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The Role of the Churches in Peace-Building and Unification on the Korean Peninsula

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Ladies and gentlemen,

First, I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations to all of you on the 100th anniversary of the Great Revival.

I also thank those from overseas who came here to celebrate the centenary.

Today, we are gathered here to commemorate the Great Revival that took place on the Korean peninsula and to remember the spirit of the movement.

It is my honor and privilege to meet with you all and to share my thoughts on this meaningful occasion.

A hundred years ago, we lost national sovereignty under the "Eulsa Treaty"(Japan-Korea Protectorate Treaty), and with the increase in Japanese occupation of Korea, the nation faced a grave situation.

Amid national crisis, churches of Korea agonized over what they could do to remedy the situation, and the conclusion they arrived at was to spread the gospel.

It was to overcome the grim reality of pain and hardship through strength from God and hope for a new and brighter future.

Bible studies and prayer meetings sprang up, people repented their sins and people gained forgiveness and spiritual awakening.

These experiences encouraged the Korean people not to abandon hope for liberation.

And such experiences gave us strength to endure the 36 years of harsh colonial rule by Japan, and made us embrace the day of independence with great joy.

The Great Revival which started in Pyongyang played a pivotal role in spreading the gospel throughout the Korean peninsula.

It was the revival movement, which took place a hundred years ago, that laid the foundation for the spread and growth of Christianity in Korea.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In looking back at the Great Revival, let us also look at the hundred years of Korean peninsula.

For Korea, the twentieth century was both night and day.

Thirty six years of colonial rule was ensued by three years of Korean War. Then, the national division and the Cold War confrontation held back social development of Korea for more than a half century.

However, we overcame all the difficulties to achieve a remarkable economic growth and became a full-fledged democracy.

Korea's per capita income grew 72 times from \$254 in 1970 to \$18,372 in 2006.

During the same period, our GDP soared 110 times, total trade volume rose 227 times, and export volume increased 392 times.

A small nation that occupies merely 0.1 percent of the global land mass became an economic powerhouse accounting for 3 percent of the global trade.

Moreover, Korea is among top five nations in the world in terms of college enrollment rate, IT industry, automobile, shipbuilding, and semiconductor industries.

Paved roads and Internet access are available at every corner of the country.

And in line with the economic growth, democracy has matured as well.

Peaceful transfer of political power from one administration to the next is something we take for granted now, and there is virtually no limit when it comes to freedom of press.

Authoritarian government regimes exercising their power on people are long gone.

Given such circumstances, what is our mission in the 21st century?

The answer is the establishment of peace on the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia and the formation of a national community.

The value of the 21 century is "Peace" and the goal is "Unification."

Unification is a historic task for all Koreans.

Unification is a process through which we can recover our history, which has been distorted and tainted by the division, and restore it to what it should be.

Such task is both responsibility and a mission for all of us who are here today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

What do we exactly mean when we say peace?

Peace is a principle to abide by on the road to unification, a value to realize, and a standard to guide us in our policy choices.

Peace is all the more important in that it represents our history, our prosperity, and our future.

First, peace is our history.

The time of peace was brief while time without peace was long.

But it is undeniable that our endeavor for peace has never ceased.

The July 4th Joint Communique in 1972, the inter-Korean Basic Agreement in 1992, the June 15th Joint Declaration in 2000, and the September 19th Joint Statement in 2005 represent the steadfast march toward peace.

Whether in a dictatorship, a military regime, or a democratic government, peace was the common goal pursued by all.

This shows the kind of meaning that peace has for Korean people.

Currently, we are here to inherit the legacy of peace efforts.

Since the national division, North and South Korea and the international community have made various efforts to reach "Peace Agreements." All of the nations should work to respect and observe the agreements that have been reached.

Secondly, peace means prosperity.

Without securing peace, economic growth will face limitations.

Economy loves predictability, and it does not like uncertainty.

No businessmen would invest in a nation with high risk of military conflict and unstable political situation. And no country has succeeded in achieving economic prosperity with a risk of war.

70 percent of the Korean economy is dependent on trade, and foreign ownership of the security market is high.

This means that peace on the Korean peninsula is a necessary condition for a sustained economic growth.

A setback in our efforts toward peace would certainly effect economic performance which we have labored to improve.

In that respect, investment in protecting and promoting peace represents investment in our economy, and commitments to peace lay the foundation for Korea to become a global leader.

Lastly, peace is our future.

We must not hand down to our next generation a divided nation where 1.8 million men and women in uniform fiercely confront each other.

We must not hand down to the next generation the Korean peninsula where families are separated and people on either side speak ill of each other.

Of course, peaceful unification is not something that can be achieved by our efforts alone. It would also require cooperation of the international community including the United States, for it is an international issue.

In other words, we have to achieve unification in a peaceful manner under close cooperation with the international community.

Only then, would our descendents be able to live their lives in prosperity without fear of war.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A short cut to peace on the Korean peninsula is to apply our wisdom for co-existence.

If the North and the South continue to rebuke, distrust and deny each other, the day of genuine peace will never come to us.

To co-exist with someone, first and foremost, you have to recognize and respect the other.

On such basis, the two need to build trust through reconciliation and cooperation.

Enhanced trust will usher in a new era of reconciliation, co-existence and co-prosperity, then the day of unification will be that much closer.

I don't believe that there is any other way.

What were the results of confrontation and hostility which lasted for half a century?

The lack of confidence between the two Koreas grew as the two sides confronted and criticized each other.

However, as we entered the new century, we began to work on ending the era of confrontation and hostility, and promote co-existence, reconciliation, and cooperation.

The starting point was the historic inter-Korean summit in 2000.

During the inter-Korean summit, North and South Korea agreed to leave behind the past and take a step forward into a new future of peace and prosperity.

It has been more than seven years since we first began our commitments for reconciliation and cooperation.

I would like to compare the year 2006 to year 1996, and show you what has taken place over the past ten years.

Last year, the number of visitors between the two Koreas was 101,708, which is an increase of 700 times from 146 visitors in 1996.

Inter-Korean trade registered 1.3 billion dollars in 2006, which is over a five-fold increase from 250 million dollars in 1996.

Last year saw ships crossing inter-Korean borders 8,401 times, inter-Korean dialogue being held 23 times, and 3,236 people meeting their separated family members.

In 1996, there were none of them.

Today, it is nothing new to watch people cross the DMZ and soldiers from the North and the South meet face to face to reduce military tension.

Goods made in the Gaeseong Industrial Complex by 16,000 North Korean workers are sold in markets in Seoul.

Mt. Geumgang became a place of tourism where you can go whenever you wish to do so.

On any given day, more than 1,000 people, 200 vehicles, and 30 vessels come and go between the two Koreas.

The railway test-runs in May represented complete connection of inter-Korean routes by land, sea, and sky, which have been severed for more than a half century.

What we could only imagine in the past are now being realized one by one.

Last month, the North and the South agreed on the provision of light industry resources based on commercial transaction and joint development of mineral resources.

This is very significant in that the project is based on a mutually beneficial model. The two economies compliment each other and raise the possibility of inter-Korean industrial cooperation.

What is noteworthy is that the North understood and accepted South Korean pricing mechanism.

Such accomplishments were possible not only due to the government effort but the public and international support for peace, reconciliation, and cooperation on the Korean peninsula.

After years of confrontation, the North Korean nuclear issue has finally entered the stage of implementation for denuclearization.

As the nuclear issue progressed, the dialogue between the DPRK and the US for normalization of relations began.

The changes in US policy toward the North are prompting discussions on normalization of the bilateral relations.

Now, all three important factors surrounding the peninsula show "green light."

I believe, an historic opportunity is approaching us to establish solid peace on the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have told you that inter-Korean relations, North Korea nuclear issue, and the DPRK-US relations are changing.

Among these, inter-Korean relations is fundamental.

Without progress in inter-Korean relations, peace will never be established on the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia.

Without progress in inter-Korean relations, we would not be able embrace a new future nor cope with rapidly changing global environment effectively.

In this respect, we need to take initiative and take proactive measures to advance inter-Korean relations.

Inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation should be accelerated across the board so as to lay a solid foundation for sustained and vibrant progress of inter-Korean relations.

We also need to have the insights to foresee what it will be like after the resolution of the nuclear issue.

The resolution of nuclear issue will not immediately solve military confrontation nor bring peace to the peninsula.

This is why we have to put in place a strategic initiative from a broader perspective which goes beyond the current nuclear issue.

The same logic applies to inter-Korean economic cooperation, which must change from the very basics.

We must think out of the box and prepare ourselves to create a single economic community which does not separate the North and South Korean economies but integrate the two into one.

Inter-Korean economic cooperation projects should be linked with economic development strategies of the South so that the two Koreas' economies can grow while complementing each other.

Building on this, we need to create an institutional framework for peace.

Peace is a universal human value, and a matter of life or death for Koreans.

There must be a consensus on the value of peace within South Korea, between the two Koreas, and among neighboring countries.

Based on that, we should build institutional framework to solidify peace on the peninsula, and to usher in a new future of permanent peace and prosperity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The National Council of Churches in Korean made an important declaration on February 29th, 1988.

It was the "Declaration of the Churches of Korea on National Reunification and Peace".

The landmark declaration of unification movement of churches still holds true even today.

We need a sense of mission to share the pain of national division and achieve unification, thereby answering the call of the time.

Churches' reform movement for peace and unification, extensive education efforts on peace and unification, and continuation of solidarity movement stipulated by the declaration are those tasks that we have to continue to promote.

Indeed, Christianity is inextricably related to unification movement in that its basic belief is "Peace".

Realizing the values of reconciliation between two Koreas through religious movement is in line with the pursuit for unification to bridge the divide of confrontation and hostility.

Therefore, what we need now is not just simple religious exchanges but more extensive commitments for peace and reconciliation.

Religion can go beyond the political, economic, and social boundaries.

It means that nothing is capable than religion in bringing genuine reconciliation and building trust between the two Koreas.

Religious communities, especially Christians, should actively contribute to institutionalization of peace by spreading the value of peace within their communities and all across the Korean peninsula.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The peace process has already begun.

Even though it is long and rough, we cannot step back to the Cold War era. We must shed Cold-War mentality and create a new future by understanding, respecting and tolerating others.

What is most important is public consensus on peace. A unified strength of the people is a must in order to realize the vision of peace.

It is people's solidarity for peace that can clear the remnants of the Cold War, form an inter-Korean community, and promise a future for Koreans. Where there is a unified will, there will be a way.

In remembering the meaning of the Great Revival 100 years ago, I pray that God's grace will be abundant on this land so that a new chapter in history will begin for peace on the Korean peninsula and the world.

I pray that almighty God will hear our prayer, our hope, and fill us with His blessings.

Thank you.

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