufferings of the Palestinian people are well known to the international community. Despite efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation by multiple actors like the United Nations, the European Union and civil society groups, the region continues to suffer from the scourge of war and violence. At the launch of the ecumenical forum I reminded representatives of the churches of the Middle East and of other regions of the world present that we are co-workers with Christ in this project of hope. Our faith compels us to be artisans of peace with justice and to accompany those who are building the peace that the Lord wills for all God’s peoples. This commitment is not based on any particular ideology but springs from the very nature of faith in Jesus Christ and is intrinsic to discipleship in the Church of the Prince of Peace.

Today, as individuals, communities and nations, we encounter a world that is divided and in turmoil largely because of inequitable distribution of power and resources. There is a growing trend to settle disputes and disagreements through force of arms rather than through dialogue and negotiation. The result is an increase of violence and war. The end of the cold war did not produce the much talked about peace dividend, though in some parts of the world it did bring some relief from the dangers associated with the prospects of a nuclear war, particularly where enmity between the two super powers had threatened global security. Presently, we face a variety of security concerns that have serious implications for international relations and are a constant threat to peace. Among others, these include the war in Iraq, the Israel-Palestine conflict and of course the military confrontation in the Korean peninsula. We also face an array of security problems in Africa, Europe and other continents as a

result of the resurgence of religious extremism and ethnocentric nationalism. Given these situations, no single government or group of governments can be expected to contain or resolve the range of security issues that confront the international community. Addressing them requires a collective approach by multiple actors including churches and civil society.

Recent events show the enormously destructive strength and inbuilt, automatic chain reactions of violence that can result in a heavy toll in human lives as well as material and financial costs. The media images of the on-going war in Iraq, Afghanistan and last year's Israeli attack on Lebanon remain vivid in our memories.

In the circumstances, prevention of conflicts, peacemaking and peace building are moral imperatives for the churches and for civil society. This is a humanitarian and economic necessity given the exorbitant price of wars and conflicts in terms of loss of human lives and the cost of post-war reconstruction. Churches and partner agencies have firsthand experience of this as they participate in humanitarian relief programmes in practically all parts of the world from Afghanistan and Lebanon to Somalia and Sudan. Churches have continually reiterated that it is not their sole prerogative to make peace, for in the end it is the responsibility of political leadership to make peace. However, it cannot be denied that in many cases churches have been instrumental in creating conditions conducive for peace; they do have a role in building a political will for peace. This they do by breaking down barriers of prejudice and distrust that give rise to conflict and violence. Jan Eliasson, a former Swedish diplomat and the First UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, speaking on the role of the states in conflict prevention and peacemaking, says: *"Inaction in the face of threatening conflict goes against the interests of the states to try to avoid developments that are potentially dangerous for their own well being. This is particularly true in a period of growing interdependence and ever more complex international cooperation"*. The same can be said of the role of churches. They cannot afford to remain silent in situations of conflict, because any situation that impacts on the lives of the people is a matter of concern for the churches.

Like the World Council of Churches, the United Nations was born in troubled times of war and violence. This is reflected in the opening words of its charter: *"We the peoples of the United Nations determine to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war ..."* According to Article 33 of the UN Charter, the primary responsibility of member states is to save people from the

scourge of war. This Article obligates member states to seek peaceful settlement of conflicts that endanger international peace and security. Be that as it may, prevention of conflicts, peacemaking and peace building are shared responsibilities. The preamble of the charter reminds us of this by use of the words, "We the peoples" Resolution of conflict by peaceful means is a collective challenge not only for the international comity of nations but also for churches and civil society groups.

Peacemaking requires patience and perseverance, new ideas and new approaches, particularly in situations where grievances have multiplied and positions have been hardened. This calls for combined efforts both at Track I Diplomacy by sovereign states as well as Track II Diplomacy by civil society groups at national and international levels. Multi track diplomacy in recent times has emerged as an important factor in the spectrum of conflict resolution. For a lasting peace it is imperative that diplomacy have the support of the people concerned. Churches and civil society groups are in a position to mobilize people for peace. Settlement of disputes and conflicts requires the creation of a climate or ethos that is conducive to peace making between parties through confidence building measures and through de-escalation of military tensions and confrontation. In a globalized and inter-dependent world this is a shared responsibility of sovereign states and civil society groups. Civil society groups, including churches, in recent times have become important actors in peace making. The United Nations and other multi lateral bodies engaged in efforts to promote peace often seek the viewpoints and concerns of these groups through formal and informal channels. Civil society has become an important partner in peace making both at the level of providing analysis as well as embarking on concrete plans of action to promote peace making and peace building programmes. The churches by the very nature of their gospel mandate have a responsibility to promote peace and work towards transformation of conflicts.

As I said earlier, the WCC's active engagement in the Korean Peace and Unification process began at Tozanso in October/November 1984. The consultation "Peace and Justice in North-east Asia" is a landmark in the history of the Korean churches' struggle for unification of the peninsula and its people. Those were difficult days of military dictatorship and rampant human rights violations. As a result of the cold war, the Korean peninsula was in the grip of an arms race. Tensions ran high. There were deliberate and conscientious efforts to promote enemy images and demonize the other. The

National Security Law was used to suppress people's aspiration for justice, peace and unification on the pretext of safeguarding national security. Some participants invited to Tozanso failed to turn up because of fear of the consequences they would have to face under the dreaded National Security Law. The Tozanso consultation reaffirmed the WCC's longstanding principle of engagement and dialogue to overcome violence and war. In the words of the consultation: *"The Churches are called to provide hope, to witness for peace, justice and unity. They must become a model of dialogue and participation for all who have been affected by the tragedy of division. Christians must surround one another in love, supporting one another in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit"*.

This historic gathering of concerned Christians identified key areas where churches needed to work. These included – among others – the struggle for peace and justice; stemming the arms race and overcoming enemy images; promoting humanitarian concerns for separated families; building awareness on the issue of unification and increasing the participation of women and youth in the movement. This remains an unfinished business.

Subsequent to the Tozanso consultation, the WCC made a pledge to continue to work in the spirit of the Tozanso process to facilitate contacts and to act as a channel of communication between the Christian communities of North and South Korea. This role of facilitation continued up to the time when the two sides were able to communicate directly with each other. The Council also called on the member churches and partner agencies to initiate and, where necessary, increase their efforts to persuade their respective governments to review their Korea policies and bring them in line with the objectives of peace, justice and reunification. It reaffirmed that the unification process should respect and recognize the reality of the two existing autonomous systems in the spirit of peaceful co-existence, with the objective of building one unified country.

It is to the credit of the WCC fellowship, particularly the member churches in Europe, North America and Japan, that they have relentlessly pursued the above goals in solidarity with their sisters and brothers in Korea.

The ecumenical journey for peace and reunification has been a long one with many ups and downs. There was a time when mere discussion of unification was considered an offence; today we witness an unprecedented increase in economic cooperation between the North and the South. Time has proved that your principled stand on the unification issue was prophetic and correct. This

is evident from the positive developments that have taken place during the last few years between the two sides – cooperation on joint projects, such as reconnection of roads and railways, the Kaesung Industrial Park and tourism at Kungang. There is also an increase of cultural contacts, joint sporting events, reunion of families and exchanges between different sectors of the Korean societies. These are positive steps that will ultimately lead to unification. The credit for these developments goes to the Korean churches for having contributed positively to the formulation of the present government policies. Progress has been good, but there is still a long way to go. The struggle for peace and unification has to continue in a geo-political climate that is more complex than it was in the 1980s.

The WCC executive committee that met in Seoul in 2004, while reaffirming the WCC central committee statement of 1989, called on member churches to mobilize support for Six Party Talks and urged the participants at these talks to give due consideration to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) concern for its security. At the same time it called on the DPRK government to abandon all uranium enrichment and plutonium extraction programmes and to move towards a verifiable return to the status reality of being a non-nuclear state party of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The WCC, as you are aware, pursues a policy of nuclear disarmament. It considers production, possession and use of nuclear weapons a sin against God. The goal of the policy is total abolition of all nuclear weapons. A nuclear free world can only emerge if all states possessing or producing nuclear, biological or chemical weapons are locked into a binding schedule for the freezing, reduction and elimination of their arsenals and productive capabilities.

From both a theological and political perspective, the WCC has consistently denounced the “logic and practice of war and violence”. It has challenged churches to relinquish any theological justification for violence and work towards building a culture of peace and nonviolence. This is the basis on which the Council embarked on a Decade to Overcome Violence 2001 – 2010. Member churches, ecumenical groups, individual Christians and people of goodwill are invited to contribute to the Decade by sharing their experiences. There is much the Korean Churches can contribute to the Decade by sharing their experience regarding peace and reconciliation in the continuing commitment to overcome war and violence in the peninsula. Jesus Christ revealed his love to us on the cross and embodied the mystery of reconciliation. From the perspective of churches, reconciliation is not just harmonizing the views of parties to a

conflict. True peace and reconciliation requires justice for all people. This means addressing people's well being and upholding their dignity.

The churches' responsibility in situations of conflict is to create a favorable climate for resolution of differences by providing a platform for dialogue where both sides may freely share their perspectives and understanding of issues in order to find a common ground on which foundations for peace can be built. God's kingdom is to be found where all people can exercise their inherent right to dignity and freedom and can live with each other in peace and harmony, where justice, compassion and love undergird the life of the community, be it on the Korean Peninsula, the Middle East or on the African continent.

As you commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Great Korean Revival, the question before us is, how do we sustain the struggle for peace and reunification? The division between the North and the South has its roots in the cold war. It has national and international dimensions. Therefore, advocacy initiatives have to be undertaken at these two levels. We are in a new period of international relations in a globalized and interdependent world. Recent events have shown the failures of the policies of confrontation. In any case, confrontation is not the Christian way. Confrontation and violence bring only pain and suffering. Ours is the path of reconciliation. According to the teachings of the Apostle Paul: "Through Christ, God has claimed us as friends and granted us peace. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5:18)

The global crisis we face has moral and spiritual dimensions that are no less profound than the crisis the world faced in the earlier stages of the ecumenical movement. Such situations can be remedied and the crisis resolved if we remain firm in our faith, knowing that peace will eventually prevail. Through your struggle in Korea you have shown us all that this is the only way forward in a divided and chaotic world.

Finally, a few words about the Six Party Talks and the way forward. The talks that began in 2003, after the initial set back and last few years of stalemate, have recently shown some signs of movement. Parties that had adopted a hard line posture have relented and now appear to be more flexible. These are positive developments.

Over the years it has been made clear that the policy of confrontation and isolation of the DPRK has not borne fruit. It has succeeded only in raising tension in the region. The only viable alternative to confrontation and isolation

is engagement and dialogue. The Six Party Talks provide a platform for negotiation that can defuse tension and pave the way for a formal peace treaty. The recent shutdown by DPRK of its nuclear facilities at Yongbon is a welcome development. There is still a long way to go. The next steps in relation to the nuclear issue are going to be critical and full of potential pitfalls. These concerns vie for negotiators' attention, together with other issues: the discussion regarding the security concerns of the DPRK; provision of humanitarian aid and assistance; the tension between the DPRK and Japan over the issue of abductees; the need to ensure that the accord reached in 2006, between North and South Korea to negotiate a permanent peace regime, be closely monitored.

The ecumenical family, particularly WCC member churches in the US, China, Japan and Russia (participants of the Six Party Talks) need to persuade their respective governments to ensure the continuity of these talks to defuse tension and conflict in the peninsula so that people can live together in peace. Towards this end it may be worthwhile to explore possibilities of organizing a parallel forum of churches of countries engaged in the Six Party Talks and also the churches in Canada, Scandinavia and the European Union, at the next round of Six Party Talks. The basis for discussion at the parallel forum could be the implementation of the guidelines laid down in the "Sunshine Policy" of dialogue and engagement as proposed by the former President Kim Dae Jung, and the 15th June 2000 Joint Declaration between North and South Korea. The forum could also act as a watchdog to monitor developments at the Six Party Talks and keep the people informed of the progress.

One hundred years ago, a great spiritual revival swept this land. It is, as has been said, "a Godly heritage". But – amid all our gratitude for the blessings of the past – we must never forget that tomorrow, too, is in God's hand. We await the next great Korean revival, the next great world revival, delighting in the good news that God's kingdom has drawn near. I wish you a successful conference, and I pray that God will continue to bless the Korean churches as you work for the betterment of the people.